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**Twenty-one
Sermons, on a
Variety of
Interesting
Subjects,
Sentimental and
Practical.**

Samuel Hopkins





Twenty-one Sermons, on a Variety of Interesting Subjects, Sentimental and Practical.

Author(s): Hopkins, Samuel (1721-1803)

Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library

Description: Samuel Hopkins studied under Jonathan Edwards, and became his official biographer as well as the executor of his papers. Greatly influenced by Edwards's thought, Hopkins took it upon himself to carry on his mentor's legacy. Serving as a Congregationalist minister in Newport, Rhode Island, Hopkins delivered and published many sermons, a good portion of them dedicated to topics of interest in Edwards's theology. These twenty-one sermons cover such diverse subjects as hope, friendship, work, divine providence, and the necessity of personal piety.

Kathleen O'Bannon

CCEL Staff

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TWENTY ONE



SERMONS,

ON A VARIETY OF

INTERESTING SUBJECTS,

SENTIMENTAL AND PRACTICAL,

By SAMUEL HOPKINS, D, D.

**PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN
NEWPORT (RHODE-ISLAND.)**

Published according to Act of Congress.

SALEM:

PRINTED BY JOSHUA CUSHING,

FOR THE AUTHOR.

1803.



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Sermon I.

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The Reason of the Hope of a Christian, which he ought always to give to him who asketh it of him.

I Peter, iii. 14, 15. And be not afraid of their terror, neither be ye troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

THE apostle Peter had a special commission to preach the gospel to the Jews, which did not exclude a regard to the uncircumcised Gentiles. He therefore writes this epistle to the Jews who were dispersed from the land of Israel, into various places in the Lesser Asia, and had embraced Christianity; with whom the Gentiles are included, who had become Christians, and had joined with the believing Jews. In consequence of their becoming Christians, they were hated, and suffered persecution by the unbelieving Jews and idolatrous Gentiles; who were disposed to inflict on them all the evils which were in their power; especially the former, who exercised the same ill will towards them which Paul had and acted out before his conversion, and which they manifested towards the apostles and all Christians; of which we have the history in the Acts of the Apostles.

The Apostle, in this epistle to them, mentions many things to support and comfort them in their afflicted, suffering state, and encourage and animate them to persevere in the profession and practice of Christianity, to whatever reproaches, worldly losses and persecutions they might expose themselves hereby; and gives them many directions for their conduct in all circumstances, and towards all persons; especially in the present state of things. Of the latter we find an instance in the words now before us. The Apostle here alludes to the words of Isaiah in the eighth chapter of his prophecy. When the inhabitants of Judah were threatened with an invasion by the neighbouring nations, he tells them not to be afraid of them, but to sanctify the Lord of Hosts, and make him their fear and their dread. So the apostle tells Christians, when threatened with the greatest evils that the enemies to Christianity could inflict, not to be afraid of their terror, neither be troubled, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts. To sanctify the Lord in their hearts was to love him supremely, and trust in him alone, desiring that he might be exalted and glorified above all creatures forever. The same word in the original is translated *hallowed*, which is here rendered *sanctify*. “Hallowed be thy name:” that is, may thy sacred name and glorious character be made known, displayed and glorified to the highest degree, by all things that take place.

“And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you the reason of the hope that is in you.” Christians are directed to be *always* able, ready and willing to give the reason of their hope, to *every one* who asketh it of them. This must be understood with some limitation. By every one who asketh, is meant every one who asketh in a proper, decent



manner, and with an apparent, professed desire to know what reasons Christians can give for their hope. If any asked them to do this, with an apparent design to ridicule and mock them, and to get some advantage, and matter of accusation against them, which would expose them to suffering; they were not obliged to answer such, as it would be contrary to the command of Christ: "Give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you."

"With meekness and fear." Christians are not to be haughty and insolent in giving the reason of their hope, nor cuter into ostentatious and angry disputes with unbelievers. They must not despise and treat them with contempt for their unreasonable disbelief; but pity them, and treat them with condescension, tenderness and benevolence, not shewing or having any angry resentment for any injurious treatment they may have received from them; but suffering and bearing all injuries with a meek and quiet spirit and behaviour. All this is implied in meekness. Fear is here put for Christian humility, in opposition to high-mindedness, and self-confidence, boasting of their privileges and character, by which they are favoured and distinguished from those who are in a state of darkness and unbelief. It implies a sense of their own exceeding unworthiness, and utter insufficiency in themselves to defend and maintain the honour of the Christian cause, without constant support and assistance from divine grace; and continual liableness to fail of their duty, and dishonour Christ, by not speaking and behaving as becomes their Christian calling and profession. This fear is essential to the Christian character, and becomes Christians at all times. The apostle Paul exhorts Christians "not to be high minded, but fear; to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling," and tells the Christians at Corinth, that he was among them in fear and much trembling.

The subject proposed to be considered, in a further improvement of the words before us, is, the hope of Christians, and the reason they have to give, and ought always to be ready to give, for this their hope, when properly required of them.

I. It is to be considered what is included in the hope of Christians.

This hope indeed implies and comprehends more than words can express, or the most enlarged mind on earth can conceive. The greatest Christians do in this state comprehend and know but a small part of what is contained in this hope. And they depend on the enlightening influences of the Spirit of Christ, for the increasing knowledge of this which they may and ought to obtain in this life. Therefore the apostle Paul prays for the Christians at Ephesus, "that God would give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they might know what was the *hope* of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Christians may be assisted in their meditations on this pleasing and important subject, by attending to the following brief and scanty representation of their hope, taken from the holy scriptures.



Jesus Christ is the Christian's hope. What is contained in his person and character; in what he has done and suffered; in the manifestations he has made of the divine perfections; in his revealed designs and promises to his church, and to every believer, is all the Christian can hope for, or can desire, and far, infinitely far, exceeds his highest expectations, and the utmost stretch of his conception and imagination. Jesus Christ has an infinite fulness for sinners. He has all they want, and they cannot conceive or wish for any greater or other good. And he gives himself, and all he has, his infinite fulness, to every believer.

Christians hope by Christ to obtain the free pardon of all their sins, however many and great they are, and to be delivered from the curse of the law of God, even eternal destruction and misery, and from all evil. As the children of God, they hope for his kind protection to defend them from all real evil while in this world; that what is in itself evil shall be made to them a real good, so that all things shall conspire to promote their greatest good. They hope, in the best way and manner, and the most proper time, to be delivered from all sin and moral depravity, and made perfectly holy, by Christ their Saviour; and that their salvation shall be for the glory of God and the Redeemer forever; otherwise it would be no salvation to them. They trust in the wisdom and goodness of Christ to order the time and manner of their death so as shall be most for his glory and their good. They hope that when they drop their bodies into the grave they shall immediately enter into a world of light and complete happiness, being wholly transformed into the moral likeness of Christ; and in the enjoyment of him, and of his favour and love, and beholding his glory; and in the happy society of the redeemed, shall enjoy uninterrupted, increasing felicity without end.

The Christian's hope includes in it an assured and pleasing prospect that Christ will destroy the works and kingdom of the devil on earth, and set up his own kingdom, and give his people the possession of the world, for at least a thousand years; which happy time for the meek, the saints, to possess the earth, and delight in the abundance of peace and happiness, shall commence and continue in a time and manner most agreeable to Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. And the Christian expects the set time will come, and is hastening on, when Christ will come to judgment, raise the dead, and assemble all the children of Adam before him, when he will sentence the impenitent wicked to everlasting punishment, and invite and bring his friends into the possession of his eternal kingdom, to enjoy perfect and progressing happiness forever; and that they shall see, and have a most pleasing and eternally increasing conviction, when all the enemies of Christ are put under his feet, and all things are adjusted and brought to their proper and designed issue, that all events which have taken place, even all the evil, sin and misery which has been, and will exist for ever, are included in the divine purpose and plan, which was in the highest wisdom and goodness fixed and ordained from eternity, and are necessary, in the most proper and desirable manner, and to the highest possible degree, to promote the glory of God in the most clear manifestation and brightest display of the divine perfections, and produce the highest happiness and glory



of the eternal kingdom of God. This will be contemplated forever, and will be a source of growing entertainment, and part of the happiness which is included in the Christian's hope. The work of redemption by Christ is so grand, wonderful and complicated, the effect of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, exercised in the most astonishing condescension, grace and mercy, truth and faithfulness, to infinitely guilty, lost and miserable sinners, in a way honourable to a holy, righteous God, his law and government, and suited to humble and save sinful rebels, and raise them to the highest honour and happiness; and is attended with such infinitely great, important, glorious, eternal consequences; that the redeemed must enjoy unspeakably great and increasing happiness in searching into the wonders of this work, and loving, praising and adoring God and the Redeemer forever.



Every true Christian hopes to enjoy all this, and more, which no tongue can utter, or heart conceive; and he shall actually possess it forever. He will stand at the right hand of Christ at the day of judgment, and enter with all the redeemed into eternal life and happiness, and enjoy the company and friendship of a most lovely and happy society, all sweetly united in love to Christ and to each other, under the best advantages to enjoy God, in the assurance of his favour and love, and to be happy in friendship with each other, and make rapid advances in knowledge, holiness and happiness forever.—But the theme is endless, and it is time to stop.—This is the hope of a Christian!

II. The *reason* which Christians have to give for this hope which is in them, or entertained by them, is to be considered.

This involves two particulars, which are in themselves really distinct, though implied in each other; and therefore it is proper to consider them separately. They are these: The reason they have to believe and be sure that the Christian scriptures, the foundation of all their hopes, are a revelation from God, containing infallible truth, without any error, in matters of faith and practice, and therefore to be relied upon with the greatest confidence and safety; and the reason of their hope that they are real Christians, and interested in all the blessings promised in the gospel to true believers in Christ.



First, The Christian, in giving the reason of his hope, must tell what evidence he has that Christianity is a divine institution, and that the scriptures which contain a revelation of it were written by the inspiration of God.

Here Christians are introduced to speak for themselves, and give the reason of placing their hope in Christ and the gospel. They have the following answer to give to those who ask them.

1. We feel the want of a hope of some good and happiness which cannot be obtained and enjoyed in this life, and in this world. We find ourselves possessed of those mental capacities and desires which cannot be filled and satisfied with the enjoyment of any or all the things of this world, the objects of time and sense. We know we have a capacity of enjoying a higher and better good than this world affords, and a good which is unfading, and will

last to be enjoyed without any end; and we feel strong desires, which we cannot suppress, of existing forever, in the enjoyment of objects which will render us completely happy. This has excited us diligently to search and inquire whether and where any ground and good reason can be found for a hope of enjoying the good and happiness which is answerable to our capacity and desires.

2. If the Bible be excluded, upon the most diligent and extensive search we have been able to make, no sufficient reason has been found, or can be given, for a hope of a good adequate to the capacity and desires of man. The heathen who have not enjoyed the Bible, even the wisest among them, have not discovered any certainty of a future state. And all their conjectures about it, and ideas of happiness to be enjoyed after death if there be a future state, are so vague, uncertain and absurd, that they can give no satisfaction to a rational mind, but tend to the contrary. They have obtained no true notions of the character of the true God; so far from it, that they represent their gods in a ridiculous and shameful light, and as practising horrible vices. None of them, even their greatest philosophers, have been able to find out what true happiness is. They are indeed, and always have been, without the true God, and without a reasonable hope in the world.

And this is true of the Mahometans. They profess indeed to believe in one God, which Mahomet taught them with a number of other things, who learned them from the Bible, with which he was in some measure acquainted; but they have no correct, consistent notions of the divine character, especially of his moral character. They do not know of any reasonable way for sinners to obtain pardon of their sins, and the favour of God; and consequently cannot have any reasonable hope of this. The most ignorant and vicious men among them have a promise of their prophet that they shall go directly to heaven, if they die fighting for his cause and their religion, or if they perform certain prescribed actions and ceremonies. And the heaven they hope for they think consists, not in holiness and in the enjoyment of the true God, and the mental happiness implied in this, but in those sensual delights and gratifications, more suited for beads than men; which are the objects of aversion and abhorrence, and not of hope, to a good and pure mind.

The Infidels, Deists and Atheists who live in that part of the world called Christian are really without hope. The latter are professedly so: they have no belief of a future state, and have no hope of any good which they cannot enjoy in this life, which to every discerning mind is nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit. These choose to view and place themselves in such a low state of existence that they have no pre-eminence above the beasts, except that they are capable of suffering more pain and misery than the brute creation.

As to the Deists, they profess to believe there is a God; but do not appear to worship him, or derive any enjoyment from their belief. Many of them, with Atheists, do not believe there is any future state; but say they expect to die as the beasts, and have no further existence. Others of them consider it as a matter of uncertainty whether they shall exist in a future



state or not; and they who profess to believe they shall exist after death, can give no satisfactory account of the happiness they shall enjoy, nor any reason of their hope of happiness in the forgiveness of their sins and the favour of God, whom they have offended. For reason, on which they depend, affords no evidence that God will forgive them; but rather that they must fall under his displeasure, and be miserable forever. They can have no hope from the god they profess to believe exists. Having renounced the God revealed in the Bible, they are wholly at a loss about the character of their god. Some of them ascribe no moral character to him; and they who do, cannot agree in what it is; and none of them can tell whether, or how far, men have any concern in it, so as to have any influence on their conduct or happiness. So that they are all without any reasonable hope, having renounced the true God.

Therefore, if the Christian hope be not founded upon reason and truth, but must be given up as fabulous and mere delusion, we are left without hope, and we must sink into the most gloomy darkness and despair. But,

3. We find in the Bible an exhibition of that good which is suited to make us completely and forever happy, containing all that we can desire or hope for. It reveals a most agreeable and wise way for the pardon of sinners, and their reconciliation with God, and to enjoy his favour as much, and to an higher degree, and be much more happy, than if they had never sinned. It contains repeated and abundant promises of deliverance from all evil, and the everlasting enjoyment of the best and highest good of which we are or ever shall be capable. All this is offered and bestowed as a free gift on every one who is willing to receive it, and asketh for it. We will not enter into more particulars here in description of this hope. They have been represented in the former part of this discourse, and will of course come into view under the next head. We will only observe here, that the infinite good comprehended in the redemption of sinners, which is the subject of the revelation in the Bible, is the only proper and complete object of hope that can be conceived of or imagined by a reasonable and good mind, if it be true, and there is evidence that it is indeed a revelation which is given to men from God, Which leads us to say,

4. There is clear, most satisfactory and abundant evidence, fully answerable to the nature and importance of the subject, that the Bible is true, and contains a revelation from God.

But before we enter upon the short and summary detail of this evidence which we propose to give, the following things will be mentioned.

Though the evidence of the truth of divine revelation is sufficient to convince the understanding and judgment of those who will seriously attend to the subject, though they have had hearts, and do not really love the truths it contains; yet they cannot have that satisfactory assurance that it is from God, and indeed a divine revelation, which those of upright and good hearts have, though their understandings and mental powers be not so bright and strong; as those of others whose hearts are not good.



It may also be observed, that truths and objects of a moral and spiritual nature may be the objects of as great certainty, yea greater, than those objects and things whose existence is known only by our bodily senses; so that a man of an honest and good heart, and right taste and discerning, would doubt of the truth of the latter, rather than of the former, if one must be doubted of and given up as not true.

We would further observe here, that if it were possible that the Christian hope is a mere delusion, which we *know* is not true, and is impossible; yet we should lose nothing by entertaining it. We shall in the issue be as well off as those who have no hope, if we should cease to exist at death, or in whatever state we should be, we should not be in a worse state than others, or than we should be had we not been Christians. We have a high enjoyment in our hope now, which will continue as long as we are in this world. It is constantly better to us than all worldly enjoyments, and we should be great losers by exchanging it with the most happy worldly man, for all his enjoyments. Our hope is a constant source of high enjoyment, which unspeakably more than counterbalances all the uneasiness and sufferings which are occasioned by it, be they ever so many and great. Therefore unbelievers, if they knew we were deluded, which they do not know, and never will, would act an unreasonable, injurious and cruel part, to take our hope from us, if they could, or even to attempt it; for if this could be effected, it would deprive us of more happiness than they ever did or can enjoy, which is better to us than all this world. And we should sink down into the most gloomy state of despair and misery, which they who never had the Christian hope cannot feel or suffer while in this world.¹

We now return to the point proposed, to speak of the reason we have of our hope, grounded on the evidence that the gospel is from heaven, which amounts to as great demonstrative certainty as there is or can be of any proposition which was ever proposed or thought of. We have read the Bible over and over again, and with much more care and attention than we bestowed on any other book. And the more we have read it, and attended

1 1. Cor. xv. 19, "*If in this life only we have hope Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*" These words have been understood by some in a sense which may be thought inconsistent with the sentiments expressed in the above paragraph. But on a careful examination, they will doubtless appear in perfect unison. To hope in Christ only in this life, is really to give up the Christian hope, and Christianity itself, as a groundless fable; and consequently to be deprived of all the enjoyment and happiness derived from Christianity, and the Christian hope, by which they have an unspeakably higher enjoyment, and greater degree of happiness, than unbelievers can have. And as they feel the vanity of all things in this world, their loss is irreparable, and they must feel themselves wretched, and sink into gloom, despair and misery: while the men of the world, by their ignorance, delusion and a worldly mind, knowing no greater good than they have or hope to obtain in the enjoyments of this life, are eagerly pursuing and fondly hoping for worldly good; by which they are, at present, prevented falling into that despair and misery, which will certainly come upon them, when this life shall end.

to and understood the truths contained in it, the more clear and certain has the evidence appeared of its divine original, and the greater pleasure we have had in the things which it reveals.

When we enter on this theme, it is not easy to determine where to begin, or where to end. There is so great a multiplicity of evidence that the scriptures contain a revelation from God, and the number of particulars from which this is proved is so great, that it would take more time than we now have, to mention all of them. We can only give a summary view of this evidence now, which we are sure is a sufficient reason of our hope, of which we shall never be ashamed.

It is common and proper to distinguish the evidence that the Bible has a divine original, into that which is called *external*, and that which is *internal*, consisting in the doctrines, truths and duties which are revealed and inculcated therein. We shall endeavour to consider these separately, though they will naturally, and perhaps to the best advantage, be, in some instances, in a degree blended together. Certainly the honest mind will view them together, and at once, as strengthening each other, and amounting to a clear demonstration of this truth.

The external evidence consists in the manner in which the Christian scriptures have been made, and given to the world; the men and their character who wrote them, and the manner of their writing; the miracles which have been wrought in confirmation of the truth of the facts related, and the doctrines and commands made known, and that they who spoke and wrote were inspired by God to speak and do what they did; the numerous predictions of things and events which should come to pass, many of which were accomplished soon, others have come to pass long since they were predicted, and many are fulfilling now before our eyes, in the revolutions which are taking place, and the present state of the nations and of the world; the spread of Christianity among the nations, by the men who were the principal instruments of propagating it, and the preservation and continuance of it in the world to this day, notwithstanding the great and constant opposition to it which has been made.

These are the chief, but not all, the external evidences of the divine original of the Bible; which must be more particularly considered. The men by whom it was written appear to be men of good natural abilities, sensible, honest and serious, as men really inspired by God to write would be. They were not a number of men who lived at the same time, and could consult together, and lay a scheme what to write; but lived in different ages, the last above a thousand years after the first who wrote. They do not appear selfish, proud and vain, to seek their own worldly honour or interest, but the contrary. The manner of their writing is inimitable, and differs from the writings of all other men* This has been observed and illustrated by many authors, and is needless for us to repeat. They write an orderly history of the world from the beginning of it to the time of those last events which relate to the subjects on which they wrote. And this history is carried on by them to the end of the world by their

predictions. This is the most ancient, well authenticated, consistent, important and useful history, that was ever formed by uninspired men, or ever will or can be. It exhibits one grand scheme and plan of events, all uniting and conspiring to bring all things to the most happy issue, worthy of the infinite Being who is infinitely powerful, wise and good. It is as really impossible that any uninspired man or number of men, especially who lived in such distant ages of the world, should make the writings which we find in the Bible, as it is for them to contrive and make the visible world: and we have as satisfying evidence that the scriptures contained in the Bible were written by the inspiration of God, as we have that the sun, moon and liars, and all the visible world, were made by him; especially if we take into view the facts which we are now going to mention.



Moses, who was the first writer, gave abundant proof that what he wrote, said and did, was by the inspiration, command and direction of the true God, by the numerous miracles which he wrought, and the predictions he made, which were fulfilled directly, or in the time of his life, and have been since fulfilled. And here we would observe, that prophecy, when it is fulfilled, is a real miracle, as absolute, independent prescience is an incommunicable attribute of God; and when a man has ability to know and foretel events that are future, this is as much above what are called the laws of nature, as the ability to work any miracle whatever, and is an evidence of divine inspiration. Therefore miracles, and prophecy which comes to pass, may be considered together, as they are frequently united in the same event in the scriptures. Thus most of the miracles wrought by Moses in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, during forty years, were accompanied by predictions of the miraculous event before it took place, though the latter was instantaneous with the former, and both were of the nature of a miracle. And so were all the prophecies of Moses which have since been fulfilled, by which, and by all the miracles done by him, his divine mission was fully confirmed, in the view of the whole nation of Israel; and this has been handed down through all ages since in the church, and been increasing by the fulfilment of many of his prophecies, and the discovery of the import and design of the institutions which he appointed, which he declared he received from heaven. And, indeed, all or most of the ordinances instituted by Moses contained predictions, pointing out the character of the Saviour who was to come into the world, and what was to be done and suffered by him for the redemption of man, which were exactly fulfilled in him, together with all the predictions of him by the prophets who arose after Moses. All the mosaic institutions, and all the miracles he did, and predictions he uttered, all the miracles and prophecies by the prophets after Moses, with all the events which took place, were designed and suited to prepare the way for that event, the incarnation of the Son of God; so that divine design and wisdom is to be seen, by those who will properly attend, superintending through the whole. It is impossible it should be a mere human contrivance. At the very time which was pointed out and fixed by the prophets hundreds of years before, when there was consequently a general expectation of the appearance of the



promised Saviour, and the Hate of the Jews and of the world was made ready for such an event, the expected Messiah came, in a character and in just such circumstances as were described and foretold long before by the prophets. He wrought many miracles, by which he proved that he was the Son of God, the very person predicted by the prophets, and taught the most important truth, in a manner which was never done by any mere man. He was a perfect example of humility, meekness, uprightness, benevolence, wisdom and piety, and taught, both by precept and example, the nature and properties of true religion, and the only excellent and perfect morality.—But now we have insensibly run into what properly belongs to the next head, of internal evidence.

He instructed his disciples into the meaning of those prophecies which related to him; and from this, and acquaintance with him, his doctrines and precepts, and the miracles he wrought, they believed with all their heart that he was the Son of God, who was to come into the world. The body of the nation of Jews, especially their teachers and leaders, the scribes and pharisees, were so sunk into depravity and ignorance, their hearts were so very bad and vicious, that they did not understand the prophecies concerning him; nor could they approve of his person, character and doctrines, all which condemned them; but they hated them with a hatred which could not be satisfied till they had put him to a cruel and ignominious death, which he had repeatedly foretold, and the consequent destruction of that nation, to his disciples, and the ancient prophets had predicted. He also said that he should rise from death on the third day. But his enemies had no expectation or belief of this, but were disposed to reject all the evidence that could be given of such a fact. And even his disciples and friends did not understand the prophets nor the words of Christ on this point, and knew not what to think of his being put to death as he was, and were wholly in the dark as to the consequence, till the evidence that he was risen from the dead was irresistibly forced upon them.

When he had given incontestible evidence of his resurrection to a sufficient number of chosen, competent witnesses, who could not be deceived, and conversed with them a considerable time, and given them proper instructions, they declared that they saw him ascend towards heaven in a cloud till out of their light; and that two angels appeared to them, who told them he was gone to heaven, and would return again at the day of judgment. They retired, and waited till, as he had promised them, they received from heaven miraculous power to bear witness of his resurrection, and proclaim salvation to sinners upon believing in his name. They were soon endued with power, and enabled to work miracles to prove the truth of their testimony that Christ was risen from the dead, and gone to heaven, and had commanded them to preach the gospel to the world, and that in this they said nothing but what was contained in the writings of Moses and the prophets. They went forth, and, contrary to all human probability and expectation of the success of such a small number of poor, low, illiterate men, with such a message, so contrary to the strong prejudices and prevailing

customs both of Jews and Gentiles, and to the lusts and evil propensities which naturally reign in the hearts of all men, they made numerous converts to Christianity, from among the Jews and the idolatrous heathen.

It is impossible that these facts should take place, unless Christianity were from heaven, and the apostles were assured that what they related concerning Christ was true. That, in their then circumstances, they should undertake to propagate Christianity, without any worldly motives, and in the prospect of poverty, disgrace and suffering, which they knew was as contrary to the natural inclinations of men as any thing can be, cannot be accounted for, unless on the supposition they knew that what they declared was true, and most important to themselves and others, and that they could depend upon the promise of Christ to support and succeed them. And it appears to us that their success in propagating Christianity, and being supported in the midst of opposition. and suffering, till they had collected a number of churches, is a demonstration that divine power upheld them, and changed the hearts of men so as to dispose them to attend to and receive the gospel. This was as far above all mere human contrivance and efforts as is the production of the natural world, and cannot be accounted for without supposing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that the apostles were enabled to do those great and wonderful things by his assisting power, agreeable to the relation given of this matter in the Bible.

And that the gospel has spread among the nations, and Christianity has been continued to this day, notwithstanding the constant and strong opposition which has been made to it in so many ways, is, as we may say, a constant miracle, and a clear evidence that it has a divine original; and is a demonstration that it is of God, according to the test proposed by the good sense of the learned Gamaliel. If this counsel, or this work, had been of men, it would have come to nought long ago: but since it has continued to this day, and men, with all their cunning and power, with which they have in all ages attempted it, have not been able to overthrow it, its divine original is demonstrated, and it must be of God. And we are certain that all they who do oppose Christianity, and attempt to overthrow it, are fighting against God, and will be disappointed and confounded.

We will finish this head by mentioning the state in which the Jews now are, and have been since the destruction of Jerusalem and their temple; and the present state of the world -, which are agreeable to the predictions in the Bible. The state into which the Jews have fallen in consequence of the crucifixion of Christ by that nation, who wished that the guilt of his blood might fall on them and their posterity, is agreeable to the prophecies of Moses and the other prophets; to the predictions of Christ and the apostles; and are, in this view, a standing evidence of the truth of Christianity: which might be illustrated by a number of particulars, had we time to mention them. Their continuing a distinct people in their dispersion among the nations of the earth for so many ages, which is a sort of public, continual miracle, holds them in a situation in which they are prepared for the visible accomplishment



of those many predictions and promises, which we find in the Bible, of mercy in store for them, by their being made willing to submit to Christ, and come into his fold, the Christian church, with the Gentiles: which is a confirming evidence of the truth of the gospel, and that this happy event will take place. And that the time is not far distant appears from other prophecies, and the present state of the world.

This leads us to observe, that the state of the Christian church from the days of the apostles to this time, and to the end of the world, and the state, changes and revolutions of the nations of the world, especially so far as they have any relation to the church, are foretold in the prophetic part of scripture, particularly by the prophet Daniel, and in the revelation given to the apostle John; which have been exactly fulfilled so far as they relate to the past and present time. And we may hence rely upon the accomplishment of the predictions of the events which are yet to take place. The great apostacy which has taken place in the church of Christ, by Antichrist or the Pope, by which the church of Rome is become a corrupt, false church, was particularly foretold, with many particular circumstances relating to its character, and treatment of true Christians, &c. the rise of it, and the time of its continuance, and final overthrow. Many things predicted of this false church have already come to pass, which are publicly known, and needless for us now to mention. It is evident that this false church, which in scripture is called a harlot, with those who support her, and all her appendages, are on the decline, and hastening to the destruction predicted. Five vials of the wrath of God, predicted in the sixteenth chapter of the prophecy by John, have already been poured out on her, and the sixth vial is now running, under which Antichrist is to sink, and the way be prepared for his final overthrow; which is now taking place in sight of the world. While this is doing, according to the prophecy, the spirits of devils are to be let loose in the Christian world, as they never were before, and under their influence all orders of men are to become exceeding corrupt and wicked, more generally, and to a greater degree, than ever before, and own themselves in opposition to God and the Redeemer. And do we not see this representation fall fulfilling from year to year? Is it not known that infidelity, Deism, Atheism, and all kinds of gross error, and of vice and wickedness, which are the genuine fruits of these, are rapidly spreading, and prevail every where? Surely all must be sensible of this who can discern the signs of the times. Let who will shut their eyes, and live in ignorance, it appears to us a striking evidence that the events of this time are a fulfilment of the above mentioned prophecy; and that, after the accomplishment of the events predicted under the seventh vial, the millennium, or prosperous and happy state of the church on earth, so much the subject of prophecy, both in the Old Testament and the New, will commence.

Having, as briefly as we could, stated the leading things in which the external evidence that the Bible contains a revelation from heaven consists, we proceed to mention what we call the internal evidence of the same truth. This, we think, is more than answerable to the



fair and promising outside, if we may so call it, which we have been considering, and is suited to establish every honest and good heart in assurance that the gospel is of God.

The Bible reveals the being, perfections, works and designs of God, and sets them in a more grand, important, rational and desirable light, than ever has or could be discovered by uninspired men, or has been conceived by any man who is not acquainted with the Bible. God is here represented as without beginning to exist, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinitely and unchangeably wise and good, just, true and faithful; as the Creator of all things, and constantly upholding, directing and governing them in all their revolutions and motions; all which are included in a most wise plan of operation, which has been fixed by him from eternity, is endless, absolutely perfect, and immutable; that he exercises a most perfect and wise *moral* government over all his rational creatures, to whom he gives a natural capacity of moral action, and obedience to all his laws, which are perfect, just and good. The law of God respects and requires a perfectly right disposition and exercises toward him and all fellow creatures; to love him with all the heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. It assures favour and happiness to the perfectly obedient, and curses the disobedient, with a curse which implies endless destruction. In short, the Bible reveals such a God as must be most pleasing and desirable to every perfectly innocent and good mind. Such have all they can desire or wish for in such a God, such a law and moral government; therefore to them he is the only true God, and their chosen portion and happiness; while they know that all the notions that have been entertained of the Divine Character and his law by those who have not taken them from the Bible, and are not consistent with it, are erroneous, foolish and wicked.

The Bible gives a particular and rational account of the creation of this visible world, which is no where else to be found; and of the creation of man, by making one man and one woman, from whom all mankind descended. It relates the sin and apostasy of these first: created parents of the human race, and how, by this, total moral depravity and sinfulness came upon all their children, by which they are all, in their natural state, under the curse of the law of God. That all men are by nature depraved and sinful, is a fact evident to all who attend to the matter; but how and in what way they are become so, none have been able to give any good reason, who have not been acquainted with the Bible, or have rejected the account *that* gives of it, which appears rational, consistent and satisfactory to those who have an upright and good heart, and even to the sober reason of *all* who examine it without a great degree of prejudice and pride.

But the Bible reveals that which is infinitely more important to us, and to mankind, which never could have been known or thought of by any creature, had not God revealed it. This is the great design and work of the redemption of man by Jesus Christ, the Son of God; which is the great subject: of revelation, as the whole has reference to this, and would be needless in any other view. This fixes a divine stamp on the whole, as it makes a more



clear, full and wonderful manifestation and display of the divine perfections, power, wisdom, holiness, goodness, justice, truth, grace and mercy, than otherwise could have been done; which cannot be known by those who never heard of this revelation, or who reject it as not coming from God.

In the gospel all mankind are represented as sinners, transgressors of the law of God, and under the curse of it. And a way is opened by which sinners may be delivered from this curie, and be recovered to holiness, the favour of God, and eternal life, consistent with maintaining and honouring the law of God, and displaying his justice and truth, his hatred of sin, and disposition to punish it. This has been effected by the incarnation of the Son of God, who is really God manifest in the flesh; who by his suffering unto death in the flesh, and paying perfect obedience to the law, for man, and in his stead, has so honoured the law, both the precepts and penalty of it, that God may be just, according to the true spirit and design of it, and pardon and justify sinners who approve of the character and works of the Mediator, and trust in him. This is the sum of the matter, which might be enlarged upon, and illustrated without end. But we shall only say now, that to us the wisdom and all the perfections of God are displayed in the gospel; that this is the true God and eternal life, and that with good reason, and with the most perfect safety, we may place our highest hopes on this sure foundation.

The disciples of Jesus appear to give a fair and honest history of what he said and did, and of the treatment he received. They neither give him or themselves any praise, encomiums or flattering titles. They only relate facts respecting him, themselves and his friends and enemies, without making any reflections in his or their own favour, or against his enemies. They relate their own faults, without offering any palliation or excuse. No uninspired writer ever did, or could, or ever will, write a history of any particular person, or of so many important and extraordinary events, in which he is as much interested, as those who wrote the historical part of the New Testament were in the facts which they relate, in the manner in which they have written. Christ uniformly spake and acted with a dignity, condescension, seriousness, wisdom and prudence which became a person of the character which he sustained, and the work he came into the world to perform. He never erred or made the lead mistake in all he said and did.

Christ taught the most sublime, important and pure doctrines, respecting God and the state of man, the way of his recovery to the favour of God, to holiness and true happiness, and in what these consist. He taught that God was sovereign and independent in bestowing his mercy on men; that he had mercy on whom he pleased, for which men depend wholly on him; that all men were so wholly depraved and wicked at heart, that they refused to come to the light when set before them; that they hated the light; yea, that they hated him and God his Father, and continued to do so, till they were born again of the Spirit of God, by which a new, obedient heart was given; that previous to this they did not understand or see

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the things of the Spirit and kingdom of God; therefore all who come to the knowledge of the truth, and embrace the gospel, are taught of God; in which he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, making the distinction according to the dictates of his wisdom and goodness, what will be best to promote the highest good of the universe, which cannot be done by the salvation of all. This is clearly and concisely expressed by Christ: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." This recommends the gospel to us as true and from heaven, as consistent and most excellent; as no man or set of men, uninspired, would have represented mankind in so bad a light, and so dependent on God for a new and better heart; or that every thing and circumstance relating to the salvation of men is under the direction of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness; all which is clearly taught in the Bible.

This leads us to say, that the gospel appears tons evidently of divine original, and we are sure that it is not of man, because it represents man as so infinitely guilty, odious and ill-deserving, that he cannot recommend himself to the least favour by any thing he can do or suffer; and that it is unbecoming the holy and just God to pardon and save him out of respect to any thing good and deserving in him, but purely on the account of the atonement, righteousness and infinite worthiness of a Mediator, to whom the unworthy sinner is united by faith: so that the salvation of men, from the foundation to the top-stone, from beginning to the end, is of mere sovereign. wonderful mercy and grace, by which man is thoroughly abased and humbled, and his salvation must be ascribed, not in the least to himself, but wholly to the undeserved, sovereign grace of God. This is perfectly agreeable to the law of God, and the sinful, guilty state of man; and there is no other possible way in which he could be saved, consistent with the divine law, and the guilty state of man. It is impossible that this should be the contrivance of man, as it is directly contrary to his thoughts and reigning disposition, and is the principal reason of the opposition men make to the gospel, and why none will cordially embrace it till they have a new heart, a heart to confess their sins, and humble themselves in the sight of God, and receive offered mercy as a free, undeserved gift to the infinitely guilty and wretched, and with pleasure ascribe all the honour and glory of their salvation to God alone; by which they are prepared to enjoy true happiness, of which they were before wholly ignorant and destitute.

We have another all-convincing evidence that the gospel is true, and has a divine original, from the duties and the nature of the religion taught and enjoined by Christ and his apostles, which are different from any thing of this kind recommended by men not inspired, and in many respects contrary thereto. The Bible teaches that all true religion has its beginning in the heart of man, in the fear of God, and consists in supreme love to him, and unreserved devotedness to his honour and interest in all our exercises and conduct, which implies constant devotion in prayer and praise, and a religious acknowledgment of him at all times, and in the proper seasons of public and social worship, as well as that which is more private

and secret. Christ said, men must deny themselves, and forsake all they had, for his sake, in order to be his true disciples; that they must be humble, meek, upright and benevolent, even towards their worst enemies; do them all the good in their power, and pray for them: forgive those who injured them, and indulge no disposition to retaliate and avenge themselves; but be harmless, and injure no man. In sum, the religion and morality taught in the Bible, especially by Christ and his apostles, is as much superior, in its reasonableness and excellence, to any thing of the kind which has been taught by men who have not derived their sentiments from revelation, as light is to darkness, and is perfectly suited to make those who heartily embrace it and conform to it happy in this world and forever. And we must further observe, that the religion and morality inculcated in the Bible is urged by the strongest motives, not only as most reasonable, and tending to render society happy in this world; but as it is enjoined by divine authority, with the promise of eternal happiness to all who obey, and an awful threatening of endless punishment to all others; in which opposite states all shall be fixed at the great day of general judgment.

We have now, in a summary way, given the reasons of our belief and assurance that the Bible contains a divine revelation, and of our hope in Christ. We see enough in him to satisfy us, even all we can wish, or hope for, or desire; enough to make us happy, beyond our present conception, in his eternal kingdom; and not us only, but all that shall believe on him, which we would earnestly urge on all those to whom we have access; knowing that all who believe shall be saved, and all who do not believe on him shall be damned.

We are sensible that Christianity has been greatly opposed in all ages since its institution, and much has been written, and many objections have been made, against it, by men of great parts and learning, which have been fully and abundantly refuted by Christian writers, some of whose writings we have seen. We know also that infidelity has greatly increased of late, and is now increasing; and that many, who profess to believe Christianity to be true, are rejecting the most essential doctrines of it, and there are many others who do not cordially embrace it, or live answerable to the precepts of it. But this is so far from making us hesitate, or abating our belief and confidence of the truth of it, that we consider it as a confirmation that it is from God. For if mankind be so corrupt and wicked as to be enemies to the true God, which the Bible asserts, and is proved by their general conduct, then they must dislike and be enemies to all the manifestations of his character, and whatever he requires as most agreeable to him. Besides, the Bible relates many instances of this opposition to the truth, and predicts that the gospel would be opposed and rejected by men. Christ says to his disciples, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." And the Bible says, "The time will come, when men will not endure sound doctrine; and shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." And it has been observed, that the present infidelity and wickedness which prevail in Christendom is particularly predicted in the Bible. Notwithstanding all this, we know the



truth of the gospel is great, and will overcome; and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Finally: We know that the Bible could not be invented and forged by dishonest, wicked men; for this is for many reasons not only improbable, but impossible. And we know that no honest, good men would have any hand in it, if it were a forgery. It follows that the very existence of it, in the form in which it is, is a demonstration that it came from God, and was written by divine inspiration. We have as great and full evidence of this, yea, greater, than we have of the existence of the visible world, or of any thing which we perceive by our bodily senses.²



2 The above evidences of the truth and divine origin of Christianity, it is supposed every Christian is, or ought to be, able to produce on all proper occasions. Others are omitted, together with answers to the objections which are made to the Bible, because every Christian may not be supposed able readily to exhibit them. A more ample and able vindication of Christianity is contained in Dr. Trumbull's *Twelve Sermons on the Divine Origin of the Holy Scriptures*, and Mr. Fuller's treatise entitled, *Christianity its own Evidence*, &c; both which are recommended as worthy of the perusal of all.

SERMON II.

The same Subject continued.

1 Peter, iii. 15. *And he ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that it in you, with meekness and fear.*

SECONDLY. Christians, in giving the reason of the hope that is in them, must give the reason, not only of their belief and assurance that the gospel is true, and a revelation from heaven; but also the reason of their hope that they do cordially embrace it, and are interested in all the blessings which are promised to all true believers. When they, in proper times and circumstances, are asked the reason of this their hope, by those who appear to want information, and to have a right to it, and it may promote a good and important end, they can make the following answer.

We all hope that we, are friends to Christ, and are interested in the promises he has made to those who believe in him. But our hope is stronger or weaker at different times, according to the strength and constancy, or weakness and inconstancy, of our religious exercises, and the consciousness we have of them, and the sight of our own hearts. We sometimes attain a degree of assurance, or that confidence which excludes all sensible doubts; but many of us, perhaps the most, have often many doubts, and some of us have *generally* many doubts and fears. Others are generally more confident, and seldom if ever doubt of their being real Christians. What is the cause of this difference it is impossible for us to determine; at least in many cases. But this we are confident of, that it is owing to our imperfection in knowledge, discerning, or Christian exercises, if we be real Christians, that we have the least doubt of it, and do not always enjoy joy an assurance that we are friends to Christ. At the same time we believe that the reason why some real Christians do not admit a doubt of their being Christians, is, their imperfection in knowledge, discerning, and Christian experience. There are others who profess to be assured constantly, without one doubt for a long course of years, that they are Christians, and shall be saved, whose life and conversation discover that they know not what it is to be a *real* Christian. But we will proceed to give the reason of our hope.

In the first place we would observe, that we trust we have been convinced of sin, and reproved for it, by the Spirit of God, as none are but those to whom he applies the benefits of redemption. Antecedent to our hearts being renewed by divine power to new and gracious exercises, we were, the most of us, if not all, brought to a degree of painful conviction of our sinful and miserable condition, which we believe is the way which God commonly takes with those whom he designs to save. But as such conviction, and the exercises that accompany it, are so different in different persons, as to their degree, the length of their continuance, the attempts and exertions they make to help themselves, and the particular means by which they have taken place and continued; we shall not try to give account of them, which every

one may do for himself, when it may be convenient. Besides, it would be deviating from our present purpose, which is, to give the reason of our hope that we are Christians, to enter into a description of the convictions of which the unregenerate may be the subjects. For no convictions or exercises which take place in the mind of a sinner, antecedent to his regeneration, or his having a new heart, can be any scriptural evidence that he ever will be renewed and become a Christian. There is no connection in nature, or by the declarations and promises of scripture, between any convictions and exercises of the unregenerate, and their becoming Christians. In any stage or degree of their convictions, change of sentiments, or external reformation, all may come to a full stop, and be lost; or, if they continue in any degree, they may never issue in a true conversion. We therefore mean to speak only of that conviction of sin, and humiliation for it, which is an evidence of our being regenerated, as it can take place only in a renewed heart, and is connected with salvation.

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Our eyes have been opened to see that the law of God, which requires our obedience to it, respects the heart and every motion and exercise of it which is of a moral nature, requiring that they all should be perfectly right and in conformity to it, and forbidding every thing contrary to this rectitude of heart, on pain of eternal punishment; that this law is perfectly right and good in all the requirements and threatenings of it. This has been attended with a conviction of the exceeding wickedness of our hearts, being wholly contrary to the law of God, and the source of every thing wrong in our outward actions. We could not but approve of the law as right, holy and good, and felt that we were wholly blameable for every thing in our heart and life contrary to this law, and were wholly without excuse. Our heart appeared to us to be naturally wholly depraved and wicked, and all sin against God so infinitely criminal and vile, and we so unspeakably guilty, having done nothing: but sinning against God and his law, that we felt and acknowledged from the heart that we deserved to have the penalty of the law executed upon us, that God would be just and glorious in doing it, and we must justify him in it, and remain forever without the least reason of complaint. Thus we submitted to God, and accepted the punishment of our iniquity, and felt a calmness and pleasure we never experienced before, in viewing with delight the divine character exhibited in his law, and works of creation and providence. We knew our heart to be naturally so totally depraved and wicked, hard, obstinate and impenitent, that it would never be made better by us, or by any means or creature, unless it were renewed by the almighty power of God, which he was binder no obligation to do; that we were utterly undone and lost in ourselves, that we were in the hands of God, as the clay is in the hand of the potter, to deal with us according to his sovereign pleasure and we heartily acquiesced in this, in being thus dependent on him. And when we were brought to a more particular and realizing view of Christ, and the way of salvation by him, (of which we shall speak presently) our sins and the evil that is in our heart appeared in a worse light to us, and unspeakably aggravated, in that it was necessary that Christ should suffer so much to make atonement for sin, in which

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such great and astonishing love to sinners was manifested. Our abuse of the gospel, and disposition to slight and reject Jesus Christ, of which we had been actually guilty in ways and instances innumerable, appeared to us great and aggravated beyond description, and discovered the exceeding malignity and baseness of our heart; the wickedness and obstinacy in refusing to accept Christ offering himself clothed with love and salvation. Oh, who can express or fully conceive of the magnitude and aggravations of the sin of impenitence and unbelief, of which they are guilty who live under the gospel, and will not embrace it!

Thus we have been convinced of sin, and reproof. for it, and we trust have submitted to the reproof in the exercise of repentance, condemnation, shame and abhorrence of ourselves. We think this is described by Christ when he says, "And when he is come (that is, the Holy Spirit) he will reprove the world of sin: of sin, because they believe not on me." And here we would observe, that this conviction of sin, from the beginning of it, and in its progress, has been attended with an evidence to us that the Bible is true and from God, in that it describes the character of man to be the lame which we found ours to be, when we saw the depravity and wickedness of our hearts. This description is given in the relation of the facts by which men in different circumstances have in all generations acted out and discovered the depravity and great degree of wickedness of their hearts, and in the many particular assertions of the great and total depravity of the human heart. And the gospel is founded on this, that mankind are all sinners to such a degree that they are wholly lost and undone, dead in trespasses and sin, enemies to God, and under the curse of the law, which is vindicated and honoured, both in the commands and threatenings of it, by the gospel: and it asserts that man is naturally so under the power of sin that he hates the light of truth, and will not come to it, but chooses to remain in the darkness of sin, till he is born from above, and has a new heart given to him. We are assured that no men not inspired by God would have written such a book, which represents man in a light so contrary to what men naturally think of themselves, or ever would have thought of it. We are sensible that our ignorance of ourselves, before we were convinced of our own sinfulness, as we have been describing it, was the ground of our ignorance of the Bible, and our criminal disregard to it, and by this conviction we have been confirmed in the truth of divine revelation, as we never were before. And we are certain beyond a doubt, that all the professed and open infidelity, or secret disbelief of the truth of the gospel, is owing to a want of a true and real conviction of sin. And in this view, we do not wonder at their unbelief; for how can they who are so wholly ignorant of their own moral character, and of their standing in any need of the provision made in the gospel, believe and embrace it? How can they believe who are proud, and have so high an opinion of themselves, and seek honour one of another? As well may they who feel themselves perfectly sound and whole, think they want a physician.

We would observe further, that the conviction of sin and reproof for it has not been a transient thing, which soon palled away and was forgotten: contrary to this, it abides by us,



continues and increases. Our hope of pardon of all our sins, and of salvation by Christ, does not abate, but increases it. We see more and more the evil nature of sin, and the ill desert of it, as we increase in our sense of the righteousness and excellency of the law of God, the wisdom of the gospel, and the worthiness and glory of God and the Redeemer. And we daily see more and more of the sinfulness of our own hearts, our indwelling depravity, that sin cleaves to us in all our exercises, and defiles them. We have an increasing sense of our desert of everlasting destruction; of our constant and absolute dependence on Christ, his atonement and righteousness, for pardon and justification, and to renew our hearts, and for every right thought and exercise, of which assistance and grace we are infinitely unworthy; therefore, if we shall be saved, it must be all of free, undeserved grace. This conviction and sense of sin, and of our own helplessness and infinite unworthiness, accompanies all our exercises of religion and piety, as essential to them, and increases as we grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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We proceed to say, when we were led to a particular view of Jesus Christ, his character, work and design, all this appeared as a reality, and the wisdom, love and grace of God shined in him and the way of salvation by him, in a new, glorious and affecting light. And we could not but highly approve of all this, and the whole character of Christ, and were filled with wonder and pleasure. We saw there was all fulness in Christ, enough to supply every want of such sinners as we were; that there was every thing in him that we could desire, and nothing undesirable; and that all he has for sinners is freely offered, without money and without price, to all who are willing to accept of it. This view and sense of heart of the truth of the gospel, and of the worthiness and excellence of Christ, and approbation of his character, and the way of salvation by him, is so fixed in our hearts, that we have never lost it, though it is sometimes more clear, impressive and affecting than at others.

Thus we have described the conviction and reproof we had of sin, and our consequent view and approbation of Christ and the gospel, as some of us have sensibly experienced these in this order, and it is the order of nature; for it is impossible that any man who is not Convinced of sin and reproof for it, so as to submit to God, approve of his character as legislator; and of his Law, should understand and approve of the gospel. Though there may be some, yea, many of us, who have not so distinctly and sensibly discerned the operations of their own minds as to ascertain the order in which their convictions and exercises took place, yet they are sensible they have had them all, as to substance, sooner or later, in a greater or less degree. Some of us have remained a longer and more sensible time, after we submitted to God in the manner which has been described, before we had clear and affecting views of Christ and the gospel, than others, and our views of the latter have been more gradual. Others have had all crowded on their minds so much at once as not to be able to distinguish the former from the latter, so as to say which was first or last, from the perception of their own minds. And there is a great variety in the degree, way and manner, time and

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means, in and by which these things have taken place in different persons. Yet the work and effect appear to be the same, as to substance and the essentials of it.

Not one of us have entertained a hope that we shall be saved, or have been led to approve of the gospel, and become friendly to God and his law, wholly from a persuasion somehow impressed on our minds, that Christ died for us and would save us, or something like this: for it is impossible that such a persuasion, be it ever so dear and strong, should be true, and therefore must be false, and a great and dangerous delusion: and they whose religion is built on this foundation only, are building on the sand, and going to inevitable ruin.

Our hope that we belong to Christ, and shall be saved by him, is built on the evidence we think we have that we have cordially embraced the gospel, and have been brought to the exercise of the Christian graces, such as repentance, faith in Christ, love to God, our fellow Christians and our neighbours, or any of those Christian graces which are implied in these, and connected with them. Some of us, we believe, have, at their first conversion, had such clear and impressive views of the truth and excellence of the gospel, that they not only knew it was divine, but also that they did embrace it with all their heart, and strength of mind; that they were turned from darkness to marvellous light, and consequently should be saved; and the Spirit of God has so excited holy affections, and shined on his own work, as to be a witness with their spirits that they were born of God: and some have been so happy as to enjoy this evidence all their days, without much interruption; especially those who have been called to labour and suffer much for the cause of Christ and religion. There are others who at the time of their conversion have had such great light and strong affections, that they were confident, without the least doubt, that they had passed from death to life, who yet have soon fallen into darkness and doubts, whether they were really converted or not: others, who have had such mistaken notions about conversion, and the feelings and exercises in which it consisted, and of Christians, previous to their own conversion and after it, that when they really passed this change they did not know, and had not one thought that they were converted then, and for a considerable time after. But as real Christian exercises continued, and perhaps on some occasions rose higher, upon reflection on their own past experience and exercises, they have entertained a hope that they were real Christians; and the evidence of this has increased on passing through trials, and their hope has grown into a confidence which often excludes all doubt. All these differences, and those which have been before mentioned, and many others not mentioned, may and do take place among real Christians, from causes and for reasons which we do not pretend to be able fully to explore and explain. If they have been convinced of sin; have submitted to God, and embraced the gospel in the manner before stated; and have and exhibit the further evidence that they are Christians which we now proceed to mention; they may reasonably think themselves such, and must be embraced by us as the friends of Christ.

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Our evidence that we have really embraced the gospel, by which our hope is supported and strengthened, arises from those exercises, and the conduct, which have attended or followed the things which have been already mentioned.

When we understood and believed the gospel, as before described, it had a powerful influence on our hearts and affections, which is lasting, and never wholly lost; at some times less sensible, at others more so, and is on the whole, we hope, increasing. We were brought into a new moral and spiritual world, and our affections were taken off from the things, the enjoyments and pleasures of this world, on which they were before fixed, as the great and chief good; and fixed on the infinitely important, glorious and beautiful objects of the invisible and spiritual world revealed in the Bible. Our minds have been so renewed and transformed by divine power accompanying the gospel, we hope, that we have no longer lived unto ourselves; but have with strong affection devoted ourselves to Christ, and given ourselves away to him, to serve him, and promote his honour and interest. And in our attention to his character, and the truths contained in the gospel, our affections and the exercises of our minds are excited to a higher degree and greater strength than they ever were towards any worldly object, or possibly could be: at the same time we are conscious that they are not flighty and imaginary, but solid and rational. We feel a fixed determination and resolution to follow Christ, and adhere to the practice of Christianity, by divine assistance: and whatever we were before, and though some of us were openly vicious, we are, by the knowledge of the gospel, and the power it has had on our hearts, become strictly conscientious, in all our thoughts, exercises of heart, words and actions; watchful and careful that they all may be conformable to the divine commands. And what is found contrary to these in our hearts, of which we see much, we lament, and, with pain and sorrow, condemn. As to all external vicious conduct in words and actions, we hope we are thoroughly reformed, and condemn and abhor ourselves for being guilty of them, and for all our sins; and have an earnest longing to be delivered from all sin, and to become perfectly holy, which we hope is what Christ means by “hungering and thirsting after righteousness.” We think this change in us could not be wrought by any thing short of divine power, accompanying the gospel, by which it has been made unto us “the power of God unto our salvation.” And we hope we have received “the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

We hope we have received from God the spirit of love, such love which in the nature and exercises of it differs from all kinds of love natural to man, and is peculiar to Christians, and conformable to the moral character of God, which consists in *love*. This love consists most essentially in disinterested good will, or goodness of heart. This has fixed our hearts in the first place and chiefly on God, in cordial and strong desires that he may be exalted, infinitely blessed and glorified forever, and readiness to devote ourselves to answer this end; and when we reflect on the subject, and learn that God is glorifying himself by every thing that has, does or will take place to eternity, we are highly pleased, and rejoice. And when

we consider that the work of redemption by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is suited to make the greatest display of the divine perfections, both in them who shall be saved and in them who perish; and that all the sin and misery that do or ever shall take place, will serve to praise and glorify Christ, and promote the greatest possible good of the universe; and that Christ will bring the redeemed and all the friends of God to the highest happiness and glory in his eternal kingdom, even to unspeakably greater happiness than could possibly have taken place if no sin and misery had ever existed, and consequently there could have been no such character as that of God manifested in the flesh, and no such works as he has done to glorify God and redeem the elect; when we consider and realize all this, we are filled with comfort, wonder and joy, finding in this divine plan all that benevolence can wish, even the highest possible good of the universe. This is an object suited in the highest possible degree to please the benevolent, and to raise their gratitude to the highest pitch to the God of love, and Redeemer of men.

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This same love, which fixes our hearts on God, and renders us friendly to his being, felicity and glory, and causes us to rejoice that he will be glorified, and produce the greatest good of which the created universe is capable, unites us also to all the friends of God; especially the friends of Christ among men, whom we consider as our brethren and sisters in Christ, who bear the image of Christ in their hearts, and are friends to, and labouring to promote, his interest among men, in which we also are engaged; who are the special objects of the benevolence, complacency and delight of Christ. For these we have a peculiar friendship, desiring and rejoicing in their welfare, loving to serve them, and do them all the good we can; and we have a peculiar complacency and delight in them and their friendship, conversation and company, which we cannot enjoy in others. This, we hope, is that love of our brethren which in the scripture is connected with love to God, and is peculiar to true Christians.

We hope we have that benevolent, universal love to all our fellow men which is peculiar to Christians, which leads us to wish them the greatest good they are capable of enjoying in this life and in the world to come, and to do good as far as we have an opportunity. And we hope we love even our enemies, so that whatever evil they do, or attempt or desire to do us, this does not make us to cease to wish them well, and to do them all the good we can, and to pray heartily for their welfare; always studying and endeavouring, if it be possible, to live in peace with all men.

We have been led by our acquaintance with Christ and the gospel, we hope, in some good measure to keep our bodies under, and crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts; to avoid all intemperance and unlawful sensual indulgence, and lay aside passion, anger, envy and malice; and to put on humility, meekness, and a calm and quiet spirit; and to practise that self-denial, and government of ourselves, our appetites and particular propensities and inclinations, according to the holy rules of the gospel, so as not to injure

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ourselves or any one else by the criminal indulgence of them. We hope our selfishness or covetousness, pride and levity of mind have been so far subdued as not to reign in us; and that the contrary principles of benevolence, humility and sober-mindedness have dominion in our hearts; that we set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth; that we see the vanity of the world and the things and enjoyments of it; and are impressed with a sense of the reality, importance and excellence of the things and enjoyments of religion, and feel unhappy when these things are in any measure out of sight, and our religious exercises respecting them do sensibly subside.

We love and greatly prize the Bible. It is better to us than all the riches in the world, or than all other books. We also prize and read the books which serve to explain the Bible, and vindicate the doctrines and duties contained in it. We have great delight in reading and meditating on the Bible, especially at times, when the truths we find there are impressed on our minds. We make the Bible the rule of our faith and practice.

We spend much time, when we are alone especially, in meditating on the subjects of religion, and are pleased with religious conversation in the company of Christians. We have great pleasure in secret prayer, especially when, as we think, the Holy Spirit enlarges our hearts and helps our infirmities, in a clear and affecting view of divine things. We are pleased with joining with others in social worship when we have opportunity, either in the families where we live, in private Christian societies, or in public assemblies. The Christian sabbath, and the institution of baptism and the Lord's supper, appear to us to be wise and good, suited to promote the highest good of men, and the honour of Christ, and we endeavour conscientiously to attend upon them; and are much instructed and edified by the *preaching* of the gospel, when the great truths of it are explained and vindicated, and the duties therein revealed are properly urged, and the preacher with suitable engagedness declares all the counsel of God.

We hope we live in the exercise of an unconditional submission to God, without making any reserve, with respect to all the events which do or shall take place, whether greater or smaller, and whether they relate more immediately to ourselves, or to the church, or to the world in general. We firmly believe that God has determined, and does order, every thing, every event, both great and small, that comes to pass, according to the counsel of his own will, which is perfectly wise and good; and we are disposed and love to say, *Thy will be done*, with respect to all events which do take place now, or shall come to pass. Nor do we, and we dare not, ask for any thing in prayer to God which we do not know is agreeable to his will to grant, absolutely, but conditionally, *if it be agreeable to his will* to do it; if it be not, we are prepared to say from the heart. Thy will be done. We have such a constant conviction and confidence that the divine will is infinitely wise, right and good, that it is matter of support, comfort and joy, that the Lord God Omnipotent reigns, and hath done, and will



forever do, whatsoever pleaseth him, being infinitely above all controul; so that his counsel standeth forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

We add in the last place, that we trust that our conversation and conduct before the world is agreeable to our Christian profession, and the holy rules of the gospel. If this were not true, but the contrary, we acknowledge all our supposed inward exercises, which have been mentioned as evidences of our Christianity, are not to be relied upon by us. and may be justly considered as mere delusion by all others. But if what we suppose be true, for which we appeal to all who are acquainted with us, and we have been brought by the influence of the gospel of the grace God to deny all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil world; we think it to be a strengthening evidence, in connection with our inward convictions and exercises which we have experienced, and have now related, that we are the subjects of the power of Divine Grace; and that, whatever we once were, we are now washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God; and that all who behold our blameless and good conversation in Christ, ought to consider it as an evidence in our favour, and of the truth and excellence of Christianity; and that they who speak evil of us as of evil doers, and falsely accuse us, ought to be ashamed.

Thus we have endeavoured to give an honest and true account of the reason of the hope we entertain, that by believing the gospel it is become the power of God to us, to our salvation. We have omitted some things which might have been mentioned, and perhaps have made some needless repetitions. Imperfect as this account is, we wish it may prove some advantage to Christians, and matter of conviction to unbelievers.³

III. The reasonableness and importance of the direction and command which has been explained, is to be considered and proved. This may be done by the following observations.

1. It must be supposed that every real Christian is able to comply with this direction, and can give the reason of his hope, when properly inquired of and asked. If this were not true, the command, which extends to all Christians, would be indeed unreasonable and nugatory. It is therefore reasonable to suppose and be certain that every Christian has good reason for the hope that is in him, and can give it when there is a call for it. This is a subject which he thinks upon and studies more than any other. He certainly does meditate upon it night and day. He considers and examines over and over again the evidence he has of the

³ It is supposed that the evidence given above by Christians, of their hope of a saving interest in Christ, is common to every real Christian, without which no man has reason to think himself to be one. But in many other particulars, not mentioned here, Christians may differ, and one have views and exercises which another has not experienced in the same manner and degree, which may be a strengthening evidence to those who have them, and to those to whom they relate them, that they have tasted that the Lord is gracious. If any desire to see the subject treated more largely, they are referred to President Edwards on *Religious Affections*.

truth and divinity of Christianity. The theme is familiar to his mind, and the evidence of the truth increases, in his view, in strength and clearness; and, of course, he is constantly, and with solemn concern, considering the evidence he has of his being a real Christian. He must therefore be always ready to give the reason of this hope that is in him. And it is reasonable and important that Christians should do this, when asked, because,

2. It is greatly for the advantage and benefit of Christians to be prepared and ready to give the reason of their hope, and actually to do it, when they are asked in a proper manner.

This has a greater tendency to keep their minds awake to these subjects than mere private meditation; to increase their knowledge in these things, and to strengthen and invigorate their exercises, and establish their own hearts in the ground and reason of their hope. Free and serious conversation upon interesting subjects of religion is attended with advantages to Christians, which could not be enjoyed if every one kept all his religious thoughts and exercises wholly to himself. This is confirmed by reason and the experience of Christians. And many, if not all, have found, by communicating to others the reasons of their belief in Christianity, and of their hope that they themselves were Christians, their hearts more established in the truth and importance of the Bible, and their hope of salvation by Christ become more clear and strong, by being quickened in their religious exercises.

3. A compliance with this command tends, many ways, to the good of others. It tends greatly to the benefit of Christians to converse with each other freely on these subjects; to communicate to one another their reasons for believing the gospel, and how, and in what way, they were brought to a clear conviction and assurance of the truth and divinity of it; and what have been their views and exercises, on which they ground their hope that they do cordially embrace the gospel, and are the real friends of Christ. By this they become particularly acquainted with each other, and obtain the knowledge of the discerning, views and exercises of their hearts, which could not be so well and fully obtained in any other way. This lays a foundation for an intimacy, love and friendship, which are sweet, edifying, lasting, and peculiar to Christians. This tends to increase the knowledge of Christians, and establish their hearts in the belief of the truth, and excite and quicken their Christian affections, while they hear others give the reason of the hope that is in them. And this appears to be an important part of Christian communion, while they drink into the same Spirit, and mutually partake of the comfort and blessings of the gospel.

This also has a tendency to promote the best good of unbelievers. If Christians have nothing to say for themselves, and are silent, when they who are not Christians, with apparent serious desire to know, ask them to give the reason of their hope, this will greatly tend to prejudice them against Christianity and professed Christians, and lead them to think that the gospel is unreasonable, and cannot be supported. But when they find Christians able and ready to give the reason of their hope, when asked, and they have it laid before them, they have matter of conviction that Christians can speak for themselves, and that Christianity



is founded in reason and truth; and it may by divine influence reach their hearts, as the means of their salvation. And doubtless this has been the means of the salvation of many. But if this should not be the happy consequence, and the unbeliever persist in rejecting the gospel to his own destruction, the Christian has done his duty; and his labour shall not be in vain in the Lord, but answer some important end.

4. In this way Christians honour Christ and his cause. They who are not able, or are not disposed, to give the reason of their Christian hope when properly asked to do it, must be numbered among those who are ashamed of Christ and of his words. Of such, He says, shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of the Father, with the holy angels. He will consider and treat them as a disgrace and dishonour to him, should he own them to be his disciples and friends. But, on the contrary, he says, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven, and before the angels of God." As these, by confessing him before men, honour him, he will honour them before the universe, in his state of the highest exaltation and glory. They who are able and ready to give the reason of their Christian hope to those who ask them, to whatever shame and sufferings they may expose themselves by this, do hereby confess and honour Christ before men, which they cannot do effectually in any other way, if this be refused or neglected. And this is one important way for Christians to exhibit their true character, and show their zeal and courage in the cause of Christ, and honour and promote it in the world. How reasonable then and important is this injunction of the Apostle!

IMPROVEMENT.

I. FROM this text, and the subject, we have warrant to conclude, that they who are not able to give a reason for their hope in the sense explained, or they who refuse to do it to any one, at any time, are not real Christians, whatever they may pretend.

There are too many, who would pass for Christians, who can give no good reason why they believe Christianity to be true and divine, or why they hope to be saved by it. They can give no account of any particular, sensible impressions made on their hearts by any of the truths of the gospel, or of any view or exercise which indicates a real change of heart. There are others to whom the general arguments for the truth of the gospel are familiar, and they can talk well and readily upon some of them; but if they be asked what their own inward exercises are with respect to the gospel, and what is the ground of their hope that they are Christians, their mouths are immediately shut, and they have nothing to say, unless it be to object against the propriety of asking or answering such a question, as no one has any business to inquire, or right to know, what are their inward exercises; every one ought to keep these to himself, &c. Others will inveigh against Christians *telling their experiences*, as

it is called, and insist it is nothing but mere enthusiasm. All these may be justly considered as having no good reason for hoping themselves to be Christians.

There are others who are forward enough, and even too forward, to tell of their religious experiences, and give a narrative of their conversion, which they seem to think to be extraordinary and excellent. And they do it when there does not appear any particular call to do it. They appear to be proud of their religious experiences, and often speak of them in a light and ostentatious manner, directly contrary to meekness and fear. These are so far from obeying the Apostle's direction, that they abuse and pervert it, and do not appear to be real Christians.

II. It hence appears how reasonable and important it is that Christians should give the reason of their hope, when they join to a church, and make a Christian profession; and that they should be asked concerning their doctrinal knowledge, and experience of the power of divine truths on their hearts. Churches have a right to know of such the reason of their hope, and with what views, exercises and motives they desire to join them. And by this means they get acquainted with them as they could not in any other way, and a foundation is laid for future intimacy and Christian communion. They therefore must be blameable, and give reason to fear they are not Christians, who refuse to join a church because they cannot be admitted unless they will give the reason of their hope, as above explained. And those churches are guilty of great and criminal neglect who admit members without any examination of them respecting their doctrinal and experimental knowledge of religion, or asking them to give the reason of their hope. The consequence generally is, that the members of such churches have no particular intimacy or acquaintance with each other, not so much as they have with the men of the world, or those who make no profession of religion; and know little or nothing of each other, and are in no respect distinguished from non-professors, but merely by having made a profession, and meeting together at the Lord's table.

III. This subject is suited to awaken Christians to a concern to be ready, and more ready than Christians in general have been and are, to give an answer to those who ask them the reason of the hope that is in them. They ought to strive to be yet better able to offer the most clear and convincing evidence of the truth, authenticity and excellence of Christianity, and to increase in the strength and constancy of every Christian grace; that they may have increasing evidence in their own minds that their hope is well founded, and be able to give more satisfying and striking evidence to others that they are Christians indeed; and so shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.

Christians have no reason to be ashamed of their hope and the gospel, let who will speak against and ridicule it. It has and will stand the test of the most severe rational trial and examination. The more it is examined by unprejudiced reason, the brighter its truth and divine



excellency shine; and it will stand and prevail, until the light of it shall fill the world, as the waters cover the sea, and all the opposers of it shall be turned into everlasting darkness. Wherefore let Christians gird up the loins of their mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace which is to be brought unto them at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and be always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh them the reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear.



There is a special reason for a careful, courageous practice of this apostolic direction, at this day, which is the time in which the sixth vial is poured out, predicted Revelation sixteenth chapter, when the spirits of devils are allowed to go forth to the inhabitants of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. These evil spirits are now among us, and have great influence on the minds of men, in the uncommon, rapid spread of infidelity, and all manner of error and vice. Christians therefore now have a loud and special call to watch and be sober, to vindicate the truth, and honour Christ and his cause in all possible ways. Let them hear and obey the words of Christ, which he spake with particular reference to this time: “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”



SERMON III.

WRITTEN IN THE YEAR. 1767.

On Christian Friendship, as it subsists between Christ and Believers, and between Believers themselves.

Cant. v. 16. This *is my beloved, and this is my friend.*

FRIENDSHIP affords the highest and most sweet enjoyment that is to be had in this life, or that rational creatures are capable of. Yea, it is in some sense the *only* source of real enjoyment and happiness; so that to be perfectly without this, in every kind and degree of it, is to be wholly destitute of all true enjoyment and comfort. This gives pleasure and sweetness to all other enjoyments, and without this they all fade, and become insipid and worthless; yea, every thing will be rather a burden, and worse than nothing; whereas, this will give a degree of enjoyment and pleasure, when stripped of every other good; so that he who is in circumstances to exercise and enjoy friendship is in a degree happy, let his situation and condition otherwise be what it may: and it is impossible he should be perfectly miserable, so long as he is within reach of this sweet, this heaven-born cordial.

It is probable that the most voluptuous sensualist that lives would in a great measure lose his high relish for the pleasures he is so eagerly pursuing, and all his sweets would be turned into bitterness, if he should feel himself perfectly, and in every sense, friendless: for none can be found, however sunk and sordid their minds have become by vice, who have no sort of taste for friendship; though it may be, on the whole, a very corrupt taste. To be sure, if any such may be found, they seem to be sunk, in this respect, below the brutal creation; for it is observed that among them there is an appearance of love of society, and at lead a resemblance of love and friendship.

However lost to all true friendship mankind in general are, yet a desire of the esteem and love of others is found in every breast, and is as essential to man as a desire of happiness; and therefore cannot be rooted out, but by destroying his natural powers, by which he will cease to be man.

Hence it is that no inconsiderable part of the future misery of the wicked will consist in feeling themselves perfectly friendless, and the objects of the hatred and contempt of all intelligent existence in the universe, while they find themselves in every respect in the most wretched, deplorable circumstances, and have a most keen aversion to being hated and contemned, and a strong desire of the love and esteem of others.

As real or disinterested benevolence is essential to true friendship, we have reason to think there are but few instances of it in this degenerate, selfish world; and where it does take place in any degree, it is in a very low and imperfect one; so that what many in all ages have been convinced of and asserted from long experience, may be relied upon as a certain truth, that this is a *friendless* world. However, there is a sort of friendship, which is at bottom



a merely selfish thing, being founded only in self-love, or which is the result of what may be called *instinct*, or natural affection; which is very common, and in many instances rises very high, and answers many valuable purposes to mankind in this present state, it being many ways of great service to mankind, as it prevents many evils that would otherwise take place, and promotes the good of society, and often gives a degree of pleasure and enjoyment. But, so far as true virtue or holiness takes place, a foundation is laid for a different kind of friendship, which is immensely higher, more noble and excellent, and consists in exercises and enjoyments which surpass those of all other friendships, more than the exercises and enjoyments of improved reason excel those of a brute, or the brightness of the meridian sun, that of the meanest glow-worm.

And God has, in his adorable wisdom and goodness, contrived and provided that this friendship should be exercised and enjoyed in the highest perfection, being raised to the greatest possible heights, attended with the best and most advantageous circumstances.

The scripture leads us to conceive of the Deity as enjoying infinitely the most exalted and glorious friendship and society in himself, for which there is a foundation in the incomprehensible manner of his subsistence in the three persons of the adorable Trinity. Here eternal love and friendship takes place and flourishes to an infinite degree, in an infinitely the most perfect and glorious society, the ELOHIM, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And the society and friendship for which men are formed by holiness, without which they cannot be perfectly happy, may be considered as an imitation and image of this, by which they are made in the likeness of God, and partake with him in the same kind of happiness, which he enjoys to an infinite degree. And, in order that men might partake with him in the exercise and enjoyment of love and friendship to the highest degree and the greatest advantage, God has not only laid a plan to promote and effect the highest and most perfect love and friendship towards each other in the most exalted and happy society forever; but has so contrived, that they shall be brought into the nearest and most intimate union and friendly intercourse with himself, by which they shall in some sense, yea, to a great degree, be united to the Eternal and most Glorious, divine Society, and partake of the same river of enjoyment and pleasure, which proceeds from the throne of God and the Lamb, in a peculiar and eminent sense.

To effect this in the best manner and to the greatest advantage, the invisible God, who eternally dwelt in the high and holy place, infinitely beyond the comprehension and reach of a creature, must come down, and make himself viable, that he might be the head, the life and soul of a visible and most glorious society. This has been done in the incarnation of the Son of God, by which the greatest purposes of God's moral kingdom are answered in the highest possible degree, and all happy intelligences, especially the redeemed from among men, are brought into a near union with God, and are under special advantages to receive communications from him, and enjoy his love and friendship in a manner and degree which



could not have been in any other way. This is the mutual love and friendship spoken of in the text, which takes place between the incarnate Son of God, the divine Redeemer of lost men, and his church or spouse, or every one of the redeemed.

He is in a peculiar and distinguished sense the friend of the redeemed; and he is the beloved of their soul in a sense and degree in which no other person is, or can be: and hence there is a mutual love and friendship between them, which is beyond comparison the most intimate, intense, sweet and exalted of any thing of the kind between any other friends and lovers, unspeakably surpassing all other friendships in nature and degree, attended with the highest, most noble, transporting, soul-ravishing enjoyment and delight, that can possibly exist, or be conceived of.

This union of hearts, this mutual love and friendship between Christ the Redeemer and Saviour, and believers in him, or the redeemed, is represented in scripture by the inclination and affection between the two sexes of which mankind consist, under the influence of which they mutually seek and come into a peculiar union and intimacy with each other, in which they may enjoy each other, and be happy in the exercise of mutual love and friendship. It is represented by the sweet love and affection between the bridegroom and his bride, and the mutual love and friendship, and solemn engagements, by which the husband and his spouse are united, and become one, and are happy in each other. And this similitude is, beyond doubt, most wisely and properly chosen, by which to represent this spiritual union and friendship, as it is in many respects the most lively, striking emblem and image of it that can be found in all nature; and is especially calculated to give men the best and most clear idea of it, and to give and keep up in their minds a conviction and sense of the reality, nature and happiness of such a union, love and friendship.

This seems to be the design of this song from which the words of the text are taken. It is indeed a *Love-song*, in which the highest, most noble, pure and honourable love and friendship between Christ and his people is represented and celebrated under the similitude of two lovers whose hearts are united in the strongest, the most pure and sweetest love of esteem, benevolence and complacency, in the exercise of which they desire and seek the enjoyment of each other in the nearest union and greatest intimacy, in the near relation of husband and spouse. This is therefore called *The Song of Songs*, i.e. the most excellent song, especially the best and most excellent of all the songs of Solomon, which we are told were *a thousand and five*, as the theme, the subject and matter of it, is by far the most important, entertaining, excellent and sublime; in order to which Solomon was divinely inspired.

As the virtuous, pious and pure love between a man and his spouse is in many respects the most lively and instructive image of the union and love between Christ and his church, God, in his wisdom and goodness, saw fit to give such a representation of it in a divine song, as what was greatly needed, and would be exceeding useful to his church and people. And though the carnal and inattentive, or those who are strangers to this divine love and



friendship, may call it all foolishness, and in their boasted wisdom despise and ridicule it, or improve it only to carnal, low and obscene purposes; yet the children of true wisdom will justify the wisdom of God herein, and adore his goodness, while they find themselves instructed, quickened and edified hereby. And every true, chaste virgin who is espoused to Christ as the best friend and spiritual husband, will attend to it, and meditate upon it, with a peculiar relish, and sweet and holy delight, which unspeakably surpasses every thing the unholy soul can enjoy, or even imagine. The words of the text are the conclusion of the answer to a question put to the spouse, viz. *What is thy beloved, more than another beloved?* She readily answers, by giving a particular description of his charming beauties and superlative excellence, by which he is distinguished from all others, the chief among ten thousands; and then sums up all in one word, by saying, *He is altogether lovely.* He has the highest beauty, excellence and perfection, and has nothing else. Having thus given his character, she says, with reference to the question. *This is my beloved, and this is my friend.* This is the person, *this* is the character, with which I am so deeply in love; I am not ashamed to own him to be the beloved of my soul. And this is my best friend, whole heart is set on me, and he loves me as much as I can desire.

The mutual love and friendship between Christ and the believer, you will observe, is expressed here. The true Christian has set his love on Christ; he is his beloved; he has given his heart to him, as to one who is the chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely. And Christ loves him most tenderly, in the character of a true, faithful and all-sufficient friend and patron, and so returns love for love.

The words do then lead us to attend to Christ, as he is here pointed out, in the character of the beloved friend of his people, the redeemed from among men.

It may be said in general, that Christ, the glorious head and husband of his church, has every thing in him that can possibly come into the character of the best friend, and that to an inconceivable and infinite degree; and there is nothing belongs to him but what serves to complete and perfect this character; yea, he is at an infinite distance from every thing else. And his relation to his people, and all his conduct towards them, are such, and such are all the circumstances of this friendship, as to conspire to make it the most sweet, ravishing, noble and exalted that in the nature of things can be; and render him in the highest possible degree a desirable, worthy and excellent friend.

But, for the better illustration of this point, the following particulars may be attended to.

1. He is the most able friend, even an omnipotent and all-sufficient one. He can do whatever he pleases. He has a sufficiency of power and wisdom in all possible cases, and is perfectly able to do for his friends, who love and trust in him, whatever they need, or can possibly want to have done. All other friends are deficient in this respect: though they may have some sufficiency and ability to do some things for us, yet it is but infinitely little they



can do, compared with what we want to have done. We are infinitely needy; and must be eternally most miserable and wretched, unless we have some friend to help us, who is fully able to go through with the work, and do all we want to have done, even in the most extreme, and, without such a friend, a desperate case. Now Christ is such a friend. he is understanding and wise, perfectly to know what our case is, and what we want, and what is the wisest and best way to afford relief, and supply all our wants; and he has full power to do whatever his wisdom dictates. And in this respect he is distinguished from all other persons in the universe; none but he was able to befriend us in the case in which we are. This will more fully appear, before we have done.

2. He has the heart of a friend in all respects, and to the most perfect degree; or, he is willing and fully engaged to do all he can do for his people; all they can possibly want to have done in any case, and at any time. All other friends fail here. Though they are able to do but little for their friends comparatively, yet they have not goodness enough to do all they can, in all cases, and at all times. They have not the heart of a friend to perfection; so are not friendly to the utmost of their power at all times, but may be very unfriendly in some instances; therefore cannot be relied upon without caution, and danger of being disappointed. But Christ has the heart of a friend to infinite perfection, so that he can be relied upon in all cases, without any limits or danger. His benevolence to his people is without any bounds, and sufficient to surmount the greatest difficulties in the way of their good, and prompt him to do things infinitely great for them, and bestow on them the best and the greatest good, however unworthy and ill-deserving they are, and however criminal and vile their conduct has been towards him, in the most aggravated and horrid abuse of his goodness.

3. He is a friend on whom we are dependent, and to whom we are indebted and beholden in the highest possible degree. This gives great advantage to love and friendship, where the friends and lovers are not equal, but one superior to the other, and the other's benefactor and saviour to such a degree as to lay his friend under the greatest obligations to love and gratitude, And the greater this dependence is, and the more one friend has received from, and is indebted to another, in this way, the more sweet and happy is the love and friendship between them. It is indeed contrary to pride, and an heart that is not formed for true friendship, to be thus united to such a superior as a friend, and to be thus dependent upon, and wholly indebted and beholden to him for every thing; but it is not so, but directly the contrary, with the truly humble sinner: that friend will be most agreeable to such an one on whom he is most dependent, and to whom he is in the highest degree obliged; and we cannot form an idea of any other two friends so happy as these, when this is the case to the highest possible degree, or conceive of any friendship so great, advantageous and sweet as this. It seems indeed to belong to the nature of true creature friendship, even to desire and delight in this circumstance, viz. to be greatly indebted and beholden to the friend we esteem and

love: the greater obligations we are under to him the better pleased we are, and the more sweet is the love and friendship. This seems to be owing to two things especially; one is, that hereby we have a clear and striking evidence of our friend's love to us; which must give sweetness and enjoyment in proportion to our love to him. The other is, that hereby we are led to feel and exercise a love of gratitude, which is peculiarly sweet, in proportion to the love of esteem, benevolence and complacency we have for our friend. In this view, the more we are obliged, the better; and the greater satisfaction and sweetness we have in the friendship. And on the other hand, the more the other has done for the obliged friend, and the greater benefactor he has been to him, the higher enjoyment and happiness he has, in proportion to his benevolence and love to him.

Hence it is, that where persons have undertaken to represent the highest and most affecting instances of true love and friendship, and the greatest degree of enjoyment and happiness in such friendship, and exhibit this to the best advantage in a feigned story or romance, they have formed a history of some one of a high and excellent character, and of a generous, benevolent spirit, setting his heart on one in a mean, low and miserable state and circumstances, to be his spouse. She is, for instance, taken captive by her enemies, and reduced to the greatest poverty and distress, and her life eminently exposed. He, in order to redeem and deliver her, and procure her for his bride and spouse, goes through a long series of self-denial and sufferings; is at great expense, and does great exploits, and exposes his life to an eminent degree, without which she must have perished in the hands of her cruel foes. And thus he delivers her, by risking all that is dear to him in her behalf, and, in a sense, giving his own life for her; so that she entirely owes her life, and all she has, to him, and is under the greatest imaginable obligations to him. In this way he procures her for his spouse. and brings her into the nearest union to. himself, and a foundation is laid for the greatest happiness in each other, in the enjoyment of the most sweet love and friendship; every way to an unspeakably greater degree than could have been in different circumstances, or in any other way, in which she would not have been so much dependent upon, and so greatly obliged to him.

This is but a faint shadow of the case before us, with respect to Christ, the friend and bridegroom of his church and people. They are fallen into an infinitely calamitous and evil state; a state of complete, total and eternal destruction; into the hands of the devil, their great and potent enemy, and under the displeasure and curse of the God that made them: being infinitely guilty and ill deserving, the prisoners of justice, bound over to suffer his eternal wrath; not being able or disposed to help and deliver themselves in the least degree. The Son of God was the only person in the universe that was able to redeem and save them; and he was not under the least obligation to do it. But he voluntarily offered himself, and undertook this most difficult, costly and mighty work; and that from pure love and benevolence to these lost and infinitely miserable creatures, and a desire to procure and present to himself

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a glorious church, a bride, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but perfectly beautiful and holy, and without blemish, being brought into the nearest and everlasting union and friendship with himself.

In order to this, he *gave himself* for them. Though he was a person of infinite dignity, riches and worth, he became poor, and humbled himself so as to become a servant, and subjected himself to the greatest ignominy and sufferings, even unto death. He voluntarily put himself into the place and circumstances of his spouse, and when her whole interest lay at stake, and she was in a state of complete destruction, he took the whole of her destruction and sufferings on himself, and went through with the matter: he drank the whole of the bitter cup, that she might escape; he gave his life for her ransom, and spilt his own blood in the most trying circumstances, that he might completely redeem her from the jaws of the most dreadful and eternal destruction, and deliver her from the hand and power of all her enemies. He has survived the dreadful scene, having completed the greatest and most difficult work that ever was, or ever will or can be undertaken, and yet lives to espouse the cause of his people; and will not stop till he has completed the matter, and sanctified and cleansed every one of them with the washing of water by the word, and brought them into the most near, and an everlasting union and friendship with himself, in the most perfect enjoyment of his love, riches, honours and happiness forever and ever.

Thus the redeemed have a Friend, not only in himself most excellent and worthy, and full of the greatest benevolence and goodness, but one on whom they are in the highest degree dependent, and to whom they are indebted and obliged in the highest imaginable or even possible degree, in a manner which is most pleasing to them, and serves to render him unspeakably more excellent and worthy in their eyes, and give a sweetness to their love and friendship, which could not be known, in any other circumstances.

No other creatures in the universe have such a friend as this. The angels have no such friend. When some of them fell into sin and wo, they had no friend to redeem them. And the redeemed from among men have had infinitely more done for them, and they are infinitely more dependent on the Son of God for all good and happiness, and indebted and obliged to him, than the angels are. They are the bride, the Lamb's wife, who are by him redeemed out of great tribulation, from a state of infinite wo, in which they lay perfectly helpless; that he might enjoy them forever in a peculiar union and friendship, which exceeds every thing of this kind in all possible degrees. These circumstances lay a foundation for a sweetness and enjoyment immensely higher than could take place in any other way. In a sense and acknowledgment of what Christ has done for them, and their peculiar dependence upon, and obligations to him, the redeemed will exercise a kind of humble, sweet and beautiful love towards their Friend and Redeemer, which is peculiar to them, and never could have had an existence in any other way but this; and which will be the eternal source of a most sweet and high enjoyment, which no stranger, none but the beloved bride, not even the

angels, can intermeddle with or taste. In the exercise of this peculiarly sweet love and friendship towards their infinitely dear and glorious Friend and Redeemer, they will eternally sing a *new song*, which none but the redeemed, the bride, the Lamb's wife, can possibly sing or learn, to all eternity; no, not even the highest and best angel in heaven; saying, "Worthy is the Lamb to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, and hast made us kings and priests unto God." Well then may they now begin to say, with a heart-felt sweetness, and joy which is unspeakable and full of glory, "*This is my beloved, and this is my friend.*"

4. Jesus Christ is a friend who has exercised the highest degrees of love, and has given the greatest possible testimonies of it.

In order to true friendship there must be mutual love. This is essential to the character of our friend, that he loves us; and he acts in this character, and maintains friendship, by exercising love, and giving proper tokens and manifestations of it, on all occasions. Solomon observes, that "A friend loveth at all times." And he is the greatest friend, whose love is the strongest, and is exercised and manifested in the most difficult and trying circumstances.

Now Christ has distinguished himself from all others in this respect, and has discovered himself to be infinitely the greatest and best friend. This appears from what was said, under the last particular, of what Christ has done and suffered for his spouse; for in all this he exercised and expressed his love, and that in the most trying circumstances, and to the highest possible degree. One thing that recommends a friend, and adds to his worth and excellence, and makes him dear to his beloved, is, that he is a *tried* friend; he has persevered in his friendship, and exercised and expressed his love in the most difficult case imaginable in doing which he has been at the greatest pains and cost, while he had the created temptations to give up his beloved. Jesus Christ is such a *tried* friend, and that to the greatest possible degree.

"Greater love hath no man," says this greatest and chief of all friends, "than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But Christ's love and friendship has infinitely exceeded this. He has done and suffered more for his people than merely dying for them, a thousand times over. He drank the bitter cup for them, which was infinitely more than merely dying a violent death. He was made a curse for them, and suffered a sense of the wrath of God. This drank up his spirits: the foretaste of it threw him into the most amazing agony: and this made him cry out, in inexpressible and most astonishing anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" What is the most cruel death that ever martyr suffered, to this? The martyrs have been able to rejoice in the midst of all the keenest tortures enemies could inflict. They have sung in the flames, and found it the most happy, joyful hour they ever saw. And so might Christ have done on the cross, had he but *their* supports, and no more to suffer than they. But what he suffered in his death was something infinitely greater and more terrible. Under this infinite weight he hung on the cross, and at last bowed his head

and gave up the ghost. This was dying in a sense and degree in which no other person ever did. To die thus was infinitely more, and greater, and more dreadful, than the death of all the ten thousand martyrs who have fallen a sacrifice to the cruelty of their bloody persecutors. Yea, it was as great a thing and equivalent to the eternal death and destruction which the redeemed deserve, and were exposed to: for he died in their stead; he took their death and eternal destruction on himself. On him it fell in its full weight, and he bore and went through it all. He knew what it would cost him to espouse the cause of sinners; yet he voluntarily undertook, put himself in their circumstances (sin only excepted) and went through with it, without flinching in the least degree. Here is an instance of love and friendship, to which there neither is, nor can be, any parallel in the universe. This is the evidence and token of love which Christ has given to his people; which is infinitely the greatest that ever was, or can be.

Besides, the love of Christ to his people will appear yet greater, if we consider their native character and disposition towards him. He loved them, and died for them, when they were not only mean, worthless, unworthy and infinitely guilty, but *his enemies*, disposed to hate, despise and oppose him, in his whole character and in all his ways; and even in his most astonishing works of love and kindness to them. Herein he has commended his love to us, in that, when we were his great and inexcusable enemies, he died for us. It is a much higher exercise of love, and a greater testimony of it, to love and die for an enemy, a base, odious injurious creature, than it would be to do this for an excellent, benevolent and much esteemed friend.

What higher evidence and testimony could Christ give of his love of benevolence, to those whom he redeems, than this! And what higher act of love and friendship can there be! Surely his love to his people cannot be doubted of. And if he thus loved them when they were, his vile enemies, he will continue to love them now they are reconciled, and have chosen him for their best friend and patron. And this is an exercise and evidence of a strong and wonderful love, that will unspeakably endear him to them, and add an inexpressible sweetness to this friendship forever.

And, as the effect and further, evidence of this love, see gives them his Holy Spirit to change their hearts, deliver them from the dominion of sin, and the slavery to Satan, in which they naturally are, and implant lasting principles of holiness and love to him, by which their hearts are purified, and unite themselves to him, with the most perfect bond and union of love and friendship. This is another pledge of his great, everlasting and unchangeable love to them. And the saints in this world, so far as they have the evidence that they are the subjects of such a work of grace, may well rejoice, and with unspeakably sweet delight give praise “unto him that has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood.” What wonderful, sovereign love and grace is this, which overtakes and falls upon the guilty, sinful wretch, while in his full career to hell, running on in the most daring,



mad opposition to Christ, and contempt of him, without the least disposition to hearken to the voice of wisdom, and turn at his reproof! Every true Christian ascribes all this to Christ, and is so affected with his preventing, sovereign love and grace, herein exercised and manifested, as to taste an unspeakable sweetness in it. With what sweet delight does he often say, "If I have the least degree of love to Christ, and a heart to know, submit to and trust in him, this is the effect of his eternal preventing, sovereign love and grace, which alone has made the difference between me and those who run on in their mad course to hell! Not unto me, not unto me, but to thy wonderful, distinguishing love and grace, be all the glory!"

It may be also observed here, that Christ has given, them his Spirit, by which they are sealed to the day or redemption, and as the pledge and earnest of their eternal inheritance, so a pledge and token of his unchangeable, everlasting love to them. He has indeed given himself, and all things, to them; he has made them heirs of the whole universe. He has made and is doing all things for their sakes. He says to his church or redeemed ones, "I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." (*Isa. xliii. 3, 4.*) Surely Christ shews the greatest love imaginable to his people, since he gives them all he has to give, and withholds *no one good thing* from them. Now the more love he has to his people, and the higher and more clear evidence he gives of it, so much the more excellent and valuable friend he is to them; and their happiness in him as a friend will be in proportion to this. How infinitely distinguished, in this respect, is Christ from all other friends! Well may the Christian say, "*This is my beloved, and this is my friend.*"



Sermon IV.

The same Subject continued.

Cant. v. 16. This is *my beloved, and this is my friend.*

5. JESUS CHRIST, the Christian's friend, is a person of infinite dignity, worth and excellence. He has all this to the highest possible perfection and extent, so that no imagination can possibly exceed it. This his true dignity, worth and excellence, in himself considered, infinitely heightens his character and worth as a friend, and lays a foundation for the most sweet, exalted and growing happiness in his love and friendship to all eternity. He who has no true worth and excellence cannot be justly valued and delighted in at all, as a friend, and there is no foundation for a happy friendship with such an one. Worth and excellence therefore comes into the essence of the character of a friend: and the more any one has of this, the more is he to be prized as a friend, and the greater happiness is to be enjoyed in his

love and friendship. A friend gives himself to his beloved; so that the more dignity, worth and excellence he has, the more he gives to the person he admits into union and friendship with him. Therefore the more worth and excellence any person has, the more we naturally, and justly, prize his love and friendship, and the more sweetness and pleasure we have in it. We prize and delight in the love of another in proportion to our esteem of him, and the sense we have of his true excellence, dignity and worthiness. How much better is it to us to be the objects of the love of some dignified personage, who appears to us to have all the excellence and attracting charms of human nature, and to have him our friend, than to have the love and friendship of one who is in our eyes absolutely worthless and contemptible! I need not therefore, yea, I cannot, say of how much advantage the dignity and excellence of Christ is in this friendship, in this view. The higher the Christian rises in his esteem of Christ, the more he sees of his dignity and excellence, the more pleased and delighted he will necessarily be in being the object of his embraces and love. Surely then he had rather in this view be beloved by Christ than by all the world besides; and nothing can fill his breast with such overflowing delight as to be able to say. This is my beloved, and this is my friend. And this lays a foundation for esteem and complacency, without which there can be no happy friendship; and the higher this rises, the more happiness and enjoyment there is in a friend. Christ in this respect is distinguished from all other persons in the universe, as the best friend, in union and love to whom there may be the highest happiness. We are in ourselves so mean and low, and of such little worth, that we cannot enjoy friendship to the best advantage with those who are our equals. The more dignified and excellent our friend is, and the more distinguished he is from us, and the more above us, in this respect, the more happy shall we necessarily be in his love and friendship. In Christ therefore believers have all that can be desired in a friend, in this respect. In him they have an inexhaustible fund for high and growing enjoyment; and, in a sense of his dignity and excellence, their ravished hearts will swell with, extatic delight, while they feel and say, "*This* is my beloved, and *this* is my friend."

6. Jesus Christ is the most condescending, familiar friend.

Where there is a great imparity in two friends, the one very high, honourable and worthy, and the other mean and low, it is inconsistent with the most sweet and happy friendship, unless he who is dignified and exalted, and is every way so much superior to the other, knows how, and is disposed, to exercise condescension equal to his true dignity and worth, so as to practise as great familiarity and intimacy with his friend who is so much beneath him, as if he were his equal. But where this is the case, the great superiority of one to the other gives a great advantage to the friendship, and renders it more sweet and happy to the inferior; so that the more worthy and exalted his friend is, the higher enjoyment he has in the friendship. This imparity in station and dignity is commonly in the way of the enjoyment of true friendship among men in this world; because the great and exalted know not how

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to condescend and stoop to the mean and low, in a manner and degree that is in such a case necessary, but are disposed to keep themselves at a distance.

But Christ is in this respect the most excellent friend; for his condescension and humility are equal to his high exaltation and dignity, and he admits his friends, however mean, unworthy and despicable they are in themselves, to as great familiarity and intimacy, as if he were but their equal; so that his superiority and dignity give great advantage to the friendship, in this respect.

And here it is of importance to observe, that his *incarnation*, or union to the human nature, by which he is a real man, even *Immanuel*, God with us, is of infinite advantage with respect to this. God is infinitely the best friend; but it is impossible he should communicate himself to creatures, and become their condescending, familiar friend, in any other way, so well, and to so great advantage, as by uniting himself to their nature, so as to become one of them. In this view, as well as on many other accounts, the incarnation of the Son of God is a most wise and gracious contrivance, as it is adapted in the highest possible degree to promote the happiness of creatures, especially of the redeemed, in the love and enjoyment of God. God hereby comes down to creatures in a way and manner suited to their nature and capacity, and discovers and communicates himself to them to the greatest possible advantage; and there is a foundation laid for that condescension to men, and intimate love and friendly familiarity between Christ and his people, which could not have been in any other way. The Most High God is become a man, a most meek, humble, condescending man, able and disposed to take his people into the most intimate union and familiarity; while this man has all the dignity and honour of divinity. Thus the man Christ Jesus will eternally be the medium of a kind and degree of communication of the Deity to creatures, which could be in no other way, and which is every way adapted to raise them up and make them happy: and the redeemed have a most condescending, intimate friend in the person of Christ, who is both God and man, who cannot be equalled by any other person in the universe; and in union and friendship with whom, they have the highest enjoyment and happiness.

The condescension of Christ, as a most tender, intimate and familiar friend, is truly wonderful, and has not, nor ever will have, any parallel in the universe. This he practised in a manner and degree truly astonishing, towards his friends and disciples, when he was on earth. He condescended to their weakness, and adapted himself in his instructions to their low, childish way of conceiving of things, and meekly bore with their stupidity and unteachable perverseness. He dwelt with them night and day, and admitted them to embrace and kiss him from time to time. We may look on this as an image and specimen of the condescension and familiarity w4th which he treats his people at all times. Though he is now exalted in the highest heavens, and has taken the throne of the universe, and rules over all, angels and authorities and powers being made subject: unto him; yet this has not lifted

him up in any degree, so as to dispose him to keep at a greater distance from his people; but he practises as much condescension towards the meanest of them, and receives them to as great a nearness and familiarity, as ever he did in his state of humiliation. His condescension and goodness in this respect infinitely exceeds that of any other friend, and is equal to his exaltation, greatness and dignity. In this he excels all other friends, as much as he does in honour and dignity.

No other friend is so easy of access as he: his friends are Welcome to him at all times; yea, he is always present with them, so that they may converse with him whenever they please, in the most intimate, familiar manner, without keeping the least distance, and without any reserve. He is all attention to them whenever they turn their thoughts with their hearts towards him, and no thing can divert him from conversing with them, or interrupt the correspondence, but their withdrawing themselves, or turning away from him. He is ready to meet them and attend upon them at what time and place they please; yea, he calls after them, and invites them to look towards him, and speak to him. He says to each one of his friends, "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." Behold, he stands at the door of every one, and knocks, and whoever opens to him, he comes in and sups with them, and they with him.

And here it is worthy of special remark, that their meanness, unworthiness, and past ill treatment of him, is not in the least in the way of this his condescending goodness and kindness. He has no disposition to retaliate for their folly and ingratitude, and keep them at a distance for this: he is as condescending and kind to the meanest and most unworthy and guilty, as to any whatsoever. And while he thus condescends, and is good and kind to them in the most liberal manner, he does not upbraid them for their past follies, or because they are so much beholden to him. He gives most bountifully, and with the greatest liberality, and upbraideth not.

And he is not, nor ever will be, ashamed of any of his people who have united themselves to him as their chosen friend, however mean and despicable in themselves; but he will appear as their friend, at all times, and in the most public manner, and own them to be his friends, and confess their names before his Father, and before his angels. Yea, he is so far from being ashamed of them, that he looks on them as an honour to him. They are unto him "a crown of glory, and a royal diadem," in the hand of this their condescending friend: they are unto him "for a name and for a praise and for a glory," as the bride is the ornament and glory of her husband. Such a friend as this has every true Christian, in which he is infinitely distinguished from all other friends; who is most exactly suited to the circumstances of the redeemed from among men, and to raise their happiness in friendship with him to the highest key.—But I have yet many other things to say of this most excellent and blessed Friend.



7. By all his condescension, love and kindness towards sinners, and entering into the nearest and dearest friendship with them, he does not degrade himself in the least, nor lose any degree of his true dignity, worth and excellence; but has greatly honoured himself hereby.

This is a very important and essential article in this friendship; for if this were not true, it would be a very unhappy union, and no good could come of it, either to Christ, or those on whom he sets his love. If this were a dishonourable friendship on Christ's part, he would by this lose his merit and worthiness in the sight of the Father; so could be of no avail to recommend the sinner on whom he sets his love, of which he stands in infinite need, and without which he cannot be happy in the favour of God; which will be more particularly considered under the next head.

The Jews attempted to reproach our Lord, and cast an odium upon him, by saying that he was a friend of publicans and sinners. If he had been so in the sense they meant, it would have been indeed a reproach and disgrace to him. If he had been their friend in a sense which did imply the least degree of love and approbation of their character as sinners, and if he had espoused their cause in this view, and under the least influence of this, he would so far degrade himself, and render himself and his love worthless, odious and despicable in the sight of all holy, worthy beings. This therefore would have wholly spoilt his character as the Almighty Friend and Redeemer of sinners. But Jesus Christ is infinitely far from this. Though he is the friend of sinners, has espoused their cause, and befriended them as no other person ever did or could; yet he has not hereby appeared in the least degree a friend to sin, but the contrary to an infinite degree. He has befriended sinners, consistent with the most perfect and even infinite hatred of sin, and so of their character as sinners, and so as to manifest his hatred and abhorrence of them to the highest possible degree. In his highest act of love and friendship to sinners, he did in the highest possible degree, and in the most public, convincing, striking manner, justify the Divine Character and law which the sinner had opposed and contemned, and condemn the sinner. The highest angel in heaven cannot conceive to this day, and never will to all eternity, how Christ could have condemned sin more effectually, and set the sinner in a worse and more odious light, and shewed his love of holiness and hatred of sin more fully, than he did when he died on the cross. In this he did in the highest possible degree justify God in threatening and cursing the sinner, and being disposed to punish him forever, while he voluntarily took that punishment on himself, that the sinner might escape.

In Christ then are united the greatest friend to God and his law, and to the cause and interest of holiness, that ever was known in the universe; and at the same time the greatest friend of the sinner. These two seeming contraries are united in the same person and character, and expressed in the most perfect manner, and to the highest degree, in the same conduct. Therefore, when Christ stooped the lowest, and condescended the most to befriend sinners, he did in the highest degree and most effectual manner espouse the cause of God

in opposition to the sinner, and appeared in his greatest excellency, and was most worthy and meritorious, in God's light. How these two could be united in the same person and the same act, was far above the wisdom of angels; and herein, in a special manner, is Christ the wisdom of God.

Well may the Christian boast and say, "*This is my friend;*" who is also the greatest friend to the supreme Lawgiver of the universe, and has so become my friend, and stooped to espouse my cause, and take me into the nearest and dearest relation to himself, as at the same time to maintain and express his dignity, worthiness and excellency, and merit infinitely in the sight of the Father.—This leads to another particular.

8. Christ improves all his worth and excellence in the behalf and for the benefit of his people. It is all theirs, and improved to their advantage, in the best manner, and to the highest degree; so that it is in effect all given away to them, being most effectually, and to the best purpose, placed to their account.

Sinners want such a friend; and no other person could befriend them to any purpose, to himself or to them, but one who is infinitely excellent and worthy. They being infinitely hateful, guilty and ill-deserving in themselves, and having nothing by which they can abate their ill-desert, and render themselves a whit the more deserving and acceptable, on its own account, they must be eternally hated and cursed, unless they have something to recommend them which is not in themselves, but in some other: and this must be something infinitely valuable and excellent, or it can in no measure or degree countervail their odiousness and ill-desert so as in the least to recommend them to their offended Lawgiver and Sovereign. And it will not become him to forgive them and show them any favour, unless they have something to recommend them, and repair the dishonour they have done him by violating his law, and despising his character and government. Therefore, unless some one did espouse their cause and undertake for them, who has worthiness and merit enough to restore the honour of God's broken law, and effectually recommend sinners to their offended Sovereign by interposing his own worthiness in their behalf, they must be the objects of his displeasure and wrath forever, as what is most fit and right.

Now Christ is the only person in the universe who was able effectually to espouse their cause in this respect, and act the part of a friend to them. He has worthiness and merit enough in the eyes of the offended Deity, effectually to procure pardon and favour for the sinner, if properly interposed in his behalf, so that it might be fit to reckon it to his account. And this Christ has done in the most lit and proper manner. He has put: himself in the sinner's stead, has borne the curse he lay under, and paid the greatest honours to the divine law and character; which is so pleasing and acceptable to the Majesty of Heaven, that he is ready to pardon and. bless any one who is a friend to Christ, and trusts in his merit and worthiness *alone* to recommend him.

Christ repeatedly spoke of this to his disciples in the most express manner, and told them that their love and union of heart to him did effectually recommend them to the Father, and interest them in his love and favour, to as great a degree as they needed, or could desire. His words are, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and *he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father*. If any man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him. For the Father himself loveth you, *because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*"

We cannot reasonably suppose that Christ means to declare in these words that their love and friendship to him did, on its own account, or because of the excellency and worth of it in itself considered, recommend them to the Father, and procure his love and favour to them, as a testimony of his well-pleaseness with their persons and love, considered as by themselves, and separate from Christ. We cannot understand our Saviour thus in these words; for this would set them in direct contradiction to the whole New Testament, which teaches us that sinners are pardoned, and received to the favour and love of the Father, purely out of respect to Christ, to his righteousness and worthiness, which alone recommends them to him; and not any exercises and works of their own. But his meaning must be, that the Father is so well pleased with him, and loves him so well, considered in the capacity of mediator and a friend of sinners, and his merit and worthiness in this character is so great in his light, that he is ready to be well pleased with and love any sinner who unites himself to him in true love and friendship, and trusts in him in this relation and character. Such love and union to this friend is a sufficient ground and reason of the Father's loving him; and so the Father loves him, *because* he loves and is united to his Son, who is infinitely honourable and worthy in his light, and is infinitely near and dear to him: and who has done and suffered so much in the behalf of the sinner, that his merit and worth might be improved for his benefit, in which he has honoured the Father, and in the most excellent way and manner possible, and to the greatest advantage, employed all the interest he has with the Father, to procure his love and favour to the sinner who is thus united to him. The Father loves his Son so well, he is a person of such infinite dignity and worthiness, and has exercised such an high degree of virtue, and has honoured him so much, in what he has done and suffered for sinners, improving all his merit with the Father in their behalf; that nothing is wanting but the sinner's loving him and trusting in him in this character, so uniting himself to him as his true friend, in order to the Father's loving him. The Father has such love to his Son, and the Son stands in such a relation to sinners, that the sinner who loves the Son is necessarily beloved by the Father, purely from the love he has to his Son, however odious, vile and unworthy he is in himself. And thus the Father loves them, because they love his Son; and can do no otherwise, unless he ceases to love his Son; for the love he has to his Son will necessarily operate so, and induce him to love those who love his Son, and to whom the Son is a friend, and acts as their friend before the Father, presenting his

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merit, and all he has done and suffered for his honour, desiring that this may be reckoned to them, and that they might have pardon and favour on his account. For the Father to withhold his love and favour from such is really to withhold his love and favour from his Son; and therefore if he love the latter, he will love the former; and there is no other possible supposition in the reason and nature of things.

And this view of the matter (by the way) may lead all the attentive to see what is the true meaning and import of the doctrine of the imputation of the merit and righteousness of Christ, for the pardon and justification of the sinner, who believes in and cleaves to him in the character of a mediator; and how reasonable it is, and exactly agreeable to the nature of things.

If we have a friend who loves us, and there is a mutual friendship between us and him, who we know has great favour and merit with one whom we have offended, and whose love and favour we want, and who is very dear to him, and greatly beloved by him; we are naturally, and with the greatest reason, ready to trust in such a friend to procure for us the favour we want. And if the dignity and worthiness of our friend is sufficient, and his merit with the person we have offended is so great as to countervail our offence, and worthy of so great a favour as we want, and we know he is engaged to make the best use of his merit and worthiness in the eyes of that person to procure of him this favour, having exerted himself in all possible ways in our behalf, and so as greatly to please and honour him; if we have such a friend, we may be sure of obtaining the favour we want, however unworthy we are, and how much soever we have offended this person, and though he has no disposition to shew us the least favour on our own account; but, considered as we are in ourselves, and unconnected with our friend, is disposed to hate, condemn and destroy us: and in proportion to our love to our friend, and sense of his dignity and worthiness, and of the high virtue and excellence of what he had done in our behalf, shall we have confidence of obtaining the favour we want, and with boldness approach the offended person in his name.

If a subject has incurred the just displeasure of his prince, and greatly wants his pardon and favour; how happy does he count himself, if he has some great personage his friend, who is near the prince, and has great honour and favour with him! especially if he knows this great and honourable personage is ready to improve all the interest and influence he has with the prince, in his behalf, and for this end has been at vail pains and expense to make good the damage the prince had sustained by his crime, and render it honourable for him to grant the pardon, and bestow the favour he wants. In such a case we all know the criminal cannot fail of obtaining the pardon and favour he needs, if his friend at court has dignity, merit and worthiness enough, in the eyes of the prince, to be worthy of such a favour. The prince's love to this personage will naturally, and necessarily, flow out to the person whose friend he is, and who loves him. And in this case we see the merit and worthiness of this great and excellent personage is imputed, or transferred to the account of the unworthy

criminal, to recommend him to that favour, and procure it for him, of which he is most unworthy in himself, and which it would have been utterly unfit and indecent for the prince to bellow upon him, had it not been for this his connection with this worthy person.

This is in some degree a parallel to the case before us. Jesus Christ, the Christian's friend, appears with such dignity and honour in the court of heaven, and has done such astonishingly great and wonderful exploits to secure the honour of the Almighty Sovereign and Lawgiver of Heaven and Earth, and render it consistent with his granting pardon and favour to sinners; and has so pleased and honoured the Father, and is so dear and excellent in his eyes, that he is ready to love and shew favour to any sinner who loves this worthy personage, and is a real and hearty friend to him; whose interest he espouses before the Father, and interposes all his merit in his behalf. This is quite sufficient to recommend the most guilty, ill-deserving wretch on earth to all the favour that Heaven can bellow. He has no need to plead any thing but his relation and union to the Son of God, as his true and hearty friend; he wants nothing else to recommend him to the highest honours and happiness in God's kingdom forever. The Father of the Universe will love him with a dear and everlasting love, and embrace him as his dear child, the friend of his well-beloved, his dearest Son. And all the angels will love, serve and honour him forever, because he bears the character, and stands in the relation, of a friend to the Son of God, and is one whose interest he has espoused, and whose name he will confess before the Father and before the angels.

Thus the Christian has a friend who is not only most worthy and excellent in his eyes, with whom his heart is pleased and charmed; but this excellence and worthiness is reckoned to his account, and is become his righteousness, by which he is recommended to pardon and favour with God; so that the Supreme Majesty and Lawgiver of Heaven and Earth hereby becomes his eternal friend and father. Therefore the higher sense the Christian has of Christ's excellency and worthiness, and the more he loves him, the more confidence, assurance and joy will he naturally have in his merit and righteousness, and say, "In the Lord Jesus Christ have I righteousness: In him shall I, with all the seed of Israel, be justified, and in him only will I glory."

9. Christ is not only a friend who is full of good will and benevolence to his people, but he highly esteems them, and has great and most sweet complacency and delight in them.

This is abundantly represented in this song. Christ often calls his spouse, the church, his *fair one*: and she is to him the fairest among women. His language to his church, and to every true member of it, is, "O my dove, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair: thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks. Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee. Thou hast ravished my heart, my lifter, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How much better is thy love than wine 1 and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! How fair and how pleasant art thou, O

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love, for delights! Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee.”

There is something mysterious and wonderful in this; that Christ should thus esteem and delight in those who are in themselves, and in their natural state, so mean, despicable, vile and odious. But this comes to pass by his putting his own beauty and excellence upon them, forming them after his own likeness, and receiving them into the nearest relation to himself, by which they become clothed with his righteousness and worthiness, and partake of his honour and fulness: so that in this near relation, and beautified and adorned with his own beauty and holiness, they are honourable in his eyes, and he takes great complacency and delight in them. And as he is continually purifying and adorning them more and more, and will go on to do it until not the least deformity, not so much as spot or wrinkle, remains, and they are become most perfect beauties, so his complacency and delight in them is increasing, and is *now* greater, in the view of what they shall soon be brought to, even the most consummate beauty and glory, like a king’s daughter, *all glorious within*, and her clothing of wrought gold: and they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, the most beautiful, glorious bride of the Lamb.

Now this adds an unspeakable value and sweetness to this friendship. In proportion as any one esteems, loves and delights in another, he naturally, and even necessarily, desires to be the object of his esteem and complacency; and consequently this gives him a sweet enjoyment and happiness, so far as he has evidence that it takes place, and in a degree equal to his view and sense of the worthiness and excellency of his friend. How great then must be the happiness of the believer in his friendship with Christ, from this circumstance! He has the highest and growing esteem of his person and character, and is more and more ravished with his superlative beauty and excellence; and nothing can be more desirable and sweet to him than to have the approbation and love of this glorious, excellent personage: and nothing is wanting to complete his happiness, but to know that he is the object of the complacency and sweet delight of his best beloved and most esteemed friend. The thought of this is most transporting to his soul; and the more he is persuaded and assured of this in this world, the more ineffable sweetness does he taste and enjoy in this friendship. What then will be the happiness of this exalted friendship, when the beloved faint shall be made to shine forth as the sun in the most perfect beauty, and shall behold the dignity, beauty and excellence of his glorious Friend and Redeemer in the meridian brightness and splendour of his glory, and his heart shall glow with the highest and most perfect love of esteem and complacency towards him, while this his infinitely glorious and excellent Friend returns love for love in the most full and ample manner, and embraces him as his dearest and best beloved, giving him the greatest possible assurance that he takes unspeakable delight and satisfaction in him, and will do so to all eternity! This will raise the redeemed to heights of happiness, and sweet, extatic delight, beyond all conception, in the enjoyment of their exalted,

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most dear and best beloved friend, while they find themselves embraced by him in the high exercises of sweet love and complacency, being perfectly pleased and ravished with their love, and, in the highest and most exalted sense, “his left hand is under their head, and his right hand doth embrace them.” How will their hearts swell with the thought, and be filled full, and even run over, with ineffable delight and joy, while they think, and with the greatest assurance say, “*This* is my beloved, and *this* is my friend!”

And it is worthy of observation here, that their dependence on Christ for all their worthiness, beauty and excellence, as they receive it all from him, by which they become the objects of his esteem and complacency, they being wholly without any thing of this kind, and infinitely to the contrary of it as he finds them; *this* their dependence on him will greatly add to the sweetness and enjoyment, while they find themselves thus esteemed and beloved by him; for it is unspeakably more desirable and sweet to become the objects of his love and complacency in this way, than in any other.

The spouse who venerates, esteems and loves her husband far above all others, is happy in his embraces, and the tokens of his esteem, complacency and delight in her, in proportion to her sense of his dignity, worthiness and excellence. And if she has received all that which recommends her to him as the object of his peculiar esteem and delight, *from him*, or some way by his means, this will greatly add to the sweetness of her enjoyment, in a sense of his great condescension and goodness, and her peculiar obligations to him. This is a faint emblem of the case before us; for these things take place in the friendship we are considering, to an immensely greater degree, and in a far more exalted manner, than can be in any thing temporal and earthly.

And, by the way, it may be here observed, that the redeemed will have greatly the advantage of an eels in their friendship with Christ in this particular. As Christ has been a greater friend to the redeemed than to angels; has exercised immensely more benevolence and kindness, and done infinitely more for them, and so laid them under infinitely greater obligations to esteem, love and honour him; so he exercises a greater love of esteem, complacency and delight towards them, than the angels are the objects of: and that because, he puts a peculiar and distinguishing beauty and dignity on them, of which the angels do not partake. As the King’s bride, the queen, however mean her state was before she married him, is more honourable, and is much more the object of his esteem and complacency, and he takes much more delight and satisfaction in her, than in any of the most dignified servants and greatest nobles of his court, however great and honourable they are in themselves, and she enjoys a peculiar sweetness in his love, and a much higher pleasure and happiness than any of them can do; so the bride, the Lamb’s wife, is more happy in the embraces and peculiar love of her glorious Friend and Husband, the King of the Universe, and tastes more sweetness in a sense of his distinguished affection to her, than the angels, those noble servants of the King of Heaven, ever will or can do. Christ will eternally exercise and manifest a pe-

cular complacency and delight in them as their distinguished friend and redeemer: and this will be the source of a peculiar enjoyment and happiness, in which they will be distinguished from all other creatures, in the love and embraces of such a friend as no others ever had, or ever will have.

10. Christ is as much the friend of every individual, and the friendship between him and each one is as great, sweet and happy, and every way to as great advantage, as if he was the friend of no other person; yea, much more so.

Herein this friendship differs from, and has the advantage of, all others. If the love and affection of other friends is divided among a great number, and they have one common friend in whose friendship they share, each one has a less share than if he was the only beloved: and if we have one friend whom we esteem and love much above all others, it seems most agreeable at lead to have a peculiar and distinguished share in his affection, and to have him a friend to us in a sense and degree in which he is not to any other; so that a partner or rival in his affections and friendship is rather undesirable than pleasing, and tends to give an alloy to the friendship, rather than a sweetness. This is in a peculiar manner so in love and friendship between the sexes. The bride or spouse is jealous of any rival in the affection of her husband; she is contented with nothing short of having the whole of his love and affection centring in her: she naturally monopolizes it to herself exclusively, and cannot bear to have any one share with her in this friendship; and if this should be the case, it will spoil the friendship for her, and the more she loves him, the more unhappy and miserable she is.

And this, by the way, is a very strong and striking evidence, among many others, that this song, in which the text is found, is not a common love-song; as in this respect it is formed on a plan contrary to the nature of common love and friendship between the sexes, or the bride and her lover, and which is only suited to the case before us. The beloved spouse is in this song represented not as a single person, but as a company or society of persons united in seeking and setting their affections on one person as their common friend and lover. The spouse seeks company in her love to the bridegroom, and endeavours to draw other women to join with her in loving him, and speaks of others being united with her, in this, with approbation and pleasure: "Therefore the virgins love thee:—Draw me, we will run after thee:—WE will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine; the upright love thee." "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved gone aside? that we may seek him with thee. My beloved is gone down into his garden, &c.—Thou that dwelleth in the gardens, the *companions* hearken to thy voice." This is a very unnatural representation for a woman to make with relation to her beloved friend, with whom she is seeking a union and friendship, in which a companion or rival would be most disagreeable. But it is perfectly agreeable to the case before us; for the spouse of Christ is not a single person, but a company or society united together in the same love and affection, to one common friend, lover and husband: and every individual

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believer, or friend of Christ, is so far from monopolizing his love, and desiring to be the only object of it, that it is a great addition to the sweetness and happiness of this friendship, that others join with him in the same love, and equally share in the love and friendship of this glorious friend and bridegroom. Each one enjoys as much of Christ's love, has as full and large a share in his heart, and enjoys him every way as much, as if he had no other lover and friend in the universe: so that, however great the number is on whom Christ sets his heart, this does not in any degree lessen the privilege and enjoyment of any individual; for he, their common friend, has an inexhaustible, infinite fulness, and is just as much, and all that, to each single one, as if he was the only object of his love. Therefore the more love and benevolence the believer has to Christ, and the higher the friendship rises, the more pleased will he be to have him esteemed and beloved by others; and the more happiness and joy will he have that others share with him in the blessings of this friendship, in proportion to his benevolence to them, and delight in their welfare; which will always keep pace with his love to Christ and delight in him as the best and most glorious friend: so that every true friend of Christ is effectually formed and prepared to enjoy a peculiar pleasure and happiness in a happy and beautiful *society*, who are equally devoted to this same friendship, and share equally with him in the sweet love and affection of his dearest and most exalted friend.—This leads to another particular.



Sermon V.

The friendship of Christians between each other.

Cant. v. 15. This is my beloved, and this is my friend,

1 1. THIS friendship between Christ and the true Christian lays the best foundation for union of heart, and sweet, exalted friendship with others.

Christ is the grand medium of all union and friendship in the universe. In this respect all things, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, are gathered together in One, in Christ. Christ has reconciled the angels to men, and made them, who otherwise must have been their eternal enemies, great friends to them, and willing to devote themselves to the most friendly offices and acts towards the heirs of salvation, and spend their whole time, and exert all their powers, in acts of kindness, in the most benevolent, friendly manner ministering to them. And angels and the redeemed from among men shall finally be brought by Christ to dwell together forever, united in the most friendly, loving society. And he has not only reconciled God to men, and laid a foundation for their reconciliation and union with him; but has opened a way, and made full provision, for reconciling men one to another, and uniting them in the most dear and happy union and friendship, which in many respects surpasses all that there was any foundation for in man's primitive state of innocency. Sin has broken all bonds of true union and friendship among men; has set them at variance one with another, and introduced a most unhappy and horrible jar and discord; so that the true character of man in his natural state is, "Living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." Thus all true friendship has fled from the earth upon the apostacy of man, and that which is most directly contrary to this took place to a most awful degree. And man must have remained in this state of hatred and enmity one with another forever, had not Jesus Christ undertaken in his behalf. He has taken a most wise and effectual method to bring them to a union, love and friendship one with another, at the same time that they are united to him, and become his friends; a union and friendship which is unspeakably dear and sweet, and immensely surpasses all other friendships, except that which is between Christ and them. This friendship has its foundation in love to Christ, and union of heart to him, and is not really any thing distinct and separate from this. The believer's love to Christ, and love and friendship to his fellow saints, or all that are united to Christ in the same love and friendship, is really one and the same undivided flame of love and affection; so that the same bond of love which Unites their hearts to Christ, does also at the same time unite them to each other and the higher their love and friendship to Christ rises, and the stronger the exercises of it are, the more sweet and perfect is their love and friendship one to another. And this their love to each other is really love to Christ: it is the same affection, exercised and expressed in this way. This is represented in this light by Christ himself, when he tells us in what a light this matter will be set at the day of judgment; "And the King shall answer,



and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” If the acts of love and kindness which Christians do, one towards another, are really done to Christ, and are acts of love to him; then the whole of the love and friendship between them, of which these outward acts are the testimony and fruit, is really the same thing with love to Christ. This is the great and peculiar happiness of this Christian friendship, and renders it a most refined, exalted and even divine friendship, and brings them into that sweet union, and peculiar oneness, for which their great Friend and Patron once prayed: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us.”



The believer’s love to Christ, in a sense of his superlative beauty, excellence and worthiness, naturally, and even necessarily, leads him to love and delight in all those who are in any degree conformed to him, and bear his image and likeness: for this is not a different thing from loving Christ himself, as this likeness or image of Christ is Christ himself formed and living in them. And this likeness to Christ will be more especially lovely and charming to the friend of Christ, if it consists summarily in love to Christ, in a high esteem of him, and true benevolence and affection to him, which is the case here: for the more any one loves and esteems Christ, the more desirous he will be that others shall love and esteem him, and the more pleased and gratified he will be with the love and esteem which others exercise towards him; and the more will he love and esteem them, and be more benevolent towards them. He whose heart is full of benevolence and good will to Christ, must be pleased with and delight in the friendly benevolence of others to him; and this will also excite a peculiar benevolence and good will to such.

Besides, in proportion to the love any one has to Christ, he will have an affection for those who are beloved by Christ; so that Christ’s love of benevolence and complacency to his people has great influence in uniting them to one another in the dearest love and affection. He who greatly loves a dear friend, will naturally love all that are friendly to him, and all to whom he is a friend. His being a friend to them will necessarily recommend them to him, and render them the objects of his complacency and benevolence. This takes place in the case before us, in the most happy manner, and to the highest degree. In this view and to this purpose it is that Christ proposes his own example of love to his disciples, as a motive and inducement to them to love one another, with that love and friendship which is peculiar to Christians, as he knew it would have the most powerful influence upon them: “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.” No other society of friends have such a powerful motive to love one another as this which Christ lets before his disciples. He has loved them so as to give his life for them, and he has made their interest his own to all intents and purposes; and they are dear to him, and precious in his light, answerable to what he has done and suffered for them. If therefore they love him, if he is honourable and



precious in their light, and they are friends to his interest; they certainly will love those who are so dear to him, and have such an interest in his affections. How greatly does this recommend Christians one to another, and render them dear and precious in each others' eyes, and promote a sweet and noble friendship, which is known to no other person in the universe!

And it may be further observed, that this sweet, humble, Christian love, which is the image of Christ's love and grace, serves further to endear Christians to each other, and increase and heighten their friendship to each other: for there is a peculiar and inexpressible sweetness and enjoyment in being beloved by those who are so amiable and honourable in our eyes, and with such an ardent, humble, sweet and pure affection as Christian love is. The Christian, who has a sensible and most pleasing idea of this love and affection, cannot feel himself embraced by others with this tender, beautiful, noble love and friendship, without an ineffable sensation, which fills his heart with the most sweet delight and joy, and kindles a flame in his soul of holy love and gratitude to them, in which he returns love for love, and embraces them with the arms of the most delightful, tender and heart-melting friendship. Thus the mutual love of Christians serves to sweeten and increase their affection to each other, and blows the coals and kindles up the fire of friendship to a more intense and vehement flame. The more sensible any one is that he is the object of the Christian love of another, whom he esteems highly as an amiable disciple of Christ, and the more evidences and tokens he has of this love, the more will his heart be inflamed in love to him; which again will increase and heighten the other's love: and thus, by the influence of their mutual love and friendship, the sweet flame rises higher and higher, until they are all melted and dissolved, and turned into a most pure, active, perfect flame: like two brands on fire, which burn flow, and give but a moderate heat, when apart; but being put together, by the mutual action and influence one on the other, the heat increases into a burning flame, which soon sets them all on fire.

Again: Their being united in the belief of the same system of sweet, important truth, and engaged in the same common interest, and in the same pursuits, and having the same views, designs, temper and disposition; and being, as to substance, in the same state and circumstances; in all these respects, and many others, being alike, united and bearing a resemblance to each other, like the children of one family, united under one kind, wise friend and father; Christians being thus united, and bear in Of this likeness to each other in so many respects, is many ways a great advantage to this friendship, and greatly adds to its beauty and sweetness, and serves to increase their love, and the union of their hearts to each other.

As this is such a pleasant, delightful, as well as noble, important theme, in which every Christian has so much concern and experience, it is proper and pleasing to add a few words more, and descend into some particulars.

This friendship, which Christians have one with another, by virtue of their union and friendship with Christ, the greatest and best friend, and the fountain and source of all true friendship among men; this love and friendship has *true humility* as its foundation and basis, and its peculiar beauty and glory.

Pride is most contrary to true friendship, and always interrupts and spoils the exercises and enjoyments of it, so far as it takes place. Every one's observation and experience will bear an incontestible testimony to this, and shews that true friendship is found no where but among the meek and humble. Now Christians, by virtue of their love and union to Christ, and the friendship with him which has been described, are become humble, meek and lowly, so are in a peculiar manner formed for true and sweet friendship with each other; a friendship which far surpasses that of any other creatures in the universe. Their native state and circumstances, sinful, lost, enemies to God and the Saviour, infinitely miserable, guilty, odious and ill-deserving, lays a foundation for self abasement and humility, when truly discerned and understood, which cannot take place to the same degree in any other circumstances. And their absolute and exceeding dependence on Christ, and his rich, sovereign grace, for righteousness and strength, and every good thing, serves to set them low, and abase them forever, in their own eyes. And the wonderful, amazing humility of Christ their beloved friend, which he exercised in his astonishing stoop and low abasement for their sakes, by which he in a sense became the least in the kingdom of God, strikes their minds with a peculiar energy, and conspires with the above mentioned circumstances to humble them and lay them very low. The friends of Christ are therefore in this sense *little ones*; little in their own sight, and in true humility: they have taken Christ's yoke upon them, and have learned of him, who is, above all others, meek and lowly of heart. And as they have, under the teachings of Christ, a clear and affecting view of their own character, as sinners, in all its meanness, contemptibleness and odious deformity, which they cannot have of others, their fellow Christians, they naturally have a much meaner thought of themselves than of others. Therefore, in the exercise of this true friendship, they are not disposed to exalt themselves, and be jealous of their own honour and prerogatives, and be displeased because others do not love, esteem, respect and honour them so much as they desire, and they think they ought to do. No! but directly the reverse of this; they are ready to think others their Christian friends have too high an esteem of them, and a love and friendship for them of which they are altogether unworthy. Thus Christians are always disposed to abase and humble themselves, and, in the exercise of this love and friendship, are preferring others, and setting them above themselves: and thus they are "kindly affectioned one to another," in the strongest and sweetest friendship, "with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." Nothing is done through strife, or vain glory; but, in lowliness of mind, each esteems others better than themselves. And, as the chosen, holy, beloved friends of Christ, they have "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, *humbleness of mind*, meekness,

long suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as Christ has loved and forgiven them. As by pride and an haughty spirit cometh contention, so the meekness and humility of mind, which is essential to every true lover of Christ, prepares true Christians for a sweet, holy and intimate friendship one with another, which no other persons are capable of, and in which there is a truly noble enjoyment and pleasure, which the world can neither give nor take away, and which cannot be told to him who has never tasted it.

Moreover, the uprightness and faithfulness of which every one is possessed, who is a friend to Christ, and which is peculiar to them, adds a great degree of excellence and happiness to Christian friendship, which can be enjoyed in no other union and connection. Sincerity, truth and faithfulness come into the very essence of true friendship; and the more there is of these, the more safe and happy are persons in their friendship. When it may be said of any, what is said of the wicked in general, even all that are not friends to Christ, “that there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue; “they are not capable of true friendship, whatever may pass between them that may be called by that name. They may have a sort of love and union to one another, on some occasions and in certain cases, as a company of pirates or banditti may have a sort of union and friendship, grounded wholly upon self love and interest. But this is a very low, mean thing at best; it cannot give the enjoyments of true friendship; and, such as it is, there can be no dependence upon it, that it will continue. It being built on no liable principle, it shifts and changes, flourishes or dies, according to external changes, and the shifting of humours, interests and circumstances. They may be great friends one day, and the next be at swords’ points, hating and opposing each other more than any body else; improving all their former intimacy, and the confidence they had put in each other, as an advantage put into their hands of betraying and injuring one another to the utmost of their power. There are so many instances of this every where among mankind, that every observing person must: have abundant evidence of the justice of this remark.

The true friends and disciples of Christ are of a different character: they are sincere, upright, true, and faithful. Therefore they are commonly characterized by this in scripture—the *upright*, the *just*, the *faithful*; by which they are distinguished from all others. They are of a sincere, upright and faithful spirit, which is peculiar to them. This, therefore, prepares them for a union and friendship with each other, which can be found no where else. They may open their hearts and divulge their secrets to each other, without danger of being betrayed, and trust and rely on one another with a great degree of confidence and safety: and there is a proper foundation for a lasting and growing friendship, whatever changes there may be in external circumstances. Thus they have the character of Solomon’s true friend, who “loveth at all times.” They love without dissimulation. In obeying the truth, through the Spirit, their souls are purified unto *unfeigned* love of the brethren; and they love one another with a *pure heart*, fervently. He who is possessed of Christian sincerity, integrity

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and faithfulness, has a pleasing idea, of which they who are not of this character have no true conception; and his heart is united to, and delights in, those who appear to be of this character, With a peculiar love and affection. And the love of such to each other is not built on any worldly circumstances and connections, or self interest. It is a more noble, exalted, sincere affection, and is built on more steady, lasting principles, of which the poor, if they are the disciples of Christ, are as much the objects as the rich: and it goes forth as freely and strongly to those who are overlooked and despised by the men of the world, as to the great and honourable. How much has such a friendship the advantage of all others! and how greatly happy must such friends be in each other! Every thing that is called love and friendship, in this world, is not worthy the name, when compared with this.

And the friends of Christ, who are most acquainted with each other, do naturally enter more and more into a near, intimate and tender friendship. As their acquaintance increases, the higher does their love arise. And their mutual kindness and acts of love and helpfulness one to another, and constant, earnest prayers for each other, tend to keep up and increase their friendship, and render it more and more perfect, sweet, delightful and profitable.

Thus, by virtue and in consequence of Christians' union to Christ, and friendship with him, a peculiar, dear love and friendship takes place between them, which is the most sincere, exalted, noble and ravishingly sweet exercise and enjoyment that can take place among creatures. Their souls are united and knit together with the bands of the most; pure, strong and Lifting friendship, as the soul of Jonathan was to David, when he loved him as his own soul. And as the love and friendship between them was, so is that between the friends of Christ; even *wonderful, passing the love of women*. It is unspeakably more pure, strong, fervent, sweet, noble, steady and durable, than any affection and friendship which takes place between the sexes, or any persons whatsoever, which is founded only in instinct, or the principles of nature.

This love and friendship is indeed very imperfect in this state, through the great imperfection and deficiency of their love to Christ, and their holiness; and by reason of that ignorance of each other which takes place in a great degree, which prevents their certainly knowing who are true friends to Christ, and who are not, and having a full and adequate idea of what is truly excellent in them, and their having so much about them which is contrary to true friendship, as is all their remaining corruption and sinfulness of heart. And this friendship is also imperfect in this state, and often, if not always, is the occasion of some uneasiness and pain, in the midst of all the sweets of it, by reason of external circumstances. They are often banished from each others' presence, and obliged to live at a distance, by which their acquaintance and intercourse is in a great measure interrupted. But if this is not the case, and they have much opportunity to be together, and have friendly intercourse, they are liable to misunderstand each other, and are often unable to communicate the sentiments and friendly exercises of their souls to their friends so clearly as would be necessary



in order fully to gratify their love and friendship. And, besides, Christian friends in this state are liable to, and are actually the subjects of, many calamities and distresses of body and mind. Now, the more love and benevolence we have for our friends, the higher sympathy shall we have with them under their troubles, and their burdens and calamities will necessarily become ours in some measure; so that the higher degree of love and friendship we have for them, the more shall we suffer with them when they are in trouble. And though there is a pleasure even in this pain; yet, according to the supposition, pain there is, and necessarily will be, in such a situation.

This view of the matter shews us that perfect love and friendship does not take place in this state; nor can it exist to the best advantage, unless in a state of perfection.

However, even in this state of weakness and imperfection, where there is so much remaining darkness and sin in the best Christian, and there are so many disadvantages to friendship, true Christian friendship affords the most sweet, refined, noble enjoyment that can be had in this life. It surpasses all other friendships, in this respect, more than the brightness of the meridian sun exceeds the shining of the meanest glow-worm. They are by far the happiest persons on earth, who, being friends to Jesus Christ, are, by virtue of this, formed for true love and friendship to each other, and are brought into a union and oneness of heart and affection, by which they delight in, embrace and enjoy each other in the arms of the most pure and ardent love. A society of such friends and lovers is the most blessed society on earth, whatever their worldly circumstances are. All earthly good, all the riches, honours and pleasures of this world, are not to be compared with this; yea, they are utterly to be despised and contemned, in comparison with this. And all other unions and friendships that take place among men, which are not founded on love and friendship to Christ, are insipid, mean and worthless, compared with this *Christian* friendship, which has infinitely the advantage of them so many ways. This the christless person may disbelieve; and it may be impossible to convince him of it, as he has really no true idea of the thing. But he who has tasted the sweetness of this friendship, is a witness of the refined, superlative pleasures of it, and prefers it to all other friendships, unspeakably more than he who is athirst prefers the pure, living, crystal stream, to a warm, dirty, putrid puddle. Well may the words of the Royal Singer be applied to this noble and happy union and friendship: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments."

There has been comparatively little of this Christian friendship, we have reason to believe, in the world, hitherto; but few who have known the pleasures of this sacred union; and most of those who have felt and exercised a degree of this divine friendship, have had but a very imperfect and low degree of it; so that it has never had advantage to appear in its true beauty, and happy, glorious effects. This pure, soul-exalting and refreshing love to Christ, and union



and friendship to each other, has yet been a great stranger in this world: but the time is coming when the world shall be full of it; when all nations shall become the friends and servants of Christ, and that in the exercise of a high degree of love to him. And their love and friendship one to another will bear a proportion to this. Each one will find himself surrounded with those who give satisfying and abundant evidence of their love to Christ, and beautiful, growing conformity to him, and of their peculiar benevolence to, and delight in, all the disciples of Him whom they so ardently love—will therefore see himself loved and embraced by them, with the tenderest and most pleasing affection and friendship. And how will his heart glow with ardent love to, and sweet delight in them, while he associates and converses with them with the most dear and unreserved intimacy! yea, their hearts will burn with the fire of this sacred love and friendship, whenever they see, or even think of, one another. Then every breast shall swell with a degree of pleasure and joy, which yet has been but little known; and a happiness, which has yet been hardly tasted in this world, shall spread itself like a mighty, pure river of delight, over the face of the earth. But this friendship will not come to its full perfection and glory in this state. We cannot therefore have the most profitable, or even a just idea of it, unless we raise our thoughts to that world, and glorious kingdom, into which all the friends of Christ will be shortly gathered, and united in one most amiable and happy society, in the presence of their common, most kind, excellent and exalted friend, in the best circumstances, and every way under the highest possible advantages to exercise and enjoy the sweetest and most perfect mutual love and friendship with Christ and one another. All that precedes this is very imperfect, and only preparatory and an introduction to this most perfect and happy union and friendship, where the most pure and exalted love will be exercised to the highest pitch, without any restraint, and so as to give the highest possible enjoyment.

There their love to Christ will be perfect; they will be all turned into a pure and most vehement flame of love to him; and *his* love will be shed abroad, and poured out on them, as most plentiful, refreshing floods of water upon the parched ground; which they will drink in with the highest relish, and most sacred, ravishing, delight. And they will each one appear in the perfect and most amiable image of Christ, perfectly excellent, beautiful and lovely, and full of the most sweet and lively affection to each other. The more they love Christ, and the greater assurance and sense they have of his love to them, the more love will they have to each other. They will have the greatest esteem of, and complacency in, one another. They will have as free intercourse and as great intimacy with each other as they can desire: there will be nothing to keep them at the least distance. They will be perfectly acquainted with each other, and have the most happy and easy way of communicating their thoughts, and pouring out their whole hearts and souls into each others' bosoms, and expressing their love to and delight in each other. If the intimacy Christian friends have with each other here is so pleasant, and it is so sweet to be beloved by them; what will it be to be embraced with

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such strong, constant love, and enjoy a familiarity and intimacy, in which they will mingle souls, without any reserve or restraint, and which will inconceivably exceed the greatest intimacy, and most tender embraces, of the dearest friends in this world! How happy must they be whose love is made perfect, and flows out to each other, without any restraint, in a most rapid torrent, and is gratified every way to the highest possible degree! And there will be nothing to cloy or abate this love; it will never fail or change, unless it be to grow more ardent and strong. The longer they live together, and the more they are acquainted with each other, the higher will their love and friendship rise. And their benevolence to each other will be pleased and gratified to the highest degree; for their friends, to whom they wish so well, are in the most happy circumstances, are as happy as they can possibly wish and desire: so that all their good will to each other will be exercised and expressed in the greatest satisfaction and joy in their happiness. And what kind offices, may we suppose, these friends will be constantly doing for each other, by which they will gratify and promote the happiness of one another!

And their acquaintance and special connections in this world, and especially the good they have been the instruments of doing to each other here, will greatly serve to increase and sweeten their love and friendship in heaven. With what unspeakable delight will these things be remembered and recounted to each other there! With what ineffable love and gratitude will the converted and saved embrace those who have been the happy instruments of this; while they, on the other hand, shall be to such the occasion of their peculiar joy, and their crown of rejoicing forever, and be embraced by them with inexpressible tenderness, love and delight.—And, Oh, how will they that have been most intimately acquainted here, and united in love, and have most abounded in acts of kindness and friendship to each other, and have been greatly instrumental many ways of promoting the spiritual good and salvation of each other; how will such, however they may be parted by death for a while, meet, with peculiar and unspeakable joy, in that world, and love and embrace each other forever in the arms of the most tender, sweet, exalted, growing friendship! In a word, there shall be no sinful mixtures in their love and friendship, and no defects, as there always are here; but it will be most pure and untainted. The more they love one another, not the less, but the more, will they love Jesus, their common friend: there will be no need of caution and restraint; no danger of running to excess. There will be the most perfect, refined pleasure, without the least pain, which unavoidably attends the most exalted friendship in this world. All the tears their friendship has occasioned here shall be forever wiped from their eyes. There shall be nothing but the most perfect, sweet union and harmony; nothing in the way of their expressing their love, and enjoying each other, without the least danger or fear of having it interrupted, or of their being parted from the friendly embraces of each other, to all eternity. What a world of love and friendship will this be! Though all who enter into the school of Christ have some experience of the sweets and happiness of this friendship, yet how low and

childish are our thoughts and conceptions of this matter. Surely eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of any of the saints, the things which Christ has laid up for them that love him, and have entered into this divine friendship with him, and with each other,

A little of this friendship, in this world, naturally, and even necessarily, leads these Christian friends, while they feel the imperfections, impediments and interruptions of this love and friendship here, to look forward to, and long for, that perfect state, where this divine affection shall be exercised and gratified to the highest degree, and they shall eternally swim in a boundless ocean of love. The more this friendship flourishes in their breasts now, the more weaned are they from earth, and all its enjoyments; the more are their hearts fixed on heaven, and the higher and stronger are their longings for the enjoyment of the society and friendship of that world of love; and the greater is their hope and assurance of enjoying it forever.

And who can be willing to live and die a stranger to this Christian love and friendship, and so miss of that world of happiness in which it shall issue, and where it shall flourish forever! Who can be content to give up his heart to that love and those friendships only, which are attended with certain disappointment, and only serve to perplex and torture the mind, and will assuredly issue in darkness, horror, and eternal hatred and discord!

Blessed, unspeakably blessed, are they in whose hearts this love and friendship is begun; who, because they love Christ, love his people also; and know that they love Christ, and have passed from death to life, because they love the brethren.

Let us then love one another, not in word, neither in tongue only, but in deed and in truth; that hereby we may know that we are of the truth, and assure our hearts before God. For this is his commandment, that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.



SERMON VI.

The Friendship between Jesus Christ and Believers.

Cant. v. 16. This is my beloved, and this is my friend.

I PROCEED to mention other particulars relating to Jesus Christ, considered in the character of the believer's friend, and the distinguished privileges and happiness of this friendship.

12. Jesus Christ is an unchangeably faithful and everlasting friend. Faithfulness is essential to the character of a friend: without this there can be no safety in intimacy with and confidence in him. Through unfaithfulness and inconstancy professed friends often betray one another; and many friendships are very short-lived, and dissolve and turn into enmity and discord. But Christ is a most faithful, unchangeable friend. He never will forsake those who give themselves up to this friendship; but will do all for them, and be all to them, that they trust in him for, or can expect from him, in the character of a most able and kind friend; yea, he will always outdo all their expectations and wishes. Moreover, he will take effectual care to secure and perpetuate their love and friendship to him; so that the friendship on their parts shall never cease after it is once begun. We have great need of such a friend as this: yea, such a friend is absolutely necessary for us in this state of weakness, darkness and sin, and where we are surrounded with innumerable, implacable enemies to Christ and to us; who are potent and subtle, and are continually doing their utmost to prevent, interrupt and destroy this friendship. If Christ was not security for us in this respect; if he was not able, and had not undertaken, to prevent our falling away from this union and friendship; alas I how soon should we break our most solemn engagements and vows, violate the most sacred obligations, and ties of the dearest friendship, and turn enemies to the greatest and best of friends! There is no trust to be put in any man with respect to this. But in him there is safety; he has engaged that they who once choose him as their Almighty and best friend, shall persevere in their love to him. And he is faithful who has promised. With regard to this, the eternal God and Redeemer is their refuge, and underneath every faint are the everlasting arms of this Almighty and most faithful friend and Saviour. This is he who was Peter's friend, and prayed that his faith and love might not fail in the fore trial and dangerous conflict he had to go through. And it was wholly owing to his care and faithfulness, that Peter did not wholly fall from his friendship to Christ; but his trial and fall were the occasion of the increase of his love to his best, most faithful and dearest friend, so that it soon rose to such an ardent flame, that he was able with the greatest confidence to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Such a friend have all who love our Lord Jesus Christ; in sincerity; for whom he once loves, he always loves to the end. How safe and secure then do they feel themselves in this love and friendship, that it shall certainly continue and flourish to eternity, who are able to say. *This is my beloved, and this is my friend!*

13. Christ is a most meek, tender, compassionate, forgiving friend.

If he did not excel in these things to an infinite degree, he could not be our friend. We have injured him more than any other person in the universe; and have done more to affront him, and provoke him to anger, than ever was done to any other. And even his friends have comparatively but a very small degree of love and friendship to him; it is a mere nothing, compared to, what they ought to have, and he is most worthy of. They are guilty of the most amazing, stupidity, and base ingratitude, and in many ways and respects act a most foolish, wicked and unfriendly part towards him, by which they are violating the most sacred laws of friendship, and the highest imaginable obligations. No friend but this in the universe would bear such treatment, and yet continue his love and friendship. And was he not meek, tender, compassionate and long suffering beyond any parallel, he would so resent such treatment and horrid abuse of him as to withdraw his friendship, and renounce them forever. But as a tender father pitieth his children, so he pitieth his friends; he is long-suffering, abundant in goodness and tender mercy, and ready to forgive all their folly, and wicked abuse of his love. He will forgive them, not seven times only, but seventy times seven; yea, without any bounds or limits. His loving kindness he will not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. We have a striking instance of this in his treatment of his friends when he was on earth. They remained in a great degree ignorant and unteachable under his constant instructions. They were inattentive, stupid, perverse and unbelieving, in a manner and degree that was very criminal and provoking. Yet he bore with them, and forgave them, and continued his love and kindness to them. He continued to treat them with the greatest tenderness and love. He constantly attended to their interest, and laboured for their good, and his love and gentleness made them great. in the last hours of his life, when the dreadful scene of his sufferings for his people was just before him, he, as a most tender friend, accommodated himself to their weakness; he attended to their case, their sorrow and trouble touched his heart, and he pitied them? and set himself to instruct and comfort them, in the most kind and tender manner. Such an astonishingly kind, tender and forgiving friend had they. And with transports of joy may every one of his true disciples say. This is *my* beloved, and this is *my* friend.

14. Christ is the most wise, kind and able physician, to heal and cure all his friends of the disorders and diseases that attend them. Such a friend they want, and no other could answer the end of a friend to them but such an one. He finds them in a most dreadful condition, even *dead* in trespasses and sins. They are undone and slain, having died a most shockingly dreadful and truly accursed death. Their souls are bruised and mangled in the most horrible manner, and torn all to pieces, as it were, limb from limb. And the devil, who has had a great hand in the horrible slaughter, and has the power of death, sits brooding over and watching his prey. In this respect they may be compared to a dead corpse of one who has been most cruelly broken on the rack, every joint being dislocated, and each bone

broken to pieces, and all the flesh terribly bruised, and torn from the bones and sinews. In this state Christ finds them. He dispossesses the devil, and breathes into them a degree of life, and healing influence. He finds them thus cast out as in the open field, and speaks the sovereign, omnipotent word, and bids them *live*: and that time is a time of love. The soul in the exercise of this new life cleaves to Christ as its healer and husband, and becomes his in a covenant of love and friendship which never can be broken. Christ brings them into his house, and his banner over them is love. He binds up their wounds, pouring in oil and wine; and washes away their blood from them. And now do they *first* begin to have a degree of sensibility, and to feel their dreadful disorders, their wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores. They who are wholly dead in trespasses and sins, and under the dominion of enmity against God and the Redeemer, are in this respect like the dead corpse: whatever dreadful wounds and disorders, are upon them, they are quite insensible of the matter. But as soon as a degree of life and restoration takes place, there is a proportionable degree of sensibility: they feel their disorders and wounds, and the need they stand in of healing; and that they want a physician infinitely distinguished from any mere creature in wisdom, power and goodness; who has a remedy which no other has or can have. They see Christ to be such a physician. They immediately say, "There is balm in Gilead, there is a physician there, exactly suited to my case." And into his hand they commit their disordered souls, despairing of a cure, unless wrought by his most skilful, tender hand. Christ, as their most faithful and kind friend, undertakes for them. He faithfully and constantly attends to their case; searches every wound to the bottom, and applies the best remedy, and that in the wisest manner, and in the best and most seasonable time; so that the cure in the end may be most: complete and perfect, not leaving spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, and attended with the most advantageous consequences. And he will never leave them till he has completed it, He could indeed cure them perfectly, all at once, at a word's speaking, as he did many bodily diseases when he was on earth, and not go into such a long process, and continued course of applications, under which the patient is often put to much pain, and seems to himself to grow worse, rather than better, and sometimes is ready to despair of a cure, and say, "All these things are against me." But he takes the latter and not the former method, because that, on the whole, it is far the wisest and best; the cure is much more perfect and glorious in the end, and attended with consequences unspeakably more happy for the subjects of it. How happy then are the friends of Christ in this respect! They are connected with, and united to, a friend, who is a most skilful and kind physician, and has furnished himself with every remedy that is needed, to heal and cure them, under their singular, and otherwise desperate, disorders. And he is infinitely engaged in the best manner to effect the most complete, happy and glorious cure, and that without money and without price. He is the Lord, that bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound. O Christian, *This* is thy beloved, and *this* is thy friend!



15. Christ is a friend who is infinitely happy, is independent and self sufficient, and has the highest honours in the universe put upon him.

This is an unspeakable advantage in this friendship, and renders it immensely more sweet and happy to the friends of Christ than it could otherwise be. If our friend is in a state of calamity and suffering, in any respect and degree, or is exposed to calamity and evil, it of course becomes our calamity, and we necessarily share in the evil with him, in a degree proportionable to our benevolence and friendship. This renders friendship very unhappy in many instances in this world, because the beloved person is very unhappy. For true benevolence to our friend is crossed by every degree of evil that he suffers, and desires he may have all the honour and happiness he is capable of; and therefore cannot be perfectly satisfied and pleased with any thing short of this. And if our friend is as much honoured and as happy as we can imagine and desire, this will give us an enjoyment, and render the friendship sweet and happy, in proportion to the degree to which it rises and is exercised. For, as we necessarily dare in the evil that our friend suffers, so we do in his happiness. There is therefore the best foundation laid for happiness. in this friendship, that in the nature of things can be, whereby our love and benevolence to Christ is gratified, and pleased to the highest possible degree.

Christ has indeed been subjected to a state of calamity and suffering; he has suffered disgrace and pain to the most amazing degree, and that for his friends: but he has, on the whole, lost nothing by it. If he had, this would have been an undesirable circumstance, which could not possibly be removed, but must have been an alloy to this friendship, and a source of uneasiness to the friends of Christ, forever. For it will necessarily give pain to any one who has entered into true friendship with another, to have his friend a loser in any respect, especially to have him in the least degree a loser on his account. He cannot bear to think of being an injury or disadvantage to his friend in any reaped, and that, on the whole, he should be a loser by him; and it is as impossible to reconcile true love and friendship to this, as to unite the opposite parts of a contradiction. But what Christ has suffered for his people is, in this respect, no disadvantage to this friendship; for, as has been just now observed, he has on the whole lost nothing by it, but has been an infinite gainer. His humiliation and sufferings, even unto death, have been the occasion of his greater happiness, and high exaltation. By this means, and in this way, he has been anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows, and been made to drink of the river of God's pleasures: and this has been the occasion of his being made king of Zion, and raised to the throne of the universe, invested with all power in heaven and on earth, as the sole ruler in God's moral kingdom, and final judge of all. Because he thus humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, therefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. He is richly rewarded, more than ten thousand fold, for all he expended and suffered for the redemption of his people, and their redemption and salvation is the

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occasion of a high degree of happiness and honour, which he could have obtained no other way.

This does not indeed lessen their obligations to him, for what he has done and suffered for them, in the least imaginable degree; for they are every way as great as if he had been an infinite loser by the means. But this is suited to gratify and please his benevolent friends to the highest degree, and add a sweetness and joy to their friendship, inexpressible. The language of their friendly, benevolent hearts is, "Let him be most blessed forever: let him be exalted in the glory of his salvation, and have all the honours of the universe given to him." And when they see him exalted, honoured and blessed, as heir of the whole universe, and independent Lord and possessor of all things; and that this is the consequence and reward of what he has done for the redemption of sinners, with what unbounded joy must their hearts expand! while, with the most sweet, ineffable delight, they join their hearty Amen, and say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, was dead and is alive, and liveth forever more, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" This circumstance greatly adds to the happiness of this friendship, and spreads ineffable sweetness through the soul of the true Christian, when he is able to say, "*This* is my beloved, and *this* is my friend."

16. All that Christ requires of his friends is, to act the part of friends to him, and to maintain, cultivate and improve this friendship between him and them.

This greatly recommends him as a friend, and is a happy circumstance of this friendship between him and his people. His condescension, love and goodness to his friends, and the intimacy and unreserved familiarity to which he admits them, have been already particularly considered. He does not take state on himself so as in any degree to keep them at a distance; nor does he impose heavy burdens on them, and subject them to hard, slavish service, as the master does his servants, in order to their enjoying his favour and friendship. No; he does not call them servants, nor in any respect treat them as such; but he calls them *Friends*, and treats them according to this most dear, soft and tender name. And all he expects and requires of them is, that they cleave to him as their friend, and as becomes his true friends, and in all respects aft up to this most endeared and exalted character. In this regard the law of Christ is nothing but a law of love and friendship, as nothing else is required; it is therefore called the perfect law of liberty. All that Christ requires of his friends is, that they return love for love; that they receive and cleave to him in all proper ways, as their Almighty, infinitely excellent, kind, bountiful and benevolent friend; that they constantly look to him, and trust in him, as such, for all they want; relying wholly on his friendship and goodness, and being heartily willing, with all thankfulness, delight and joy, to be wholly and infinitely indebted to him for all things, as being in themselves nothing but emptiness, insufficiency, wretchedness, guilt and deformity; heartily acquiescing in it that he should do the office of such a friend to them; that they heartily love, esteem, honour and rejoice in him, in this

character; live a life of nearness and intimacy with him, and follow him wheresoever he goes; and do all those acts of love and kindness to him that become his friends, and by which they may properly express and discover their true and superlative love and friendship to him. Thus he tells his disciples that he required nothing of them but that in which they might express and evidence their friendship to him. "Ye are my friends," says he, "if ye do whatsoever I command you."

What a sweet and delightful work then are all the friends of Christ called to! viz. to love the most excellent, worthy, dear and kind friend, and cultivate the greatest intimacy and most sweet friendship with him. In one word, he only requires them to be happy in him, in the nearest and highest enjoyment of him as their friend, in the exercise and gratification of an inclination and affection, which gives the most ravishingly sweet and delightful enjoyment that in nature can be. Surely all the friends of Christ may say from their own experience, "His yoke is *easy*, and his burden *light*. His commandments are not grievous, but perfectly delightful; and in keeping them there is a great reward. The ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. We have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches." And now, O Christian, what does the Lord, thy all-sufficient friend and Redeemer, require of thee, but to say, with joy unspeakable and full of glory. This is my beloved, and *this is my friend*, and live answerable to such a high profession and character?

17. Another advantage and peculiar happiness of this friendship is, that the friends of Christ have just as much evidence that He is their friend, as they have that they are friends to him; and this evidence rises, and is clear, in proportion to the degree of exercise of love and friendship to him.

It has been observed, that it is essential to true love and friendship for any one to desire to be the object of his love, and to have him his friend, on whom he has set his affections. And the more sincere and strong our friendly affection and love to another is, the more do we desire to be the objects of his love and friendship; and the greater uneasiness and pain will attend suspicions of his love to us. As it is the sweetest, happiest thing in the world, even the highest enjoyment we can imagine, to be beloved, especially by those for whom we have an high esteem, and a strong and most friendly affection; so, perhaps, nothing is more disagreeable, or will give a more sensible, cutting pain, than to find ourselves neglected and quite cast off by such. And this is eminently true in the case before us. True friendship to Christ does render it above all things desirable to him that exercises it, to be the object of Christ's love and favour. And to be cast off by him, and be the object of his displeasure and wrath, is to such an one, above any thing else, undesirable and dreadful. In this case, above any other, "Love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, even a most vehement flame."

This has often proved a great unhappiness in human love and friendship, especially that which takes place between the sexes. Many a one has been most cruelly tortured and undone



by this. They have had a vehement affection and love for another, while they have found themselves not beloved, but slighted and despised: this has proved to them an insupportable burden, spread darkness over all things under the sun, rendered them incapable of enjoying any thing, and made them weary of their own life; and has often put an end to it by a lingering, cruel death.

But the friends of Christ are in this respect most happy. They can no further doubt of his love to them, than they question their own love and friendship to him. If they love him, and are his true friends, he is certainly their friend. Yea, if they love him in sincerity, though in never so imperfect and low a degree, they are the objects of his love, and a friendship is begun between Christ and them which will continue forever. For this Christ has given his word to all his friends. He has said, "I love them that love me; and he that loveth me, I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him. And him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

We want nothing then, in order to be assured that Christ loves us with a strong and everlasting love, and is our unchangeable friend, but to know that we love him: or, in other words, we may be certain that Christ loves us, so far as we have good evidence that we sincerely desire and prize his love and friendship. And our evidence of this will be in proportion to the degree of our love to him, or the strength and constancy of our affection and friendship. This is true in all instances of love and affection to any friend; the evidence that we do love them, and are their friends, will be in proportion to the degree and constancy of the exercise of our love and friendship to them, and the expression of it in all proper ways. This love always evidences itself, and is attended with a consciousness that it does exist in our hearts, in proportion to the strength and constancy of its exercise; and we may love a friend to such a degree, as to remove all doubt, yea, render us absolutely assured that we do love him.

So it is in this case; if we doubt whether we are true friends of Jesus Christ, it must be because we are not so, or are so in a very weak and low degree, and with great inconstancy, and there is much in our hearts and actions directly contrary to love and friendship. And as this love rises, and becomes more and more a constant, vigorous exercise and flame in the heart, the Christian will have higher evidence and greater confidence that he is a friend to Christ; and consequently that Christ is his friend. And nothing is wanting but a constant, vigorous exercise of this love, in order to a constant consciousness and prevailing assurance that this glorious person is our beloved, and consequently that he loves us, and is our friend.

Thus we see how happy this friendship is in this respect, by which it is distinguished from all other friendships whatsoever. Full provision is made for the gratification of love to Christ in all respects. In proportion as the Christian loves Christ, he enjoys him, and his love and friendship is gratified and pleased, in a sense and evidence of Christ's love to him. So far as he prizes Christ's love, and really desires to have him his friend, from true love to him, and has a sense and evidence that he does love him, just so far he has a sense and

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evidence that Christ actually is his friend, and does love him; so that this desire is gratified and answered, and turned into a degree of sweet enjoyment, in proportion to the strength and constancy of it. When the Christian therefore can with confidence say, "This is my beloved," he may with equal assurance add, "This is my friend." For these God has joined together: and nothing, neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be ever able to separate them.

18. This friendship between Christ and the believer will reconcile men to death, and support and comfort them under the death of others, their Christian friends.

It tends to make death desirable and sweet. Friends have been so united in this world, and had such a love for each other, that if one must die, the other would choose to die with him; and so the death of one has made death desirable to the other. But the friendship of which I am speaking has a much more powerful influence this way, in many respects. When a friend to Christ, with his heart full of love to him, looks into the grave, and considers that there his dearest Lord and friend once lay, this will sweeten the grave to him, and make the thought of laying his head in the dust pleasant, and he will be ready to say, with one of his friends of old, "Let me die with him." Besides, friendship to Christ reconciles to death, and renders it desirable, and the thought of it sweet, as it is the only way to the full enjoyment of Christ, and a dwelling with him in his holy and glorious kingdom. The friend of Christ longs to be delivered from all contrariety to him, as what is most odious, and the greatest burden, and to get rid of all ignorance, and coldness, and indifference, towards him, and be turned into a perfect, pure flame of: love to him; to dwell in his presence, and honour, praise and serve him day and night: and when he sees death to be the only way to this, he is not only reconciled to it, but is ready to long for it. And when he sees that his Almighty Friend has conquered death, and taken away the sting of it, with what courage and joy can he look it in the face; while with him who was one of Christ's great friends on earth seventeen hundred years ago, and is now with him in heaven, he desires to depart and be with Christ, which to him is far the best of any thing he can conceive of or wish for.

Again, this friendship with Christ gives the best support under the death of dear Christian friends, and lays a foundation even for comfort in it. Herein it has the advantage of all other friendships. The more strongly *they* take place, the more is death dreaded; because this puts an utter end to the friendship, and cuts off all hopes of ever seeing and enjoying one another again. It is in this view that St. Paul speaks of the sorrow and mourning of those that were no Christians, on the death of their dear friends, as those who *have no hope*. They are left quite disconsolate on the death of their friends, because they have no hope of ever seeing and enjoying them again. But Christians have no reason to mourn so. They may part with each other here with high hopes and full assurance of meeting again in a short time,



and enjoying each other, to a much higher degree, and in a better manner, than ever they did before, in the presence of Christ, in his glorious kingdom.

When our dear Christian friends are torn from our fond embraces, and we are deprived of their sweet company, and know we shall see them no more on earth; the more we love Christ, and the greater is our benevolence to them, the more comfort and joy shall we have in the thought, that they have ceased from sin, yea, from all their labours and troubles, and are gone to be with Christ, our great and common friend, and enjoy the benefits of this friendship to an immensely higher degree than we can here; that they will soon be restored to us, with great advantage, and we shall see them in Christ's kingdom, unspeakably more loving and lovely than they were here; and, in a much more noble and perfect friendship, shall reap the happy consequence, and all the advantages, of our acquaintance and friendship here, and be forever with the Lord, our glorious Friend and Redeemer. Surely Christians may well, under the loss of their dearest friends, *comfort one another with these words*.

19. Christ will bring his friends to the nearest enjoyment of himself, and communion with him, where they shall taste the growing sweets of his love and friendship forever.

This is one peculiar excellency and privilege of this friendship, and what crowns all, that, with all its superior excellence and sweetness, and with every other advantage, and desirable circumstance, it will never come to an end, but will continue, flourish and increase forever. The many and great disadvantages and imperfections that attend it in this state shall soon wholly cease; and every thing desirable, and that can possibly advance it, in any respect and degree, shall take place, and that unspeakably beyond the highest flights of the warmest and brightest imagination. This has been repeatedly brought into view, and in several particulars that have been mentioned; but it is so important an article of this friendship, that it seems to deserve our more particular attention.

This friendship is in this world very sweet, and exceeds all others, both in its excellency and in the enjoyment it gives. But this is but a low beginning of something immensely more exalted and happy; and is only preparatory to that which shall be most perfect and everlasting. This friendship is exceeding imperfect in this state, has many interruptions and hindrances, and is attended with numerous inconveniences, which often occasion great pain and distress, which is peculiar to the friends of Christ, and is many times very keen, and even overwhelming. Their remaining degrees of unfriendliness and opposition of heart to Christ, their blindness, stupidity, ingratitude; their great degree of alienation from Christ, their unfruitfulness, and the ill returns they make to him, and their want of a sense of his love and favour, are a most heavy burden to them, under which they often go mourning all the day long. For these things their souls are bowed down, and greatly disquieted within them. And their love to Christ, and concern for his interest in the world, is often the occasion of great concern and trouble, while they live in: such a wicked world as this, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, where there are so many enemies to Christ, and his cause is in so many

ways opposed and run down. These things often cause them to hang their harps on the willows, in this strange land, and to sit down and weep when they remember Zion, and the interest of their Friend and Redeemer; and rivers of water run down their eyes, because men keep not his law, but dishonour him. And the higher their love and friendship to Christ rises, the more affecting and painful will these things be to them; like the dear friends of Christ, the holy women who followed him weeping, when he went to the cross, surrounded by an insulting crowd of cruel enemies. Their love to Christ, their dearest friend, filled their hearts with the keenest twinges of the most cutting pain, which, as a dreadful sword, pierced their souls through and through. But it is wisely and kindly ordered that this friendship should begin in such a state as this, and in these circumstances; and this will all turn to its great advantage in the issue, and prepare the way for a higher enjoyment than if they had never taken place. Christ, their great friend and patron, superintends, and is in this way disciplining them, and in the best manner training them up for the near enjoyment of him in the most perfect state of friendship and happiness. They are espoused to him, though they are in an enemy's country; and he is preparing them for the happy nuptials, when they shall be brought into his presence, and kind embraces, never to part again. And all their pain and sorrow in this world, which they have suffered on his account, and all they have done and suffered for him, shall in the end serve to increase their enjoyment and happiness, and be richly rewarded by him.

He has desired and prayed that they all may be where he is, that they may behold his glory, and enjoy him to the best advantage, and in the highest degree; and he will never rest till he has brought them to this. He will bring them to share in his own honours and happiness, as fully as their enlarged capacities will admit. He will seat them at his own right hand; yea, they shall sit down with him on his throne, and reign jointly with him, as the queen shares in the dignity and honours of the prince her husband. They shall drink with him of the river of his pleasures, and enjoy all that he has, even the whole of his boundless riches and most extensive kingdom. He will bring forth all his hidden treasures for them, and open his heart to them in the fullest manner and without any reserve. He will make them perfectly like himself, and put his own beauty and glory upon them, and bring them to a high and perfect relish for his beauty, and put them, in all respects, and every way, under the best advantage to love and enjoy him forever. This shall perfect this friendship, which will be increasing in unknown, inconceivable heights forever and ever.

Thus they shall be satisfied, perfectly satisfied, and inconceivably happy, when they shall awake in his likeness, and stand complete before him, the beloved of their souls, in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures forever more. Then it will be said concerning every one of the true friends of Christ, "These are they which came but of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his

temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Then shall Christ appear, in all his fulness and glory, as the head of his church, and, in the highest and most emphatical sense, say, “I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse. Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly.” Then the angels will tune their notes higher than ever, and say, with a voice like the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him., the glorious friend and bridegroom of the redeemed; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready”

The friends of Christ now little think what they are coming to, and what will be the issue of these exercises they now have. They have already seen and enjoyed what others never have; for Christ in his superlative glory and excellence has been manifested unto them: but they shall see greater things than these. And the words which Christ spoke to one of his disciples when he was on earth, are applicable to all of them: “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shall know hereafter.” “Beloved, now we are the sons of God, the friends of Christ; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

SERMON VII.

On Christian Friendship.

Cant. v. 16. This is my beloved, and this is my friend

APPLICATION.

I. THIS subject as it has been considered affords great evidence of the truth and divinity of Christianity, and of all the great and leading doctrines; and at the same time shows how the Christian, though not learned, or of great natural capacity, is assured that it is a revelation from the only true God, and will give eternal life and happiness to all who cordially embrace it.

If the gospel is formed and suited to give those who embrace it the highest and most refined and noble enjoyment, which is the beginning of most complete and endless happiness; if, so far as it has its proper and genuine influence on the hearts and lives of men, it spreads happiness through society, and forms all to a happy union, by which they promote, enjoy and rejoice in the welfare of each other; and brings them into a friendship, which is in the nature of it perfect, having nothing undesirable, and nothing wanting to render it the most excellent, noble and durable love and friendship that can be imagined; then it must be divine, a revelation from heaven, the production of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. But that all this is true, has been made abundantly evident, by the very imperfect representation in the preceding discourses. And it is sufficiently supported by the scripture itself, by impartial reason, and by abundant experience,

This scheme of friendship and happiness for man never would have been thought of by any one of the human race, had it not been revealed from heaven. Hence it is made certain that no other scheme of religion, but that revealed in the Bible, is true, or can make men happy by embracing it; and that all other methods to obtain happiness, of which there are many devised by the wit and learning of the most sagacious among men, are mere delusions, and never will or can obtain it. For when the world by their wisdom knew not God, or the way to true happiness, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save, and make completely and eternally happy, all them who believe.

But the unbeliever will say, "I do not pretend to understand the scriptures; but I am certain that my reason and experience dictate that there is no happiness in attending to the Bible, but very much the contrary. And the spread of Christianity in the world has been far from making mankind more happy than they were without it. It has been the occasion of unspeakable calamity. And even professing Christians, instead of being united by it in love and friendship, have been the greatest enemies to each other, and destroyed one another in the most cruel manner."

Answer. That such have received no happiness by the attention they have paid to the Bible, is not an argument of the least weight that it is not to be found there. Men may come to the Bible with a strong and prevailing disposition and taste of mind or heart which does not relish that in which true happiness consists; but is highly disgusted and displeased with it. With this vitiated taste they relish and seek after happiness, where it cannot be found, being wholly blind to these spiritual, noble objects and truths, in the knowledge and enjoyment of which there is the highest happiness. And such a wrong taste and disposition tends to bias their understanding and reason, so as to render it partial, and incline to speculative error. It is therefore to *impartial* reason that we appeal.

This blindness, which consists in a wrong taste and disposition of mind, the scripture speaks of as common to all men in their natural state; and when it so commonly takes place, it is a confirmation of the truth of the scripture: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

As to the effect which Christianity has had in the world, it is acknowledged that where it has been perverted and abused, it has been the occasion of much evil. The best things are capable of abuse, and of being made the occasion of great misery. But this is no argument against their excellency, and tendency to the greatest good, when improved according to their nature. In order to be under advantages, to determine this question, we must study the Bible, and learn what are the doctrines and precepts contained in it. Every one who with impartiality and a right or good taste does this, sees what Christianity is, and knows that in conformity to it, the greatest peace, love and friendship, and the most pure and noble happiness, is to be enjoyed; though an abuse of it may be attended with the worst consequences.

This brings into view the other part of the inference we are considering, viz. that the true Christian has a constant evidence in his own mind that Christianity is from heaven, and will give complete and eternal life and happiness to all who embrace it. They have found and tasted this happiness, consisting in Christian friendship to Christ and to all who appear to bear his image, and know that nothing is wanting in order to their complete felicity forever, but to have this friendship perfected, and attended with every circumstance favourable to it. They are sure this scheme is from heaven, and has a divine stamp upon it, as it is as much beyond man to form it, as to create the world. They may not be able to produce all which is called the *external evidence* of the truth of Christianity, or to answer all the subtle cavils and objections and witty scoffs of infidels, but are able to say, with the primitive Christians, "We know that the Son of God has come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true. This is the true God, and eternal life." And they are witnesses to the truth declared by their beloved Lord and Saviour: "This is eternal life, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." They have found the treasure hid in a field, the pearl of great price. They have found all they want to

make them eternally happy; and cheerfully forsake and give up every thing else, and renounce all hopes or desires of any other happiness, for the sake of these.

II. How happy are the true friends of Christ! They have a degree of sweet enjoyment and happiness now, which strangers intermeddle not with, in love and union of heart to Christ and their fellow saints. They taste the sweets of Christian friendship, in comparison with which all other enjoyments are low, insipid and worthless. They see such superlative, ravishing beauty and excellence in their most beloved friend, that they are become insensible and dead to all those objects which glitter in the eyes of the world, and charm their hearts, by which they are hurried on in the pursuit of them with the greatest eagerness. They have a friend of such excellence and worth, that it will take an eternity to tell what he is, and make a full display of his sufficiency and perfections. What though their portion in this world is mean, and their lot hard; it is ordered by their kind, wise friend for their best good. What though they may be overlooked, yea, despised, by men, and are counted the offscouring of all things; their names, are enrolled in the most honourable place in heaven; they are engraven on the breast of Him who is at the head of the universe, who is their Almighty and everlasting friend, and will confess their names before the congregated universe. Their life is hid with Christ: in God: and when Christ their friend, who is their life, shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory. Though they are inconceivably unworthy guilty, despicable and ill-deserving in themselves, yet their friend to whom they are united has dignity and worthiness enough to recommend to the highest honours and happiness. Because they love him, and have united themselves to him, as their friend and patron, the great Father of the universe loves them, and is disposed to bestow on them all imaginable favours and honours; and all the angels delight in them, and join to serve and honour them. By virtue of their union to and interest in this friend and patron, they are counted worthy of immensely higher honours and happiness than their most perfect and longest continued holiness could have entitled them to. The low, guilty and wretched state into which they are fallen by sin, shall on the whole be no disadvantage to them, but infinitely to the contrary. All this evil shall be turned into the greatest good to them. From this infinite depth of guilt and wo, in which they are sunk infinitely below the reach of any finite arm, they shall be raised to the top of the creation, and be made the highest and happiest of all, next to the most blessed and glorious personage to whom they are united, and bear the most near and honourable relation. With him they shall dwell forever, and be admitted to as great intimacy and familiarity as if he was their equal, and immensely more, even as great as they can possibly desire—shall constantly have all the tokens and expressions of his love they can wish for, and enjoy a dear and sweet friendship with him, without interruption, which shall exceed every thing of the kind beyond conception, and will grow more and more sweet and transporting through boundless duration, eternal ages. In that world of love, where all shall swim in this river, this boundless ocean of sacred pleasure and delight, they shall have the sweetest, the

cream of all; as the first-born, they shall inherit a double portion forever.—But I must stop; the theme is boundless.

Am I speaking to any of the friends of Jesus Christ, who love him in sincerity, and as chaste virgins are espoused to him? Hail, ye blessed of the Lord! Ye are greatly beloved by him, and nothing shall be able to separate you from his love. All things are working together for your good. Jesus, the beloved of your souls, is at the head of the universe, and is the appointed judge of all. Lift up your heads, and rejoice, for your redemption draweth nigh. You shall soon see him at the head of his most glorious kingdom, with all his enemies under his feet. He will completely fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness toward you. All things are for your sakes, that his abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God. Be entreated then not to faint, but lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees. Let us not cease to pray for one another, and for all the saints, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto us more of the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance, which he has provided for all the saints.

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III. But who are these most happy persons, the true friends of Jesus Christ? Many are doubtless deceiving themselves in this important point. They are professing great love to Jesus Christ, and are confident that he is their friend, while indeed they know him not, and are real enemies to his true character; and will be found at last the workers of iniquity, of whom he will be ashamed, and reject them, as those whom he never knew. There may be others who, though they are his real friends, are often calling their love and friendship to Christ in question, and ready sometimes even to conclude against themselves. It may therefore be worth while to attend to this question a little, to which the subject we are upon naturally leads us.

Doubtless many readers have had this serious and important question in view, through the whole of the preceding discourses. And while we have attended to the nature, peculiar circumstances and exercises of this friendship, much has been said to give light in this matter, and assist persons in determining whether they are in any degree acquainted with this divine friendship, or not. But, for the further assistance of those who are seriously inquiring whether they are true friends to Christ, or not; that the truly sincere may be encouraged and comforted, and the presumptuous self-deceiver may be detected and convinced; it may be worth while to attend to the following particulars, which this subject naturally brings into view.

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I. True friendship to Jesus Christ is not grounded on, and does not originate from, a conviction and belief that he loves them and is their friend.

This has been apparent in the whole description that has been given of this love and friendship; and is most evident from the reason and nature of things. Where one loves, and

is a friend to, another, only because he is persuaded that the other loves him, there is no real benevolence, esteem, complacency or true; friendship in the case. It is nothing but *self love*, called out to exercise in this particular way, in which there is not a spark of true friendship; but is a principle most directly opposite to it of any in nature. The man is a friend to himself, he is wholly bound up in his own private interest, and values and seeks nothing else, and takes no complacency and delight in any thing else, in no person or things any further than, in his view, it is friendly to him, or tends some way to promote his interest; or that which he looks upon so. Such an one, continuing so, is not capable of true friendship, to which disinterested benevolence is essential. This is so plain a dictate of the common sense and feeling of mankind, that it cannot be disputed. If the affection and friendship of any one to us is evidently wholly grounded in the kindness he has received from us, and our friendship towards him; and all his affection and regard is excited and kept up by this consideration only; so that if we should leave off to shew kindness to him, or he should suppose that we were not his friends, all his affection and friendship would immediately cease; if this was evidently all the friendship he has for us, we cannot help looking on such an one not to be our true friend. Such sort of friendship as this may take place between persons who have not the least degree of true benevolence, and who are real enemies to each other's true character. And all mankind have joined to pronounce it a worthless thing, and not worthy the name of true friendship. And it is as distant from true friendship, and as worthless, when exercised towards Jesus Christ, as if it was exercised towards us. Yet many are here deceiving themselves, and offering that to Christ for his acceptance, which if we should offer to any of our fellow men, they would despise and abhor it.

But the true friends of Christ have had their affection and love to him excited, and they have commenced his true friends, from a view of his true character, exhibited in divine revelation, entirely independent of the consideration of his loving and being a friend to them. When his character was once opened to their view, and they saw what manner of person he was, they were pleased and charmed with him, and their hearts became friendly to him in a moment. They did not, neither could they, stay till they knew he was their friend, and loved them, before they commenced his friends, and gave their hearts to him. No; they could not but love him, whether he loved them or no. That this is always true of the real friends of Christ, is evident to a demonstration, not only from what has been just now observed of the nature of true friendship, there being no other such, but that which is founded in a disinterested love and affection; but from this plain and infallible truth, viz. that we can have no evidence that Christ is our friend, and loves us, until it is evident that we are his friends. There is no other possible way for any person to know, or have the least ground to think, that Christ is his friend, but by first becoming a friend to him. If therefore he waits, and neglects to become friendly to Christ, till he has some evidence that Christ is more a friend to him than to every other person, he never will be a friend to him. We are therefore



certain, that if there are any friends to Christ in this world, they became so antecedent to any evidence which they had that Christ was their friend, and loved them: for it is impossible they should have any such evidence antecedent to their love to him, and as the ground and spring of it; this evidence being always consequent on our love to Christ, and never before it. Christ says, "He that loveth me, I will love him; or, I will love them that love me." Here we see Christ's love and friendship is grounded on a person's love to him, and is the consequence of it; therefore the latter cannot be the consequence of the former, and grounded on that, And here Christ promises his love and friendship to them who love him; therefore, according to this promise, our love to him is the only evidence that he is our friend. And there is not one promise in the Bible, of Christ's special love and friendship to any one, unless he has that character which implies true love to Christ: or, they who are not true friends to Christ have no promise made to them of Christ's special love and favour; therefore can have no degree of evidence of it, while they continue such. They therefore who think they have had any token or evidence of Christ's special love to them, antecedent to their loving him, or before they become his friends, are most certainly deluded. And they whose friendship to Christ is built on such a supposition, and has originated wholly from the belief that he was their special friend, are founding all their friendship on a gross delusion, and are indeed no true friends to Christ, and need nothing but to see the truth, in order to know they are not. And they who will not love Christ, and become friends to him, till they first know, or believe on good evidence, that he is their special friend, will never be his friends in this world; therefore will certainly remain his enemies to all eternity.

The true friends of Christ love him for what he is in himself; and all their friendship to him consists originally and fundamentally in this. He has worthiness and excellency, beauty and charms enough in his person and character to win the heart of any one who has the least degree of true discerning, and right taste and disposition. If persons have no degree of such taste and discerning, all the possible manifestations and testimonies of Christ's special love to them would not beget the least spark of such a disposition; so would not produce the least degree of true friendship: therefore would do no manner of good to such an one, but hurt; as it would be the occasion of the exercise of the wickedness and lusts of his heart, and leave him really a more confirmed enemy to Christ than he was before. But if persons have any degree of right taste and discerning implanted in their hearts (which is always done in regeneration) they will love and be charmed with the beauty and excellence of Christ's character, and commence his true friends immediately, before they know, or have the least evidence, that he is their friend, or has any special love to them. And it is in consequence of their thus loving and cleaving to him, that he manifests himself to them as their special Friend and Redeemer. And this manifestation is made by the medium of their love to him, which, as has been before observed, is in all cases the only evidence that any person can have that Christ is indeed his friend. Christ himself has on design stated this matter as

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plain as words can make it. He says, "He that loveth me, I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him."

It is granted that the manifestation and evidence of Christ's special love to his true friends will greatly increase their love to him; and therefore, in a sense and degree, they love him because he first loved them; or, his love to them, manifested in the way just mentioned, does render him more dear to them, and greatly increase and sweeten their love and friendship for him. But if they had no antecedent love to him, grounded upon what he is in himself, such manifestation would not be the occasion of any true love, as has been observed. "When therefore a sense and manifestation of Christ's love to them is said to be the occasion of their love to him, it is supposed that they were already, and antecedent to this, his true friends. The more true love and friendship we have for any one, grounded on the true worth and excellence of his character, the more pleasing will it be to us to be beloved by him, and the more will it increase our love and friendship.

The view of this matter which we have now had is sufficient to demonstrate, to every considerate, unprejudiced person, that those remarkable words of the apostle John, *We love him, because he first loved us*, cannot mean that our love to Christ originates from a belief and sense of his love to us, as the proper cause and reason of it, so that men never love him in any other view, or on any other account, and our love to him is in proportion to the evidence and manifestation of his love to us, so that when this evidence ceases, and we call in question his love to us, our love to him ceases, and again rises in proportion to our belief and assurance that he is our friend. This is the meaning that many have put on them, and earnestly contended for. But what has been said is sufficient to shew that they herein contend for a love and friendship to Christ which is not true friendship, but is perfectly selfish and mercenary, so cannot be that in which true Christianity consists. The worst of men will love those that love them, without any alteration in their moral character at all. Such a love is no virtue, but rather a vice, as it is only the exercise of their lusts. And these same men will love Christ, if they can be persuaded to believe that Christ loves them, and yet be as destitute of true religion, and as vicious, as ever. And whoever is a friend to Christ only in this view, and on this account, has no true religion, and is at bottom a real enemy to Christ. The meaning of these words then, "*We love him because he first loved us*," must be, that God's love and benevolence to us is the ground and reason of our ever being brought to love him, as we never should have been brought to such a temper and disposition, but have continued his enemies, had he not, from his eternal, electing love, given us a new heart, a heart to love him; so that, in this sense, his love to us, which is *first*, even from eternity, is the cause of our love to him. This is a certain truth, and these words are as well adapted to express it as any that can be thought of. Our Saviour, speaking of the same thing, viz. the love and friendship between his disciples and himself, expresses it in different words. He says to them, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you;" i.e. my previous choice of you to be my

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disciples and friends has been the reason of your becoming my friends and followers, as you never would have become my friends, had I not brought it about: so you now love me, and are become my friends, because I *first* loved you, looked you up, and called you by my influences and grace. What the Apostle plainly means to assert here is, that in the work of redemption, in which a reconciliation is brought about between God and man, and a mutual love and friendship takes place, God is the first mover, and not man. This is the theme he is upon, as appears by the tenth verse: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins." God is first in his love to man, by which he has provided a Mediator; and then, by his motion and influences, brings men to love him. And thus we are brought into this friendship, and love God and the Saviour, not as first moving in the affair ourselves, but because God *first* loved us. The devil knew that such a *selfish* religion is not true religion, but is an argument that a man is really a wicked man, and an enemy to God; therefore he said, in order to set *Job* in a bad light, and insinuate, that the character God gave of him, as an *upright man*, did not belong to him; "Doth *Job* serve God for nought?" &c: *q.d.* "*Job* is wholly selfish and mercenary in what he does, and has no true respect and love to God, nor is really his friend: for all the love and service he renders to God is grounded on God's love and kindness to him, and the good he gets by it. Therefore only take away these tokens of love and goodness, and his love will wholly cease, and he will turn an enemy to God." And God implicitly grants, that if this was the case with *Job*, he was not worthy the character he had given him; therefore proceeds to put this matter to the trial. Wo to the person whose love and friendship to Christ is built on no better foundation than this. When the trial comes, he will be found wanting, even just such an one as the devil would have him be; a real and confirmed enemy to Jesus Christ.

Let every one, then, who is inquiring whether he is a true friend to Christ, or not, see to it that he does not deceive himself here, while all his love and affection is only a *selfish* thing, arising wholly from a thought and belief that Christ is his friend, and not consisting in any true sense of his worthiness, superlative excellence and beauty. The true friends to Christ love and esteem him, are pleased with his person. and character, and are friendly and benevolent to him, rejoicing in his honour and happiness, independent of his love to them; and therefore if he should cast them off forever, and their character continue the same, this would not destroy their love to him; but they would, notwithstanding this, continue his hearty friends, even under the highest tokens of his displeasure; could he do this consistent with his true character.

1. The true friends of Christ are submissive and obedient to him.

There is no true principle of obedience but love; and just so far as this takes place, there is a spirit of obedience. So far as one is a true friend to another, he is devoted to his service, and is at his beck, especially if he is his superior, and has a right to dictate and command. And with what freedom and pleasure do we strive to serve and please our dear friends! This

is no talk, but a privilege. What influence then will true love and friendship to Christ have in this respect! with what sweet delight do they devote themselves to Him, looking on his service as the greatest privilege and happiness that they can conceive of! They long to be all submission and obedience to him, from a sense of the sweetness and pleasure of it. As soon as they become friends to him, they are reconciled to and pleased with all his institutions, commands and ways. They esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be perfectly right. They will meditate on his precepts, and have respect to all his ways. Yea, they will delight themselves in his statutes, and rejoice in the way of his testimonies, more then in all riches. They well understand the Psalmist when he says, "I opened my mouth, and panted, for I longed for thy commandments." They are not disposed to pick and choose for themselves, but are ready to sign a blank, and say, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" "With this disposition they read God's word, desiring to find what is that good and perfect: and acceptable will of Christ. They are not offended at the cross, or feared at the prospect of sufferings for their dear Lord and Master; but are ready to look upon this as a great privilege and happiness. Ail this is the natural and even necessary attendant of true friendship to Christ. This our dear Lord has expressed repeatedly in the strongest terms. His words are, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. If a man love me, he will keep my words. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

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There are many professed friends of Christ who are, found wanting, yea, essentially defective, when tried by this plain, infallible rule, which is most insisted on of any in the word of God, as the best rule of trial. They have, it may be, at times had some uncommon motions and affections of soul, as they fondly think, towards Christ: and in these they rest as a sure evidence that they are become friends to him. But what is the fruit in their life and conversation? Why, it may be truly said of them, they profess great love and friendship to Christ, but in works they dishonour and deny him. They call him Lord and Master, but do not the things that he says: therefore we may be sure they are not his friends; that all their affection, love and joy, however high it rises, is of a spurious kind, and has nothing of the nature of true love to Christ.

Look well to yourselves in tills point, my friends. Flatter not yourselves that you are friends to Christ, unless you are wholly devoted to his service, and are, with great exactness and conscientious care, labour and watchfulness, attending upon whatsoever he has commanded, and avoiding all that he has forbidden, in thought, word and deed: at the same time not counting this a task, but a privilege, from which you never desire to be released.

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SERMON VIII.

On Christian Friendship.

Cant. v. 16. This *is my beloved, and this is my friend.*

3. IF PERSONS are the true friends of Christ, their obligations to him appear exceeding great to them.

It is the nature of true friendship to operate thus. This above all things tends to make persons sensible of the obligations they are under to their friend, and to be ready, and even delight, to acknowledge them. The more we esteem and love any one, the greater does his kindness to us appear, and the more are we affected with it, and, consequently, the more sensible shall we be of the obligations we are under to him; and the more shall we be pleased and delighted in being thus obliged.

This takes place in the friendship we are now considering, to a degree beyond any parallel. No obligations in the universe are so great as those of Christ's friends and servants to him. They are enhanced to an amazing degree, and become infinite every way. They are enough to fill the soul with wonder and astonishment, and swallow up all thought. And his friends are not without a sense of this. They feel themselves bound to Christ by the strongest ties, which are beyond all expression. He has bought them by his own precious blood, and what obligations do they acknowledge themselves to be under, to be wholly and forever devoted to him, with the utmost strength of their hearts!

If you are the friends of Christ, this has been often a very affecting theme to you. You have felt and acknowledged your obligations to Christ, with an ardour of soul inexpressible, and with a great degree of sweetness and delight. And you have said, many a time, "What shall I render to the Lord and Saviour for all his benefits?" And you have found you had no returns to make answerable to the immense obligations you are under to him.—This leads to observe,

4. The friends of Christ never think they have done enough for him, but always, in their own view, come vastly short of what they owe to him.

This is always the attendant of true friendship among men, especially where one is a great friend to another who is much his superior every way, and to whom he is under great and peculiar obligations. He is not afraid of doing too much for his friend; but always comes short of what he would be glad to do, being ready to purpose and do more than he does. And he is not apt to magnify what he has done, and think he does a great deal, as he does it with so much pleasure, and his obligations appear so great; but he is disposed to think it little, or even nothing; and if his friend appears to take great notice of it, he is ready to wonder at it, and think he greatly magnifies it. He thinks he is to blame that he has done no more, and is uneasy with himself on this account, and wonders that such notice should be taken of what he has done.



But in the case before us, this takes place in a higher degree than in any other; as the Christian's friend is so much more worthy and excellent than any other, and he is under so much greater obligations to him, and his defeats and short comings are so much greater and more aggravated than in any other case. All the Christian does, and renders to Christ, links into nothing, in his view, and he looks upon it as amazing condescension in Christ to take any notice of it, or accept it. He can heartily and feelingly espouse the language of a certain great friend of Christ, who was once in our world, but is now in heaven with him: "What I would, that I do not; and what I would not, that I do." I am infinitely in debt to my glorious friend, but pay nothing. All my returns I make to him are so little, and so much below the obligations I am under, that they are altogether unworthy his notice. O that I could give away to him my whole self forever in one pure, constant, ardent flame of love. And even this would be so little, worthless a gift, that it is great grace and condescension in him to accept it. If I was called to the greatest sufferings in his cause, and to lay down my life for him, this I should count the greatest privilege; but how little would this be towards paying the debt I owe! how little compared with what he has done for me!

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There are many professed Christians, who naturally think they do a great deal for Christ, and that he is much in debt to them for it; while they are really doing little compared with what many others do. And the very reason why they have so high an opinion of what they do is, because they count Christ's service hard, and at bottom have no true love to him. But the true friends of Christ, from the great love they have to him, are disposed to look upon all they can do or suffer for him as little or nothing.

5. The friends of Christ are ready to espouse his cause at all times, let it cost them what it will.

This is the nature of true friendship; it will lead persons always to appear on the side of their friend, to espouse his cause, and promote his interest. Solomon observes, that a friend loveth at all times. This is applicable to the case before us: a true friend of Christ loveth at all times, is ready to stand up in his cause, and espouse his interest, let who will oppose it. He is not ashamed of his friend, and will not account his name, estate or his life dear to him, if he is called to give any or all of them up, to testify his love to Christ. He is tenderly affected and hurt when Christ is slighted and dishonoured, and will do all he can to wipe off the reproach. And if Christ must be dishonoured and reproached, he is willing to suffer reproach with him; and desires not to fare better in the world than Christ and his cause do.

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6. The true friends of Christ desire and long to have others become his friends.

Their benevolence to Christ, and to their fellow men, will both influence to this. They want all should love and honour Christ, out of love and benevolence to him; and they earnestly desire that others may enjoy the happiness of this friendship, as friends to them. Under the influence of this they are praying for others, that they may be brought to know Christ, and so become his real friends and servants. And they are taking all the proper ways

they can think of to recommend Christ to others, both in words and conduct, by holding forth light, and matter of conviction of his worth and excellence.

7. The true friends to Christ know that they are naturally enemies to him, and continue to have a great degree of opposition and enmity in their hearts to him, even now.

There are many professed Christians who are Insensible that they are, or ever were, in any degree real enemies to Christ. They think mankind in general, and themselves in particular, are much misrepresented and abused, if any one declares them to be naturally enemies to Christ. This, we are obliged to think, is owing to their not being real friends to Christ. If they were, they could not be so insensible of that which opposes him. It is no wonder that he who is not a friend to Christ should be blinded in this matter, and wholly overlook his opposition and enmity to Christ; but that a true friend to him should be thus blinded is perfectly unaccountable, and even impossible. All sin is most direct opposition to Christ, and enmity against him, whether it be in us or in others. But the Christian world is full of sin; and all men are naturally wholly given to it, and therefore really hate Christ. And even his best friends, in this world, have a great degree of corruption, and many sinful exercises of heart. And all this is real enmity to Christ, it being not the less so because they have a degree of love to Christ. Therefore it seems impossible that a friend to Christ should be insensible of this.

When any one has no true love and friendship for another, but greatly undervalues, dislikes and hates him, and yet imagines he is his true friend, he must of consequence be in a great degree stupid and blind to the slight and contempt that is cast upon him, and will naturally think he is treated well enough; and may look upon that as an act of respect to him, in which really a slight is put upon him, and is an act of enmity against his true character. But he who is a true friend to another, and esteems, honours and loves him to a great degree, for what he is in himself, and in a view of his true character, will be quick to discern and feel every slight that is put upon him, and every thing that opposes his character. So it is in this case; the true friend of Christ knows the whole world lies in wickedness, and that all men are naturally in arms against Christ, and are proclaiming their enmity against him; that he himself is naturally a rebel and enemy to him; and that there is a great degree of the same thing in his heart now, of which he shall never be wholly cured, till he is perfectly cured of all sin. In this view the friends of Christ loathe and abhor themselves, humble themselves before him, and lie in the dust at his feet, judging and condemning themselves, acknowledging their own guilt and ill-desert, and exceeding vileness and odiousness, and feeling themselves wholly without the least excuse. They know that the carnal mind, even every thing that is in man naturally, is enmity against Christ, and that the friendship of this world is enmity against him; that they are no further friends to Christ than they are new creatures, having put off the old man with his lusts, and put on the new man: and, O, how do they long for

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deliverance from this body of sin and death, to be perfectly like Christ, and turned into a pure, holy flame of perfect love to him!

8. The true friends of Christ think much of him, and his name is as ointment poured forth, having a sweetness and fragrancy, which often fills their hearts with an holy warmth and fervour, and sweet, heavenly delight.

Our dearest friends have always a place in our hearts: we are apt to have them much in our thoughts: every thing about us, and every occurrent, almost, will suggest the idea of them to our minds, which we are apt to carry with us wherever we go.

And surely there is something like this in the friendship we are considering. No person has reason to think he is a friend to Christ, unless he thinks much of him, and the pleasing idea he has formed of him is apt to be present, and is familiar to him.

The friend of Christ has really more concern with him, than with any other person in the universe; and more passes between him and Christ, than between any one else. To him his heart naturally goes out, when alone, in exercises of love, devotion and prayer; and of him he thinks much, even in company; for none can so divert him as to erase the sweet idea of his best beloved from his mind. And whatever he does in word or deed, he does all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Christ is in him the hope of glory; and the life he lives is a life of faith on the Son of God.

9. The friends of Christ do trust in him wholly for righteousness and strength. They trust in his merit and worthiness only, to recommend them so as to find acceptance with the Father of the universe, and to all that favour they need. They know they have no worthiness of their own, but infinitely the reverse of it; that they are in themselves most unworthy, odious and ill-deserving; and they know that Christ has merit and worthiness enough to recommend them; and they see wherein it consists. Their knowledge of the true character of Christ, and sense of his worthiness, excellency and amiableness, in which their love and friendship to him consists, is a sufficient foundation for their trust in him to recommend them to the offended Lawgiver. They see the reason why he is so worthy and acceptable to the Father; and do not wonder that he is ready to pardon and shew the greatest favours to those who are his friends, and for whom he has undertaken as their friend and patron, interposing and employing his merit and worthiness in their behalf. They therefore see the safety there is in relying upon him for this, however unworthy they are in themselves; that they need nothing but to be united to him, so that he shall be their friend, and properly espouse their cause, in order to have all the favour they want, and to be "*accepted in the Beloved.*" And the higher their love and friendship to Christ arises, and the greater sense they have of his excellency and Worthiness, the more strongly do they rely upon him for righteousness; the more clearly do they see the propriety, wisdom and glory of this way of the sinner's finding acceptance with God, and with the more cheerfulness and delight do they trust in him, "desiring to be found in him, not having their own righteousness, which is of



the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." In short, the more they love Christ, the more fully do they see their destitution of all righteousness and worthiness of their own; yea, the infinite distance they are from any such thing, even their infinite vileness and ill-desert; and the more clearly do they behold the sufficiency of his worthiness to recommend them; and the more pleased are they with being saved in this way, as the wisest and most sweet and excellent of any they can imagine.

If a person wants a favour of any one, which he has forfeited, and of which he is utterly unworthy, having justly incurred his highest displeasure; and there is another, a third person, whom he highly esteems and loves, and knows he is most worthy and acceptable in his eyes whose favour he wants; he will naturally desire that this his beloved friend should espouse his cause, and interpose the influence and merit he has with the offended person, to procure his pardon and favour. And if he knows that this his much esteemed and most dear friend has actually undertaken thus to mediate in the behalf of offenders, and in this work has done much to please and honour the offended, injured person, even enough more than to countervail the injury and damage he had sustained; he will naturally rely wholly upon his merit and worthiness with the offended person, for that acceptance and favour he wants. And his receiving it in this channel, wholly by the interposition, merit and worthiness of his highly esteemed and well beloved friend, will render it doubly sweet to him, at the same time that it will greatly endear to him his very worthy friend. And hence we may observe, that it is agreeable not only to the practice of mankind in such cases, but to the reason and nature of things, that such a friend should, by his merit with the offended person, procure pardon and favour to the offender, who applies to him and trusts in him, to do such a kind office for him; and that it may be reasonable and proper that such a favour should be given him purely out of respect to the merit and worthiness of his friend, to whom he is united, and in whom he trusts for this, which it would not be proper and wise to grant in any other way.

Thus the friend of Christ sees that "the Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake," and says, with unspeakable satisfaction and pleasure, "In the Lord have I righteousness;" yea, with immensely more pleasure than the angels have in being accepted in their own righteousness. And the honour and glory that the Mediator, their dearest friend, has, by thus becoming the righteousness of his people, and procuring pardon and acceptance for them, is exceeding satisfactory and pleasing to his friends. They are abased and humbled to the lowest degree, and made to take their proper place, in a sense of their own infinite unworthiness and guilt: Christ, their friend, is exalted, as having merit and worthiness with God sufficient to cancel their guilt, and recommend them to the greatest dignity and blessedness. And with this they are well pleased, and rejoice to take their own place, sink down low at the foot of Christ, and to exalt and honour their glorious Friend and Redeemer. And in this way they at the same time exalt and honour themselves in the highest degree.

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They who are at heart in no degree friendly to Jesus Christ, never thus trust in him for righteousness; nor can they be reconciled to this method of pardon and salvation. Whatever profession they may make, and however orthodox they are in speculation, they do not really understand this matter; it is foolishness unto them, and their whole hearts do in all their exercises most directly and strongly oppose it; and they are at bottom seeking after righteousness, as it were by the works of the law. The friends of Christ trust wholly in him also for strength, by which they may persevere in love and friendship with him; being sensible that they have no sufficiency of their own, and that there is not the least ground of dependence on themselves. In this sense, they go through this wilderness to the world above, *leaning on their beloved*; knowing that though of themselves they can do nothing, yet through Christ strengthening them they can do all things.

III. Let what has been said on this subject be improved to recommend Jesus Christ to all as the best friend, and as a motive to enter into friendship with him, and make him their friend without delay.

You have been attending to the unspeakable privileges and blessedness of this friendship; you have had enough laid before you abundantly to convince you that this is the most important and happiest friendship in the universe; that they are indeed blessed and made happy forever, who are true friends to Jesus Christ. They enjoy a much higher degree of happiness in this world, than any other persons ever did, or ever can do.

And you are all now invited into this friendship, who have hitherto lived strangers to it; you are none of you excluded; but Christ is offered to you all in the character of an almighty and most excellent friend; and nothing is wanting but the free consent of your hearts to give yourselves up to him, in this character, become friends to him, cleave to him, and love him, in order to his being your friend. You cannot fail of having him your friend but by rejecting the most kind offer he makes to you. If therefore any under the gospel perish at last for want of an all-sufficient friend, who is able and ready to do all for them they can want, even in the most extreme case, and is infinitely the best, most sweet and excellent friend in the universe; it must be because they have persisted through their whole life in refusing his kind offer to be their friend, and pressing invitations, urged by the strongest motives imaginable, to choose him as their friend.

All that has been said on this interesting, pleasing subject conspires to shew the folly and misery of such. But to all this a few words more may be added, in an address to such who have hitherto rejected this Heavenly Friend.

Consider how happy they must be who have entered into this friendship; who love, and are beloved by, such an infinitely excellent and amiable friend. Much has been said in the preceding discourses to set forth the happiness of such. But the particular consideration which is suited to lead you to conceive of this matter, is, the happiness of other friendships; at least the happiness which men are eagerly seeking and pursuing in them.



The blooming, sprightly youth commonly sets out soon in the eager pursuit of happiness, in love and friendship. For this he has the most keen taste, and can conceive of no higher enjoyment than this. To love and be beloved by a friend which he shall choose out from all the rest of mankind, and prefer to all the rest, to enjoy such a friend in the most agreeable circumstances, is the height of all felicity in his view. And even the hope and prospect of it will give a degree of high enjoyment, such as it is, and prompt him to go through almost any difficulty and hardship, in order to be united with and enjoy such a friend.

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Your observation and experience with respect: to this may serve to convince you of the exalted happiness of the friendship I am inviting you into. What are all the excellencies and charms, either of body or mind, of the most lovely persons on earth, compared with those of Jesus Christ! You want nothing but a taste and relish for his beauties, in order to lower your relish for all mere human friendships, and to make you long for *real* enjoyment in the most noble and substantial friendship; and the highest enjoyment of earthly lovers (to obtain which they would be willing to give away all the riches of both the Indies) would appear to you to be mean trash; a low, despicable, fading nothing. They who, in a high taste for friendship, are pursuing happiness in earthly loves, are always disappointed in a greater or less degree. Either they never get possession of the beloved object, or, if they do, they find not those excellencies they expected, having greatly overrated them in their imaginations; or the enjoyment does not answer their expectations; and the happiness they find is short-lived, and attended with many troubles and undesirable things, and soon dies away. And often the short-lived comfort gives place to a keen and lasting misery, which leaves the poor creature in absolute despair of that happiness which had been expected, and so eagerly fought after. But in the friendship now proposed to you, your highest expectations shall be immensely outdone. The enjoyment of your friend shall not fade, but increase. You will find his beauty and excellency greater than you conceived; and that the one half was not told you. You shall exist in the bloom and vigour of eternal youth. Your taste for love and friendship shall not die, but increase, and be a thousand times as high and keen as that of the most passionate, doating earthly lover: and this shall be completely satisfied in the enjoyment of your beloved, under all imaginable advantages, and with every desirable circumstance, while his beauties shall sparkle in your eyes, and more and more charm, and fill you with unutterable transports of the most solid and lasting joy, and he will give himself wholly to you forever.

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O let them who have a high relish for earthly love and friendship improve this to help their conceptions of the happiness of the love and friendship now recommended; and let them hence be excited to seek after this enjoyment, by choosing Jesus Christ as their friend. Let them know that it is only because their taste is vitiated and perverted, that they are not pursuing this love with as much eagerness and high expectation as the fond youth is hurried on in earthly amours.

And let the *youth*, in particular, be invited into this friendship. It is pity the morning of your days, the bloom and vigour of life, should be spent in the eager pursuit of that which will not profit, but end in disappointment and misery. It is pity you should not give yourselves up to Jesus Christ, the heavenly friend, in your early days, and let him have your first love. He is calling upon you to give your hearts to him, in this noble and exalted friendship. You shall find all the sweetness in this that you expect, and are pursuing elsewhere, and ten thousand times more. And this shall sweeten all other friendships to you, that are worthy to be desired and pursued. This will lay a foundation for a virtuous, noble friendship with others, which shall grow more and more refined and sweet, and shall end in something happy and glorious, beyond all our present conceptions.

Again, consider the base ingratitude and wickedness there is in slighting and rejecting the offers of this friendship with Jesus Christ, and the dreadful consequence of it. If you do not enjoy all the blessings of this friendship, it will be wholly your own fault, and the consequence will be unutterable misery. You must answer for the wickedness you are guilty of in rejecting Christ, which is in proportion to his greatness, worthiness and excellence, his kindness and love, and the happiness you hereby refuse. You are spurning at, and trampling upon, the most tender love, of the most worthy and excellent personage, who offers to receive you into the embraces of the dearest love. And O, what will be the consequence of this! Why, Christ, the great and celebrated friend, who now offers to take you into a dear and everlasting friendship, and become your most loving friend forever, if you will consent to it, will become your peculiar and greatest enemy; yea, your implacable enemy forever. He will hate you, and heap mischiefs on your head, without the least degree of pity or regard to your interest. He will cast you into outer darkness, and tread you down in his wrath, and trample you in his fury. His hatred, wrath and vengeance towards you will be great and dreadful in proportion to his love and kindness to his friends. And all his friends will most heartily, join with him in this; and not one of them will exercise the least love and pity towards you. All your friendships you are entering into and pursuing now, will wholly cease soon, and turn into the most tormenting hatred and enmity. The higher your love and friendship with others rises, which is consistent with your being enemies to Christ, and the more connections you have with men, the greater enemies and plagues will you be to one another forever. And the time will soon come when you shall know you have not a friend in the universe, and that you yourself know not, nor ever will know, what true friendship means; being justly cursed, and given up to an unfriendly heart, full of pride, hatred, envy, malice, revenge, cursing and bitterness, in consequence of your refusal to enter into a friendship with Jesus Christ, Consider how hard and cutting it is now to be hated, and have the ill will of others, and find yourself friendless when in calamity and distress, and you stand in need of help; and let this teach you a little what you must feel if you ever come to the case just described. And as you would avoid all this evil, of which we can have but a faint idea now, be persuaded to attend



to the most kind offer which Christ makes to you. O run, *fly* into his arms, which are now stretched out to you, and he will embrace you forever. Are you in the utmost danger of sinking into hell, his almighty, everlasting arms shall be underneath you, to hold you up, and raise you to the highest heavens. Are you most miserable and wretched, run to Christ, and he will deliver you out of all trouble, and effectually secure you from all evil; yea, he will turn evil into good, and bring the greatest good to you out of the greatest calamity and evil. He is, in the most eminent sense, the friend and brother who was *born for adversity*. He is able and ready to help in the most adverse, evil case, where no other friend can help and deliver. This is his peculiar work, and which is his glory.” He is anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those that are bruised, to comfort all that mourn, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

O, how much do you want such a friend as this I How miserable must you be without him! What a comfort will such a friend be in the various calamities in this life! His name is as a strong tower: the righteous, his true friends, run into it, and are safe. How much will you want such a friend, when you come to die! one who has conquered death, and taken away his sting, and turned him into a friend to his people: and over such the *second death* shall have no power. What have you to object against entering into this friendship without delay? Have you any objections against Christ, as not being such an one as you want and desire? O, let not one of you say so! How shall we bear to have our dearest and most excellent friend thus spoken against, and set at nought! O ye friends of Christ, do not your hearts bleed when your best beloved friend is thus contemned and wounded! And do you not pity these poor, deluded creatures, who are thus abusing the kindest friend of sinners, to their own eternal ruin! Surely this is the language of your hearts, O sinners! You have a thousand objections against him. He has in your eyes no form nor comeliness, no beauty, that you should desire him; therefore he is despised and rejected by you.

Or do you object against yourselves, as too mean, guilty and unworthy to be received and loved by such a friend, so that it would be presumption in you to think of entering into such a near union and friendship with him? This objection is altogether groundless: was it not so, he never would have admitted one of the fallen race into this happy, high and noble friendship; for this objection, if it were one, lies with infinite weight and strength against them all. Do you find that Christ has any where made this objection against any, in his word? Surely no! so far from this, that he has done and said every thing he possibly could, to shew that this is not the least objection with him, and never did, nor ever will, make it against the most vile, guilty wretch among mankind, who is willing to be his friend, and chooses him for his friend and redeemer. Your guilt, vileness and misery will be many ways an advantage to this peculiar friendship, as has been shewn; and will be so far from being a dishonour to

this glorious Friend of sinners, though he take you into the nearest and dearest relation and friendship with himself, that it will turn greatly to his honour and glory. Let this then rather be an argument with you to give yourselves up to him without delay, as your almighty, wonderful, excellent friend.

IV. Let the professed friends of Jesus Christ be hence led seriously to consider their distinguishing privileges, and high and peculiar obligations. Your profession and calling is a holy, high and heavenly one indeed. How amazingly dreadful to be found at last, after all your profession and hopes, those to whom Christ will say, "I never knew you: Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity!" O give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Cleave to this infinitely excellent and glorious friend with your whole hearts, and in all your ways. O love him, and he will love you; he will manifest himself unto you, in all the wonders of his love and grace; he will come unto you, and take up his abode with you. Shall the friends of Christ suffer themselves to get at a distance from him, and let their hearts sink down into a great degree of indifference and coldness towards him? Shall they cleave and bow down to some other friend, which courts their affections! Shall they turn away from him, and seek to make friendship with this world, which is enmity against Christ? If there are any such, they may with great propriety be addressed in the words of Absalom to Hushai: "Is this thy kindness to thy friend! Why wentest thou not with thy friend?" What fault have you found in him, that you treat him so? Are you not, in a sense, betraying him into the hands of his enemies? Shall he be thus wounded in the house of his professed friends!

Oh hearken to his sweet and charming voice, while he calls to you in such melting language as this: "Look unto me, my spouse, from the lion's dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Return unto me, for I am married unto you. Hearken, O daughter, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." O, if you have a spark of true love and friendship for him, how can you forbear saying, and resolving with your whole heart, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now." Take with you words, and turn to the Lord, your Friend and Redeemer: say unto him, "Take away all our iniquity, and receive us graciously into thy favour, and the most kind embraces of thy love: so will we render thee our whole souls in the most ardent love, gratitude and praise." He will then heal your backslidings, and love you freely.

Let the dear friends of Christ hold fast their profession without wavering, and follow on to know the Lord. Cleave to him, let it cost you what it will; and hold yourselves in readiness to part with all, even your own lives, for him. If ye suffer in his cause, as his friends and followers, happy are ye. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for his sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, if there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be

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like minded, having the same love to Christ and to one another. If ye be indeed risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth: and when Christ, the chief shepherd and your friend, shall appear, you shall appear with him in glory; and ye shall receive a crown of everlasting glory, and reign with him in his kingdom forever. Amen.



SERMON IX.

WRITTEN IN THE YEAR 1798.

[Phil. ii. 12, 13.](#) *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*

IT is proposed to explain, illustrate and improve this passage of holy scripture with a view to promote the knowledge and practice of those exercises and duties in which real Christianity consists, and by which it is distinguished from all counterfeits.

In order to this, the following things must be attended to, and with care distinctly examined.

I. What is meant by Christians working out their own salvation, and in what this work consists.

II. What is meant by doing this with fear and trembling.

III. What is to be understood by God's working in them, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.

IV. Wherein, and in what respects, this affords a reason and motive to enforce the foregoing exhortation, expressed by the particle For, by which the sentence is introduced: *For it is God who worketh in you, &c.*

V. Improve the subject to practical purposes.

I. We are to consider and shew what is intended and implied in Christians working out their own salvation. For it must be observed, and kept in mind, while attending to this subject, that the Apostle is here, and in the whole of this epistle, addressing none but those whom he considers to be real Christians, "saints in Christ Jesus;" [[chap. i. verse 1](#)]; in whom God had begun a good work, which he would perform until the day of Jesus Christ; [[v. 6](#)]; who not only believed on Christ, but also suffered for his sake, [[v. 29](#)], and had always obeyed Christ since they first believed: [[chap. ii. 12](#)].

By salvation we are to understand, eternal life, which consists in deliverance from sin and all evil, and being made perfectly holy and happy in the enjoyment and favour of God in his eternal kingdom. This is the hope which Christians are called by Christ to consider and pursue; the prize set up before them, for which they are commanded to run.

The Christian worketh out this as his own salvation, by avoiding and renouncing every thing which is in the way of obtaining it, and would effectually prevent it, if it were not given up and rejected; by surmounting and overcoming all the opposition and difficulties which would retard and obstruct him in his work; by his faithfully performing all those exercises, duties and works which are included in the life of a Christian, and necessary in order to his salvation.

When a person is truly converted, and becomes a real Christian, a true disciple of Christ, he then *begins* this great work, which is not finished till he leaves this state of trial, and passes



into the unseen world by death. This is the most noble and important work, as well as the greatest and most difficult, in which any of the children of men can engage; and, as will appear before we have finished the subject, infinitely too great, and altogether impossible, to be performed by fallen man, unless strengthened and carried through it by the power and grace of the mighty Redeemer.

This work of Christians is represented and described in the scripture by a variety of expressions and metaphors, too many to be here particularly enumerated. It will be sufficient for the present purpose to mention the following.

Our Saviour speaks of this work in the following words: "And he said unto them all. if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." The apostle Paul describes this work of a Christian by telling how he worked out his own salvation: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward men. I follow after, that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended by Christ Jesus, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. I have, fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

Jesus Christ represents this work by a warfare, in which the soldiers follow their general to battles and. lieges, in which they resolutely press forward to conquest. He says, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." And this is repeatedly represented by the same thing in the Revelation, where he often promises salvation to him who *overcometh*.

The apostle Paul represents the work of a Christian by those who strive for the mastery over those who opposed and fought against them; and who ran in a race, in order to obtain a crown, in the midst of a number of competitors: "Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man who striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do this to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." And he describes the same work in the following passages: "God will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life."

But, in order to give a more particular and full description of this work, and shew what is implied in it, that every one may be in some measure sensible of the greatness and difficulty

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of it, this subject requires yet further attention, and more clear illustration from what is said of it in the holy scripture. This will be attempted under the following heads.

First. In working out their own salvation persons must avoid, forsake and renounce every way or practice of known and allowed sin.

The scripture teaches us that the allowed practice of any one way of known sin is not the way to heaven, but will certainly exclude men from salvation, though they should avoid all other ways of sinning, and whatever pains they may take in doing many things, and though they may make a high profession of godliness, and appear to have a great religious zeal. The apostle John says, "Whosoever abideth in him (that is in Christ) sinneth not: whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him. He that committeth sin is of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." He does not mean that he does in no sense sin, and is perfectly free from all sin; for this would be a direct contradiction to what he had before asserted, viz. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." By sinning and committing sin is therefore meant, living in the allowed practice of any known sin, or omission of any known duty. "They who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." The gospel teaches them to, deny *all* ungodliness, and *every* worldly lust, as the only way to obtain salvation. They who are working out their own salvation "are undefiled in their way, they do no iniquity, and have respect to *all* God's commandments."

They must not only avoid all grossly sinful anions, and live what is called a sober and regular life, but they must so govern their tongues as carefully to avoid every sinful and even idle word. The command is, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers:" [Eph. iv. 29.] And it is declared by the highest authority, that "for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment:" [Matth. xii. 36.] And an apostle says, "If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain:" [Jam. i. 26.]

And they must watch against, avoid and suppress all sinful, vain and idle thoughts and imaginations in their own hearts. They must keep their hearts with all diligence, and not suffer any vain thoughts to lodge within them. They must oppose, fight against and mortify every lust, every sinful motion, disposition or inclination in their heart, and not indulge any vain imaginations. The heart is the feat and fountain of every thing which is sinful. Out of the heart proceed evil *thoughts*, and every sin which is brought forth into practice, in words and actions. All moral evil which is or has been in the world originates in the heart. The Christian therefore has a constant, great and difficult work to do in keeping his own heart, in watching against and striving to suppress every thought and motion which is contrary to the holy law of God, which has a primary respect to the heart, and, by requiring every

thought and exercise of it to be holy, forbids every motion and thought which is not conformable to this holy law.

Under this head it will be needful to be more particular.

I. All selfish, covetous thoughts and affections must be opposed and suppressed. A selfish disposition, and all selfish thoughts, are covetousness, in the most proper and extensive sense of the word. And this disposition of the heart is the root and source of all sin, or of every thing wrong in the hearts and lives of men, or of all that is forbidden in the law of God. Therefore St. Paul speaks of covetousness as comprehending all sin, which is forbidden in the law of God, in the following words: "I had not known sin but by the law: for I had not known lust except the law had said, *Thou shalt not covet;*" [*Rom. vii. 7.*] It hence appears that a covetous spirit is directly opposed to what the law of God requires; and this with the fruits of it is all that is forbidden. Selfishness seeks her own wholly, and nothing else; and therefore is directly contrary to that holy, disinterested benevolent love, which the law of God requires, and which the Apostle says "seeketh not her own." Man is naturally wholly under the power of this selfishness in all his thoughts and actions; and the Christian has as much of this in his heart, as he has of sin; and to be delivered from every degree of selfish thoughts and affections, will complete his salvation. Therefore, in working out his own salvation, he must seek deliverance from this giant, *selfishness*, and watch and oppose all the motions of it, which will intrude itself and mix with every thought and exercise of the heart, and strive for the dominion, and that in a secret and unperceived way, putting on the appearance of benevolence and goodness, not to be discovered and detected but by the discerning mind, which is constantly on the watch against it.

This selfishness implies all other evil thoughts, as it is the root of all sin, as has been observed; but as these evil thoughts are ranked under different names, as they respect: diverse objects, and produce a variety of dissimilar actions, it is proper to consider them under distinct heads according to their particular names, in order to give a more clear and full view of the thoughts and affections which the Christian must oppose and mortify, in order to work out his own salvation.

2. Christians must watch against and oppose all proud thoughts, or the pride of their own hearts, would they work out their own salvation. Pride is selfishness, or a fruit of it, which consists in a disposition to exalt self, and induces persons to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Against such thoughts the apostle Paul cautions Christians, and commands them to suppress and extinguish them: "I say to every man who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think;" [*Rom. xii. 3.*] Our Saviour frequently inculcated the necessity of mortifying pride, and putting on humility, in order to be saved. He repeatedly said that he who exalteth himself shall be abased, and he who humbleth himself shall be exalted. The apostles commanded men to humble them-

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selves in the light of God, as the only way to favour, and directed Christians to be clothed with humility.

Fallen man is naturally under the dominion of selfishness and pride. He is exceeding proud; by which all his thoughts, words and actions are governed, even when he puts on the appearance and pretence of humility. This his pride is most unreasonable, and the source of constant unhappiness; while there is the highest reason for the deepest humiliation, in a view and sense of the infinite odiousness of his character and conduct, and his unspeakable guilt and misery, being the object of the high displeasure and awful curse of his Maker. But it is always true that the more reason men have for humility, and the more unreasonable their pride is, their pride is proportionably greater, and their hearts are more strongly opposed to humbling themselves. It is the nature of pride to hide itself from the person who has it; and he who has the most of it is the farthest from being sensible that he has any pride. And he only sees his own pride in any degree of true light in whose heart the power of it so far broken as to exercise a degree of true humility; which is true of every Christian. And even he is far from seeing the whole of his pride, and it often deceives him. It dwells in it great measure unseen in his heart; and it mixes itself with all his thoughts, and is gratified in words and actions, while it is not directly perceived, and is called, it may be, by some good name, and even looked upon to be real humility.

Pride has different objects, and supports and exercises itself in ways and by means innumerable. It is exercised towards God, so far as he comes into view, in mean, degrading thoughts of the Most High, and high and exalting thoughts of self; in haughty stubbornness to his authority, and disobedience to his law; in setting a high value on his own exercises, which he calls religious, so as to be confident they are highly pleasing to his Maker, &c. &c. It is exercised, as it respects men and himself, in a manner and ways too many to be enumerated here.

The gospel is levelled directly against the pride of man, and is calculated to exalt God, and abase man; so that none but those who humble themselves in the sight of the Lord can approve of the way of salvation by Christ, or go one step in it. Every true Christian has thus humbled himself; so that the dominion of pride is broken in his heart. He has come to Christ: and taken his yoke upon himself, and learned of him who is meek and lowly in heart; and walks humbly with God, and before men, in a view and sense of his own vile, odious character, his unworthiness, littleness and ill-desert before God, and his absolute dependence on him, of whom he has the highest, most exalted and honourable thoughts. He delights to abase himself, and exult the Lord, trusting wholly to the atonement and righteousness of the Redeemer for pardon and acceptance with God. But the Christian is far from deliverance from all pride. He has a degree of true humility, and in the light of this discovers his own pride, as he never did before, which appears to him to be exceeding odious; and the many instances of the exercise of it, which he sees in his own heart and practice, are



made the occasion of promoting his humility, and of humbling him in his own eyes. And it requires constant watchfulness and exertion of a Christian to fight against, suppress and mortify the pride of his own heart, in which he is working out his own salvation; for he cannot be saved in any other way, nor until all his pride be slain, and he is completely delivered from it.

All this is illustrated in the instance of king Hezekiah. He was a good man, and had been truly humbled; and resolved to walk softly and humbly all his days. But on a certain occasion he was led astray by his own pride and vanity of mind, which was not perceived by him in the time of his gratifying it. His sinful heart deceived him, and was lifted up in pride. But when this was discovered to him, he humbled himself for the pride of his heart; as it proved the occasion of his seeing more clearly than before all that was in his depraved heart: [see [2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26, 31](#); [Isai. xxxviii. 15.](#)]

3. The Christian, in working out his own salvation, has to watch against all anger, wrath, bitterness, envy, and malevolence, even in the thoughts and motions of his heart. All these are implied in selfishness and pride, and are the genuine offspring and fruit of those evil dispositions, which, being indulged and gratified, produce all the angry clamours, contentions, fightings, wars, murders, and the various kinds of injuries, unrighteousness and oppressions, which take place among mankind. The Christian, from the remaining depravity of his heart, and the many, various and daily temptations, injuries and provocations, is in constant danger of having some or all of these evil thoughts and motions rise in his heart, and of indulging them in a sinful degree. He must therefore keep up a continual watch and fight against all these; constantly endeavouring to guard himself against them, that he may avoid or suppress them in their first motions, and prevent their breaking forth into words and actions. And without this he cannot work out his own salvation. In order to be saved he must mortify all these, and endeavour to cultivate an unruffled, calm, patient, meek and quiet spirit, and live in the exercise of that benevolence of heart which is contrary to anger, wrath, envy and malice, and will suppress and root them out. The apostle James therefore says to professing Christians, "If ye have bitter envying and strife *in your hearts*, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish:" [[Jam. 3. 14, 15.](#)] And the apostle Paul says to such, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:" [[Eph. 4. 31.](#)]

4. Would Christians work out their own salvation, they must not indulge, but avoid and suppress, a worldly disposition and affections. All men are naturally of the earth and earthly. They love the world, and seek a worldly good as their portion: they set their hearts and affections on the things of this world: they speak of the world, and therefore think much of it, and take their greatest and only pleasure in the pursuits and enjoyments of this world. The Christian is no longer of this world, but has renounced it as his portion, and chosen



that which is infinitely better. But as he has still a degree of a worldly disposition, and is surrounded with worldly objects, and must have much concern with them, they are constantly courting his affection, he is continually in danger of being led astray, and setting his affection on things on the earth. It therefore requires constant care, watchfulness and exertion in order to guard against, and suppress and mortify, all worldly affection, in the exercise of that faith which overcometh the world, and leads the soul to set its whole affection on things which are above, and not on things on the earthy and to keep the heart from a sinful love of the world and the things of the world. Salvation is to be obtained in no other way but this, by which Christians are more and more weaned from this world, and have their conversation in heaven. The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches and the pleasures of this life, being indulged, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. Therefore the Christian in working out his own salvation must follow the direction of Jesus Christ, who said to his disciples, "Take heed to yourselves, watch and pray always, lest, *at any time*, your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life:" [Luke xxi. 34, 36.]

5. The Christian's working out his own salvation implies a keeping in subjection and mortifying all inordinate bodily sensual appetites and lusts. These appetites are given to men to answer good and important purposes, while in the body in this world: but become a temptation to innumerable indulgences, which are hurtful and criminal, and are inconsistent with the gospel salvation; for they who live after the flesh shall die. In this respect therefore every Christian must crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, and mortify their members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, and evil concupiscence. They must keep under their bodies, and bring them into subjection, as the only way to escape destruction. They must avoid the practice of gluttony, rioting and drunkenness, and all chambering and wantonness; and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof; but purge themselves from all these, that they may be vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for their Master's use; knowing that their bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost.

Thus, to keep the body under, and regulate and govern all the inclinations and appetites of it, and occasioned by it, requires great and constant care and watchfulness, and strong resolution and fortitude of mind, and is no small part of the work of a Christian.

6. The Christian cannot work out his own salvation unless he crosses and strives against an indolent, slothful disposition, which is natural to man, and prevalent in him with respect to all those things and actions which respect his salvation, and are necessary in order to it. Hence have been invented innumerable excuses and pleas in favour of sitting still, and neglecting those exertions and duties which are necessary to be performed in order to salvation, which are too many to be mentioned here. Christians are exposed to be infested and retarded in their work, by giving way to this slothful disposition, which is most contrary to the work they have to do. This requires their whole time, and constant zealous exertions,



in which they must not be slothful, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. The Christian must therefore improve every opportunity, and all his advantages, diligently working while his day lasts. To sit still in indolence and sloth, is really to go backwards. In doing this work the Christian must do as the apostle Paul did; he attended to this one business; forgetting those things which were behind, i.e., his former indolence in, and deviations from, the way of truth, he reached forth to those things which were before, he pressed toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

7. The work of a Christian consists much in watching and guarding against, suppressing and overcoming, the unbelief of his heart, and all unbelieving thoughts.

Faith is necessary to salvation; and they who are saved live by faith, and persevere in believing to the saving of their souls. The Israelites were excluded from entering into the land of Canaan by their unbelief; and the scripture teaches us that unbelief under the gospel will as effectually exclude men from heaven: "He who believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him, and he shall be damned."

Believing and unbelief, as it respects divine revelation or the gospel, do not mean merely the speculative judgment or conclusion of mind respecting the truth or falsehood of the gospel, or of any particular doctrines or facts which relate to invisible things. Two persons may be convinced in their judgment that there is good evidence that the gospel is from heaven, and agree in their speculative sentiments in the doctrines which are revealed; and yet one of them may be a true believer, in the scriptural sense of believing, and the other an unbeliever. This will be according to the disposition and exercises of their hearts, with respect to the gospel, and the truths which it contains. If the heart of one of them has no relish for these truths, and love to them, but dislikes and is displeased with them, so that they are not cordially embraced as good and excellent, he has no true discerning respecting them, and does not see them to be what they really are, and is not a believer, in the scripture and proper sense of believing. The other has such a taste and disposition of mind, that he relishes these truths, and receives them with cordial approbation and love. He sees them in a light of which the other has no apprehension or idea, and he feels them to be great and important realities, true, excellent and good; and they have such an influence and power on his heart as to excite strong affections, and govern him in all his exercises and conduct. This is a true believer. His faith is as different from that of the former, as light is from darkness; as powerful sensibility of heart, with strong exercises of affection and love, are from insensibility and hardness of heart, and real dislike of the truth, and aversion from it.

True faith, or a real belief of the truths of the gospel, is of a moral nature, and therefore has its foundation and seat in the heart; so that exercise of heart is necessarily implied in it, and essential to it; for every thing of a moral nature belongs to the heart, and that in which no disposition or exercise of the heart is implied, has nothing of a moral nature, and is neither good nor evil in a moral sense, i.e. neither virtue nor vice, which is true of every

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thing in the mind which consists in mere speculation. Therefore we find that believing and unbelief, as they respect the gospel, are represented in scripture as belonging to the heart, and an exercise of that: “*With the heart* man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. If thou believest *with all thine heart*, thou mayest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you *an evil heart of unbelief*, in departing from the living God.”

It appears from the passage of scripture last mentioned, not only that unbelief belongs to the heart, and, being seated there, is moral evil; but that professing Christians are so exposed to the influence of an unbelieving heart, that it concerns them to take heed to themselves, and be on their watch and guard against the prevalency of this evil in their hearts. And indeed all true Christians have as much of this unbelief in their hearts as they have of moral depravity or sin. Their faith is comparatively small, and as a grain of mustard seed. It does exist and increases so far as their hearts are purified, and they grow in grace. Yet they are more sensible of the awful degree of unbelief in their hearts, than any other persons are or can be, and see the evil nature and hatefulness of it.

This unbelief does not consist so much in speculatively questioning the truth of divine revelation, and doubting of the truths contained in it, as in the want of sensibly feeling these truths in their reality, excellence and importance, and not being properly affected with them. All this is unbelief, which no conviction which is merely speculative, or any light and evidence which can be offered, by any external means and revelation or instructions, will remove, as it is properly *hardness of heart*. But it may, and often does, prejudice and blind the speculative understanding, so as at least to weaken the evidence of truth in speculation, and occasion speculative doubts about it; and is the cause of all that unbelief in speculation which takes place in the Christian world; this being not for want of external light and matter of conviction, but from the blindness and moral disorders of the heart.

The true Christian is sensible of this, and that he has that insensibility of heart to divine truth, and that darkness and blindness, which is not owing to any want of light and evidence which is set before him, but to the stupidity, hardness and moral depravity of his heart, which will resist the greatest light and matter of conviction that can be set before him, and the strongest mere speculative conviction of his judgment, and would lead to renounce in speculation all the evidence of the truth of divine revelation, were he given up of God to the power and prevalence of a reprobate mind; and that it is to be ascribed to divine restraints, or to the grace of God shining in his heart, and giving him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that he has any degree of true faith, and has not abandoned himself to total infidelity.

His remaining unbelief appears to him, especially at times, to be so great and overbearing, that it is very grievous, and as a heavy burden sinks him down, as an unspeakable calamity, and exceeding criminal. Against this he has to watch, strive and pray continually, and he

can work out his salvation in no other way. His constant petition is, “Lord, deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief. Lord, I do believe; help thou my unbelief, and increase my faith. Give me that faith which is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. May I never draw back to perdition, but believe to the saving of my soul.”

8. The Christian cannot work out his own salvation without resisting the devil, by watching against and opposing his influence and the evil thoughts suggested by him.

The devil works in the hearts of men by the lusts, depraved propensities and evil thoughts which have been mentioned. He is represented in scripture as taking the advantage of the depravity of man to suggest evil thoughts, and excite and strengthen the lusts of the heart, and to blind the minds of all them who do not believe; to watch and exert all his cunning to deceive and destroy them. Unregenerate, wicked persons are represented to be wholly under his power, in whom he powerfully worketh, they being in his snare, and led captive by him at his will. And in order to persons being converted and becoming Christians, this strong enemy must be dispossessed of their hearts, by Christ, and they turned from the power of Satan unto God. And though Christians are so far delivered from the power of the devil, and out of his reach, that he cannot destroy or really hurt them in the end; and he who is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not; that is, is not able to destroy or hurt them, by leading them to sin the sin unto death, or to live in a course of sin; yet they are not out of the reach of his temptations and assaults, so long as they are sanctified but in part, and live in this state of imperfection and depravity. Satan provoked king David to number the people; and our Saviour said to Peter, “Behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.” The apostle Paul was attended with a temptation which was the messenger of Satan to buffet him. And even Jesus Christ, who had no depravity to give the devil an advantage, was assaulted and tempted by him. The apostle Peter directs Christians to consider the devil as their adversary, as a roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour. The apostle Paul, speaking in the name of all Christians, says, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places;” and directs Christians to take to themselves the whole armour of God, that they may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; and goes on to address them in the following words: “Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above [or over] all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” [*Eph. vi. 10, 18.*]

In these words great and constant work is prescribed to Christians in resisting the devil, and standing their ground against all his wiles and assaults; a conflict too great and mighty



for all but those who are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; yet necessary in working out their own salvation. The apostles James and Peter exhort Christians to this same work in the words following: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour: whom resist, stedfast in the faith."

There are some who profess to receive the Bible as a revelation from God, who doubt whether there be any devil, or invisible spirits who are enemies to Christ, and seek the destruction of men. But surely they must be very inattentive to the Bible who can doubt of this. The real Christian finds the truth of this so abundantly asserted, that he cannot doubt it: and his own experience, if properly attended to, will confirm him in this. He will find many motions and suggestions in his own mind, which, from the kind of them, and the manner in which they take place, are evidently from the agency of Satan. And he is warranted from scripture to consider the devil as having a hand and agency in all the foolish imaginations, evil thoughts and motions of his heart, and in all sin which he sees in others; especially their opposition to Christ and the gospel, and unrighteousness and violence towards men; for he is deceiving the whole world, and works in all the children of disobedience, and is attempting to stir up all the corruption which is in the hearts of good men. Therefore, while Christians are watching against and opposing all their own evil propensities, and acting against and endeavouring to suppress and counteract the sinful courses of others, they are really resisting the devil, while they consider themselves and others as criminal, for every evil motion in their hearts, and all wrong conduct, as if there were no devil to tempt them.

However great, difficult and of long continuance this work of resisting the devil is, every Christian must go through it, and overcome, in order to obtain heaven. The Christian is in himself wholly unequal to it, but by Christ strengthening him he may go through it all. The Christian must do the work, while in order to it he must be strengthened by the power and grace of Christ, by which he becomes strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. The Christian has no reason to desire that Christ should take this work out of his hands, and resist and conquer the devil and his lusts without the agency of the Christian; but ought to consider it as a great privilege to be obliged to do the work himself, and conquer, in the strength and power of the Redeemer.



SERMON X.

The same Subject continued.

Phil. ii. 12, 13. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.

IT has been attempted to shew in the preceding discourse, though in an imperfect, defective manner and degree, what the Christian has to oppose, suppress, mortify, and overcome, in working out his own salvation. This may be called the negative part of his work, consisting in renouncing and departing from evil; and is all comprehended in the apostolic injunction: “That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, *the old man*, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts:” [*Eph. iv. 22.*]

Secondly. We come now to consider the positive part of that work in doing which Christians work out their own salvation, which is summarily expressed in the following words: “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

This implies much, and consists in a constant, careful endeavour to conform to and obey the divine commands in heart and life, to live soberly, righteously and godly in all things to the end of life. This may be divided into two branches, viz. the duties of which God is the more direct object, and those which more immediately respect man.

To God they owe their whole selves, and all they can do. They must love him with all their heart, soul, strength and mind. This implies a variety of strong, constant exercises of heart towards him, as he is revealed in three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; especially as he has appeared God manifest in the flesh, in the character of the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, exhibited in his words, and works of obedience and suffering, his death, resurrection from the dead, ascension to heaven, and reigning gloriously there; and in his revealed future designs and works.

They must believe in God and in Jesus Christ, that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him. They must attend to, believe and realize his being and whole character as he is revealed in the Bible, with all the important and leading truths which are contained in it, setting God always before their eyes, and trusting in Christ for pardon and complete redemption, which implies all they want or can desire, diligently seeking the divine favour through him, or for his sake. Thus they must live a life of faith on the Son of God, desiring to be found in him, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; heartily desiring and seeking his Spirit to dwell in them, and form their hearts to every Christian exercise and duty, and doing all in the name of Christ, in the exercise of a cordial love of his whole character, and pleasing approbation of the way of salvation of sinners which is revealed in the gospel.



They must be heartily devoted to the glory of God, to his honour, interest and kingdom, as the supreme object of their desire and affection. This is necessarily implied in supreme love to him, in which they give themselves wholly away to him in the exercise of the most friendly, benevolent love, rejoicing in his being, felicity and glory. This is in a true and in the highest sense disinterested affection, and necessarily excludes all selfishness, so far as it takes place, as it cannot proceed from self-love as the ground of it, but is directly contrary to it, as it gives up all selfish affection and interest, for an infinitely greater, more worthy and important interest and object; making the being of God, his interest and honour, their supreme interest, the object of their highest regard, and ultimate end, to which all other beings and interests are wholly subordinated, as not worthy any regard, but to be rejected when they come in competition with the honour and interest of this infinitely great, worthy, and glorious Being. By this disposition and exercise of heart alone do they comply with the apostolic command, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. And that they who live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again." And thus they enter upon and live a life of true and real self denial.

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The more Christians are swallowed up in views of the glory of God, and their hearts desire and rejoice in the unchangeable and eternal glory and felicity of the Infinite Being, as the object of their whole pursuit, interest and happiness, which does not consist in the least degree in selfish affection; the more is their own salvation promoted, and the greater is their enjoyment, and the nearer do they get to heaven. The person who, under the influence of self love, or selfishness, seeks his own personal interest, honour and felicity supremely (and this is the unchangeable nature of every degree of self love) exerts the whole strength of his soul in direct opposition to the Christian affection now described; and as he regards himself supremely, he subordinates the being, felicity and glory of God, that he may answer his own selfish ends thereby, and cares nothing for the former, aside from his own supposed personal interest, or any farther than the latter may be promoted thereby. Such an affection is the strongest contradiction to all truth, and does love and make a lie in the highest and most emphatical sense. If the smallest pebble, or one grain of sand, should be selected and preferred to the whole material world, comprehending this earth, the sun, moon, and all the stars, and no regard be paid to the existence, order and beauty of the whole, any further than they relate to that single grain, and contribute to support and favour that infinitely small portion of the material world; this would not be more unreasonable and contrary to the truth, yea, it would be infinitely less so, than for one individual person to pay a supreme regard to himself, and subordinate the Infinite Being to his own private, personal interest and happiness, who is so great, worthy and glorious, that there is infinitely less proportion between such individual and him than there is between the least grain of sand and the whole material creation.

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There are too many professing Christians who embrace and pursue a scheme of practical religion which is as unreasonable, contrary to truth, and absurd, as this appears to be. They say that it is impossible for men to love God, so long as they consider him to be displeased with them, and think he does not love them; that he must first manifest to them that he is their friend, and loves them, and they must believe it before they can love him; that in this way they were brought to love God, and to be reconciled to his character and law, and to all the truths and duties of Christianity; they were brought first to see and believe that God loved them, and on this foundation only they first began to love him, and continue to be friendly to him. Thus they declare that all their regard and love to God is nothing but self love, for they love him only because he is a friend to them, and will answer their own selfish ends, and promote their own personal, selfish interest, and subordinate their Maker, and all his interest, to their own beloved selves. Their religion is all built on an impossible supposition, viz. that they had evidence that God loved them, before they had any love to him, and while they were his enemies: which is directly contrary to scripture and reason. But if this were not contrary to scripture, and a mere delusion, their love to God is as far from true friendship to him as darkness is from light; for it is nothing but self love at second hand, and is an affection which our Saviour condemns, as that which the most wicked man and greatest enemy of God may have. He says, "If ye love them who love you," (i.e. merely because they love you,) "what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?"

The words of the apostle John are appealed to as a support of this scheme of religion: "We love him because he first loved us." But these words are entirely misunderstood by them, and perverted to a most injurious and fatal purpose. The apostle does not say, "We love God because we first believed he loved us;" in which sense they take the words, in order to answer their purpose. The natural and plain meaning of the words, and which is pointed out by the context, is this: "God loved us first, and gave his Son to die for us; and he has given us a heart to love him, by which we have been born of God: this is the cause of our loving God: for if he had not thus first loved us, while we were enemies, and caused us to be born again by his Spirit, we should not have loved him: for he who is not born of God will not exercise any true love to him, though he should love them, and tell them he did so, by a particular revelation. Therefore they who love God only upon this selfish ground, and build all their religion upon it, however zealous they may be, and however much they may do, are not working out their own salvation, but the contrary, and never will obtain it."

The importance of this point, and the delusion with which so many are deceived, it is to be feared to their own ruin, is thought to be a sufficient reason for this seeming digression.

This supreme love to God, and dedication to him, living not unto themselves, but to and for him, implies a hearty, sensible acknowledgment of him in all their ways, and in all

events which take place; seeing his hand in them all, and heartily submitting to him, and acquiescing in his governing providence, and rejoicing that the Lord reigns without control, ordering every thing, and every circumstance, from the greatest to the least, in the exercise of infinite power, wisdom, rectitude and goodness.

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This pious disposition, and these exercises of heart towards God, are to be expressed and acted out in all proper ways and conduct. This requires much care, labour, and self denial, and a strong resolution, and much fortitude of mind. The Christian must confess Christ before men, must speak for him and in his cause, whenever there is a proper opportunity, and must publicly profess his belief in him and cordial subjection to him in obedience to all his commands, and attendance upon all his institutions. He must pay a strict and conscientious regard to the sabbath, carefully avoiding all those things which tend to interrupt his attendance on the religious duties of that day, devoting the whole time as much as may be to the exercises of religion, constantly attending on public worship, with seriousness and devotion. He must attend much to the Bible, daily reading and meditating upon it, that he may grow in his acquaintance with it, and be entertained and directed by it, “as a lamp to his feet, and a light to his path.” Thus “his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

He will attend devoutly on the Lord’s supper whenever he has opportunity, and be careful not to neglect the important preparatory duties of self examination, prayer, &c. He is a friend to family religion; and, if the head of a family, will practise daily devotion in it, in attending to the word of God and prayer, taking particular care that the whole family attend in a serious and orderly manner, and that they are all instructed in things of religion, and under good regulation and government. And he will be careful that no worldly business or concern interrupt the religious duties of the family. He must also practise, and constantly maintain secret prayer. A Christian cannot maintain his spiritual life, activity and comfort in the omission of closet duties, and cannot work out his own salvation without constantly entering into his closet, agreeable to the direction of Christ, and being much in devotion there. The prayerless person is not in the way to heaven. Prayer comprehends not only petition for what persons want, for themselves and others, but adoration, praise and thanksgiving for divine beneficence to themselves and to others, together with humble confession of sin, unworthiness and ill-desert. The Christian will find abundant matter for prayer and devotion, or intercourse with God, every day and hour, and must in some good measure, at least, act up to the apostolic direction, “praying always, with all prayer, and supplication in the Spirit; in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known his requests unto God,” to whom he may have access at all times through the great Mediator, with humble boldness and freedom.

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And as the Christian has made a public profession of religion, and joined a particular Christian church, he is under covenant engagements to watch over his brethren and sisters,

and assist in the exercise of discipline, agreeable to the directions of Christ; which requires great attention, care and resolution, in order to be acquainted with the truth of facts, and judge and act, so far as he is called to it, agreeable to the truth and the dictates of Christian love, and so as shall be most for the honour of Christ, and the good of every individual of the church. This is included in the exercise of piety towards God, as well as his duty to his fellow Christians. And his love to God will induce him to speak and act, in all companies and on all occasions, for the honour of God, and so as to recommend Christianity to all, being constantly concerned that his conversation should be as becometh the gospel of Christ.

Another branch of practice by which Christians work out their own salvation consists in those duties which more immediately respect their fellow men. These are all implied in loving their neighbour as themselves, or doing to others as they would that others should do unto them, and in expressing this love in all proper ways in words and conduct.

They are careful and exact to do justice to all with whom they have any connection, and are conscientiously concerned and engaged not to injure any person either in their thoughts, words or actions, in any of his interests, of worldly property or character, of body or soul; constantly watching against and opposing the many temptations and opportunities to do wrong to any of those with whom they have any concern, in the least instance or degree; taking diligent heed not to practise according to the many false maxims and examples of mankind, but making the holy scripture their constant rule in all their thoughts, words and dealings with others.

And they are not only concerned and careful to do justice to all, but they love mercy, and wish and endeavour to do all the good they can unto all men, embracing all opportunities to promote their best interest, both temporal and eternal, whether they be friends or enemies. They must exercise a benevolent love to their worst enemies, whatever injuries they may have received from them; they must wish them well, do good to them, and pray for them in particular, while they are praying for all men. And if at any time they are convinced that they have injured any of their fellow men, they must not rest till they have made all the reparation or restitution which is in their power, whatever mortification, cost, and pains this may require.

They must be careful to speak and conduct towards all with becoming decency and respect, whether superiors, inferiors or equals; and to set good examples before all, of humility, temperance, sobriety, meekness and kindness; being ready to every good work, practising patience, forgiveness and long-suffering, endeavouring to live in peace with all men, as far as shall be in their power. And to this end they must be careful to practise all those relative duties towards those who are in the nearest connection with them, whether husband, wife, parents, children, brethren, sisters, domestics, and particular relatives or friends. And they have particular and important duties to do towards their brethren and sisters of the church, of the household of faith, some of which have been mentioned under the preceding head.

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They must live in the exercise and expression of benevolence and kindness to them, being ready and careful to minister to the relief and comfort of their bodies, by giving them food and raiment, and affording them any help of which any of them shall stand in need, and by exercising and manifesting a particular concern and friendship for them, and complacency in them, in the exercise and practice of that *brotherly love* which is peculiar to Christians.

They must be diligent and faithful in their particular calling and business, striving to improve their time and talents to good purpose, so as to have a supply for their own bodily wants, and of theirs who depend in any measure on them; and so as to be able to give relief to all who stand in need; and so as to redeem time for religious exercises, and the improvement of their minds in all useful knowledge, which in their circumstances they shall have opportunity to acquire, diligently improving all their time in something really useful to themselves or to others, or to both.

Thirdly. Christians in working out their own salvation must persevere in this work, which has been imperfectly described, to the end of life.

Christ said to the Jews who professed to believe on him, "If ye *continue* in my words, then are ye my disciples indeed," [*John viii. 31:*] which words imply that none are the true disciples of Christ but those who persevere in obedience to him to the end of life. They only who overcome, are faithful unto death, and endure to the end, shall be saved: [*Math. x. 22; Rev. ii. 7, 10.*] "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him," and he draws back unto perdition: [*Heb. x. 33, 39.*]

Fourthly. The Christian, in working out his own salvation, must increase and make progress in his labour and work, and daily do more and more. He must make advances in knowledge and skill in his business, and increase in zeal, engagedness and activity.

When a Christian enters on his work, he may be compared to a youth who begins to work at some trade. By working he continually increases in skill and ability to work: he daily makes advances in his work, and does more and more in a day, till he is perfect in his trade and business. So the Christian who is working out his own salvation not only continues and perseveres in his work, but his work increases on his hands, and he gains in skill and strength, in his engagedness and activity, and does and abounds more and more. Increase in grace and holiness is as necessary in order to obtain salvation, as perseverance. It is essential to the nature of true grace to grow and increase in the exercise of it; so that it is as certain that he who does not make any advances in a holy life, and increase in his work, and abound more and more, is not in the way to heaven, and has no true grace, as it is of him who falls away, and wholly ceases to work. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day." There is no way to heaven but this.

The apostle Paul tells the church at Philippi, to whom he gave the direction in the text, that in working out his own salvation he was striving to press forward, and go on in his Christian course till he should arrive to perfection, not resting in any past or present attain-



ments: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The apostles insist much on this, as the character and duty of Christians, that they increase and abound more and more in each Christian grace and in every good work. This will appear by the following quotations: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” To *abound in the work of the Lord* is to increase in working, and to do more and more. In this sense the word *abound* is frequently used, which will appear from the passages which will now be quoted: “And this I pray, that your love may *abound* yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment: [*Phil. i. 9.*] And the Lord make you to increase and *abound* in love one toward another, and toward all men. Furthermore, then, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and please God, so ye would *abound* more and more. Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye [increase more and more: [*1 Thess. iii. 12; iv. 1, 9, 10.*] That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God: [*Col. i. 10.*] For if these things, (i.e. the Christian graces which he had just mentioned,) be in you and *abound*, they shall make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Beloved, beware lest ye, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness: but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:” [*2 Pet. i. 8, 10, 11; iii. 17, 18.*] In these words, abounding in every Christian grace, and growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, is represented the only sure way to escape falling into destruction, and to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The same truth was inculcated by Christ: “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” According to this there are but two sorts of visible Christians, viz. they who are not real Christians, and consequently bear no fruit; and they who are true Christians, and are fruitful, being constantly purged so as to increase in their fruit, and bear more fruit the longer they live. And that this must be so is plain and certain, because for a man to work out his own salvation is to do that by which he is ripening, preparing and becoming more meet for the kingdom of heaven; which he cannot do but by growing in grace, and becoming more and more holy, and going on toward perfection in holiness: and this is the same with abounding more and more in every good work.

This is the work and life of a Christian, a description of which has been now attempted in order to show what is intended by his working out his own salvation. This attempt, though

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imperfect and defective, will serve to discover what this work is, according to the holy scriptures, in the most essential part of it, and that it is indeed a very great work, infinitely the greatest, most difficult and important, that any man ever engaged in and performed.

Some, it may be, will be ready to say, as the disciples of Christ said to their Lord, on a certain occasion, "Who then can be saved!" If this be the work of a Christian, and the only way to work out our own salvation; if men must thus deny all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and must live thus soberly, righteously and godly in the world; if they must be so strict, careful, watchful, painful and laborious in this work; if they have to oppose and conquer such numerous, crafty and powerful enemies, and must deny themselves, and take up their cross daily; if they can have no respite, can never be released from this work, by night or by day, but must persevere in it to the end of life; and not only so, but their work increases on their hands every day, so that the longer they work, the more is required, and the more they do, the more they have to do; if this be the case with man, if this be the only way to heaven, who will ever get there! If there be any in the way to salvation, surely they are very few; the most are like to miss of it forever. And who can have courage to engage in such a work as this! and how is this consistent with the words of Christ: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light?"

A full answer to this is found in the reply of Christ to the question which his disciples put to him: "Who then can be saved?" "This is indeed impossible with men, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." Though man, in his fallen, depraved state, be altogether unequal to this work, and will never, of himself, do any thing to any purpose; yet, by the help of God, by his grace and assistance, he may do all this, and work out his own salvation; and he will find it to be not only possible, and that, by Christ strengthening him, he can do all these things, and more; but the most agreeable and pleasant work in which man can be employed. This is held forth in the text, which is to be farther explained, and will be more particularly considered in the sequel.

But before we pass to this, several observations will be made with regard to working out our own salvation, as it has been described, which may prevent any misunderstanding, and throw further light on the subject.

I. By Christians working out their own salvation is not meant that by this they so recommend themselves to God, that out of regard to the worth and merit of their good works they obtain an interest in the divine promises, and a title to salvation. The declarations of scripture are directly contrary to such a supposition. "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works: for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the

Holy Ghost.” Men are brought into a state of salvation, and an interest in the promises of the covenant of grace, and have a title to eternal life, by the first act which unites them to him, that is, by the first exercise of faith on him. They do not earn or merit salvation by their works, nor do they aim at or attempt this, or have the least desire of it. They are so far from this, that their first holy exercise implies a sense of their unworthiness and ill desert; and they come to Christ for salvation as a free gift to the infinitely unworthy and ill deserving, trusting in his merit and righteousness to recommend them to all that favour and salvation which they desire and seek after. And all this is expressed or implied in all they do in working out their own salvation. They are so far from offering any thing of their own as the price of their salvation, that all their working and exertions are implied in coming to Christ and trusting in him for complete redemption as a free, undeserved gift, to be obtained through him, without money or price. And all they do in working out their own salvation consists essentially in this, in coming to Christ for all, and receiving all from him, even strength, righteousness and salvation, in a sense of their total unworthiness of the least good, and desert of infinite evil.

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It is of importance that this point should be viewed in this scriptural light, and kept in mind, to prevent those dangerous mistakes into which many have fallen.

Moreover, real Christians not only have an interest in salvation by promise, when they begin to work it out; but if it were not so, all they do in working out their salvation is so far from meriting or deserving salvation, or any favour, that they continually deserve to be excluded from it forever and to perish; and by all they do they do not become less ill deserving than they were before they began to work, but more so. All they do is so defiled with sin, is so deficient, and comes so far short of what is their duty, that for this they deserve to be given up to evil, and perish, and must perish after all, were it not for the merits of Christ; in whom they are accepted in all their holy exercises and works, and their sins are pardoned, and through his righteousness they receive the reward of eternal life. This every Christian feels constantly, and acknowledges to be true with regard to himself, while he is with the greatest care and diligence working out his own salvation.

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II. Christians do not work out their own salvation in their own strength, but by the special and constant assistance and powerful influences of the Spirit of God, by which they are made strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Christians are in themselves altogether unequal to this work; being nothing but weakness and insufficiency: it is infinitely too great and arduous for them: they depend entirely and constantly on the grace and assistance of God, in order to do any thing effectually towards it. This is abundantly declared in the scripture. Christ tells his disciples, “Without me ye can do nothing.” And he said to the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul therefore dared to say, “I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me. For when I am weak, then am I strong. By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace, which

was bestowed upon me, was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” According to our text, it is God who worketh in them both to will and to do this great work which is before them. Without his energy, and constant effectual operation on their hearts, they would not take one step in this work, or put forth any act of will towards it. But this will be more particularly considered in further attending to this subject.

III. This work is as necessary to be done in order to salvation as it would be if men obtained a title to salvation by thus working, and merited it by their good works. Though men are not saved by or for their holiness, yet holiness is as necessary to salvation, as if they were; for deliverance from sin, and turning from it, and the exercise of holiness, is essential to salvation, as the latter can have no existence without the former. It is as necessary that men should be holy in order to salvation, as it would be were they to obtain a title to it and merit it by their holiness and good works; for it still remains true, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, or enjoy salvation. But to be holy and exercise holiness, is to work out salvation, in the sense of the text, and as it has been now described.

The moral inability of man to exercise holiness, and go on to perfection in holiness of himself, does not make it in any degree less necessary that he should be holy in order to be happy; and therefore not the less necessary that in order to be holy men should be active and work; for that men should live a holy life, or be holy, without working, or the exercise of holiness, is a contradiction.

IV. Though men are morally unable to work out their own salvation of themselves, but depend on God for assistance and grace, by which he worketh in them both to will and to do it; yet it is not only as necessary they should do these works, but they e as much their own works and actions, as if they did them of themselves, without any assistance and powerful, effectual influence from God. God’s assisting men to do these works, does not make them the less man’s own exercises and works, than if they did them without any assistance. Every act of any person’s will or choice, and all the designed attendants and consequences of such a volition, are his own exercises and actions, and it is impossible it should be otherwise, whatever influences he is the subject of in order to his thus willing and acting. Whatever a man wills, and does in the execution of his will, are *his own* exercises of will, and *his own* actions, and cannot be otherwise; and to assert the contrary is always an untruth and a palpable contradiction.

It would be needless to make this observation, were it not that some have been so thoughtless and absurd, however learned and judicious in other matters, as to say, that if God worketh in men to will and to do, so that their choice and doing is the effect of what God does work in them, then it is God who wills and does, and not man; and if there be any virtue or goodness in what is done, it is the virtue and goodness of God, and not man’s. But this is manifestly most absurd, and contrary to the reason and common sense of mankind;

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for they feel and know that every thing which men will and do is their own choice and deed, and not of any other; and that, whatever induced them thus to will and do; and that it is as much their own act and deed, as if they had done it without any such influence. And if what they do be right and virtuous, it is as much their own virtue and goodness, as it could be if they had done it without any influence or assistance from others.

Upon the whole, to conclude this head, it appears that Christians have a great work to do, which is absolutely necessary in order to be saved, in which they must be active, must will and do it. And this is to perfect holiness in the fear of God, and work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. And this is the work spoken of in the text; a description of which has been attempted in the preceding discourse: which may God bless to the benefit of all who shall give to it a proper attention. Amen.

SERMON XI.

Phil. ii. 12, 13. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

IN attending to these words, it has been attempted to consider and shew what is intended by Christians working out their own salvation. This has been endeavoured in the preceding discourses. It is now proposed,

II. To consider what is meant by their doing this *with fear and trembling*.

It is of importance to observe here, and let it be kept in view, that this passage of scripture cannot be understood, and the true sense of it given, unless the real meaning of these words be properly ascertained, and fixed in our minds: for they are really the key by which alone the meaning of the whole passage is opened, and without which the true intent and force of these words of the Apostle cannot be perceived. This, it is expected, will be made to appear before the subject is dismissed; and is a reason why these words should be examined with particular care and attention, that the true import of them may not be overlooked, and they be taken in a wrong sense, but the true meaning of them be known and fixed.

The drift and force of the exhortation of the apostle is not merely to work out their own salvation, but has a principal and chief respect to the *manner of doing this*, which is expressed in the words, "With fear and trembling." Therefore in these words is contained an essential part of the exhortation; and to this part, which points out the manner and only way in which they could work out their own salvation, the following words do wholly refer, as an argument to enforce it: "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure." This is a reason, not merely why they should work out their own salvation, but why they should do this with fear and trembling, as the only way in which it could be done. Whatever men may do, and however much and great pains and labour they may take in working out their salvation: yet if they do not this with fear and trembling, they will fail of obtaining salvation. This points out the only way to heaven. But this will be more particularly considered and illustrated in the prosecution of this subject.

The following particulars will serve to lead to the true meaning of fear and trembling.

1. These words must intend something which is right and becoming all Christians at all times, while they are working out their own salvation. It is what is essential to all truly Christian grace and exercises, and belongs to the beauty and excellence of their character: and as they cannot be real Christians and live as such without it, so the more they have of it, the better and more strong and excellent Christians they are. If this were not so, the Apostle would not have exhorted them, and consequently all Christians, at all times and in all ages, thus to work out their own salvation. It would be injurious and absurd to suppose that he exhorted to those exercises and that practice which are not virtuous and excellent, and becoming all Christians, at all times, as their indispensable duty, in which they are



bound to excel, and cannot be practised to excess. This observation, of the truth of which none can doubt, will help to shew what is not intended by fear and trembling here, viz. all those exercises which are wrong, or are a blemish and imperfection in the character of a Christian. These must all be excluded, and will lead to the observations following.

2. The Apostle does not exhort Christians to work out their own salvation under the influence of a servile, *slavish fear* of God, in which no true love is implied, but is contrary to a spirit of love. This is sometimes meant by fear in the scriptures, and is condemned as contrary to a Christian spirit of love and true obedience. This Apostle says to Christians, “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father. God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, of love and of a sound mind:” [*Rom. viii. 15; 2 Tim. i. 7.*]⁴ He therefore certainly did not exhort Christians to exercise such fear in working out their salvation. The apostle John says there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

3. By fear and trembling here is not meant a constant, trembling fear of falling away and perishing at last. This cannot be the meaning, because this is not the duty of all Christians, and cannot be considered as a Christian virtue, but rather an imperfection, and at least a defect of grace. Christians are directed to make their calling and election sure. The Apostle speaks of those Christians to whom he gave the exhortation under consideration, as those of whom he was confident that God would carry on the work he had begun in them, until the day of Jesus Christ. And how could he direct them to tremble with fear of perishing, when he at the same time had told them he was confident that Christ would save them? Why might not they be as confident of their salvation as he was? He speaks in the language of assurance of his own salvation in this letter. He speaks of his own death as connected with his being with Christ. And he says of himself, with others, “We *know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” And no doubt some, if not many, of the Christians at Philippi had a comfortable assurance of their interest in the covenant of grace, and consequently that they should be saved. It is certain that the Apostle did not know that this was not true of them. It is therefore certain that he considered this exhortation to be applicable to the most assured Christian that was then on earth, or ever will live in this world, and pointed out their duty as much as of those who were in doubt whether they should be saved or not. The Apostle himself, and every assured Christian, had as much of this fear and trembling as any Christian whatever; and it was as much his and their duty and privilege, and essential

4 The word in the original, translated *fear*, (*2 Tim. i. 7.*) is *deilias*, which not the word commonly used for fear; and the most proper meaning of it is *cowardice*.

to their character, in which they would abound more and more as they advanced in the Christian life and excellent attainments.

The word *fear* is often used in scripture in a sense which denotes that which is a virtue and real piety, and in this sense are fear and trembling used. And the fear of the Lord, or to fear God, commonly means the exercise of true piety. Of this all who read the Bible with attention are sensible.

From the foregoing observations it evidently appears, that by fear and trembling in the text must be intended Christian humility, with all the natural and necessary attendants of it, consisting in a sense of their own depravity and guilt, or ill desert, and of their total moral impotence and insufficiency in themselves, to work out their own salvation, or to will and do any thing towards it; with an entire and constant dependence on and trust in God the Saviour for pardon and acceptance, through his atonement, and the influences of his Spirit to give them moral discerning, strength and ability to work out their own salvation, in a sense of his greatness, majesty, power and sovereignty, who has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth; and of their own littleness, vileness, and infinite unworthiness of the least favour; while they view destruction, which they deserve, and shall certainly fall into, unless they are rescued by the mighty power and sovereign grace of God, in all the horrors and dreadfulness of it; and the infinite greatness, worth, and importance of that salvation which is given by Christ to all who believe and obey him.

That all this is implied in that humility and faith which is essential to the character of a Christian, and by which he lives, and works out his own salvation, none can doubt who properly attends to the subject. And that the whole of this is implied and expressed in the words fear and trembling, is evident, from the use of those words in other places, and on different occasions, and from what follows in the passage we are upon.

We find these words used three times, beside that in the text before us, by this apostle. He says to the Corinthians, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." He seems here to set himself designedly in contrast with those whom he calls false apostles, who appeared proud and self-sufficient, and affected a great parade and shew of their own abilities and accomplishments, and boasted great things. On the contrary, when he was with them, and God did great things among them by his ministry, in their conversion, he gloried not in himself, but in the Lord, and laboured among them in fear and much trembling, in a pressing sense of his own weakness, and insufficiency for the great work in which he was engaged; that he was nothing, and that God alone could give the increase and success desired. He expresses the same thing in the following words: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." When he speaks of the Corinthians receiving Titus *with fear and trembling*, the meaning is, that they received him in humility and lowliness of mind, in a sense of their own sinfulness and unworthiness, and

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readiness to receive instruction from him, sensible of their ignorance and need of being taught; in opposition to self-sufficiency and pride, undervaluing and despising him.

This same Apostle says to servants, "Be obedient unto them who are your masters according to the flesh, *with fear and trembling*." None can reasonably suppose that servants are here commanded to act from a servile, slavish fear of their masters, doing all and obeying them out of fear of their rod: for this is not a commendable spirit in servants. By fear and trembling is evidently meant a spirit of humility and submission to the will of their masters; willing to take their own proper place; not setting up for themselves, but feeling their dependence upon their masters for all temporal support, realizing the evil consequence of a

contrary spirit and conduct, of pride and self-sufficiency. And in [Romans xi. 20](#), he uses the word fear to denote a Christian virtue, in opposition to pride and self-confidence: "Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear."

And that the meaning of fear and trembling in the text which has been given is the only true meaning, is evident from the words which immediately follow these: "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure." This is given as the reason why they should work out their own salvation *with fear and trembling*. And this is a good reason why they should do this, in a humbling sense of their own depravity, unworthiness, and moral inability to work out their own salvation, and continually maintain self-diffidence, in a sense of the greatness of the work, and their own insufficiency, and their entire dependence on God for his powerful influence on their hearts, in order to their willing and doing, and taking one step in their Christian course. But if these words are not taken in this sense, the propriety and force of the argument cannot be discerned, and is lost. But this is to be more fully considered under another head.

Having given a summary of the meaning of fear and trembling in the text, in order more fully to elucidate this point it will be proper, if not necessary, particularly to shew what is implied in this general account; which may be done under the following heads.

1. Fear and trembling implies a trembling conviction and sense of their own weakness, and total insufficiency, in themselves, to work out their own salvation, while they have some true view of the greatness, difficulty, importance and necessity of the work, and that it must be done by them, being most reasonable, and their indispensable duty.

This self-diffidence every Christian feels and constantly exercises in disclaiming all moral power and ability to do any thing towards his salvation, if left to himself, and is necessarily implied in that humility denoted by fear and trembling.

2. This is attended with a thorough conviction, and sensible acknowledgment, that their weakness and utter insufficiency is wholly their own fault; that it consists in their moral depravity, and the inexcusable wickedness of their own hearts. This conviction and

view of themselves strikes death to their pride, and is an essential ingredient in Christian humility, and in fear and trembling.

3. Consequently, fear and trembling includes in it an affecting conviction of their own unworthiness and ill desert; that they are utterly unworthy of salvation, and of that assistance and grace by which alone they can obtain it, and deserve to be left of God to fall into destruction; which would certainly be the case, in a moment, if God should deal with them according to their folly and crimes, and withhold from them that assistance and sovereign goodness which they are constantly forfeiting, and pour that evil on their heads which they are provoking him to inflict; that they are therefore in the hands of a sovereign God, who has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. This view and sense of the truth will not be in the least removed or abated by the strongest well grounded hope and confidence that this sovereign God has had mercy on them; and therefore does not in any degree exclude the humility, the fear and trembling, implied in a real and constant conviction of these truths.

4. Fear and trembling implies a fearful and trembling sense of the infinite and amazing dreadfulness of endless destruction, which the Christian considers and dreads as his certain portion, if he should have his desert, and not be rescued and saved from it, by the constant exertion of the mighty power and sovereign grace of Jesus Christ. The strongest Christian hope and assurance that they have a divine promise that they shall escape this evil, and be kept by the mighty power of Christ, through faith, unto salvation, will not remove or abate this awful view of destruction: but they who have the highest well-grounded confidence of their salvation, will have the greatest sense of the evil implied in perishing forever.

5. A belief and sense of the infinite greatness, power and terrible majesty of God, and a correspondent conviction of their own littleness and nothingness in his sight, impressing an awe of his displeasure, and dread of sinning against him, is implied in fear and trembling. This sense and feeling will increase, as Christians grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whatever evidence and assurance they may have of the favour and love of God.

6. The Christian works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, while he constantly views and feels the dangers with which he is surrounded, by which he is liable to fall and perish, and against which he has no strength and security in himself; that he is always surrounded by innumerable hosts of invisible, subtle, potent enemies, who are seeking his eternal ruin, and doing all they can to prevent his salvation; while he has no more power or skill in himself to resist or escape their rage, and destruction by them, than an infant has to conquer a roaring lion.

This is the representation which Christ himself gives of the state and circumstances of a Christian, while in this world. He speaks to every Christian of which his church is composed in the following language: "Look unto me from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards." [*Solomon's Song*, iv. 8.] He speaks to his church, and to every believer of which



it is composed, as dwelling among lions, even in their dens, continually exposed to be devoured by them; and in the midst of leopards, beasts of prey, who conceal themselves in thickets and on trees, from which they suddenly dart themselves, seize and devour men as they pass: denoting that they are in such a dangerous state in this world, and continually exposed to be destroyed by powerful, invisible enemies, which is fully represented by persons lying in the dens of hungry, devouring lions, or on mountains haunted by leopards, every moment exposed to be destroyed by them, having nothing to defend themselves from them. He calls to them to look to him as their only refuge and deliverer, letting them know their dangerous, helpless situation, and that in him alone their help is found.



7. This is attended with a constant and increasing view and sense of the dangerous enemies which they have within themselves, consisting in their moral depravity and evil propensities; that if Christ should leave them to themselves, they should immediately turn his enemies, and join with the devil, and be on his side and espouse his cause in opposition to Jesus Christ, and finally fall with him into eternal destruction.

8. Fear and trembling is not only consistent with, but necessarily implies, a humble and constant dependence on Jesus Christ alone for grace and strength to follow him through all these dangers and difficulties, leaning on his almighty arm, his infinite wisdom, goodness, truth and faithfulness, for pardon of their sins through his atonement, and deliverance from moral depravity; for power and skill to restrain and conquer their own lusts, and escape everlasting destruction; trusting in him to work in them both to will and to do all that is implied in their working out their own salvation. This, and all which has been mentioned in the above particulars, is implied in fear and trembling; in that humility and saving faith by which the Christian lives, and works out his own salvation. By this he becomes strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. His grace is sufficient for him, and by it he overcomes.

9. As every Christian is coming vastly short in his duty in every thing which he does, and is constantly guilty of much sin, so he is in danger of unthought of deviations from his duty, and by temptations to fall into particular gross sins, against which he has no security but the promises of the covenant of grace; and to escape these he depends upon the sovereign will of God, who worketh in him both to will and to do, *of his own good pleasure*. This is the ground of a constant dread of every sin of omission or commission, and continual care and watching against all sin, and fear of displeasing God, so as to leave him to commit some particular sin, in a trembling sense of his own weakness, and the certainty that he shall not avoid it unless God be pleased to prevent it, by working in him to will and do the contrary. With this view and feeling the Christian ought daily to walk while he is working out his own salvation, however assured he may be that he shall not fall away finally and miss of salvation. And this is implied in the fear and trembling recommended in the text.



10. While Christians are working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, they are sensible and acknowledge that by their own works, and the utmost they can do, they do not in the least recommend themselves to God as deserving any favour on this account; but are infinitely ill deserving as sinners, for which all they do makes not the least atonement; and so much depravity and sin constantly attends them in all they will and do, that they are continually adding to their guilt and ill desert. They therefore utterly renounce all dependence on their own righteousness, and trust wholly to the atonement and righteousness of Jesus Christ for the pardon of their sins, and for all the favour and blessings they want and hope for, willing and rejoicing to receive all this purely for the sake of his atonement and worthiness, while they are considered in themselves as infinitely unworthy of the least favour, and deserving of endless destruction. This view of themselves, and cordial acknowledgment of it, is agreeably to truth, and essential to Christian humility, while they live by faith on Jesus Christ, and “walk humbly with God.” Thus the Christian saith, (it is the constant language of his heart,) “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength;” strength to work out my own salvation, and righteousness to recommend me to pardon and the favour of God. In the exercise of this fear and trembling the apostle Paul renounced all dependence on his own works, desiring to be found in Christ, not having any righteousness of his own, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Such only are of a contrite and humble spirit, who tremble at the word of God; constantly flying for refuge from the wrath to come, and laying hold on the hope set before them in Christ Jesus. He who trusts to himself that he is righteous, and attempts to recommend himself to God, or thinks he deserveth any favour for his own works, exerciseth that pride and self confidence which excludes fear and trembling, and is contrary to living by faith.

What has been now said, in the description of fear and trembling, may be in a partial and imperfect manner represented by the following similitude.

A person finds himself in the midst of a hideous forest and thicket, in which are impassable mountains, swamps and dreadful precipices; he himself is sick unto death, and not able to walk a step, while he sees himself surrounded by hungry lions, and innumerable other beasts of prey, threatening to rush upon him and devour him. And on consideration he finds he has brought himself into this dangerous, wretched state by his own inexcusable folly, and that his disorders and weakness are really his own fault; that he has greatly abused the Lord and owner of the territory in which he is, and all things in it; that he might therefore justly in his displeasure deliver him to the tormentors, and to be miserably devoured by the fierce beasts of prey. While he is in this situation, giving himself up to despair, as wholly lost and doomed to inevitable destruction, the great personage, the owner of the forest and all that it contained, appears to him, and tells him that though he had abused him, and had ruined himself, by his own inexcusable folly, yet he was ready to forgive him, and was able and disposed to cure him of his disorders, and give him strength to walk, and to extricate

him from the evil and dangerous state in which he was, and make him happy in the most agreeable circumstances. Upon this he stretched out his hand, and bid him take hold of it, and he should be safely led out of this horrid place. The poor man felt an invisible energy accompanying this proposal and command, by which he was strengthened and willing to lay fast hold of the nobleman's hand, and to trust wholly in him as his deliverer, pleased to be wholly dependent on him for all the good he wanted, having in himself not the least sufficiency to help himself, and being utterly unworthy of the favour now offered to him, firmly believing the truth and ability of his patron to accomplish all he had promised.

The nobleman told him, that though he depended wholly on him for all his strength to act and walk, and every volition to exert himself in order to escape the dangers of this wilderness, resist the wild beasts, pass through the swamps and miry marshes, ascend the steep mountains, and stand firm on the brink and side of dreadful precipices, and arrive to the promised land; yet he must be active, and work out this his salvation in the exercise of his own care and constant labor; he must resist the beasts of prey, and by his watchfulness and exertions in every step of the dangerous, difficult way he had to go, he must persevere in his work, and in obedience to him, till he should bring him to a place of safety and rest; that, in a sense of his own insufficiency to will or do any thing in this travel in order to his salvation, and his total and constant dependence on his patron, for disposition and strength to will and do, and persevere in the work before him, he must keep his eye upon him, and place all his trust in him, keeping hold of his hand, or of a strong cord which should be fastened to himself, his patron, and always be in his reach, when his hand was not. And in this way he should be carried safely on to the land of promise.

Thus the poor man set out, confiding in the power, truth and faithfulness of his patron, and disclaiming all confidence in himself; continuing his course through hideous swamps, and over high and steep mountains, and on the edge of dreadful precipices, when, by losing his hold or taking one wrong step he should fall and be dashed in pieces in a moment, unless prevented by his guide, making use of the strong cord when his patron was out of sight. Thus he went on in the exercise of constant care and watchfulness, and incessant exertion, taking heed that every step of his should be according to the direction of his leader; and found that the efforts which he made to resist the wild beasts of prey, which continually sought to devour him, were effectual to make them fly from him, and thus he kept himself from their deadly touch. And the farther he went, he became more afraid of displeasing his guide, who was so worthy, kind and condescending; and increased in a sense of his danger if left to himself, and the certainty and dreadfulness of the destruction which would in that case await him; confiding altogether in the power, wisdom, truth and goodness of his patron. He sometimes in a measure forgot his own weakness, and constant dependence on his patron, and attempted to stand and walk in his own strength; but this always cost him dear, for when he thought thus to stand, he certainly fell, and it proved the occasion of shame and

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humiliation. And he made many wrong steps, which he knew was offensive to his patron, which filled him with shame and pain, and served to increase self-aborrence and diffidence in himself. Thus he went on through all the difficulties and dangers of the way, in fear and trembling, increasing in self-diffidence and humility, and in his humble dependence and trust in his able, faithful patron, till he came to the promised land of safety and rest, where he is to live a happy and endless life.

From the whole which has been said in the description of fear and trembling, the result is, that it consists most essentially in Christian humility and poverty of spirit, in a sense of their own weakness and insufficiency to work out their own salvation, and a humble trust in God for his constant, powerful energy on their hearts, disposing and prompting them effectually to will and to do all that they must will and do in order to be saved; together with all those views and exercises which are implied in this, according to the various objects in their sight, and the circumstances with which they are attended. This is essential to the life of all Christians, and to the exercise of every Christian grace; and the more they have of this, the stronger and more beautiful Christians they are. Thus the apostle Paul worked out his own salvation with fear and trembling, while confident and assured of the favour and love of God, and of eternal life. He felt himself to be nothing but weakness, while he was strong in the Lord; to be less than the least of all saints, and that he was nothing, and the chief of sinners. He felt that all his sufficiency was of God; that by his grace working effectually in him, he was what he was, and did what he did in the Christian life. Well might he then recommend this fear and trembling to all Christians, as essential to their character, without which all their attempts to work out their own salvation would be in vain, and end in sad disappointment.

And if this Apostle did work out his salvation with fear and trembling, then the greatest and most assured Christian does not get beyond or above this; but the more he has of it, the greater is his strength and excellence. This has been in some measure kept in view through the whole of this description of fear and trembling. And the Christian who has not an assurance of his salvation, but at times is in great doubts whether he be a real Christian or not; though he may differ in some respects in his views, feelings and exercises from the assured Christian, yet he is working out his own salvation with this same fear and trembling which the assured Christian has, while he is attended with many doubts and fears, which perfect, or a more strong love would cast out.

From the foregoing view of fear and trembling, it appears to consist in a disposition and exercises of heart which are in direct opposition to a self-righteous spirit, or a trust and confidence in ourselves, relying on our own strength and sufficiency to work out our own salvation, depending on this as a righteousness to recommend to divine favour. They who are of this disposition depend on themselves to move *first*, and set themselves to work out their own salvation, hoping for all the favour they think they want, as the consequence of

their thus working, and out of regard to it. This evil disposition, which is contrary to the nature of Christian exercises, our Saviour sets in a clear and striking light in the character and conduct of the pharisee, who applies to God in a confidence in his own sufficiency and righteousness, trusting in himself that he is righteous, valuing himself on his own supposed good character, and despising others. The publican is an instance of humble fear and trembling.

SERMON XII.

Phil. ii. 12, 13. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

II. THE next thing proposed is, to consider and show what is the meaning of God's working in Christians both to will and to do of his good pleasure. This may be done by attending to the following particulars.

1. Working *in* men to will and to do, must intend more than affording them external means and advantages, and urging them by external motives to will and to do; for this cannot with any propriety be called working in them, when all that is supposed to be done is done out of them and externally. Some have supposed this to be all the meaning of these words; not because it is the natural meaning of them, for it is a *forced* meaning; but because they think man needs no more to be done for him in order to his working out his own salvation, and that any thing more, and an immediate operation on the will, is inconsistent with his liberty, and his actions being his own, or really virtuous. But the absurdity of all this has been often fully shewn, and will appear before this subject is finished. It is sufficient to observe here, that to say that an operation on the human heart which effectually influences men to will and to do, that is, to act voluntarily, and consequently freely, is inconsistent with their acting voluntarily, and willing and doing any thing in the exercise of all the liberty which can in nature exist or be conceived of, is inconsistent with human liberty, is as flat and palpable a contradiction as can be made. If to work in men so as effectually to prevent their willing and doing in any particular instance, be inconsistent with their having or exercising any freedom in that instance; then working in them so as effectually to make them will and do in that instance, or any other, is to promote their liberty, and cause them to act freely. And to say that what men do voluntarily is not in all cases their own act and deed, is to say that men are not capable of doing any thing which is their own act; for they can do nothing but what they do voluntarily, and the stronger and the more forcibly the motives are impressed on their minds to induce them to will and act, the more freely they act, and the more sensibly are their choice and actions their own, and the more virtuous they are, if agreeable to the truth.

2. This does not mean any divine operation on man, which respects his willing and doing, of which willing and doing is not the certain consequence, and which therefore is consistent with his not willing and doing. For any divine operation in man, of which his willing and doing is not the effect, is not working in him to will and to do; because, notwithstanding such operation, he is left short of willing and doing. To work in men to will and to do, is to do that which is effectual to produce the will and the deed, so that there is a certain connection between the former and the latter. And this is the import of the original word here

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translated *worketh*. It signifies, to operate with energy, and effectually to accomplish the end, and produce the willing and doing.

That working in men to will which leaves them short of willing, is the same with working in them to will, *if they will*, which is talking most absurdly. Men are always able to will, *if they will*, and need no special assistance or influence on them to will what they will, or if they will, which is the same. If men are willing, or do will, they have no need of any operation or assistance to make them willing; for this they have already by the supposition; for they at all times can will, if they will. There can therefore be no such operation; and any supposed assistance or working in them which leaves them not actually willing or doing is not working in them to will and to do.

3. God worketh in Christians to will and to do, by giving them the powerful influences of his Spirit, without which they would neither will nor do those things by which they work out their own salvation, and which are effectual to cause them to will and do them; there being a certain and infallible connection of one with the other.

Men are naturally, while wholly destitute of such influences, not only entirely destitute of all inclination to every thing that is truly virtuous and holy, but their hearts or wills are obstinately set in them to do evil, and they run swiftly on with all their hearts towards destruction; and they go on in this course until God changes their hearts, by taking away the heart of stone, the obstinate, rebellious heart, and giving them a new heart, a humble, obedient heart, and thus makes them willing to obey him in the day of his power, or by his omnipotent energy on their hearts. And when he has begun this great and good work in any whom he pleases, he carries it on until the day of Christ, and takes care constantly to grant them that assistance and those influences by which he thoroughly and effectually worketh in them both to will and to do all those things whereby they work out their own salvation, and are prepared to dwell with Jesus Christ in his kingdom forever. They receive the spirit of Christ when they first become Christians, to be in and dwell with them forever, by whom they are led, and who is the author of every holy exercise of heart which they have, and of all the good works they do, by which they go on in the way to heaven, and until they are made perfectly holy. They being interested in the promises of the covenant of grace, their salvation is made sure, and God is engaged by promise never to leave them or forsake them, but to lead them safely on to glory, and that he will keep them by his mighty power, through their faith, by which they shall work out their own salvation.

That God thus works in all true Christians to will and to do all they will and do in working out their own salvation, and that they are thus wholly dependent on him for every right motion and choice of heart, and for every good thing they do, is not only plainly asserted in the words of the text, which cannot be understood in any other sense than that which has been given of them, without straining and forcing them to speak an unnatural sense, but is abundantly confirmed by innumerable other passages of scripture, which speak the

same language and assert the same thing; too many to be rehearsed here, and of which the careful, intelligent reader of the Bible cannot be ignorant. And this is expressly or implicitly acknowledged by all Christians in their prayers, however some professing Christians may in their speculations, and even in the feelings and tenor of the exercises of their hearts, contradict it.

4. There appears to be some intended difference between willing and doing, when it is said, God worketh in Christians *both* to will and to do. Strictly speaking, men are active in nothing but in the exercise of their will, or in *willing*, and therefore *do* nothing else: yet the effects and consequences of the exertions of their willing, which by divine constitution are connected with their acts of will, and their voluntary exertions, they are said to do or to be done by them, and are considered as in some sense distinct from their volitions; so that, when their will is carried into full execution, they may be said to *do* what they *willed*, and so both to *will* and to *do*. And when any thing is willed, determined or chosen, which will cannot be immediately put into execution, but the act or event willed is future, and at a distance, when such a choice is executed and effected, the person thus willing has both willed and done the action or event. Thus, when a man wills and determines to attend public worship devoutly the next sabbath, or to visit one of his neighbours and to give him some salutary advice and exhortation, or to give something to the poor, he wills those things; but they are not yet done, till by a course of acts of will they actually take place and are effected; and then he hath both willed and done them. These observations may serve to shew the propriety of the distinction in the words before us between willing and doing, and what the distinction imports. The Apostle makes this same distinction more than once. He says, "To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not." [*Rom. vii. 18.*] He found a strong desire and inclination to do many good things, and was hearty in willing them: but when he came to put what he willed into actual execution, he failed of coming up fully to what he willed, and felt the necessity that God should work in him both to will and to do; and that when he faithfully executed his own will it was owing to the effectual grace of God, working in him not only to will, but to do it. He, writing to the Corinthians respecting a collection for the poor, says to them, "Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness *to will*, so there may be a *performance* also;" [*2 Cor. viii. 11.*]

5. The words which are added, "Of his good pleasure," remain yet to be explained. The meaning appears to be, that God worketh in men to will and to do as it pleases him, in the exercise of his sovereign goodness, who hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. In the beginning of this work, he chooses whom he will to be the subjects of it, not being under obligation to any; who are all wholly gone out of the way, their hearts being set against God, and every thing which has the nature of holiness. God waits not to have them turn and will that which is right, for this they would never do, if left to themselves, whatever means are used, and motives set before them, to persuade them to

it. He first begins, and gives them a new heart, and creates them in Christ Jesus unto good works, and works in them to will and to do. Thus, not by works of righteousness which they had done (for they were dead in trespasses and sins, altogether rebellious) but according to his mercy, he saved them, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; and being thus made willing by the powerful operation of God on their hearts, according to his sovereign good pleasure; and having begun the good work, and they being brought into that covenant, according to which he has in his sovereign grace promised to carry it on till it is completed; he worketh in them to will and to do, so as to insure and perfect their salvation, in that manner and degree which is according to his sovereign good pleasure.

The next thing proposed is,

IV. To consider the force of the argument by which the foregoing exhortation is urged, or the reason given why Christians should work out their own salvation *with fear and trembling*, introduced and denoted by the particle For. “For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.”

In order to set this in the true and best light, what has been before observed must be kept in view, viz. that the design and force of the exhortation is not merely or chiefly to work out their own salvation, but to do this in a particular way and manner, *with fear and trembling*. They began to work out their own salvation when the Apostle was with them, and had made great progress in this work, after he had left them; and he now enjoins upon them to go on in this great work, with fear and trembling, with self-diffidence, in a sense of their own insufficiency, and their constant absolute dependence on God; with humility and poverty of spirit, and all those feelings and exercises which are implied in this.

And he urges this upon them with this good and forcible reason, “*For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*” You have no sufficiency of your own to do or will any thing right, but are always and entirely dependent on God, who is the author of every choice and exertion by which you are enabled to proceed in the Christian life, who is above all controul, and acts as an absolute sovereign in this matter. And without him you can do nothing.

The sense of this passage of scripture, as it has been now explained, may be expressed in the following words.

“My beloved fellow Christians, as you gave up yourselves to Jesus Christ, to obey and serve him, when I was present with you, and have since, in my absence, continued and made great advances in your obedience, I earnestly exhort you to go on in your Christian course with that holy fear and trembling which implies a sense of the difficulty, greatness and importance of the work which is before you, keeping in view the eternal happiness and glory which the gospel sets before you, and the infinite evil that awaits all who come short, together with a constant conviction of your utter moral weakness and insufficiency for this work, and your entire and constant dependence on God for his powerful assistance in every step

you take; so that if he should leave you to yourselves, you would certainly come short and perish. Be on your constant guard against the least confidence and trust in yourselves; be not high minded, because you have been thus distinguished, and have continued in your obedience, making advances in the Christian life; but fear: be humble, and, in a constant sense of your own utter insufficiency, to do the least thing towards your salvation of yourselves, put your whole trust in God at all times for his constant influence and help, by which alone you will be able to work out your own salvation.

“This caution and exhortation to go on in your Christian course with this fear and trembling is proper and important, as it is natural to man to be high minded, and to trust in himself; and even Christians, through their remaining depravity, are in danger of a criminal degree of this, in a measure, forgetting their own weakness and insufficiency and dependence on God, by which they greatly injure themselves; and because thus to fear and tremble is essential to the life of a Christian, and cannot be exercised in too high a degree: for the more a Christian has of this, the more beautiful and perfect is his character, and he will work out his own salvation with greater safety, strength and activity. And there is the highest reason and the strongest motive for Christians to work out their own salvation with this fear and trembling, to which I am exhorting, because they are in fact thus entirely and always dependent on God for every right motion of their heart, and all they do in this work, as all they will and do is the effect of a divine operation effectually working in them both to will and do, and that of his sovereign good pleasure, and entirely independent of them.”

The Apostle exhorts them to maintain a humbling sense of their depravity, moral weakness, and utter insufficiency to the work in which they were engaged, and had made considerable progress, and their entire dependence on God for every right exercise of heart; to remember and realize that all they had attained to in the Christian life was to be ascribed to God working in them to will and to do it; and that they were still thus dependent on him for every right choice and action; so that if God should cease to work in them both to will and to do, they would immediately fall away and perish.

The Apostle was sensible of the disposition in man to overlook his dependence on God every moment for every right motion of his will; and to trust in himself, relying on his own strength and sufficiency: and he knew how fatal this disposition was to the souls of men, if it were not counteracted and mortified; and that Christians had need to be reminded of this. He therefore warns the Christians at Philippi to avoid this fatal rock; and at the same time marks out the only true and safe way to heaven. And happy would it have been for many professing Christians since, if they had attended to, understood and conformed to this apostolic direction; who, contrary to this, have thought themselves something when they were nothing, and have attempted to work out their own salvation in their own strength, relying on their own sufficiency to will and to do; and consequently never have willed and done any thing right, and really holy, but have perished in the foolish, presumptuous attempt.

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Having attempted to explain these words under the four preceding heads, as was proposed, we come now,

Fifthly. To improve the subject to practical purposes.

I. From the explanation which has been given of this important passage of scripture, if it be in any measure just and right, we learn that many have overlooked the true sense of these words, have put a wrong meaning upon them, and perverted them to very bad purposes.

They are such who assert man's sufficiency to work out his own salvation of himself, without any distinguishing, efficacious influences of the Spirit of God, effectually working in him both to will and to do all that is necessary for his salvation; and deny that man is absolutely and wholly dependent on God in working out his own salvation: but hold that he who does this distinguishes himself independent of God's assistance, of which he has no more than they have who do not work out their own salvation. They who espouse and contend for this sentiment, are wont to appeal to the first words of the passage before us, "Work out your own salvation;" and think this sufficiently supports their cause, and asserts that men are, of themselves, to work out their own salvation, independent of any internal divine influence on their hearts effectually to will and to do. At the same time they wholly overlook the following words; or, if they are urged against them, they put an unnatural and forced meaning upon them, which has been shewn cannot be the meaning, in the foregoing explanation.

Thus this text is wholly perverted to support and establish a doctrine which has a most pernicious and destructive tendency, is contrary to the whole tenor of scripture, and directly contrary to this very text, taken together, and rightly understood; which, it is thought, clearly appears from the foregoing explanation. This is a most dangerous and destructive perversion of scripture; for every one who believes in his heart he is so sufficient to work out his own salvation, and to distinguish himself from those who neglect to do this, without any distinguishing influences of the Spirit of God, working in him both to will and to do, and thinks he is thus by his own self-sufficiency actually working out his own salvation, is deceiving himself, and trusting in man, and making flesh his arm; he is therefore accursed, and will sink into destruction. How lamentable that such doctrine should be advocated by any, yea, by *so many*! How unhappy that such multitudes should, through the moral blindness, selfishness and pride of their hearts, be led astray by these false teachers! Surely the blind are leading the blind, and they both will fall into the ditch of endless destruction!

There have been those who have understood these words as a direction to unrenewed sinners to begin and work out their own salvation, enforced with a strong encouragement, if not a promise, that if they thus set out in earnest, and do what is called *their part*, God will give them all needed assistance to go on so as to obtain salvation, or do *his part*. This they understand by his working in them both to will and to do. Thus, according to them, God waits to have them set out and begin to will and to do; and then he sets in to assist them

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to go on. It is sufficient to shew every considerate person, surely, that to put such a meaning on these words is wholly to pervert them, only to mention it. The words are spoken to Christians, in whom God had already begun a good work, by working in them to will and to do, and who had made great progress in the Christian life. And what he teaches them is their own insufficiency to will and to do, and that they did not begin in this work till God first wrought in them both to will and to do; nor go one step without his efficacious agency on their hearts; and therefore they ought to maintain a humbling sense of this on their minds, and put their whole trust in God, who only can work in them to will and to do that by which they must work out their own salvation. To apply these words to sinners, to encourage them to a proud conceit of their own moral strength and sufficiency, and to trust in themselves to work out their own salvation, is as direct and gross a perversion of them as can well be imagined.

There are others, who, though they have rightly considered the exhortation in the text to be addressed to Christians, yet have mistaken the proper meaning and force of the exhortation, of fear and trembling, and of the reason given by which the exhortation is urged; and therefore have overlooked the true sense of the text, and really perverted it. Without attending to the true, or any precise and determinate meaning of fear and trembling, they consider the exhortation to Christians to work out their own salvation, as directing them to do what they call *their part*, which they are to perform, without taking any notice of the *manner* in which they are exhorted to do it; and consequently represent God's working in them to will and to do, rather as the consequence of their working, in which he will assist them in their endeavors to work out their own salvation: so that the meaning of these words, according to them, is this: Work out your own salvation, do your part, for then and on this condition God will do *his part*, and work in you both to will and to do.

He who has attended to and understood the explanation of these words which has been attempted in the preceding discourses, and approves of it, must be sensible that the above representation of the meaning of the text wholly overlooks the true design and force of it, and is a total perversion of it, and may justly be said to "darken counsel by words without knowledge."

On the whole, it appears that they who attend only to the first part of the passage which has been explained, as exhorting men to work out their own salvation, without bringing into view the following words, not attending to the words *fear and trembling*, as expressing the manner in which this work is to be done, or giving a wrong sense to them, have not given the true import and force of the exhortation, and have not improved it to promote the purpose designed by it; and many have in this way perverted it to establish delusion and falsehood. And, that they also who have attended to the last words, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do," without attending to their connection with the foregoing exhortation, and the true meaning of fear and trembling, and the force of the

reason and argument from thence, expressed in the particle For, have, at best, not given the true and important meaning of the whole passage; and have overlooked the design and force of it, and the most interesting and practical truths contained in it; if they have not improved it to promote error and delusion.

In short, this text cannot be understood, unless it be considered in the connection of each part of it, and in the true meaning of every expression and word contained in it. But when this is done with proper care and judgment, it will be found to be clear, easy, consistent, and harmonious, and to exhibit true religion, both in theory and practice, and the real character of a Christian, as distinguished from all counterfeits.

In this view, the preceding particular explanation has been attempted, and is to be yet further improved.

II. From this passage of scripture, as it has been explained, several doctrines are expressed or implied, and the objections which have been made to them appear to be wholly without foundation, and very unreasonable. Some of these will be particularly mentioned and considered.

1. As God is here said to produce every good volition and exercise in the Christian by which he works out his own salvation, it has been objected, that according to this the work is all done by God, and not by the Christian, which renders the text, taken together, wholly inconsistent and absurd; as if it were said, "Work out your own salvation; but at the same time remember that you can do nothing, and really have nothing to do; for it is God who must do all, by producing the will and the deed!"

The mere mentioning of this objection is sufficient to expose the unreasonableness and absurdity of it. If God works in them to will and to do, then they both will and do; and this is as much their own will and deed, as much their own exertion and work, as it could be were there no previous exertion of God, as necessary in order to their thus willing and doing. Christians do nothing in working out their own salvation till they begin to will and act; and when they do this, it is as much their own act and deed, as in the nature of things any thing that is willed and done can be, whatever God may do in working in them thus to will and to do. The latter is the work of God, and not theirs, the former is as much their own exertion and work, as if God did nothing in them, and is entirely distinct from what God does. Their own exertions, their willing and doing, in working out their own salvation, are as necessary as if they were independent of God, and he did not work in them to will and to do: and therefore this is no reason why they should not will and work, but sit still and do nothing; but is a good reason why they should work, and do what they do with fear and trembling, not trusting in themselves, but in God alone, to enable them to go through and perfect this work.

2. This doctrine of absolute dependence on God for every volition and exertion in working out our own salvation, which is implied and asserted in the explanation which has

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been given of this text, has been represented and objected to as a very discouraging doctrine, tending to lead persons to sit still, and not attempt to do any thing towards their salvation.

It is granted that the view of the text which has been given does tend to discourage persons from attempting to work out their own salvation in their *own* strength and sufficiency, independent of God, and his effectual operation on their hearts to will and to do; and will effectually do it, where it has its proper influence on the hearts of men. But this affords no real ground of objection to the doctrine, but is rather in favour of it. It is necessary that men should be discouraged from working out their salvation in this way, and relinquish it, in order to their being saved; and the sooner and more thoroughly they are discouraged, the better. Such discouragement is indeed given in the text, and in a vast number of other passages in the Bible, being rightly understood; for men are every where in scripture represented as wholly dependent on God for the effectual influences of the Holy Spirit in order to do that which is necessary to be done by them for their salvation.

But to him who feels his own moral depravity and utter insufficiency to will and do any thing by which he may be saved, without the powerful operations of God to work in him to will to do it, this doctrine will open the only ground of hope and encouragement to do or attempt to do any thing. If a child or any person were called to do some great thing, to which he knew he was wholly unequal, being utterly insufficient to such a work of himself, he would not have any courage to attempt it, until he knew that one stood by him who was able and promised to give him all necessary assistance, if he would rely wholly on him for it; but this would give him sufficient encouragement to engage in the work with hope of success; and would be the only ground of encouragement and hope.

Jesus Christ said to his disciples, "Without me ye can do nothing." Surely he did not say this to discourage them and lead them to sit still and do nothing; but to encourage them to trust in him, and to engage in the work assigned to them with alacrity, courage, and hope. The apostle Paul knew that he was what he was by the grace of God, working mightily and effectually in him both to will and to do; that he had no sufficiency of himself for any good thing, but that all his sufficiency was of God; that without the powerful assistance of Christ he could do nothing. Did this discourage him, from attempting to do any thing? No; directly the contrary: from this he took his sole encouragement, and was animated to pursue his work with activity and diligence, and laboured more than all the other apostles, knowing that, through Christ who strengthened him, he could do all things.

Thus it appears not only that the objection under consideration is altogether without any ground or reason, but that it is made against a passage of scripture which, according to the explanation which has been given, affords the only ground of hope to sinners, and gives sufficient and the only encouragement to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; and which does contain a complete answer to the objection, and that it is as direct, great

and mischievous a perversion and abuse of the text, as can be imagined. Let it therefore be rejected by all with abhorrence, and silenced forever.

3. The objection which has been made, that this doctrine of man's dependence on the powerful operation of God for every virtuous and holy act of will, so that it is really produced by him, and could not exist did not God work in him both to will and to do, is inconsistent with human liberty, and makes man a mere machine, who is acted upon in all he wills and does, is really answered and refuted in the words themselves, as they have been explained.

Human liberty consists in willing and doing, or in acting voluntarily. To act freely, and to act voluntarily, are synonymous terms, meaning the same thing; and it is impossible to exercise or conceive of any other real liberty than this. All the liberty of any moral agent consists in acting voluntarily. There is no other liberty in nature possible. Therefore, liberty does not consist in any thing which takes place before the actual exertion of willing; man does not, he cannot, exercise freedom antecedent to his acting voluntarily, or when he ceases to will and to do. Therefore, when God worketh in men to will and do what otherwise they would not will and do, their liberty is so far from being obstructed by this, that it is promoted, and the consequence is, their actually willing and doing, and, consequently exercising all the liberty of which any creature is or can be made capable. How groundless and unreasonable then is this objection! It amounts to this, that man cannot be free in that which is the only exercise of liberty, because he never would have acted thus freely in that instance, did not God by working in him, induce him to exercise all the freedom of which he is capable in actually willing and doing.

It is evident that many puzzle and bewilder themselves about human liberty, and think many facts and doctrines contained in the Bible to be inconsistent with liberty; or at least confess themselves unable to conceive how they can be consistent with it, because they have never attended so much to the nature of human liberty as to be able to determine precisely in what it does consist, and imagine it consists in something of which they have no clear and consistent idea, and which is really impossible, and never did or can exist. If they would carefully consult their own feelings to find what that is which they feel and exercise when they consider themselves perfectly free in what they do, they would find that when they acted voluntarily or of choice, and did as they pleased, they acted freely, and possessed all the freedom they could desire, or have any consistent conception of; therefore, that though God work in them to will and to do, or whatever were the previous cause of their willing and acting as they did, yet they were perfectly free in their choice and conduct; and that it was as much their own will and choice, as it could be on any supposition whatever, and they themselves wholly accountable for what they will and do.

This passage therefore is so far from being inconsistent with human liberty, that it supposes and asserts that persons have and exercise all the liberty in the practice of morality and religion of which man is capable, and carries in the face of it a complete confutation of

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the objection under consideration. And let no one imagine he has not all the freedom that is desirable, or that, in the nature of things, can be possessed and exercised, while he feels and knows that he acts voluntarily, or does as he pleases. And if he does both will and do that which is really working out his own salvation, let him ascribe it wholly to the sovereign mercy of God, who worketh in him thus to will and do of his good pleasure.



SERMON XIII.

Phil. ii. 12, 13. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.

HAVING considered three objections to the text, as it has been explained in the preceding discourse, it is proposed in this to answer several more.

4. It is objected, that if men are not and cannot be willing to work out their own salvation, unless God first work in them to will and to do, then they cannot be blamable for not willing and doing.

To this objection there is a full solution and answer in the words to which it is made. If none do any thing towards working out their own salvation, till God worketh in them to will and to do, this supposes that previous to this they are unwilling; and that this unwillingness, or opposition of will to this work, is the only difficulty in the way of their willing and doing that by which they would be saved; and were it not for this opposition of heart or will to do that by which they would be saved, there would be no need that God should thus work in them to will and to do, which otherwise they voluntarily refuse to do. It is therefore supposed that they act freely in willing and doing that which is contrary to working put their salvation, and consequently that they are wholly blamable for voluntarily opposing that by which they might be saved, if they were willing to comply with it. For we have no other idea of blame or crime, but that which consists in willing and doing that which is contrary to reason and truth, and the command of God, when nothing is in the way of willing and doing that which is right and wise, but their unwillingness or opposition of heart or will to that which is required. And the greater the degree of opposition of will there is to that which is right and good, and the stronger the propensity and inclination is to the contrary, the more blameable and guilty such persons appear to be to all who exercise reason or common sense. And the more fixed in the strong and constant opposition of their hearts they are to that which is wise and good, and propensity to do evil, so that they are perfectly deaf to all warnings and counsels and motives which can be set before them to choose and do that which is right, and would make them happy, and they cannot be reclaimed by any means whatsoever that can be used with them; the more odious and blameworthy they are, according to the feelings, judgment and consent of all.

If a child be disobedient to his parents, and wholly refuses to pay any respect to them and regard their dictates, the more obstinate he appears to be, and fixed in his rebellion, under all possible means used with him to reclaim him, this is so far from being any excuse, or extenuation of his blame or guilt, that, it is considered by all, unless it be those who are joined with him in the same disobedience, as an aggravation of his guilt. Whoever thought of excusing a murderer or thief, and could think him blameless or the less guilty, because he had long persisted in his evil practices, and could not be reclaimed by all the persuasions,

threats and severe corrections which could be administered or devised? Can any one avoid thinking him the worse, and more odious and blameable, the more his inclination to murder or steal is proved to be fixed and incurable? It is possible the person himself might plead this as an excuse; and his companions in the same wickedness might join with him in exculpating him and themselves, because they had such a strong inclination to persist in their practices, and were so utterly averse from a reformation, and so far from having the least disposition to any thing of the kind, that they could not be willing to hearken to advice, and reform. But all who are not murderers nor thieves would consider their attempting to make such an excuse as an aggravation of their crimes, and an increase of their blameworthiness.

This is applicable to the case before us, and may serve to illustrate it. Mankind are all rebels against God, and are sunk into total moral depravity, in which they have a strong, fixed and incurable propensity to rebellion, and a proportionable aversion from God and holiness, and *will not* come to Christ that they might be saved. This depravity and obstinacy is *incurable*, that is, by any thing in themselves; for their whole inclination, and all their exertions, are an opposition to turning to God, or a willingness to embrace the gospel; it is incurable by any means that can be used with them, or by any thing that can be done for them by any creature. The removal of this rebellious disposition is infinitely out of the reach of the power of men or angels. He only can do it who created all things, and is able to take away the hard, obstinate heart, and give an obedient one, and work in men to will and to do that to which they are naturally totally averse. Nothing is or can be in the way to prevent any persons being willing to embrace the gospel, but a contrary will and choice, and aversion of heart from Jesus Christ and the gospel. And if this be not in the nature of it criminal, and blameable in every degree of it, then there can be no such thing as blame or crime in nature. And if the strong degree of opposition to that which is right and wise, and inclination to the contrary so as to render it incurable, in the sense explained, does render the person innocent; then every the least degree of such inclination is not criminal, so there can be no such thing as sin; unless men can sin without any inclination to sin, and may incur blame when they exercise no choice.

All this is supposed and really asserted in our text: That mankind are wholly and obstinately opposed in their will and affections to that which is right and wise, and necessary to be chosen, in order to their salvation; that this is the only and all the difficulty in the way of their salvation, and is the only thing which renders it necessary that God should powerfully work in them to make them willing to embrace the way of salvation. The objection is therefore contrary to the passage objected to, which when considered contains a full answer to it, and the objection appears not to have the lead foundation, if all blame consists wholly in having no inclination to that which is right and wise, and in an inclination and choice which is directly contrary: and nothing can be blameable but this: and the stronger this in-

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clination is, and the more there is of it, the more and greater is the guilt; which no man can deny without contradicting the plainest dictates of reason and common sense.

When it is said in the objection, that if men *cannot* embrace the gospel unless God work in them to will and do it, this must render them blameless, if by this any difficulty is designed to be expressed which does not wholly consist in their unwillingness to this, and is not the same with their *will not*, it is not true that they *cannot*; for, as has been observed, there can be no other bar in the way of their embracing the gospel, but a fixed opposition of will to it; and this is supposed and even asserted in the text, as nothing else or more is necessary to work out their salvation but a *will* to do it. And when it is said they *cannot* be willing, the meaning is, that they are wholly destitute of the least inclination or real desire to comply, and have such a strong, fixed opposition of will to it, that they cannot be willing to embrace the gospel, such opposition of will being entirely inconsistent with it, so long as it continues; and they being without the least inclination or desire to remove this opposition, but acquiesce in it with all their hearts, it cannot be removed by any thing short of the power of God working in them to will and to do. But if this be all that the objector means by his *cannot*, this is so far from being any excuse for not being willing to embrace the gospel, that it is the very thing in which all blame consists; and the more there is of this *will not*, and the stronger the inclination is to oppose and reject the gospel, the greater is the guilt and blameworthiness, as has been before observed, and cannot be denied by any who will allow that there is any such thing as guilt and blame in nature. In this sense the words of Christ are to be understood, when he says, "No man can come to me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him:" [John. vi. 44.] The Saviour of the world does not say this to excuse men as blameless in not coming to him, but rather to express their total depravity and the greatness of their guilt, asserting that there is such opposition of the will or heart of all men naturally to him, that they are disposed to reject the gospel, and, while this is the case, no man can with such an heart come to Christ, as this implies a contradiction. And this depravity and opposition of heart is so great and fixed, that no man will come to him, unless it be removed by the power of God working in him to will and do that which he would otherwise continue utterly to refuse. That these words are thus to be understood is certain from what Christ saith elsewhere on this subject. He said to the Jews, "*Ye will not* come to me, that ye might have life. How *can* ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" In which words he asserts, that the only thing in the way of their coming to him was, that it was contrary to their inclination or will; and that their inability to believe on him, which is the same with coming to him, or the only reason why they *could not* believe, was nothing but an opposite inclination to desire and seek that which was contrary to believing on him and coming to him. We are certain that Jesus Christ did consider this inability to come to him, though so fixed and great that it could not be removed by any power short of that Divine Energy which can give a new heart, as any excuse for not coming to him; for

he asserts their not believing on him and refusing to come to him to be the greatest crime, for which they might justly be condemned to perish forever. Hear his words. "He that *believeth not*, is condemned already, *because* he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. And when he (the Spirit) is come, he will reprove the world of sin, *because they believe not on me.*"



If they who make the objection under consideration would attend to all this, and consider it well, they would know that they were as really objecting against Jesus Christ himself, as against our text, as it has been explained; for he saith the same things in the words which have been cited. And they would at the same time be convinced that the objection is contrary to all reason and the common sense of mankind, and implies the greatest absurdity, and contradiction to all moral truth.

Many bewilder themselves, and put a stumbling block before their faces, and make great and hurtful mistakes, by using the words *cannot* and *inability* in a sense which is inconsistent with blame, and wholly excuses for not doing what a person cannot do. That which a person cannot do, though ever so much inclined to do it, and however willing he is to do it, were it in his power, he cannot be blamed for not doing. And this is the sense in which mankind commonly use the words *cannot* and *inability*. But when these words are used in a moral sense, so as to imply no difficulty in complying with what is required, but want of an inclination and desire to do it, or an actual opposition of will to it, which is quite a different and opposite sense from the other; such a want of ability or power to comply with that which is reasonable and right, does not excuse a refusal to comply, but necessarily implies blame, and the person is criminal in proportion to the degree of his inability to comply, or the strength and fixedness of the opposition of his heart to that which is required, in which all the difficulty of this compliance consists.

This may be illustrated by the following instance: A poor man, a real object of charity, suffering for want of the necessaries of life, who must perish soon if he had not speedy relief, begged the compassion and help of two neighbours who then were together. One of them was a kind, benevolent man, and felt for the sufferer, and ardently wished it were in his power to relieve him; but he was poor himself, and had nothing to give to his distressed brother. The other was rich, and able immediately to help the suffering, perishing man, if he had been willing to do it; but he was a stranger to benevolence, and had the greatest aversion from giving or doing any thing for the relief of any of his fellow-men, and never had felt the least compassion to the distressed, or given so much as a penny for the relief of any, though he had many opportunities to do it, and not a few had perished by his refusing to afford them any help. He therefore in this instance hardened his heart, and felt not the least compassion for the perishing man, and refused to save this beggar from death, which was in his power, had he been willing to give him what he could easily spare.



Who can avoid pronouncing the former blameless, or considering the latter as very criminal and blameworthy? And the farther he was from any inclination . to help the distressed, and the more fixed and obstinately set he was against giving any thing to the poor, the more vile and criminal he must appear to all. The latter cannot be liberal, and delight in distributing what he possesses, until he has a new heart, and is possessed with a disposition directly contrary to that which now governs him in all his thoughts and desires. And his heart is wholly and with all its strength opposed to a benevolent, generous heart, and therefore he cannot have the least inclination and desire to have such a heart, but is entirely satisfied and pleased with his present selfish disposition. And if he should pretend to desire and attempt to obtain a good, benevolent heart, all his desires and attempts would really be nothing but the exercise of his selfishness, and the gratification of his evil, covetous disposition; and therefore would be nothing but real opposition to a good heart. So that it may be truly said of him, he is utterly unable to change his own heart from a selfish to a benevolent one. Yet who can think him the less criminal and blameable on this account? Must not all look upon him as guilty and odious in proportion to the fixed strength of his selfish, cruel disposition, and his inability by this to become benevolent and kind?

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The difficulty which is in the way of his helping the poor man may be as great, and his inability to do a generous action as real and as much insurmountable and immoveable by him, for the reason which has been mentioned, as the inability of the former to relieve him. It may be said, agreeable to truth, of both of them, that they *cannot* relieve the distressed sufferer. But their inability is so entirely different, and of so opposite a nature and kind, that the inability of the former excuses, and that of the latter is so far from excusing, that it is the very thing in which his crime and blame consists. And they who attend to all that has been offered or can be said on this point, and yet will not see the difference and opposition between these two kinds of inability, but persist in asserting that there is no difference, and that they equally render a man blameless for not doing what he is unable to do; that the inability of the latter of these two men to relieve a distressed person is as blameless and excuseable, as that of the former; are not capable of being reasoned with or of making any proper use of common sense, which cannot be accounted for but by supposing that their inability to see and make this distinction, and reason properly upon it, is not owing to any defect in their natural capacity and reasoning powers, but to an inclination of heart, or propensity of will, which perverts their reason, and shuts their eyes against the light of truth, so that they *cannot* see it, however clearly it shines; which is the criminal inability that has been described.

Every degree of inclination to sin is opposition to the contrary, and is a difficulty in the way of a holy inclination and choice; and the former necessarily weakens the latter in proportion to the degree of it, so that perfect holiness cannot be exercised, so long as any degree of the opposite inclination exists. And the difficulty or inability to be perfectly holy is

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greater or less in proportion to the greater or less degree of the opposite inclination to sin. This, the apostle Paul says, is the case with Christians in this world: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye *cannot* do the things that ye would:" [Gal. v. 17.] None will suppose, it is presumed, that the Apostle said this to excuse Christians for not being perfectly holy, or designed to represent the lusting of the flesh, or inclination to sin, as blameless, by saying that they *could not* do the things that they would; for if the lusting of the flesh be not sinful and blameable, then there cannot be any such thing as sin or blame. When the Apostle says, "Ye cannot do the things that ye would," he does not offer this as an excuse for their not doing them; since all the difficulty in the way of their doing them was their sin: it was therefore a wholly blameable, sinful *cannot*: it was a difficulty and inability to be perfectly holy which was criminal and wholly blameable in every degree of it, and that too in proportion to the strength and degree. Christians had a degree of holiness which was exercised in opposing all sinful inclination, and desiring to be perfectly holy. They would be, they had a desire to be, as to do all the things which were required of them in a perfect manner and degree; but a contrary propensity to sin still worked in them, and rendered them unable to do what they would, so that in every exertion they fell short. This therefore was a sinful inability, a *cannot* wholly blameable; for it consisted in their inclination to sin.

The unregenerate sinner is nothing but flesh, in the Apostle's sense of the word here, and in many other places, that is, corrupt human nature. All his inclinations and desires are lusts of the flesh, in which there is no good thing. This his carnal mind is enmity against God, is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed *can be*. He has no inclination or desire to be holy, to oppose the carnal mind, which therefore has the whole dominion in his heart, and reigns there without controul. The difficulty and inability he is under to will and to do that which is good is total and complete: and as the Christian cannot do the things that he would, cannot be perfectly holy, the sinner cannot have the least inclination or desire to be holy, or will and do any thing towards his salvation. And as the partial inability in the Christian to be perfectly holy is altogether his sin, and consists in it; so the total inability to will and to do that which is holy in the sinner is all of it his sin, and therefore consists wholly in that which is blameworthy. His inability, his cannot, is all sin and nothing else. And to offer this as an excuse, as rendering the sinner wholly blameless, is so unreasonable, absurd and perverse, that it cannot be done by an honest, discerning mind.

So much has been said in answer to this objection, perhaps too much, and some repetitions have been made, it may be too many, because it is so much in the mouths of many, originates from delusion, and has a most pernicious tendency.

5. The objection which is often made, that it is unreasonable to command or exhort sinners to do that which they have no power to do, and cannot do unless assisted and enabled to do it by the Spirit of God, appears to be groundless, from our text itself, when rightly

understood; and is fully refuted in the answer to the last objection. When it is well understood what is meant by want of, power to obey what is commanded, and comply with the exhortation; that it means nothing but want of will, and an opposite inclination; the objection vanishes, as nothing to the purpose. It means a want of ability to obey, which is itself sin, and that in which blameableness consists, and therefore cannot be an excuse for not obeying. Therefore, as this kind of inability is only a sinful opposition of heart to that which is right and duty, it does not remove or lessen the obligation to obedience and to comply with duty. Surely none can think that a person may not with reason and propriety be exhorted and commanded to do that which is right and his duty, and for his interest to do, merely because he is not willing to do it. For if so, then no man may be commanded or exhorted to that which he is not inclined or willing to do; which denies the existence of any law, except it be a man's own inclination and will. If God may not command a creature to do what he is not willing to do, there is an end to all divine laws, and moral government, and a man's own inclination and will is his only law or rule of conduct; consequently there can be no sin, unless it be doing that which is contrary to a person's will and choice, which is impossible.

But it may be asked, Where is the propriety of commanding or exhorting sinners to do that which they never will do, unless they have a new heart given to them by God, and he work in them to will and do it; or what end will this answer?

Reply. The reason and propriety of this has been already shown; and that if this were not reasonable and proper, there can be no such thing as law and moral government. And this is suited, and even necessary, to answer the following ends.

First. If there were no law and commands, and these were not set before sinners, pointing out their duty, and urging them to do what is necessary to their salvation, they could not know what the law is, and what is their duty, and what is necessary to be done by them in order to be saved; which is important and necessary. Without this they would not be under advantage to know the character of God, of Jesus Christ, nor their own character, nor what they must be and do to be saved. "For how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Second. If commands and exhortations to obedience were not applied to sinners, they would not know that they are sinners, and how depraved and corrupt they are, and how opposite their hearts are to the gospel, and that they are undone forever, unless sovereign grace give them a new heart, and make them willing in the day of divine power; all which it is important and even necessary the sinner should know, in order to his being saved. The apostle Paul said, "I had not known sin, but by the law:" and this is true of every one; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. And they cannot know that their hearts are strongly opposed to the gospel, the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, until they have the offer, and are invited and exhorted to believe on him.

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Third. Therefore the gospel is to be preached to all men, and every man is to be instructed, warned and exhorted to believe, that he may escape the wrath to come, whether they will *hear*, or whether they will *forbear*, or refuse to hear. This is the way which God takes to answer his wise, benevolent purposes. They to whom he in his wisdom is pleased to give a heart to believe, will embrace the gospel, and be saved; and under a conviction of their guilty, lost state by nature, and that they should have justly perished, had not God given them a heart to believe, they will ascribe the whole of their salvation to sovereign grace, and give all the glory of it to God forever. They who do not hear and embrace the gospel, but, according to the criminal choice of their own hearts, reject the great salvation, will perish, under the aggravated guilt of slighting Jesus Christ, and abusing his grace and love, and will exhibit a striking manifestation of the exceeding, amazing depravity and wickedness of the human heart, and of the justice of God in their eternal destruction.

It has been observed, that the text contains an answer to the objection now under consideration, and it has been shewn how it is answered. But an answer is found in it, in another view of it. The Apostle tells Christians that if God did not work in them to will and to do, they would not will and do any thing towards their own salvation; and at the same time exhorts both to will and to do, and work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. This is directly in the face of the objection. For though they could have no will to work, unless God gave it to them; yet they are exhorted and commanded to be willing and to work out their own salvation. Why then may not the sinner, who can have no will to do any thing towards his salvation, unless God work it in him, be exhorted and commanded to will and to do? Is it possible to make any objection to this, which is not really against the exhortation in the text?

6. It may be further objected, that the text, as it has been explained, implies the doctrine of the certain perseverance of all true Christians, unto eternal life; which doctrine tends to make them who think themselves Christians careless about their salvation, and leads them to indulge themselves in sin, since, having once believed, they shall be saved, whatever life they live.

Answer. The text, as it has been understood, it is granted, does imply the doctrine of the perseverance of all real Christians: for if they depend wholly on God to renew their will to holy exercises, by which they are born again, made new creatures, and created in Christ Jesus unto good works, there is no reason to think he will forsake such a work, and suffer it to come to nothing; as there is an apparent inconsistency in this: it may therefore be relied upon as certain, that Infinite Wisdom and Unchangeable Power and Goodness never begins this great and good work, by which men are brought into a state of salvation, and become real friends to God, and are pardoned and have his favour, without a design to carry it on till it is completed in their perfect holiness and endless happiness, as this work from beginning to end depends wholly on him. The contrary supposition appears most unreasonable, and

unworthy of God, and dishonourable to him. Moreover, the expression itself denotes a constant work which God is carrying on in Christians, without ceasing or relinquishing it. "It is God who *worketh* in you to will and to do," that is, continually, not at one time only, but always, to the end of life. It is not said, God did once work in them, or that he did work in them sometimes, but not always; but he *worketh* in you, as being common to all Christians, and at all times. And in this view only it can be a reason and encouragement to work out their own salvation. with fear and trembling, as it has been explained.

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But if the doctrine of the certain perseverance of all true Christians to final salvation were not implied in the words of the text, when considered alone, yet it is established with the utmost certainty when they are viewed in connection with what the Apostle had before said to these Christians in this epistle. His words are, "Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:" [chap. i. 5, 6.] The good work is that spoken of in the text, by which God was working in them both to will and to do. The Apostle, under inspiration, was confident, which amounts to a certainty, that wherever he begins this work, he will carry it on to perfection, "We therefore may be confident, and certain, that wherever God begins to work in men to will and to do that which is good and holy, he designs to carry this work on to perfection; that he will completely finish what he once begins. And this same truth is abundantly asserted, many ways, in the Bible, to which it is needless now particularly to attend.

. It is objected to this doctrine, that it tends to make Christians careless, and is a temptation to indulge to sin, seeing, according to this doctrine, their salvation is secured to them, let them live as they will. An answer to this is found in the words of the text, in which this doctrine is contained, as has been shewn: for at the same time Christians are told that God had begun a good work in them, which he would finish, carrying it on to perfection, they are exhorted to work out their salvation with fear and trembling; and that too for this very reason, that God was working in them so as effectually to secure salvation to them. They are informed that their working out their own salvation in this particular manner was as necessary to their salvation, as if God did not intend their salvation; that there was no other way to be saved; and that God thus working in them both to will and to do, with an intention to go on and perfect it, was the only encouragement, and a strong and cogent motive, thus to work out their own salvation.

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The objection before us is therefore made in direct opposition to the words of the text, in which the doctrine of the saints' perseverance is improved as a motive to every Christian duty in the practice of real holiness: it is therefore impossible to encourage the contrary. This apostle always speaks in the same strain. He says of himself, in this same epistle, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am also apprehended of Christ Jesus. Reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God

in Christ Jesus.” The Apostle considered himself as apprehended, or laid hold of, by Jesus Christ, when he was converted and became a Christian, with intent to keep his hold of him till he had brought him to possess the prize of eternal life. This was so far from making him careless and inactive in the duties of the Christian life, that he improved it as an encouragement and motive to activity, zeal and engagedness in running the Christian race, that he might obtain perfect holiness, and the prize which his Saviour intended for him, and so work out his own salvation, of which he was assured, by what Jesus Christ had already done for him by working in him both to will and to do those things which accompany salvation, being infallibly connected with it. In the same view he writes to the Christians at Thessalonica: “Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here he writes in the same manner as in our text. He urges them to the practice of Christian holiness, from the encouragement and motive that God had designed them for salvation, giving them the character of his children, by which they were interested in the everlasting covenant of grace, by which salvation was insured to them.



This objection not only has an answer in these, and innumerable other passages of scripture, but it is also confuted by the inconsistency and unreasonableness of it. It carries this inconsistency in it, that if the perseverance of Christians in holiness is made certain by God, on whom they depend for it, and he has determined they shall work out their own salvation; then it is not necessary that they should live a holy life, and work out their salvation, and they may be saved without all this, and however much they neglect their own salvation, and indulge themselves in all manner of iniquity: or, if it be made certain that they shall persevere in a holy life, that they may be saved, then they may as well and certainly be saved without persevering in a holy life, and though they fall away into sin: and this will encourage Christians not to attempt or desire to persevere in obedience, and to live in sin. They who can argue thus have given up the use of reason, to embrace the most palpable absurdity.

The objector also falls into another inconsistency, by supposing that a Christian may have assurance that he is a real Christian, and therefore shall be saved, when he is so inclined to sin as to prefer living in sin and the indulgence of his lusts to a holy life; and that he may maintain his assurance, while he neglects religion as a task, and lives a careless, wicked life; which is contrary to truth, to scripture, and the reason and nature of things. If it were possible that a real Christian could be in such a frame, and have such a prevailing disposition, and continue in it, it would be impossible that he should have any just and well grounded assurance of his being a Christian; for he can have no evidence of this, but from a disposition and exercises directly contrary to a preference of a life of sin, viz. exercises of real holiness, disposing to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. The hypocrite, who has no true grace, may be so deluded as to think and presume he is a real Christian, and abuse the doctrine of the certain salvation of all who are once Christians, to indulge in sin, because



he has really no love to holiness, and prefers a life of sin to the life of a Christian. But it is inconsistent to suppose that a real Christian should have or think he has evidence that he is a Christian, while he is in a careless frame, and loves the pleasure of sin rather than God and holiness.

The scripture asserts that assurance of being a Christian, and of salvation, is to be attained and maintained in no other way but the exercise of holiness, and great care and diligence in living a holy life. The apostle John says, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall allure our hearts before him:" [1 *John*, iii. 18, 19.] The apostle Peter exhorts professing Christians to take care to live and abound in the exercise of every Christian grace, in order to have and maintain an assurance of their real Christianity; and concludes with these words: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall:" [2 *Pet.* i. 5-10.] This is the scriptural way of assurance; and they who think they have an assurance that they are Christians in any other way, and from some other proposed evidence, are presuming, and deceiving themselves to their own destruction.

And it must be further observed, that it is not only inconsistent with the character of a true Christian at any time to prefer a neglect of religion and a living in allowed sin, to a holy life, if the former were as sure a way to salvation as the latter; so that an assurance that he shall be saved will be no inducement to him to live a careless, sinful life: but it is yet a greater inconsistency and contradiction to suppose a Christian, in that strong and lively exercise of grace, and love of holiness, which always attends a true assurance that he is a Christian, and shall be saved, should *then* and for that reason prefer a life of sin to a holy life, and from this assurance be led into sin. This is impossible; and directly the reverse is certain, viz. that such an assurance is not only accompanied by a strong desire and engagedness to live a holy life, as without this there can be no real assurance, as has been shown; but the assurance itself will greatly add to the strength of desire and engagedness to live a holy life, to the honour of God, and for his own comfort, were it not necessary in order to be saved.

There are not only these inconsistencies in the objection, but the objector supposes that the true Christian is wholly selfish and mercenary in all he does, and is all ways disposed to. prefer a life in sin to a holy life, if he may be as sure of his own salvation by living in sin, as by the contrary. Therefore, having no true love to God and regard for his honour, nor any delight in the law of God, or love of holiness for its own sake; if he can obtain a promise that he shall be saved, he will have no motive to serve God, or have any concern for his character and glory; but will choose to live a life of enmity to God, by serving himself and his own lusts. It is certain there never was, and never will be, *such* a real Christian, though thousands have with the objector *supposed it*, and are hoping for heaven by living in the

exercise of a selfish religion, which is abomination in the sight of God, and will certainly lead them to destruction.

The doctrine of the certain perseverance of all real Christians in a life of holiness to salvation, secured to them in the covenant of grace, is a comfortable and pleasing doctrine to the true Christian. He knows his own insufficiency, and absolute and constant dependence on God for all holy exercises and conduct: and that if God should leave him to himself, he should fall into sin and ruin. And when he finds a promise in the covenant of grace, that all true Christians shall be kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, and that where he has begun a good work in men he will carry it on to the day of complete redemption, he lays fast hold of it, as the only ground of hope that he shall persevere unto salvation, and would not be without it for a thousand worlds. But the self-confident hypocrite, who never knew his own heart, but thinks he can stand in his own strength, and distinguish himself from others who have the same assistance which he has, and by his own exertions embrace the gospel and live a holy life, in which he himself, not God, determines whether he shall be saved or not, by his own independent obedience, or by the abuse of the assistance he has; to such this doctrine is most displeasing, and they will oppose it with all their might; because it takes away their god in which they trust, their own selves, and makes their salvation altogether dependent on God, from first to last. For the same reason they oppose the doctrines of the divine decrees and of election, as these represent men as wholly dependent on God, especially for salvation, as according to this he determines who shall be saved, and who shall not, independent of man, according to his own pleasure. This is the only reason that can be justly assigned for their displeasure at these doctrines, and their opposition to them. And if persons of this character do not trust in man, and rely on an arm of flesh, even themselves, and that in a matter of the greatest importance and magnitude, infinitely more so than their own existence, or any other of their concerns, it will be difficult, yea, impossible, to conceive what is meant by trusting in man. How is it possible then that they should escape the awful curse pronounced by God? "Thus faith the Lord, cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm:" [Jer. xvii. 5.]

7. It is objected, that these doctrines, of man's entire dependence on God in doing any thing towards his own salvation, of election, and the certain perseverance of all true Christians, if they be true, had better not be preached, since they will not be understood by people in general, and are very offensive to many, by which they are prejudiced against religion; and by many who believe them, are abused to very bad purposes; and, on the whole, do much more hurt than good.

Answer. This objection is really against the Bible itself; and particularly against the text we are considering, in which these doctrines are all either expressed or implied, as has been shown. Therefore the whole Bible, and more especially our text, are to be adduced as containing a complete answer.

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If these doctrines are not to be preached, inculcated or mentioned, why are they contained in the Bible? Why has God published them to the world? If the preaching of these doctrines tends to do hurt, then their being published in the Bible, which is to be read by all, has an evil tendency. They who make this objection, who are not a few, would drop it immediately, if they have any proper regard for the Bible, as it is levelled against divine revelation, and the Author of it.

If these doctrines be not understood by any preachers or hearers, this must be their own fault; for nothing is revealed which may not be understood, so far as it is revealed, by the honest, attentive reader of the Bible, in the assiduous use of all the helps in his reach. And if they be not understood, the fault must be in the hearer or the preacher, or perhaps in both.

That these doctrines are improved to increase the prejudices of many against religion, and are abused by others to evil purposes, is no reason why they should not be taught, explained and vindicated; since this is an equal reason why none of the important truths of the Bible should be taught; for there is no truth in divine revelation which is not liable to abuse, and has not been abused by men, to their own hurt. It is no new thing for men to pervert the writings of inspiration to their own destruction. Shall they therefore be laid aside, and not studied and inculcated? Let the objector judge.

Let who will think these truths to be of little consequence, and not suitable to be maintained and preached, or doubt or disbelieve them, or abuse them to the worst purposes: yet they remain highly important and useful. They have been found to be so, by thousands and millions. And the heart of every true Christian is formed upon them, or agreeable to them, whatever his speculations may be. And there is no other way to heaven than that which is marked out in our text. This leads to the next head of improvement.



SERMON XIV.

Phil. ii. 12, 13. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.

II. THIS subject is to be improved in a use of Examination.

I This is the most important and useful part of the subject to which we have attended. The text, as it has been considered and opened, and vindicated from objections, points out the only way to heaven, and exhibits the true character of every real Christian; and teaches with what views, exercises and efforts he must work out his own salvation. But all this will be in vain to us, if we do not apply it to ourselves, and in this light examine and try ourselves, whether we be real Christians, according to this description of a Christian, and walking in the narrow way to heaven.

They who are sincerely desirous to know their own state and character, and to determine from the best evidence whether they be real Christians or not, may be assisted in this most important inquiry, by attending to the following particulars.

1. Have you ever been convinced, and have you a clear, constant and growing conviction, of your utter insufficiency to will and do any good tiling, unless God work in you to will and to do; by reason of the natural depravity of your hearts, by which you were, in a moral sense, dead in trespasses and sins? that if you should be left to yourselves, to follow your own will and choice, without the powerful, regenerating influences of the Spirit of God, you should certainly run on to destruction; and are therefore wholly dependent on God for every right motion of will, and all that which is right and good in you; even on his sovereign, undeserved grace? The Christian has a clear and powerful conviction of this in his own mind continually, and daily acknowledges it to God, and increases in a sense of the depravity of his own heart, and his constant dependence on God for divine influences to work in him every right motion of heart; and a view and sense of this truth attends all his exercises and conduct. And while he feels his constant dependence on God to will and do any thing that is right, he acquiesces in it, and humbly trusts in God, and cries to him for his assistance and grace.

Herein lies the foundation of the first and great difference between a true Christian and those who are not so. The latter are strangers to this conviction and feeling, and, whatever their speculations may be, if they do or attempt any thing in religion, they do it in their own strength, and feel as if they had some sufficiency of their own to do good, and were not wholly dependent on God for every right motion of heart, or exercise of will.

2. Do you feel a constant and cordial conviction that you are wholly blameable for the want of a disposition to will and do that which is necessary for your salvation, and for all opposition of will to this, that your insufficiency to work out your own salvation, and dependence on God to work in you to will and to do it, is no excuse for your not doing it; but

that your want of a will to do it, and all opposite inclination, is altogether your own. fault. Are you willing to be looked upon in this light, and disposed to confess this as your sin, and humble yourself in the sight of God for every thing in your heart and life which is not conformable to the holy law of God? It cannot be reasonably supposed that a true Christian, who has been convinced of his own sinfulness by an acquaintance with the law, and is a hearty friend to it, as perfectly right and good; who is a friend to Christ, who has obeyed this law, and died on the cross to magnify it and make it honourable, and to save his people from their sins -, that such an one should not condemn himself for every thing in his heart and life which in the least deviates from this law, and is not a perfect conformity to it: for not to do this is inconsistent with his character as a Christian.

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3. When you are most attentive to, and feelingly sensible of, your own weakness and insufficiency, and of your dependence on God in the sense above described, is this lb far from discouraging you, and disposing you to sit still and do nothing, that *then* you have the most ardent desires, and the greatest courage, zeal and engagedness to prosecute and go through the work of a Christian, and work out your own salvation? This, which has been the matter of discouragement, uneasiness and objection to multitudes, has a directly contrary influence with the Christian, and opens the only way in which he can have hope, and by it he is animated with zeal and courage to run the Christian race; and what others cannot feel to be consistent, or be pleased with, is to him plain and easy, and most satisfactory and pleasing, as most suited to glorify God, and promote the humility, holiness and happiness of man. In this view, and in this way only, the gospel is to the Christian the wisdom of God and the power of God. Agreeable to this St. Paul says, "When I am weak, then am I strong." "I can do all things through Christ who. strengtheneth me." That is. When I have the greatest sense of my own weakness, and insufficiency to the work before me, I feel the greatest strength and courage by trusting in the grace and power of Christ; I am then strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and can with courage undertake and go through the most difficult and arduous work.

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4. Are you influenced to will and do, and quickened and excited to religious exercises, in such a way and manner as naturally leads you to be sensible that these things take place by the grace and assistance of God, so that you are disposed to ascribe all to him, and not to yourselves? Do your own feelings and experience witness to your own mind that "It is not of him who willeth, nor of him who runneth, but of God, who sheweth mercy?" It is doubtless God's way so to work in Christians by his Spirit as to lead them to be sensible that all originates from him, and to acknowledge him lo be the worker of all good in them. And they can from their own experience adopt the words of Paul, and say, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

5. Are you indeed doing the work of a Christian, working out your own salvation, in any measure in the manner which has been described? Do you make religion, and the service

of Jesus Christ and his interest, your great and really your only business? And do you make any progress, and abound more and more?

The real Christian is painfully sensible that he fails and comes unspeakably short in every thing, which he knows is to be attributed to his own depravity and the sin which dwelleth in him, so that when he would do good, evil (sin) is present with him, and the good which he would he does not. And this sinful defect, and the evil which attends him in all he does, is a grievous burden, and matter of constant humiliation before God. And the more the Christian does, and the more zeal and engagedness he has in religion, the more sensible he is of his sinful defects; therefore this increasing sensibility is no evidence that he is not working out his own salvation with fear and trembling, but on the contrary is a sign that he is a real Christian, and is willing and working. They who do the least, or rather nothing at all, in this work of a Christian, are commonly most insensible of their defects, and are disposed to think they are doing much, and have few or no painful defects to lament.

But though every Christian comes so lamentably short of what he ought, and heartily desires and wishes to do, which is matter of constant shame and humiliation; yet he is really working out his own salvation, in the manner which has been described in the preceding discourses, and is making this work his only business. And he must be supposed to gain skill and strength to prosecute this work, and grow in grace and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the longer he is in the Christian school, and is going in the way to heaven. He therefore who is not in some good measure diligent in this business, and fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, is not steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, has no reason to think he has ever entered upon this work, or knows what it is to live the life of a Christian.

6. Do you live a life of prayer? The Christian, who is working out his own salvation with fear and trembling, feeling his own insufficiency, and constant dependence on God to work in him to will and to do, and having a lively sensibility of his dangerous situation, surrounded with numerous subtil, potent enemies, who are seeking his ruin, and beset with various and strong temptations to turn aside, and offend God; and that he shall inevitably fall into destruction, unless God prevent it by his constant influences and sovereign grace; is constantly looking to God for safety and help, and expressing his only hope and trust in him, praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance. He will earnestly cry to him for his direction and assistance, in every exigence and at all times, and call upon the name of the Lord as long as he lives.

A child on the side of a tremendous precipice, depending on his father to guide him in every step, and hold him up by his hand, by which alone his fall and being dashed to pieces can be prevented, would keep his eye constantly on his father, and cry to him to help him from falling, and conduct him safe through all the dangers with which he feels himself surrounded. Or should a child be in the midst of a wilderness with his father, filled with fierce



beasts of prey, ready to devour him, while he is without any strength to defend himself, and knows not one step of the way to a place of safety, and feels that if he should be a minute without the help and guidance of his father, he should run directly into the mouth of some savage beast, or turn aside from the only way to escape death, he would constantly cry to his father for help and protection, who alone could save him. And if his father should be out of his fight but a few minutes, what a cry would he raise after him! and never cease till he got hold of his father's hand.

And shall not the Christian, who feels himself in circumstances of which those of the child now described are but a very faint representation, being infinitely more important and affecting, cry night and day unto his God and only Saviour, for help, succour and deliverance! Surely he will constantly with cheerfulness obey his invitation and command, as not only his duty but his greatest privilege, while he hears him saying, "Look unto me, my spouse, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards: Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me: Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: Pray always, and faint not: Pray without ceasing," &c. And the more he loves God, and the stronger is his faith and trust in him, and his confidence in the certain and punctual fulfilment of all his promises, the more hearty, earnest and fervent his prayers will be; for in this way. he will express a sense of his dependence on God, and his love to him, and faith and trust in his promises.

The nominal Christian, who has no proper sense of his dependence on God, as it has been explained, but feels himself in a, great measure sufficient to the work of a Christian, and has no real love to God, or trust in his promises, and dependence upon him, to work all his works in him, both to will and to do. can live without much prayer from day to day; or, if he pray, it will be but a formal, cold business, in which there is no engagedness or heart. But this is not the character of a true Christian, who is working out his own salvation. with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who worketh in him both to will and to do. He casteth all his care upon God, and in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, makes known his requests unto God. Believing that they have a Great High Priest, who is in heaven, Jesus the Son of God; they come boldly, with the utmost freedom of access and of speech, unto the throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find help in time of need.

7. Have you, after you have done all, no reliance on what you do, to recommend you to God as less deserving of his displeasure, or more worthy of pardon of your sins, and of salvation; feeling that if God should be strict to mark your iniquity against you, you cannot answer or stand before him, and must justly perish forever? Under this view and conviction do you constantly fly to Christ, and trust in his atonement, which he has made by his blood, and in his righteousness, for pardon and acceptance with God; feeling yourselves to be infinitely guilty and ill-deserving; that were it not for Christ and his worthiness, and your



union to him and interest in his righteousness, you must sink into hell; and that nothing in you, or that you have done or can do, can be acceptable to God, unless you are accepted in the infinitely beloved and worthy Saviour? and in this way, and under this sensible conviction, whatsoever you do, do you do all in the name of Christ, asking all you petition for in his name, and hoping for acceptance and mercy for his sake alone? It has been shewn that this is essential to the character of those who walk humbly with God, and work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. He who attempts to work out his own salvation in any other way, is really working out his own destruction.

8. On the whole, let all professing Christians seriously and with great care examine themselves, and inquire? whether they be really walking in the narrow way to heaven, described in the text; whether they have skill to discern and distinguish it from all others which have been devised by men, or that can be imagined; whether they know there are the strongest motives and greatest encouragements to work out their own salvation, while they are certain that they are wholly dependent on God for this, and shall do nothing unless he work in them to will and to do; and that by all they do they do not deserve the least favour, but remain as ill-deserving as ever; and find themselves as zealous and as much engaged to do. while they know they can do nothing of themselves, as if they were self-sufficient, and independent on God to work in them to will and do, and could merit their own salvation by what they do; whether their depravity of heart, and indisposition to do any good thing unless God work in them to will and do, be matter of shame and self-condemnation to them, having no excuse to offer for it, but take the whole blame to themselves, being disposed to justify God, should he leave them to perish in their sin, and always ready with pleasure to give him all the glory of their salvation, if he of his sovereign grace shall begin and carry on this work to perfection; whether they are willing to be in his hand, to dispose of them as he in his infinite wisdom and goodness shall see best, and rejoice that all men and all things shall be governed and disposed of so as to answer the wisest and best ends, thus always rejoicing in the Lord, that he reigns without any possible controul forever.

He who understands our text, and sees the truths expressed and implied in it to be perfectly confident and harmonious, and heartily acquiesces in them, and in the view of these truths, and on this plan, is constantly working out his own salvation with fear and trembling, is doubtless taught of God, and made wise unto salvation, which he will finally obtain, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he who sits still or loiters with respect to this great work, from whatever motive, or is labouring to go to heaven in his own strength, independent of God, so as to be at heart opposed to his salvation being determined by God, and on this ground is in his heart an enemy to the doctrines of the decrees of God, of election, and the certain perseverance of all true Christians; is in darkness until now, and knows not the only way of salvation. The

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scripture warrants us in this conclusion, however uncharitable and censorious many may think it to be. We appeal to the Bible, and to the day of judgment.

IV. This subject will be improved by urging the exhortation in the text. Let all who hope to be saved, make it their only business to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. There is no other way to heaven but this; and this is a work of life, which cannot be finished till death takes us out of the world. This is the sight of faith, by perseverance in which the Christian will lay hold of eternal life.

The lead deviation from this narrow way, or neglect or loitering in this work, is unreasonable, and an abuse of the gospel, and tends to evil. In order to go in this way, the flesh with the affections and lusts must be crucified; selfishness and pride, with all the evil propensity which springs from them, must be watched against and crossed; for all these will lead the Christian aside from the right way, so far as they are regarded and gratified. A strong disposition to self-dependence, and dependence on some creature, in opposition to constant dependence on God alone, is implied in these lusts. And so much of this is in the Christian, that he is constantly exposed to fall by it, and often does so, in a degree. When the Christian is in a pious frame, and his religious affections are strong and vigorous, he is exposed to trust in his present disposition and feelings for what he hopes to will and to do in future; and when he trusts in this as a stock and sufficiency of his own for some future work, he always finds himself disappointed, and fails of willing and doing as he expected, because, in proportion to his thus trusting to himself, his heart departed from the Lord, and in a degree forgot that he depended every moment on God, to work in him to will and to do. Would the Christian work out his own salvation, he must watch and pray against self-dependence, in this way, or in any other. If he trusts in any degree to ministers, books, the Bible, or any means, or special religious advantages, that these will help him in any measure, independent of the divine, immediate operation, working in him every right motion of heart, he gets so far out of the way, and cannot come right till he repent of his folly. Peter trusted to his own present feelings, and was self-confident, when he said to Christ, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended: Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee: I will lay down my life for thy sake:" [*Matth. xxvi. 33, 35. John xiii. 37.*] Trusting to himself, he fell from his own steadfastness, and could not be recovered without deep and bitter repentance. Let all be hence warned not to be high-minded, but fear; and let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. When the Christian is weak, fears and trembles in a sense of his own insufficiency, and feels his dependence on God constantly to work in him to will and do, then is he strong to run the race which is set before him, and work out his own salvation.

To what has been said, the following particulars may be added as motives to engage in and pursue this work.



I. Consider *how great* this work is. There is none equal to it, or to be compared with it. It is to overcome self, sin and Satan, even all the powers of darkness; principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places. Nothing short of Omnipotence can strengthen you to perform it, even the mighty power of God, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right-hand, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion. At the same time that the consideration of the greatness of this work leads to fear and tremble, to feel our own insufficiency, and to trust in God alone for a will and strength to do it, it serves as a mighty motive to desire to engage in it and go through, by the power and grace of Christ. The motive is great and strong in proportion to the magnitude of the work before us.

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2. Consider the consequence of neglecting this work, or performing it. The consequence of the former is, to perish forever; for none can be saved but those who in this way overcome. The consequence of the latter is, to sit down with Christ on his throne, and reign with him forever.

3. Consider the abundant encouragement, and innumerable great and precious promises, which Christians have to strengthen and animate them in this work, and to trust in Christ to carry them through. They who trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved; they shall renew their strength; shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and. they shall walk and not faint.

4. Consider the pleasure and happiness there is in working out your own salvation with fear and trembling. It is not a slavish, servile work. There is pleasure in this fear and trembling, which is nothing more than true humility and trust in God. No man knows what true happiness is, who is not cordially engaged in this work. And he who is thus working out his own salvation has true pleasure and happiness in his work. He has joy and peace in believing, and is going on to complete, everlasting rest and joy in the kingdom of Christ.

This subject will be concluded with an address to sinners who neglect the great salvation.

The words of the text are not directly and immediately addressed to you; yet they contain matter of instruction, conviction, admonition and exhortation to you; to which it is of the greatest importance that you should attend.

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You are here taught your sinful, depraved, undone state; that you are so under the dominion of evil propensities, that you will not be persuaded and disposed to exercise one right volition or thought, unless God work it in you by his good Spirit; to do which he is under no obligation, and you are constantly provoking him not to do it, but to give you up to eternal destruction. Here you have set before you your guilt, misery and danger in a most clear and affecting light. At the same time you are taught that your neglect of salvation, and all that moral depravity, in the exercise of which you are sinning against Christ, and running into ruin, is your own inexcusable, aggravated wickedness, of which you are continually guilty, and is enough to sink you down to the deepest hell; and will certainly do it, unless

God shall exercise sovereign mercy to you, and you repent and turn, and are willing to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

And as your opposition of heart to this, and even the neglect of this salvation, is altogether your own fault, for which you have no excuse, consisting in your own inclination and choice, heaven and all the blessings of it are opened and freely offered to your acceptance, and you are invited, exhorted and commanded to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, having a promise that in this way you shall certainly be saved.

All this is set before you and urged upon you in the discourses on this subject which you have heard. Your attention to these truths is therefore demanded by all the authority of heaven. And you are required heartily to receive and comply with them, and thus to lay hold on eternal life, which is now set before you and offered to you as really as to any one else. Therefore if you perish, it will be by your own inexcusable and greatly aggravated fault. These truths are infinitely important and interesting to you; for you will be forever happy or miserable, accordingly as you cordially embrace or reject them.

Say not, "I am not elected, and therefore cannot be saved, let me do what I will, as the decrees of God are against me." This is horrid presumption, for you to meddle with and pretend to determine that which is secret, and act upon it. Besides, it is revealed and certain that if you perish you will perish as really and as much by your own inexcusable fault, as if there were no decree of God concerning you. This plea and excuse will appear to be vain and unreasonable, when the truth comes to light; and that it proceeded from a heart full of enmity against God; and being silenced it will serve to aggravate the destruction of those who make it. Oh! of what infinite importance then is it to you, that you should wholly lay it aside before it is too late!

Do not entertain the thought that you cannot embrace the gospel and work out your own salvation, and imagine that this is a good excuse for your not doing it. For this is taking upon you the character of the slothful servant, who thought to excuse himself for neglecting the right improvement of the talent which was committed to him, by saying, "Lord, I knew thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed." If there ever was or can be a person of the character which Jesus here describes, thou art the man, and your excuse will be turned against you, and you will meet with the doom pronounced on such a servant; "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

It is true that you are under an inability to do any thing by which you shall be saved, which has been explained as consisting in the sinful inclinations of your own heart; and you depend entirely on God for a new heart, and he will give such an heart, or not, according to his good pleasure; and will determine whether you shall be saved or not. But it has been fully shewn that this kind of inability is so far from being an excuse for not doing, that it is the very thing wherein the sinner's criminality and blame consist; and to make this an excuse



for not doing implies a great degree of stupidity and perverseness, and is replying against God, in the same manner that the slothful servant is represented to do.

Do not give yourselves up to sloth and indifference in religion, and indulge your evil inclinations, in neglect of all concern about the salvation of your soul, because you think this is already determined by God, and you cannot alter the case, therefore you will not trouble yourself about it. This is the certain way to determine that you never shall be saved, and are going in the way to destruction; for this is the certain way to perish forever, if you persist in it, as none can go to heaven in this careless way.

Besides, such a conclusion and practice is most unreasonable, and must proceed from amazing blindness and stupidity. It is a disposition of mind which is condemned as an evidence of the greatest stupidity and sottishness by all who exercise any reason and common sense, in temporal concerns. If a man be accused of a capital crime, and is to be tried in a day or two, when it will be determined whether he shall be put to death or not, and such a man should appear to be perfectly unconcerned about himself and the issue of the case with respect to him, who could be found to justify him in this? Would not all join to condemn him as an unreasonable stupid man? Or should a person be condemned to death, for some crime, and the day of his execution be fixed; could he be perfectly unconcerned and easy about his case and fate even till the moment of execution came? If this were possible, and such an instance should be known, all would cry out on him, as sunk below the reason, sensibility and feelings of a man, being as thoughtless and stupid as a beast. How much more unreasonable, insensible and stupid must he be, who is upon the verge of eternity, and it must soon be determined whether he shall be unspeakably happy, or beyond all conception miserable forever, and yet has no concern about the matter, but is trifling away his time in carelessness about his eternal interest, and vain amusements! This is an instance of stupidity, sottishness, phrenzy or madness, which cannot be described!

Do not therefore give way to such unreasonableness, stupidity and infatuation, as to spend your time and strength in care and exertions about temporal things, while you neglect the utmost, constant attention to, and highest concern about, those infinitely important and weighty matters, which hang upon every moment of your lives.

Do not entertain so good an opinion of yourselves as to think you are willing to be Christians, and that the reason why you are not, is not the want of a willingness to embrace the gospel, and because you will not come to Christ for salvation; but from some other cause, for which you are not blameable.

Many who are under some concern about the salvation of their souls, fall into this delusion, and think they are willing to come to Christ and be Christians if Christ were willing to receive them. Such are ignorant of their own hearts, and have no true idea of that which is implied in being a Christian; and really charge Jesus Christ and the gospel with falsehood; for in that he declares that whosoever will may come and be saved. In this way they overlook

the true reason why they are not Christians, and shut their eyes to their own true character, guilt and odiousness. It is of the greatest importance that this delusion should be removed.

Do not attempt to evade all conviction of the truth, and concern about your salvation, by flattering yourselves that you are in no present danger of destruction, and you shall have time enough hereafter to obtain salvation, though you neglect it now. Remember that you have no security from falling into hell one moment; and the voice of God and of reason to you is, "Make haste! Escape for thy life, lest thou be destroyed!"

And do not indulge a thought of your own sufficiency and moral strength to work out your own salvation, unless God work in you to will and do. Many are so ignorant of themselves, and of the work of a Christian, as to imagine they are sufficient to begin and go through the work, without feeling their dependence on God. And they think they are truly religious, and working out their own salvation, while they are only gratifying their own selfishness and pride, and are in the sight of God abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

There are others who are so confident of their own independent sufficiency to help and save themselves, when they shall set about it in earnest, that by this confidence in themselves they are led to indulge in neglect of religion, and carnal security, for the present; and by this delusion many are fastened down in sloth and neglect of their souls till it is eternally too late. Could they be persuaded to try their supposed strength in earnest, there would be hope that they would be convinced of their delusion; as many have been in this way thoroughly convinced and humbled. But so long as they cannot be awakened and roused to try their boasted strength, they are like to remain in the fatal delusion.

It is of infinite importance to you that you do not, on the one hand, presume upon our own strength and sufficiency to work out your own salvation, and, trusting in yourselves that you are righteous, depend upon obtaining salvation by your own righteousness, or, on this presumption of your own sufficiency, live in ease and security, at present, in the indulgence of your own corrupt inclinations, depending on yourselves for strength and help when it shall be necessary for you to be religious to escape destruction; or that you do not, on the other hand, live in ease and the neglect of salvation, from the consideration of your depravity and inability to save yourselves, and your dependence on God for this, imagining that this takes away all obligation and encouragement to embrace the gospel and work out your own salvation. Both of these delusions equally lead to destruction.

May you realize the infinitely evil and dangerous state in which you are, and be excited to fly from the wrath to come, by laying hold of the hope set before you, knowing that salvation is freely offered to you, and heaven stands open for you, and you are invited to run for this prize, having at the same time the offer and promise of the Holy Spirit, and of all the assistance you want, if you will so far trust in God as to ask him for all this. O sinners, why will ye die!

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SERMON XV.

WRITTEN IN THE YEAR 1800.

Romans iii. 27. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay; but by the law of faith.

THE Apostle Paul does in this epistle particularly state and explain the way in which sinners may obtain the favour of God, and eternal salvation, which is opened by the gospel. There are but two possible ways of obtaining the favour of God and eternal life, which he mentions, viz. by the works of the law, or obedience to the law of God, and by faith in Jesus Christ. The former way he says is impossible to sinners, and if it were possible, it would be highly improper, and attended with evil consequences. Having proved that all men are sinners and guilty before God, he says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Because the law worketh wrath; and the salvation of sinners is not of works, lest any man should boast." The latter therefore he establishes as the only proper, wise and possible way in which sinners may be justified and saved, and says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law: and it is of faith, that it might be by grace, by which boasting is wholly excluded."

In attending to these words of the text, it will be attempted to explain them by showing what is meant by the law of works, and what by the law of faith, and why boasting is excluded, not by the former, but by the latter; and then improve the subject in some useful remarks and inferences from it.

By the law of works is meant the original law or constitution, which requires perfect, persevering obedience, in order to have and continue to enjoy the favour and blessing of God, and which pronounces him accursed who is guilty of disobedience in one and the least possible instance. This law every rational creature is under obligation to obey. The holy angels were made under this law, and, by a sinless, perfect obedience to it, during the whole time of their probation, they have obtained and enjoy the divine approbation, and the reward of eternal life. This is the constitution under which Adam and all his posterity were made; this is the *law of works*. Had the father of the human race continued perfectly to obey this law to the end of his time of trial, he would by these his works have obtained eternal life for himself and his children too; but, by transgressing this law of works, he fell under the curse of it, and laid the foundation of the ruin of all his children, by their falling into the same state, as *their* sinning was, by divine constitution, connected with his transgression.

And many of the sinful children of Adam have and do, through their pride and ignorance of themselves, and of the nature, extent and design of the divine law, seek and attempt to



become righteous, and obtain pardon and salvation by the works of the law— their own obedience. Most of the Jews did so in the days of the Apostles. They sought righteousness as it were by the works of the law, and went about to establish their own righteousness; and in this way they failed of obtaining righteousness, and remained as much under the curse of this law of works as if they had attempted no obedience to it: for all who in this way are of the works of the law, are under the curse of it; for it is written, Cursed is every one who continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them. This way to life is forever shut against all the sons of Adam; for they have all transgressed it, and by this have rendered it forever impossible to obtain the righteousness of it by their own works and obedience. It is natural, however, for fallen man. Gentiles as well as Jews, to seek a righteousness by their obedience to this law, and to gratify their pride and disposition to trust and boast in themselves and their own righteousness; and numbers beyond our calculation in the Christian world have taken and are still taking this sure road to destruction, rather than to give up and renounce that *boasting*, which must be effectually destroyed in order to embrace the gospel.

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By the law of faith, is meant the gospel institution and dispensation, in which provision is made for the pardon, justification and salvation of sinners who are under the condemnation and curse of the law; not by any works of righteousness which they have done or can do, to take off the curse of the law, or to recommend themselves to this favour and blessing, but purely on the account of the atonement, righteousness and worthiness of Christ, in which they become interested so as to avail, on their behalf, to deliver from all the evil they deserve, and procure all the good they want, by *faith* in him, or believing on his name.

It being of great importance that all should have right and clear conceptions of this subject, it is proper and useful to give a more particular description of these two laws, the law of works and the law of faith. This may be done to the best advantage, perhaps, by considering wherein they agree with each other, and in what respects there is a difference and opposition of one to the other; and how not the former, but the latter, excludes boasting.

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First. It is to be considered and shewn wherein there is an agreement between these two laws, and what is as true of one as of the other, and is common to them both.

I. Holiness or obedience is necessarily implied and exercised in compliance with each and either of these laws, and in order to be interested in the promises and blessings which they contain.

The law of works requires perfect and persevering holiness and obedience, in order to enjoy the blessings of it. The least sin cuts a person off from all the promised good of this law, and subjects him to the curse of it, without any possible remedy by that law, as has been before observed.

And a compliance with the law of faith, or the covenant of grace, which is the same, implies holy exercise or true obedience; and this is absolutely necessary in order to be interested in the promises and blessings of this law and covenant.

That faith from which this law or covenant has its denomination, and in the exercise of which this law is complied with and fulfilled, and to which all the promises it contains are made, implies holiness of heart, and is itself a holy exercise. This being an important point, and denied by many, so much evidence of it from scripture and reason will here be produced, as it is hoped will be sufficient to establish the truth of it to the conviction of every unprejudiced mind.

That faith which discerns and believes the truth of the gospel from a view of the moral excellence and wisdom of it, and sees the character of Christ to be divinely excellent and beautiful, is not a mere speculative faith, confined to the understanding, exclusive of taste and exercise of heart, and cordial approbation. Moral excellence and beauty is not, and cannot be, the object of mere intellect, as distinguished from taste and discerning of heart; therefore a real sight of moral excellence and beauty, or loveliness, necessarily implies love of that excellence and beauty, and these cannot be distinguished or separated one from the other; for they are really one, and the same thing. Hence it is demonstrably certain, that the faith which discerns the gospel to be true and excellent, or that internal evidence which renders it most worthy of belief, implies a discerning, taste and relish of divine excellence and beauty, which is a virtuous disposition and exercise of heart; and is real holiness of heart, if there be in nature any such thing.

But that saving faith implies and essentially consists in a holy exercise of heart, in embracing the gospel as excellent and holy, and worthy of all acceptation, a cordial approbation of Christ and his character, and trusting in him, is abundantly evident from the scripture, as well as from the reason and nature of the case.

The following passages, among many others which might be mentioned, afford an undeniable proof of this.

Believing on Christ and receiving him is mentioned as one and the same. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Coming to Christ and believing on him is mentioned as the same things "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto, me and drink. He that *believeth* on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow living waters." Receiving Christ and coming to him are holy exercises of heart; for the character of Christ is so perfectly holy, that it is impossible that an unholy heart should be pleased with it; and none can cordially come to him and receive him but in the exercise of holy love to him. Christ said to the Jews, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent;" and proceeds to speak of coming to him, and eating his flesh and drinking his blood, as being the same with believ-



ing on him: [John vi. 29-58.] He said to the Jews, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you;" and then proceeds to tell them that this was the only reason why they believed not on him, and did not receive him: "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" In these words it is asserted that none can believe on him unless his heart be friendly to God and to him; and that it is impossible that any one should believe on Christ who is an impenitent enemy of God; which could not be true, if faith did not imply holy exercises of heart: [John v. 40, 44.] That faith in, Christ implies holiness of heart, and is a holy exercise, is asserted by Christ in his discourse with Nicodemus; [John iii. 18-21:] "He that believeth on the Son is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil; for every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doth truth cometh to the light." If every one that doth evil, hateth the light, and will not come to it, and loves darkness rather than light, is condemned, and he that believeth on Christ is not condemned; then believing is coming to the light, and loving it, or receiving the truth in the love of it, and doing the truth, or conforming to and practising it, in which holiness consists. Surely nothing can be plainer and more strongly asserted than this is in these words.

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Believing on Christ is commanded as a duty, and therefore must be an exercise of the heart, and an holy exercise; for nothing can be the subject of command but the heart or will, and nothing was ever commanded by God but holiness, and nothing else can be duty. Christ preached, saying, "Repent and *believe the gospel*." He said to his disciples, "Ye believe in God, *believe also in me*." He said to the Jews, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. The apostle John says, "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Therefore believing on Christ is called "*the obedience of faith*," and obeying Christ is the same with believing on him. "And being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation to all them that *obey* him." The apostle Paul observes, that the just *lives* by his faith; and says, "I *live* by the faith of the Son of God." If faith was that by which he lived, it was his spiritual, Christian life, which certainly is Christian holiness. He therefore says, "Faith worketh by love." Love is the sum of true holiness, but this is the efficacious, operative nature and life of faith, so that the faith is wholly dead and inactive, the life and active nature of which is not love.

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The apostle Paul says, "Abraham was strong in faith, giving glory to God." If faith be not friendly to God, to the divine character, it does not, it cannot, give any glory to God, however strong it may be; but friendship to God is true love to God, and is a holy exercise of heart. Accordingly the apostle James, speaking of Abraham believing God, says, "By this he obtained the character of the friend of God." If there were no love or holiness in saving faith, then an impenitent enemy of God might have as much of it, and be as strong in faith,

as Abraham or any other man, and that too without any true discerning or sight of the true character of Christ, and spiritual things. "For every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light;" which is true of every impenitent, unregenerate person. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Therefore, whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, or has saving faith, is born of God; has a new and holy heart given him of God; for with such a heart the spiritual man discerneth spiritual things, and believeth unto righteousness.

Much more evidence might be produced from scripture to prove that saving faith is real gospel holiness; but as what has already been said on this point does make it sufficiently clear, it is needless to add any more proof that, according to the law of faith, holiness is as necessary in order to an interest in the promises and blessings of it, as it is according to the law of works; which is the proportion proposed to be proved.

2. The holiness which is necessary in a compliance with the law of works and the law of faith, consists in conformity to the same law or rule of duty. It is therefore the same kind of holiness, as there is but one law and rule of holiness. All holiness consists in love to God and our neighbours, which, though expressed in different words, and exercised in a different manner and circumstances, and to answer different purposes, yet it is essentially one and the same thing, and is conformity and obedience to the same law.

Secondly. It is to be considered wherein these two laws differ, and are opposed to each other.

This may be stated and explained in the following particulars.

1. According to the law of works, the perfectly holy and obedient offer to God their holiness and works of obedience as the price of the favour and acceptance of God, and the reason of their having his approbation and rewards, and God accepts and rewards them out of respect to their obedience and good works, as a testimony of his love of holiness, and pleasure in their obedience to him. Thus the holy angels were justified by their works. Their perfect holiness and obedience was the price of the favour they obtained of God. They trusted in their own righteousness to recommend them to God's acceptance, and the benefits of justification and eternal life; and, in bestowing these upon them, God testified his approbation of their character and works.

The law of faith is directly the reverse of this. It opens a way for the pardon, justification and eternal life of sinners, who have fallen under the curse of the law, and are forever cut off from a possibility of being justified by the law of works. According to the law of faith, sinners are pardoned and justified by the atonement, righteousness and merit of Jesus Christ, and the holiness which they exercise is so far from recommending them to the least favour On account of their moral worth and excellence, that it wholly consists in what is implied in *receiving* these blessings and all they want as free gift to the infinitely guilty and

ill-deserving, without money or price, from the hands of an infinitely gracious and bountiful benefactor.

By faith the sinner comes to Christ for all he wants, sensible that by sin he has undone himself, and may justly be cast off by God into eternal destruction; he confesses his sins and ill desert, and heartily approves of the law of God, which condemns and curses him, as just, good and excellent, worthy to be maintained and honoured. He highly approves of the character of Christ, in seeking and promoting the honour of God, by vindicating and honouring the law which sinners had transgressed and trampled under foot, by suffering the curse of it himself, in dying on the cross, and obeying it perfectly. He is pleased with the way of salvation by Christ, in which the sinner is humbled and saved by free grace, and not by works of righteousness which he has done or can do; and he is greatly pleased with the deliverance from all sin, and that perfect holiness which Christ will bestow on all who believe in him; and he is satisfied with that heaven and happiness, that glorious immortality, which Christ has brought to light, and will cause all believers fully and eternally to possess, as his purchase and free gift to them, though in themselves infinitely unworthy and ill-deserving. Thus the believer comes to Christ as the apostle Paul did, desiring not to be found in his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

This is the great, capital and most striking difference and opposition between the law of works and the law of faith, which, it is presumed, will be clearly understood by every judicious, attentive person, and appear to be of great importance to be made and always kept in mind.

It may be useful, however, to some, farther to explain and illustrate this interesting and important point by the parable of the elder son and the prodigal. The latter having rendered himself guilty, odious and wretched, by leaving his father's house, and foolish conduct, when his eyes were opened, and he saw how guilty, wretched and undone he was, and that all he wanted for his relief was to be had in his father's house, he determined to go and cast himself upon the goodness and mercy of his father, confessing his folly and sin in abusing his father and leaving his house, and his utter unworthiness of the least favour. In this, and in receiving all he wanted from the free, undeserved kindness of his parent, was exercised and expressed as real love to him and his family, as his elder brother had done, if he were as good and obedient as he represented himself to be. The latter recommended himself to his father's approbation and favour by his constant obedience and good deeds: the prodigal was covered with shameful guilt, unworthiness and ill desert, and humbly and gladly receives all that is bestowed upon him as a free gift to an unworthy creature, who might justly have been left to perish without the least relief, having nothing to recommend him to favour, but every thing to the contrary. The one brings and offers his works of obedience as the reason why he should be favoured and rewarded, or as the price by which he had purchased the blessings



he desired and expected; the other has nothing but shame, guilt and wretchedness, and seeks and accepts of his father's kindness in receiving him to his favour, and all the privileges, enjoyments and honours of his family, as a free gift to a most ill-deserving son, who could make no compensation for the injury he had done. But in his friendly thought he had of his father, in his returning hence to him, confessing his sin and unworthiness of any favour, and cordial acceptance of offered mercy, and gladly coming into his father's house and family, he exercised as real love and friendship to his parent and his family, and to the laws, business and enjoyments of his house, as did the elder son: and yet their love and friendship was exercised and expressed in very different and opposite ways, according to their different and opposite state and circumstances.

But the difference and opposition between these two laws of works and faith in other respects, which are implied in or do arise from that already mentioned, though not so great and important, yet must be noticed, as necessary in order fully to understand the subject to which we are attending.

2. None can be justified and obtain eternal life by the law of works, unless he is perfectly obedient and holy, without the least sin or defect.

But by the law of faith the least degree of holiness exercised by a sinner, in believing in Christ, and coming to him, and trusting in him for pardon and salvation, obtains justification and the promise of eternal life, while he is yet attended with a great degree of unholiness and sin. The reason of this difference is, because by the law of works a creature is justified by his own works or holiness, which therefore must be perfect; for by the least sin he falls under the curse of the law, and can never after obtain any blessing by it: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But by the law of faith the sinner is not justified by his own works or holiness, but wholly by the merit and righteousness of Christ. The least exercise of holiness by which a sinner accepts of Christ offering himself to him, and comes to him for pardon, righteousness and complete redemption, interests him in all the blessings Christ has obtained for sinners, and in all the promises of the covenant of grace. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him who sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life."

This leads to observe another difference between these two laws.

3. By the law of works a creature cannot be justified until he has persevered in perfect obedience to the end of the time of his probation: but by the law of faith the sinner is justified, and interested in all the promises of the gospel, and made an heir of eternal life, upon the *first act* of faith in Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; he shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life." Saving faith is indeed a persevering faith, so that he who once believes will continue to believe to the end of life. His faith

shall never fail; not because it is in its own nature a persevering faith, or from the power and sufficiency of the believer, but because God has promised, in the covenant of grace, that he who once believes, to whom he has given faith to lay hold of and embrace this covenant by believing on Christ, shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. The first act of faith being in this sense and manner a persevering faith, the promise is made to believing, even the very first act of it, and it is proper that this should bring into a state of justification, and give a title to eternal life, as the first act: of faith is the beginning of an everlasting union to Christ, in whom the believer has everlasting righteousness and strength.

4. Though the holiness of the law of works and the law of faith be the same in nature and kind, consisting in obedience to the same, and conformable to the revealed will of God; yet, owing to the state and circumstances of the sinner, and the different way and manner of obtaining justification by the exercise of holiness, which has been described, there is a real and great, though circumstantial, difference in the exercise of the same holiness. The sinner, infinitely guilty, ill-deserving and wretched, exercises his love to God and his law, and to Christ the mediator, in coming to and trusting in Christ, and receiving from him deliverance from the infinite evil he deserves, and from all sin, and accepting of all the good he wants and is capable of enjoying to all eternity, as a free, undeserved gift. He has a greater sense of the infinite goodness and free grace of God, and feels more dependent on this, and more indebted to God, and under greater obligations to him, than the holy angels who have never sinned can; and consequently the redeemed exercise a greater degree of humility, and a more ardent and sweet love of gratitude, and render a higher tribute of praise to God, their Redeemer and Saviour, than they are capable of who have never sinned. Therefore the redeemed from among men are represented as singing a new song before the throne of God, which none but they could learn.

Thirdly. It is to be considered how and why all boasting is excluded by the law of faith, as it has been explained.

It is not implied in this, that the law of works, when rightly understood and perfectly obeyed, affords any ground of boasting in a bad sense, or of sinful boasting, which is meant here. The holy angels, who are justified, and have obtained the reward of eternal life by the law of works, have no ground for boasting. They have no pride, and do not glory in themselves, in their own obedience and works, but in the Lord, in his munificence and glorious character. But this law of works is not suited to the sinner, to obtain justification and life by it; for he has fallen under the curse of it, and is forever excluded from the righteousness of it in his own person; and to suppose a sinner can be justified by any obedience or works he can perform, is to let him infinitely higher than the place and state he is in, and to dishonour and degrade the law; and for a sinner to attempt this, is a most daring instance of pride and self-confident boasting. And were it possible that a sinner could obtain the favour of God, and justification, by any obedience or holiness of his own, and out of respect: to the worth

and amiableness of that, this would please and flatter his pride, and nothing could prevent his haughty boasting of himself and his own good works. And this suits the heart of proud man; he naturally seeks to be justified by his own works, if he seeks it at all, that he may have something to boast of, by recommending himself to the favour of God by his own good deeds, being ignorant of himself, of his own character, and of God and his law.

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Thus the Jews rejected the law of faith, and followed after righteousness, and obtained it not, because they fought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. They, being ignorant of God's righteousness, went about, or attempted, to establish their own righteousness. And many thousands and millions of Gentiles in the Christian world have stumbled at that Humbling Hone, the law of faith, which excludes boasting, and have fought and are now seeking to be saved by the law of works; how many millions none can tell! And perhaps there is not, nor ever has been, one of the sons or daughters of Adam who has enjoyed the light of divine revelation, and has in any measure or way sought to be saved, who has not in a greater or less degree made this wicked and dangerous attempt. Happy are they who have been cured of boasting by embracing the law of faith.

What has been said in describing the law of faith is sufficient to show that it excludes all boasting. The sinner in this way is received to favour, is justified and saved, not on account of any works he has done, or ever will do, and is not recommended to favour by any worthiness or holiness he has, but is considered as in himself, as poor and naked, wretched and miserable, infinitely guilty, and deserving to be cast into hell forever, and all the favour he receives is a free, undeserved gift and bounty, yea, bounty to the most ill-deserving. Where is boasting then? What has he to boast of but guilt, ill-desert, poverty and wretchedness?

And all this is not only true, and he is viewed in this light by God, agreeable to his holy law; but the sinner is made to feel and acknowledge this, and cannot believe on Christ and come to him by faith, unless he has a clear conviction of his own vile, odious character, and feels that he has no worthiness to recommend him to the least favour, but is infinitely far from it; that he is so unworthy and infinitely guilty and ill-deserving, that he may be justly hated by God, and cast into endless destruction. Thus the sinner, in complying with the law of faith, even in the first and every act of faith in Christ, humbles himself in the sight of God, while he is made in a sense to annihilate himself before God, yea, to feel that he is infinitely worse than nothing. And all his holiness, and every right exercise of mind, consists in a hearty acknowledgement of this, and thus humbling himself, and approving of the character of Christ, and the way of justification and salvation by him, which is the law of faith, and in views and exercises which are implied in this. Thus all pride and disposition to boast is counteracted and destroyed, the sinner abases himself, and rejoices to exalt free, sovereign grace, when and so far as he believes in Christ, and is pleased with the law of faith: and the more holy and obedient he is, in conforming to this law, the more humble he is, and farther

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from all disposition to boast. Thus all boasting is entirely and forever excluded by the law of faith.

SERMON XVI.

Romans iii. 27. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay; but by the law of faith.

IMPROVEMENT.

I. WE learn from what has been observed on this subject, that they make a great mistake, and have espoused a dangerous and hurtful error, who believe and assert that if faith or believing in Christ, in order to justification, is a virtuous or holy act, or implies any real goodness, then the sinner has something to recommend himself, which is of real worth, of which he has reason to boast, and must be acceptable to God; and therefore has no need of the merits of Christ and free grace in order to be justified. They therefore contend that to assert that a sinner must exercise any holiness previous to his justification, and in order to it, and that faith is a holy act, is entirely to subvert the gospel, and lays a foundation for boasting, and flatters the pride of man. Of these there have been, and now are, not a few in all parts of the protestant world.

What has been said on this subject serves to show how unreasonable and contrary to the truth this notion is, and the evil tendency of it. But it may be useful and of importance to review some things which have been mentioned in the preceding discourse, by which the error and absurdity of this opinion will be abundantly exposed and confuted.

I. The sinner is under the curse of the holy, righteous and good law of God, which pronounces him to be a hateful, accursed creature, deserving to lie under the divine displeasure and wrath forever. Every transgressor of this law is under this curse and in this state, whatever holy obedience he had performed, and how long soever he had continued perfectly holy before his sin. His transgression, even one instance of it, totally obliterates and annihilates his preceding holiness, so that it cannot have the least influence to prevent the curse coming upon him, or alleviate it in any degree; but he is as odious and guilty, and as much the object of God's displeasure for his transgression, as if his previous holiness never had existence, which cannot be reckoned in his favour in any respect or degree, without counteracting the law of God, and setting it aside in favour of the sinner, who by it is cursed. And it is the same with regard to any future holiness and obedience. If the sinner repent and turn to obedience, though ever so perfect and long continued, this would not in the least degree atone for the sin of which he had been guilty, or remove the curse which the law has fixed upon him for his sin; and therefore could not be more acceptable to God than if he had not obeyed, or than his obedience before he sinned, and cannot be the reason and ground of his receiving any favour from God, as after obedience is as much obliterated and rendered of no avail to recommend to any favour, by his sin, as his obedience before he sinned, it



being equally contrary to the law, which pronounces him accursed, to regard and accept or show any favour for his after obedience, as for the former, and it cannot be done without vacating and setting it aside, as not worthy of regard.

This is the plain law of God, which curses every one who continueth not to obey it in all things which it requires, and holds him under this curse, notwithstanding all the obedience he had paid to it before he sinned, or any obedience after that. The law affords no remedy or help, or grants any thing better than what is contained in the curse. This is the law of God. It is his voice to all his creatures who are moral agents. It is the language of his heart, which he will never counteract or contradict, in words or conduct. He views the sinner in the light in which his law sets him, and will treat him accordingly so long as he remains under the curse of it, and is not delivered from it in a way which is perfectly consistent with it, and in which as much regard is paid to it, as if the sinner remained under the curse of it forever.

Therefore, whatever repentance and approbation of the law which curses him, and love to God, the sinner exercises before he is delivered from the curse by actually coming to Christ: and believing on him, does not in any degree remove his guilt, or render him less deserving of the curse, and cannot recommend him to the least favour; but he is in the sight of God as much accursed and the object: of his displeasure, and in this sense as truly ungodly, as he was before, and as if he had no such exercises of love and repentance, as they cannot be reckoned in his favour, so as in the least to remove the curse. And whatever repentance, and love to God and his law, or holiness, is necessary in order to come to Christ, and is exercised in coming to him and believing on him, this cannot, in itself considered, recommend the sinner to favour, or render him less unworthy or less accursed; but as by this the sinner lays hold of Christ, and is united to him, he comes within the reach of his merit and worthiness, so as by him who has been made a curse he may consistent with the law be delivered from the curse of it, and obtain all the favour which he wants. And being thus by Christ delivered from the curse of the law, and pardoned and justified by virtue of his atonement and righteousness, his person and his holy exercises of faith and love become acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, to whom he is united, God may now be just, and maintain and honour his righteous law, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus, he being made accepted in his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased.⁵

5 This serves to fix the true and plain meaning of the Apostle's words, [*Rom. iv. 4, 5.*] "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt: but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness." By him *that worketh* is meant, him who by his works of obedience recommends himself to favour, and the reward of eternal life, and in this sense earns the reward by the price of his obedience, which no creature can do, except those who are perfectly innocent and holy, as has been observed in explaining the law of works. He who worketh not is the sinner, who neither has nor can have any works to recommend to the least favour; who is convinced of this, and makes no attempt to do any

The reason of all this—why the sinner’s holiness before or after he has once sinned cannot be acceptable and reckoned in his favour, or in any degree remove the curse of the law, and whatever holiness he may exercise previous to his union to Christ, and is necessary in order to his coming to Christ, and actually forming this vital union to him, cannot render him acceptable to God, or less unworthy and accursed, and why he is totally unacceptable, as ungodly and cursed by God, till he is actually united to Christ, and can be accepted only in the worthiness of this beloved Son of God—the reason of this is plain and easy to be seen.

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The transgression of the law of God in the least single instance is rebellion against a Being infinitely great, powerful, wise, just and good, who has absolute and unlimited right and authority to command and give law to his creatures; they are therefore under infinite obligation to perfect obedience; and consequently a violation of this obligation can be no less than an infinite crime, or an infinite moral evil. Besides, he who rebels against God, has a disposition and will to dethrone him, and put an end to his law, authority and moral government, and introduce infinite confusion and misery through the whole universe; and his conduct tends to his, and would actually effect it were it possible, and were it not counteracted and prevented. Every sin therefore must be an infinite evil, in the nature and tendency of it. There is no moral truth more demonstrably clear and certain than this; and

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thing in this view and to this end; who feels that he is justly accursed, and under the displeasure of God, and deserves nothing better than everlasting destruction, being an ungodly rebel against God, and wholly unrighteous. As such he looks to Christ, and believeth on him, and cordially receives him and trusts in him for righteousness, who pardons and justifieth such unrighteous, ungodly, infinitely guilty, hell-deserving sinners as he feels and confesses himself to be. They who hold the tenet to which the inference under consideration is opposed, lay much stress upon the word *ungodly* in this passage, as if it denoted a sinner altogether destitute of the least friendly disposition towards God and Christ, being an impenitent enemy to God. But though such are often meant in the scripture by the ungodly, yet it does not follow that precisely this idea is always to be denoted by this word. It has been shewn in what sense every unpardoned, unjustified sinner is properly denominated ungodly, and this appears to be the sense in which the Apostle uses it, from the connection and context. And understanding it as they do, makes the Apostle to say that a sinner, with a hard, impenitent heart, full of enmity to God and to Christ, and the way of salvation by him, and justification by free grace, may and does believe on Christ, receive and trust in him for justification and salvation, which he at the same time abhors with his whole heart! This is to make him assert, with themselves, that which is most absurd and absolutely impossible. It is therefore most certain the Apostle did not use this word here in the sense which they put upon it, but in a sense perfectly agreeable to the subject: of which he treats, and the point he is proving, which is naturally and easily understood by the unprejudiced and discerning i being consistent with himself, with other scripture, and with the clearest reason.

this is a truth on which many other moral truths depend, which relate to the law of God and his moral government, as we shall see.⁶

Sin being thus an infinite moral evil, no temporary sufferings of the sinner, or of any mere creature, can make the least degree of atonement for it, so as in any measure to alleviate or deliver him from the curse of the law. And it is equally certain that no holiness of a mere creature can avail to recommend him who has once sinned to the least favour. Though the sinner had been perfectly obedient and holy a thousand years before he sinned, this is but a finite moral good, and therefore the infinite moral evil of which he has been guilty infinitely overbalances his finite holiness, so that it weighs nothing in the opposite scale, and does no more to lighten or take off the curse, than if it never had existence. And this is equally true of any obedience which the sinner should perform after he had once sinned, as has already been observed: it has no tendency to take off the curse, and cannot recommend him to any favour, or be the least ground or reason of his being considered and treated any better or otherwise than as one who is justly cursed, unworthy of any favour, and deserving all the evils of the curse. And therefore it would be unreasonable, and acting contrary to the law, to consider and treat him otherwise, or shew him any favour out of respect to his obedience.

Thus it appears certain, that it is impossible that the holiness of a creature who has once sinned, should be accepted as a reason of his having any favour, and being in any respect delivered from the curse of the law, as the evil of his sin infinitely outweighs all the moral good of which he is capable, and sinks it into nothing, so as to render it wholly unacceptable, consistent with the divine law, were it true that such obedience or moral good might take off the curse of the law, and render the sinner acceptable, did it overbalance, or were it equal to, the evil of his sin. But even this is not true. The curse of the law denounces infinite natural evil as the punishment which sin deserves, and therefore cannot be taken off or removed by any thing but *suffering*. No degree of obedience or moral good, be it ever so much or so great, can make any atonement for one the least sin, so as to deliver the sinner from the curse. Therefore Christ himself was made a curse, that by suffering the evil of the curse, the just *suffering* for the unjust, he might deliver the sinner who believes in him from the curse, and open the way for him to come to God with acceptance.

From all this it appears that the opinion under consideration, that, if the sinner is recovered to any degree of holiness antecedent to his justification by the merit and righteous-

6 The penalty threatened in the law of God to every transgression, which is endless punishment, has its foundation on the infinite evil of sin, and is a demonstration that it is an evil of such magnitude: for, if sin were not infinitely criminal, it would not deserve an infinite punishment, nor would it be threatened. Christ explains the meaning of the curie or penalty of the law, when he says, "Depart *ye cursed* into everlasting fire." They who deny the infinite evil of sin, cannot vindicate or understand the divine law, or the gospel, which is founded upon it.

ness of Christ, and in order to it, he has whereof to glory, and has a righteousness of his own which is acceptable to God, so that he stands in no need of the righteousness of Christ in order to be justified; that this opinion is a great and dangerous error, most contrary to the reason and nature of things, and the holy law of God, and really perverts and makes void both law and gospel. Therefore they who hold and persist in this error are in truth and in a high degree *Antinomians*, as their doctrine makes the law wholly void in the most important and essential branch of it. And their doctrine on this point is totally *Antichristian*. For the law is in such a sense the foundation of the gospel, that if the former be perverted and made void, the latter becomes unintelligible and useless. If sinners may be delivered from the curse of the law, and obtain favour and; unification, by becoming in any degree holy and obedient, then they may be saved without Christ and the gospel. "If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law; and if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." [*Gal. ii. 21, iii. 21.*]

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We hope that men, some of them at least, who hold and propagate these antinomian and antichristian doctrines in theory, have better hearts than heads, and love and embrace the truth in the former, while they believe that which is gross and dangerous error with the latter,

2. Were the preceding observations not true, which is indeed an impossible supposition, and could the sinner, on becoming perfectly holy and obedient, be delivered from the curse of the law, and admitted to the acceptance and favour of God, and his past sin not be remembered against him, out of respect to his present holiness, consistent with the law of God, yet this does not touch the case of a sinner, who only exercises so much of a right disposition as is necessarily implied in approving of the character and law of God, and of Christ, and in coming to him for pardon, justification and life. He may exercise such a degree of holiness consistent with his having much more sin than holiness at the same time, which is undoubtedly true of every sinner who embraces the gospel, and of every Christian as long as he lives in this world. A sinner who becomes friendly to God, and embraces the gospel, has such low and sinfully deficient exercises of love, and so much of that which is contrary, and positive wickedness, that, aside from his guilt for former sins, his present character, considered in itself, has much more evil than good, and, on the whole, is worse than nothing, and cannot be an object of the complacency and favour of God, but rather of his displeasure and curse, and he stands in as much need of favour and justification by free grace through the righteousness of Christ, as if he had no holiness, and were altogether an enemy to God: for he has no money or price to purchase this favour, and is continually running more in debt. And to plead his good character as proper to recommend him to the least favour, would be highly displeasing to God, and must be so to every good man, whether done by the sinner himself, or any other person.

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They who make the objection under consideration, who think themselves Christians, and that they do exercise holiness, may be asked, whether they think this has railed them above the need of free grace and justification by the righteousness of Christ, or at least do not stand in so much need of it as they should if they had no degree of holiness. If they answer in the affirmative, they are not such Christians as was the apostle Paul. If they answer in the negative, and say that they are as dependent on the righteousness of Christ for justification and all favour as if they were wholly unholy, and they expect to be saved by free grace as much as they could be if they could be saved in their sins without any holiness, that they are far from having any thing to boast of, and the more conformed they are to God in holiness, or the more they see God and love him, the more they are disposed to abase and humble themselves before him, and feel their need of such a Saviour as Jesus Christ; then by this confession they entirely give up their objection, and grant that whatever holiness the sinner may exercise previous to his justification, and in his coming to Christ for it, this does not make him the more deserving of favour, nor does he stand in less need of justification by free grace through the worthiness of Christ; and it will be so far from disposing him to be proud, and boast, that it will bring him to humble himself at the foot of sovereign, free grace, which humility will increase as he shall grow in grace, and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But further to confute, if that be possible, and show how false and absurd the tenet is which we are opposing, it must be observed,

3. The holiness which the sinner exercises in believing on Christ and coming to him for all he wants, is so far from being the ground of pride and boasting, or promoting and encouraging this, that it directly counteracts and destroys such a disposition. The sinner's heart is naturally full of pride, and a disposition which is gratified in self exaltation and boasting; and nothing can cure him of this reigning disposition, and in any degree destroy his pride, but a change of heart by the Spirit of God, by which pride receives a deadly wound, and he is disposed to humble himself in the sight of God. And the grace he hereby receives and exercises consists in discerning and confessing his sinful, lost state, that the law he has transgressed is just and good, that he is infinitely vile and ill deserving, that God may justly send him to endless destruction at any time, that he has nothing that can deserve or recommend him to the least favour, but every thing in every respect infinitely to the contrary: and in this view and sense of his own character he comes to Christ as a poor, infinitely guilty and wretched sinner, and begs for mercy, not for his own sake, or for any thing he has done or ever shall do, but for the sake of what Christ has suffered and done, pleased and hoping to be pardoned and received to favour by free, undeserved grace through Jesus Christ, desiring forever to be abased and humbled, and that the most undeserved, sovereign grace may be exalted and honoured in his salvation.



Where is pride and boasting then? It is effectually excluded and destroyed, by the exercise of that grace and holiness by which the sinner approves of the character and law of God, condemns himself as justly deserving eternal misery and nothing better, and looks to Christ for undeserved, free pardon and favour to an infinitely guilty, odious, undeserving, wretched beggar. He who can believe that such exercises, which are according to the law of faith, are agreeable to the pride of man, and will lead to boasting, may with as good reason believe that humility is pride, and self abasement is self exaltation.

And besides all this which has been now said to confute this error, it must be observed, that they who exclude all holiness from saving faith, by which the sinner is justified, left if it were a holy exercise he would have reason to boast as having something of his own to recommend himself, do suppose that a proud, impenitent enemy to God and his law, may see the truth, wisdom and goodness of the gospel, and approve of the character of Christ, and the way of salvation by him, which supposition is as unreasonable and absurd, and as contrary to the holy scripture, as can be made or conceived. And it is indeed most dishonourable to Christ and the gospel, as if his character was such that a wicked man, an impenitent enemy of God, might discern the truth and excellency of it, and heartily approve and be pleased with it! How contrary is this to the declaration of Christ and his Apostle! The former says, "He that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light." And the latter, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."⁷

II. From this subject it appears, that saving faith, by which the just do live, is a very different thing from what many have imagined and taught.

Saving faith consists in the discerning and belief of the truths of the gospel, and cordial approbation of them, and conformity to them, which is peculiar to a renewed, wise and understanding heart. It implies the whole of evangelical holiness, in the exercise of which men believe on Christ, receive him and cleave to him with purpose of heart, and walk in

⁷ The importance that this gross error, which is so unscriptural and absurd, and leads to so many hurtful conceptions of the law of faith, should be wholly discarded, has been the motive to attempt thus to expose and confute it. Though it has been embraced by many in the protestant world, and there are those who at this day contend for it, yet it is hoped that an effectual stop will be put to the continuance and spread of it. If they who have imbibed it, and are disposed zealously to defend it, should not be convinced of their mistake, yet they who have not exploded, but have been rather favourable towards it and the doctrines which imply it, through want of conviction of those truths by which it may be made to appear contrary to scripture, and a dangerous error, may, by attending to what has here been said, be led to see their mistake, and renounce it, with proper concern and zeal to suppress it, and vindicate the opposite truth. And they who are coming on the stage, and have not yet formed any opinion on this point, may be prevented imbibing this error, so that it may die with those who now embrace it, and cannot be convinced of their error, and not be handed down to posterity.

him, and by which he dwells in their hearts. It is the life of a Christian, and is essential to all his holiness, and cannot be distinguished from it; for it all consists in fighting the sight of faith, by which he lays hold of eternal life.

Therefore the faith by which sinners are justified does not consist in mere speculation, or conviction and judgment and reason, considered as distinct from the heart and the exercises of that, or of the will and affections; which has been the opinion of many. It is presumed enough has been said fully to confute this notion.

Nor does saving faith consist in the sinner's believing and persuasion that he is justified, that Christ died for him, is his, so that he shall certainly be saved. This belief an impenitent enemy to Christ may entertain, and yet continue as impenitent and unholy as he was before. Besides, there is no foundation for such a persuasion or belief, antecedent to the exercise of saving faith, by and in consequence of which a sinner is justified; but it is perfect delusion and falsehood. No such thing is revealed in the Bible, that a sinner is justified before he believes in Christ, cordially receives him, and is reconciled to God; but the contrary; that he is condemned, and under the wrath of God. Therefore a belief that his sins are pardoned, and that God loves him, antecedent to his having an interest in Christ by cordially receiving him, is a delusion, and is a persuasion grounded entirely on a false suggestion, either from his own heart, or the father of lies.

It has been said, and published, in vindication of this sort of faith, that men must believe that they are justified, &c. that by their believing it may become true, according to their faith; and therefore they must believe without any evidence of the truth of it, either from scripture, sense or reason, that by their so believing it may become true. And indeed there is no other way to adhere to this notion of faith, but by embracing this mass of absurdity and nonsense.

Volumes have been written in this century by men in high repute for piety, in which this notion of faith rung through the whole; and they have been, and still are, read by multitudes with high approbation. Without calling in question the piety of the authors or their admirers, many, if not most of whom probably do not critically attend to their notion of faith, but to the good things which they have written; there is sufficient warrant to say that this notion of faith is not only most contrary to the scriptures, but as unintelligible, and attended with as many absurdities, as any religious tenet that was ever thought of and propagated by Mahomet, the Man of Sin, or any one else.

This notion of faith is not only in itself unscriptural and most absurd, but, considered in the tendency of it, and that with which it is connected, the dangerous and destructive consequence of it will appear. They who entertain this notion of faith, suppose that the impenitent enemy of God, upon believing that God loves him, that his sins are pardoned, &c. does begin to repent and love God, &c. because he is persuaded that God loves him and will save him; that by this belief, and under this persuasion, the sinner is converted, and becomes



a true friend of God, and a real Christian. They say that a sinner cannot be brought to love God, until he first sees or believes that God loves him, or is in some manner and degree become propitious to him; that a fight and real belief of this is effectual to induce him to love God, and live a holy life. This makes his conversion and all his love and holiness to be nothing but selfishness and pride; and such a conversion does not imply any change of heart for the better, but for the worse, and all his supposed holiness is nothing but selfishness and sin, which the world of men may practise, and continue real enemies to the true character of God. The Lord Jesus Christ has decided this in the most plain and express words: "If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them."

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The Christian, *after* he has believed and embraced the gospel, and is justified, may, on reflecting on his own state and exercises, have good evidence that he does love Christ, and is a true believer; and therefore that he is justified and shall be saved; this consequently he may believe, and in this way obtain the "assurance of hope." But this is not saving faith, or any part of it; for saving faith must take place *before* he is justified, and there must be ground of evidence that he has saving faith, *before* he can have any reason to believe that he is in a state of justification, and shall be saved.⁸

III. From the view we have had of the law of faith we may see the reason why men are naturally opposed to the gospel, and refuse to comply with it, viz. because holiness is necessarily implied in an approbation of it and cordially embracing it. Therefore faith is the gift of God. In order to believe on Christ, a man must be born again of the Spirit of God, have a new heart given to him, and be made a new creature, friendly to true holiness. This is therefore abundantly asserted in the scriptures. It will be sufficient here to refer to the words of the apostle John: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God."

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If the gospel were an institution which might be approved of, believed and truly embraced, by an unholy heart, an unregenerate man; it would not be a holy institution, and therefore could not be from God. Jesus Christ is a holy Saviour; holiness is essential to every part of his character, to all his words and works. Salvation by him is a holy salvation, and the way of salvation is wise and holy in every view of it. It is therefore impossible that an unholy heart should come near to this Saviour with the least inclination towards him, and

8 This subject is more largely and very particularly considered by Dr. *Bellamy* in his "Theron, Paulinus, and Aspasio; or, Letters and Dialogues, upon the Nature of Love to God, Faith in Christ, and Assurance of Eternal Life," and in his "Essay on the Nature and Glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ;" which books may be recommended to all who desire to be well acquainted with the subject, and form their judgment according to the truth. This subject is also discussed by President *Edwards*, in his "Discourses on Justification by Faith alone." and by the author in his "System of Doctrines contained in Divine Revelation," vol. ii. chap. iv. section vi., "Concerning Saving Faith;" and section xi., "Concerning Believers' Assurance of Salvation."

the way of salvation by him; but such an heart must hate him, and choose to keep at a distance from him and avoid him; and can be no more reconciled to him and the gospel, than to the holy law of God.

How degrading and dishonourable to Christ and the gospel then, and how unreasonable and absurd, is their notion, who hold that the gospel is suited to please and win the heart of an unregenerate man, so that while he hates God's holy law, he with an unholy heart embraces the gospel, and in this way and by this means his heart is changed, and he becomes friendly to God and his holy law! When shall the professed friends of the gospel cease to dishonour and pervert it, in order to suit it to the taste and inclination of an unholy heart?

IV. We hence learn that all the interests of true virtue and holiness are as much and as well secured and promoted by the law of faith, as they are or can be by the law of works.

Many have thought that the doctrine of justification by faith, through the atonement and merit of Christ, not being in the least recommended to this favour by any works or holiness of our own, is a licentious doctrine, and tends to influence men to neglect a holy life, and give themselves to sloth and sin. But this has been wholly owing to their ignorance of the subject.

According to the law of faith, true holiness is as necessary in order to justification, as if the sinner were justified by the merit of his works, though in a different way and for a different reason, as has been shewn. Faith itself, by which the sinner receives Christ, and renounces all dependence on his own holiness to recommend him to the least favour, and relies on free, undeserved grace for the justification of one infinitely unworthy and ill-deserving; this faith itself is a holy exercise, as has been proved; and men cannot live by faith but by living an holy life.

As real holiness in love to the character of God and his law is exercised in approving of the character of Christ, and coming to him and trusting in him for pardon, justification and eternal life, as can be in obeying the law of God, as the price of the divine favour, according to the law of works. Holiness is as really and necessarily exercised in applying to God as an infinitely gracious and bountiful benefactor; and gratefully receiving of him infinite favour and blessings as a free gift to the infinitely guilty and ill-deserving, as is or can be exercised in obedience to his authority and law as a recommendation to and enjoyment of his favour and blessing.

And as obedience and holiness is as necessary according to the law of faith, as it is according to the law of works, in order to justification and eternal life; so there is not merely as much, but much greater, encouragement to practise it, and the obligations and motives to the exercise of holiness, in love to God and man, are greatly increased, and rendered unspeakably greater and stronger, by the law of faith.

How wholly groundless and unreasonable, and contrary to truth, fact and experience, is the objection to the law of faith, according to which "a man is justified by faith, without

the deeds of the law,” or not by the law of works, that this renders unnecessary, and is a discouragement to holiness and good works, and encourages licentiousness and sin!

V. This subject opens an easy and plain way, and perhaps the only satisfactory and true way, to reconcile the two apostles, Paul and James, in what they say of that by which sinners are justified. St. Paul has said, “Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the, deeds of the law; knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” St. James has said, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” It has been rashly thought by some that the apostles in these words expressly contradict each other; but their perfect consistence and agreement with each other will appear only by observing the different sense in which they use the word *works*, which is evident by all they say on the point.

Paul expressly defines the works which he excludes from the law of faith, and sets in opposition to it. They are *the works of the law*, the same with the law of works, meaning works done in order to recommend to favour, as a price offered to purchase and merit acceptance and justification of God, as has been represented and explained. By works James means Christian holiness and obedience, which is the same with the law of faith, which has been explained. By works James means that love, in all its operations and fruits, which he says is the life and soul of faith, and without which there cannot be any true faith. His words are, “For as the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” How could he more strongly assert the holiness of laving faith, when he says that holy love, the root and essence of all Christian obedience and good works, is as much the life and active nature of a living, having faith, as the spirit is the life and activity of the body? How contrary is this to saying, as many have done, that holy love, which implies and comprehends all the obedience and good works of a Christian, is the effect and consequence of faith, and produced by faith, as the cause produces the effect!

Paul agrees with James perfectly in his description of saving faith. He says, “Faith worketh by love,” that is, Love, which is the essence of all Christian obedience, and implies all good works, is the soul and active life of faith, by which it operates, or acts and works, as the spirit is the life of the body, by which it moves and acts.

VI. This subject may be improved by those who have attended to it, as affording matter by which they may examine themselves, whether their conversion and consequent religion be true and genuine, or false and spurious.

Have you been effectually cured of a disposition to trust to your own righteousness, and renounced and become dead to the law of works, under a clear conviction that you were cursed by it, notwithstanding any thing you could do, and that you should be justly accursed forever, unless you obtained relief by the law of faith, trusting in the merit and righteousness of Christ for pardon and justification?

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And have you been led to understand and cordially to embrace the law of faith, in which you highly approved of the character of Christ, and the way of: salvation by him, condemning yourself as being so far from having or doing any thing to recommend you to God, or render you deserving, that you were infinitely guilty and ill-deserving?

Have you felt and experienced this law of faith, suited to destroy your pride, and set you at the greatest distance from boasting, and the more you understood and cordially embraced this way of salvation, the more disposed you have been to humble yourself in the sight of the Lord?

Do you know that your heart was naturally as much opposed to the gospel, as it was to the holy law of God, and that, had not God given you a new heart by regeneration, you should have continued an enemy to Christ? that the law of faith is a holy law, and that it cannot be complied with by a heart unfriendly to God and holiness? that the more you attend to and are pleased with the law of faith, the greater is your aversion from sin, and the more you long to be holy, and hunger and thirst after righteousness?

Are you desiring and looking for that evidence that you are justified and shall be saved, which arises from a consciousness that you do embrace the gospel, and have those holy exercises which imply this, or are implied in conforming to the law of faith? and do you desire no other evidence but this, that your justification may be proved only by good evidence that you are sanctified?



SERMON XVII.

WRITTEN IN THE YEAR 1789.

Eccl. iii. 14. I know that whatsoever God doth, it shall be forever: nothing can he put to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God doth it, that men should fear before him.

WE may be sure that the Infinitely Great, Eternal, Omniscent Being, who is the First and the Last, the Almighty, *does nothing* for an end, or with a view to accomplish any design, which is temporary, and shall wholly cease and come to nothing, so that every thing which remains shall, in all respects, be just as it would have been *had he not done it*. For this would be infinitely unworthy of such a Being, infinitely beneath him, and unbecoming his character: it would be really more unbecoming and trifling, than for a man to do all he does through life for no end at all, were this possible; or for the greatest monarch on earth to spend his life in action for no higher and more important ends than those which children have in what they do. That which Chafes to exist in all its effects and consequences, so that the universe is in no respect; better or otherwise than if it had not been, is of infinitely less worth and importance, than that of which the consequence and good effect, or the end of which, is *without end*, or forever. Therefore the Infinitely Great, Wise and Good Being will do nothing but that which shall answer an end which never shall cease, so that the consequence and good effect of it shall exist forever.

If this visible world were to cease to exist, and every effect and consequence of its having existed were to cease forever, so that no end were to be answered by it but what took place during the existence of it; and no existence, or circumstance of existence, should be in any respect otherwise than if it had not existed; it would have been created, and preserved during the existence of it, in a great measure, if not altogether, in vain. It is certain no end would be answered worthy of the Infinite Creator. There would really nothing be gained by such a work; all would be lost. Therefore we may be sure that none of the works of GOD are of this kind, but every thing that he does, will, in the effect and consequence of it, exist forever, or the end to be answered by it will never cease.

The natural world which we behold, with all the works of man in it, is to come to an end, at least as to the form in which it now exists, when the end of the existence of it is answered, but that end which was designed to be accomplished by the creation and continuation of the existence of it will remain forever. The natural world, the sun, moon and stars, with this earth, and all the creatures and things contained in them, which are not capable of moral agency, and moral government—the *natural world* was created, and is upheld, for the sake of the *moral world*, and those creatures which are capable of moral government, and of conformity to God in moral exercises; as a house is built, not for its own sake, but for the sake of those who are to live in it. And when this world, having answered the end



with respect to the moral world for which it was made and preserved, shall be burnt up, the moral world, and all moral agents, will continue forever, with all the effects and consequences of the natural world, respecting the moral world, which were designed to be produced by creation and providence.



Hence it is demonstrably certain that moral agents, at least some of them; and if *some* why not all? will exist without end; for they cannot answer the end of their existence, and the end of all those works of God which he has done for their sake, if they should cease to exist: they must therefore exist forever.

It will appear evident and certain, no doubt, if duly considered, that moral government cannot be perfectly or properly exercised, unless it be endless, and consequently, unless moral agents, the only subjects of this government, continue to exist forever. This is evident from the text we are considering, and what has been observed upon it. But the evidence of this arises from another view of this point. Moral government cannot be exercised without a law pointing out and requiring the duty of moral agents, and fixing the penalty of disobedience, and maintaining and executing this law, agreeable to the requirements and sanctions of it. The punishment which a transgression of the divine law deserves is endless evil or suffering; and therefore this must be the penalty of the law of God, and must be executed on the transgressor, unless something can take place to answer the same end; therefore he upon whom this penalty is executed, must exist forever, in order to suffer the penalty of the law. And although it be not essential to the law of God, that there should be an express promise of endless life to the obedient, yet the threatening of evil to the transgressor seems to imply favour to the obedient, and is inconsistent with putting an end to their existence, and depriving them of endless happiness, which in their view, and in reality, would be an infinite *negative evil*; and therefore must be inconsistent with the wisdom and goodness of God, yea, with his distributive justice; for they deserve no evil, so long as they continue obedient. Therefore nothing but transgression can put an end to the existence and happiness of a moral agent: it hence follows that they who persevere in obedience must exist happy forever, and they who transgress must suffer evil without end; consequently every moral agent must exist forever, in order to the proper and full exercise of moral government. Therefore whatever God does respecting moral agents, (and he has respect: to these in all he does) in this sense, shall be *forever*; he has a view to an endless duration, and aims at an end which never shall cease, but must exist forever.



It has been observed, that the moral world is the end of all God's works; and that the subjects of moral government must exist forever; and that, in this sense, all that God does shall be forever. But the subjects of moral government, and all the events that immediately relate to them, do not comprehend all the moral world: God himself must be considered as included in this everlasting, moral kingdom, as the Supreme Head and Eternal King of it. And he, being infinitely greater, more important and worthy of regard than any or all

creatures, must therefore be the end of all that is done: that is, he must make himself the highest and last end, and do all *for himself*, as the scripture asserts: “The Lord hath made all things *for himself*.” The exercise, manifestation and display of his own perfections and glory must be the supreme end of all the works of God, which necessarily includes the greatest possible happiness of the obedient subjects of his moral kingdom; which therefore must be forever, or without end: for a temporary display of the Divine Glory, and the temporary happiness and glory of the moral kingdom of God, would be infinitely less than an eternal and increasing duration of these, and nothing in comparison with this. In this view, we see how whatsoever God doth is forever. His design in all he does is his own glory, in his everlasting kingdom. This is his end, and the issue of all is this, which shall have no end. The kingdom of God is an *everlasting* kingdom, and of his dominion and glory there will be no end; which is abundantly asserted in scripture, we all know. And this kingdom, glory and dominion is the end of all God’s works. Therefore every thing he doth shall be forever; it hath no end in his design, and in the effect and consequence. Nothing can be more certain than this.

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2. It is asserted in these words, that God has fixed a plan of operation, including all his works, all he doth or will do in time and to eternity; and that he is executing this plan or design in all he doth: all his works having reference to this, and being included in it. This is implied in the former particular. For if in all God doth he hath respect to that which is endless, he must have formed a design, and fixed a plan of operation, which is endless, including all he will do, and all events, to eternity. This the scripture abundantly asserts: “He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations:” [*Psal. xxxiii. 11.*] “He is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doth:” [*Job xxiii. 13.*] “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world:” [*Acts xv. 18.*] And, if we attend to the point, we cannot but know that it must be so, it being impossible that it should be otherwise; for to suppose the contrary is to suppose God is *changeable*, which is inconsistent with infinite perfection, and with his being infallible, and to be trusted in all cases. Indeed, if there were not a Being who is *unchangeable*, there would be no God. Besides, if God be infinite in power, knowledge, wisdom and goodness, which he certainly is, then he is able, and could not but fix upon a plan of operation, including all he would do, all his works of creation and providence, without end, or forever. He could not but propose an end of all his works, and lay the wisest plan to accomplish that end. Not to do this must manifest want of wisdom, or of ability, and therefore would be inconsistent with infinite power and wisdom. It is impossible he should not know what is wisest and best to be done in every instance to eternity: he is able to do it, for nothing can be in the way to prevent his doing it: and it is equally impossible he should be infinitely wise and good, and not fix upon and execute the wisest and best plan of operation. Nothing can be more evident and *certain*

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than this. Well may we join with Solomon, and say, “*We know*, that whatsoever God doth, it shall be forever.” He has proposed infinitely the best possible end, which cannot be accomplished in time, but by an everlasting series of works: he has fixed upon the wisest plan to answer this end, and all he doth has reference to this end: and the effect and consequence of all his works, for the sake of which they are done, will remain forever.

Let us now proceed to consider the following words: “Nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it.” These are part of the same sentence, and have respect to the foregoing, and assert, that nothing can be put or added to what God doth, or taken from it. In these words the following particulars are expressed or implied; which also imply each other.

1. These words contain a more strong and express declaration than the foregoing; That the divine plan of his endless operations, including every thing which he doth and will do to eternity, is unalterably fixed, so that it is impossible that any change or alteration should be made, in any respect, or in the least degree. His designs are fixed from eternity. He has determined what he will do, and what he will not do, in every instance, greater or less. And his plan admits of no alteration; nothing can be added to it, or taken from it. It has been observed, that this is abundantly asserted in scripture, and that reason teaches it must be so; and that to deny this, or ever doubt it, is to deny or doubt of the existence of a God, supreme, omnipotent, infinitely, intelligent, wise and good.

2. These words imply that all things, and every event from the greatest to the least, from the first to the last, are included in the divine plan, and are unalterably fixed by the counsel and decree of God. This must be so, unless creatures and things may exist, and events may take place, independent of God, and with which his power and operation has no concern, without the least dependence on his determination and will, and, it may be, contrary to it; which no rational man can admit, as it is absolutely impossible.

If all the works of God are known to him, which they could not be, unless he had determined and fixed what he will do; then every thing, every event which shall take place or exist, must be known, and consequently certain, and made so by the divine decree, determining what he would do. If any one event, even the least that can take place, were not fixed, but uncertain whether it will take place or not; then what God will do, so far as his works respect: that event, must be uncertain, and cannot be known or fixed. Therefore God, by determining his own works, equally determined and fixed what every creature should be and do, as the latter is necessarily included in the former. The divine will and operation has respect to, and concern with, every thing, every event, even the least that takes place; and it comes to pass and actually exists by some act of his, without which it could not take place, whether it be in the natural or moral world. The existence, the time and circumstances of the existence, of every *bird*, even the least, and the time and means of its beginning and ceasing to exist, are all fixed by what God does. Every hair of our heads, and of every head, and creature, that ever did or shall exist, is made by God. He numbers them all, and orders



every circumstance, the growth, length, bigness, life, decay and loss, or disposal, of each one. Every tree on the earth, every plant, leaf and spire of grass, he produces by his power, energy and care. He causes every drop of rain or hail, and every flake of snow, that falls, and determines the bigness, the shape and time of the falling of each one. All these are the work of God, as are innumerable others, whether greater or left. These therefore must be all fixed front eternity, by Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.

And it is equally certain that every event, and all that comes to pass in the *moral world*, depends upon the will and determination of God, and could not exist, if he determined and did nothing concerning it. Every action of moral agents, and every perception, motion and every thought which takes place in their hearts or minds, is comprehended in what God doth, and is effected by his power and operation. "The heart of the king," and consequently of all men, "is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: *he turneth it whithersoever he will.*" Every thing in the moral world, even the least motion and thought of the heart, is of unspeakably more importance than the events in the natural world, and are as much dependent on the will and operation of God; and therefore must be as much fixed and certain. And this is necessarily implied, in God's determining and fixing what he will do, so that there can be no alteration of his plan of operation; nothing put to it, or taken from it, for it comprehends *all things*, and all events, great and small, which shall take place and exist from the beginning of time, to eternity.

Thus certain is it from this text, as well as from innumerable other passages of scripture, and from the reason and nature of things, that God has, by determining what he would do, necessarily "foreordained *whatsoever comes to pass.*"

3. These words assert that the divine plan of operation, which is endless, and includes all things and every event that ever did or shall take place, is the wisest and *best* that can be; so that to make any alteration in it, in any respect or the least degree, to take any thing from it, or add any thing to it, which is not included in it, would render it less perfect, wise and good. In this respect, "nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it," without hurting or marring it, and rendering it less perfect, wise and good; therefore it is impossible there should be the least alteration, in any thing or circumstance, so long as God is omnipotent, infinitely wise and good. "His work is perfect;" which includes the whole created universe, with every thing from the greatest to the least, and all events and circumstances of events, even the most minute and inconsiderable, which take place in time and eternity. It is impossible it should be otherwise, if God be omnipotent, infinitely wise and good. The work of such a Being must be, like himself, *absolutely perfect*. He must know what was the most wise and best plan, and therefore the most desirable. He was able to form and execute such a plan, and his wisdom and goodness must be pleased with it: which will answer the best end, and includes all possible good, and excludes every thing which would render it less perfect, and is, on the whole, undesirable. Of this we may be as certain as we can be that

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there is a God, who is. supreme, omnipotent, infinitely wise and good, who hath done, and will do, what he pleases, in heaven and on earth, and in all the created universe, and that *forever*.

Thus we find Solomon asserting, in the words under consideration, what he *knew* to be an important and most evident and certain truth, viz. that God's plan of operation is endless, is unalterably fixed, and comprehends all things, and all events which ever exist or take place, and that this divine plan, including all the created universe, and every event and circumstance which will take place to eternity, is most wise and good, being absolutely perfect; so that nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it, without making it less perfect and good. This truth is abundantly asserted in divine revelation, and is evident to a demonstration from the reason and nature of things. And to deny or doubt of it, is in effect to deny or doubt of the being of a God, who is supreme, infinitely wise and good. This truth is concisely, though fully, expressed by the Assembly Divines at Westminster, in their shorter catechism, in the following words: "The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his own will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained *whatsoever comes to pass*. And he *executeth his decrees* in the works of creation and providence. His works of providence are, his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and *all their actions*."

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This is a doctrine of divine revelation, and most agreeable to reason, to wisdom, and benevolence; and they who exercise these, in any good degree, must be pleased with it. For, according to this, nothing does or can take place, but that which is wisest and best, and necessary for the greatest general good; every thing and every event, the greatest and the least, being under the direction of infinite wisdom, rectitude and benevolence, and ordained and fixed by these. To have such a plan, which includes all the works of God, and every event, motion and action in the creation, in time and to eternity, formed by infinite wisdom and goodness, exactly suited to accomplish the best end, including all possible good, and excluding every thing which, on the whole, is undesirable; to have such a plan, unalterably fixed forever, so that nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it, must be most agreeable to the upright, wise and good: and that person who *understandingly* opposes it, and whose *heart* is displeased with it, must be wholly destitute of all these.

This is suited to please the truly pious mind, to support and comfort such an one, and to excite all those affections and exercises in which true, genuine piety consists. And all the truths and facts included in this divine, unalterable plan, are adapted to promote and effect the most perfect virtue, piety and holiness: and were not this a truth, there could not be any such thing as piety or true religion among creatures.

This leads to consider and explain the concluding words in the text, in which this is asserted: "And God doth it, that men should fear before him."

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By the fear of God, fearing him, or fearing before him, which is the same, is meant the exercise of that true piety and religion which is peculiar to good men, and distinguishes them from the wicked. In this sense the phrase is used in numerous places both in the Old Testament and the New, of which every one must be sensible who reads the Bible with attention and care. It is needless therefore to mention passages to prove it; I shall, however, cite *one*, which is in this book; [*chap viii. 12, 13:*] “Surely I know that it shall be well with them that *fear God, which fear before him*: but it shall not be well with the wicked, *because he feareth not before God.*”

“*God doth it*, that men may fear before him;” That is, he has formed this wise and perfect plan of operation, which is unalterable, as the proper and only foundation of the exercise of piety and holiness by creatures; and every thing God does in executing this plan is suited to excite and promote this, and bring it to the greater perfection, which is included in his endless design; and holiness shall be exercised in the most perfect manner and degree, and flourish under the best advantages, in his kingdom, *forever*. This is God’s everlasting end, for which he does and orders every thing and event in the universe, viz. his own glory, manifested and displayed in the everlasting holiness and happiness of creatures, in his eternal kingdom. And the existence and knowledge of such a fixed and endless plan of divine operation is the only proper foundation for the exercise of true piety; it is suited to excite the exercise of holiness in creatures; and there cannot be any true piety which is exercised and practised in opposition to this truth, but all true religion is in perfect conformity with it.

This I shall endeavour to illustrate and prove by considering what true piety is, by mentioning the several branches of it, in which it is exercised; and, at the same time, shewing that these exercises of piety are consistent with this truth, and naturally flow from it as the proper foundation of them.

I. Love to God. is necessarily included in true piety; so that where there is no degree of this there is no real religion. Indeed, this comprehends all the exercises of piety, and is the sum and whole of it, as every exercise of piety, called by different names, and differing in some respects, are only different modifications of this same affection of love. Therefore *love* to God is required, as comprehending every exercise of true piety. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.” That is all the affection that is required, as it immediately respects God, and therefore includes the whole of true piety. This love consists in benevolence or friendly affection towards God, complacency and delight in him, and gratitude to him. Benevolence regards him as at the head of the universe, infinitely great, omnipotent and supreme; all the creation being as nothing, compared with him, and absolutely in his hands and at his controul, made and used for him; He being the only necessary and all important Being, his interest, honour and glory being the supreme end of all, while he is capable of



infinite felicity, and actually possesses it, being unchangeable in his being, perfections, designs and happiness, infinitely wise, righteous and good;—I say, benevolence regards God as *such a Being*, and is gratified and pleased in the highest; degree in such a character; and the language of the benevolent heart is, “Let God reign forever in unchangeable felicity and glory: let him be glorified by all things, and his praise be without end; let his counsel stand forever, and let it be impossible that any thing should exist or take place but what he orders, and says. *Let it be*: Be thou exalted, O Lord, above the heavens, and thy glory above all the earth! Let his infinitely wise, righteous and benevolent will be done in heaven and earth, and through all his dominions, forever and ever, Amen.”

Is it not easy to see, must it not appear with irresistible evidence, to all who will calmly attend, that every benevolent friend of God must be pleased that he has laid and fixed an unalterable plan, such as best pleased him, comprehending every thing and all events that are desirable, and necessary to answer the best purpose, to eternity, he being, in this, independent, and infinitely above the controul of creatures; so that it is impossible that it should not take place, in every particular, and most minute circumstance, just as he has determined from eternity, without a possibility of his being crossed or disappointed in any instance? And is not all this comprehended in the pious, benevolent boast and exultation of the Psalmist? “But *our God* is in the heavens; *he hath done whatsoever he pleased*. For I know that the Lord is great, and that *our Lord is above all gods*. Whatsoever the Lord *pleased, that did he* in heaven and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places.” Such a Being, prosecuting, without a possibility of any mistake or hindrance, such a grand, comprehensive, eternal plan, formed and fixed by infinite wisdom and benevolence, must be the highest possible object of the benevolence of man, and is most perfectly, and to the highest degree, suited to please and gratify such an affection; on which it may expatiate with the highest pleasure, and without limitation as to the object, and with increasing strength, forever.

But if there be no such supreme, independent Being, who is able to propose and effect the greatest possible good, and is infinitely engaged to do it, and has laid an unalterable plan, including every thing that is wise and good, and nothing but what is most agreeable to infinite benevolence, the whole being considered together, but many events have already taken place, the existence of which are disagreeable to infinite wisdom and benevolence, all things considered, which are not included in the most wise and benevolent plan, but have taken place independent of God, and exist contrary to his will that they should exist, and so that God will not be so much glorified nor so happy as he would have been had they not taken place, and there will be much less good in the universe forever than there might have been had they been prevented; then there is no God to be loved, and be the object of benevolent, friendly affection, which shall be completely pleased and satisfied in him. For he must be either impotent and dependent, and unable to effect that which is most agreeable to wisdom and goodness, and therefore is disappointed and crossed, if he be wise and good;



or he has no wisdom or goodness, though he is omnipotent, and so has suffered that to take place which was not best on the whole, that it should exist, and is contrary to benevolence and wisdom, when he was able to prevent it, if he pleased. If the latter were true, all must acknowledge he could not be the object of love, of benevolent, friendly affection. And if the former, and not the latter, were true, all must be sensible that he could not be an object with which benevolent affection can be pleased and satisfied: but if it were exercised towards him, it must be in pity and grief for him, and inextinguishable sorrow that he was not able to lay and prosecute the best plan without interruption, but is dependent, disappointed and crossed, and most unhappy, and must be so forever! The benevolent friends to such a Being, and to benevolence, must be crossed and miserable, in proportion to the degree of their benevolence, while the enemies to such a Being, were it possible there could be such an one, which, blessed be God! it is not, would be gratified and triumph. And as such a Being must be infinitely less important and glorious, he must be an infinitely less worthy object of benevolence, than he whom the truth we are vindicating describes.

And surely every one who attends properly must see that, on this last supposition, such a Being could not be the object of the complacency and delight of a benevolent heart. This is clear, from what has been said respecting benevolence: for pious, holy complacency and delight in an object or character, is nothing different from the satisfaction and pleasure which benevolence has in that being or character. Therefore if there be any thing in a being contrary and displeasing to benevolence, and opposed to what that seeks, it must be equally opposed. to complacency and delight, and contrary to it. To impose the contrary is a flat contradiction.

It is equally apparent that the God who is exhibited in our text, as it has been now understood and explained, must be the first and highest object of complacential love, as it has been shewn that he is suited to gratify and please benevolence to the highest degree; for the pleasure which the benevolent heart takes in any object, is the same with complacence and delight in that object, as has been just now observed. Therefore that being or character with which the benevolent heart is most pleased and gratified, is the supreme object of complacential love.

The benevolent heart must be pleased with unbounded, infinite benevolence, clothed with, omnipotence, fixing and executing an endless plan, including the highest possible good, in which God will be glorified in the. highest degree, and his servants and kingdom most happy and glorious forever, and which admits no evil but that which is necessary to answer the best end, and promote the greatest good, and render the system, the universal plan, infinitely better, more wise and beautiful, than it could be, were the evil excluded. Such a Being, of unchangeable perfection, infinite benevolence, wisdom, rectitude, truth and faithfulness, must be embraced by the benevolent heart, with the warmest and most strong affection; he must be chosen as the supreme good, as the object of the highest complacence



and delight. God is exhibited to such a mind as such a Being, and in this amiable light, in forming and executing such a plan, comprehending all possible good, and including every thing that exists, and every event that shall take place to eternity; being exactly suited, in every respect, to manifest and display the divine perfection and glory, in the felicity and glory of his eternal kingdom, and which could not be altered, in the least degree, without rendering it less perfect and good. On this Being, and on such a system, including all things that exist, or shall take place—on this absolutely and infinitely perfect Being, and his all-perfect work, the pious mind will dwell with increasing satisfaction and ever fresh delight forever and ever. But were there no unchangeable God, absolutely independent and sovereign, and doing whatsoever he pleases, forming and executing the wisest and best plan of operation to eternity, and including and fixing every event, there would be no such object of supreme affection and delight to the pious, benevolent mind, to be embraced with unreserved love, and unlimited or unalloyed satisfaction and pleasure. Yea, were this God and his plan of operation capable of any possible alteration or change, to eternity, it would give pain to the benevolent heart, and be an eternal impediment to perfect *love* and happiness.

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The person whose heart is wholly selfish, and knows not what *disinterested love* means, and whose mind is consequently contracted down to his own *little self*, and fixed on his own personal concerns, does not extend his thoughts and affections to those grand objects, the glory of God, and the greatest general good of the universe. He really loves nothing but himself; and he cannot be pleased with a God on whom he is wholly dependent, unless he knows, or thinks he knows, that he is wholly devoted to his interest, and will accomplish all his *selfish* desires and wishes. He must be displeased with, he must *hate*, a God who is of *one mind*, and cannot be turned by him; who has fixed his plan of working, including every thing that takes place; and who is unchangeably seeking the greatest general good of the universe, however inconsistent this may be with *his particular interest and happiness*; and who will not regard that, but give it up, whenever the greatest public good requires it; being determined, without a possibility of change, to punish forever every persevering enemy to his character and government. Such a creature cannot love any God, unless he will conform to his will, and is, in some measure at least, dependent on him, and waits on him to know what he will choose and do, independent of God, before he can determine any thing respecting him; so that he himself shall *independently* turn the scale in every thing that concerns himself; and God must attend him as his tool or servant, to consult his interest, and answer his ends. The language of his heart is, “I would not have a God absolutely independent, and unchangeable in his designs and decrees, respecting me and my interest. What is the glory of God, and the general good, to *me*, if my own personal interest and happiness be not regarded and included; if my selfish inclination and will be not gratified, but crossed? I cannot love such a God.” Directly the reverse of this is the feeling and language of the benevolent heart, which has been represented above.

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I proceed to consider *love* as it is exercised and expressed in *gratitude*; and to shew that the God of the Bible, who worketh *all things* after the counsel of his own will, and is executing a plan in the most wise manner, suited to answer the best end, and which comprehends all his works, and every event through endless duration, that *this* God is the proper, infinite object of the pious, everlasting gratitude of a benevolent heart. Benevolence or goodness, exercised and expressed, is the only object: of true, pious gratitude, and therefore it is found no where but in a benevolent heart, or, which is the same, in those who are friends to disinterested benevolence. The love of gratitude is essential to disinterested benevolence of a creature, as it is included in the very nature of it, as is the love of complacency, as has been shown. Wherever the benevolent mind sees the exercise of benevolence by any being, he is not merely pleased with it, but exercises gratitude towards that Being, and that whether he himself be the object of that benevolence, or any other being in the universe. For the benevolent man is a friend to universal being, capable of good; he wishes well to *all*: therefore, he who regards the good of being in general, and promotes the general good, or expresses his benevolence by doing good to any particular being, is the proper object of grateful love, and such benevolence is suited to excite it, and certainly will do it in every benevolent heart. It hence appears, that as the truth in our text is suited to excite the love of benevolence and complacency to the highest degree, as has been shewn, it will also excite true gratitude; and that every thing contrary to this truth, is opposed to the pious love of gratitude.

When the benevolent mind sees Infinite Benevolence designing and effecting the greatest possible good to being in general, and promoting the greatest happiness of the whole, who “is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works,” and beholds him decreeing and doing, and causing to be done, every thing that is necessary to answer and effectually secure this end, this eternal purpose; he finds unbounded scope for the highest: and most sweet gratitude to this Infinitely Good Being, who is glorifying himself to the highest degree, and producing the greatest possible happiness in the created universe forever. He gives thanks to God for his infinite goodness manifested in his works, and in his revealed design and fixed plan, including his own glory, and the highest good of the created universe. His mind is enraptured in gratitude to God for his regard and benevolence to the sum of all being, *Himself*, the first and the last, the Almighty, in that he has made all things for himself, for his own glory, and is unalterably determined, and infinitely engaged, to glorify himself by all his works, and by all creatures, and in conjunction with this to effect the greatest possible happiness of the creation. This manifestation of the divine holiness, and infinite benevolence, is the greatest, the supreme object of the gratitude and thankfulness of the pious, benevolent heart.

And when the pious, good man attends to the infinitely guilty and wretched state into which mankind have fallen, and how exceeding odious and vile they are, being total and obstinate enemies to God, his law and government, and violently opposed to all his benevol-

ent designs; and beholds God so loving the world as to give his only begotten Son to save them, that whoever believes] on him should not perish, but have everlasting life; and that a most glorious, happy and eternal kingdom shall be raised out of the ruins of an apostate world, to the glory of divine grace; and that the greatest good shall be brought out of all the evil that has been, or will exist to all eternity, so that the issue shall be infinitely better than if there were no evil; and that this is all included in the eternal plan which was fixed by Infinite Wisdom and Goodness; when all this comes into view, it will excite the most sincere and strong exercises of grateful love, which will continue and increase forever.

And when the pious man attends to the goodness of God to him, in particular, and is sensible that it is the effect of God's eternal counsel, and his benevolent design of good to him, and that it flows from him on whom he is absolutely dependent, who orders all things, so that his hand is to be seen in every event that takes place; all this is peculiarly adapted to excite his grateful love, while he says, "Not unto me, but unto thy name, be all the praise and glory." And what a foundation is here laid for holy, increasing gratitude forever!

Gratitude to God consists in a true sense and pleasing approbation of the goodness of God to universal being, and to ourselves, and in making all the acknowledgements and returns of which we are capable, in loving and giving ourselves away to him, to be used for his service, glory and praise forever.

The man who has no disinterested benevolence, but is wholly selfish, is not capable of the least degree of this true gratitude. He can love those who love him, but this is nothing but self love, at bottom; for by the supposition, he seeks himself, and is devoted to none but himself in all his exercises, and is not pleased with benevolence for its own sake, or any farther than he may reap some personal benefit by it, to gratify his self love. He is displeased with that goodness which passes by him, and does good to others, or seeks and promotes the general good.



SERMON XVIII.

Eccl. iii. 14. I know that whatsoever God doth, it shall he forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God doth it, that men should fear before him.

THESE words have been explained in the foregoing discourse, and the truths contained in them have been found to be the following: that God hath in his wisdom and goodness, by his unchangeable decree, foreordained whatsoever comes to pass; that this truth, considered in its extent and consequences, is the only proper and sufficient foundation of the true piety of men.

The last mentioned truth is now under consideration, and has been in part illustrated and proved, by instancing in true love to God. We now proceed to consider other branches of piety, which are included in love, and grow out of this root or flock, and may be considered as different modifications of this same love; and to show that God, viewed as described in the text, is the only proper object of them.

2. The *fear* of God is an exercise of piety. This is put in our text, and in many other places in holy writ, for the whole of true piety, as has been observed. The reason of this doubtless is, because it is in a peculiar manner suited to express the pious exercises of a fallen creature, infinitely vile and guilty, and justly exposed to eternal destruction, into which he will infallibly fall, unless he be rescued by sovereign grace, who with humility and self diffidence, knowing that he is wholly lost in himself, trusts wholly in Christ, the only Saviour of sinners, whom he has offended, and is constantly offending; yet trusts in him alone, even in his infinite power and sovereign goodness, for pardon, righteousness, holiness, strength and redemption. And thus it is peculiarly adapted to express the mode or manner of the pious, religious exercises of sinners who believe in Christ, and are friends to God and the Redeemer; or the holiness of repenting, believing sinners, that is, real Christians.

It is plain, at the first view, that the God who is represented in our text, in his absolute independence, decrees and works, as it has been explained, is suited to lead men to *fear before him*, according to this general, comprehensive sense of fear, including the whole of piety; and that all those doctrines which are opposed to this, have a contrary tendency, and are not consistent with the fear of God, in this sense of it. But it may perhaps give some farther light on this subject, by more particularly considering the fear of God in a more restrained sense, and as a branch of true love or piety.

It is of importance to observe here, that *fear* is used in different and opposite senses in the Bible; because there are two sorts of fear, one, that which implies holy, love, and is essential to true piety; the other is opposed to love, and is therefore the fear of those who are not friends to God, but enemies. This latter is intended by *fear*, in the following passages; *1 John iv. 18.* "There is no *fear* in *love*, but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment: he that feareth, is not made perfect in love." *2 Tim. i. 7:* "For God hath not given us

the spirit of *fear*, but of power, and of *love*, and of a sound mind.” *Rom. viii. 15*: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to *fear*, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

These different kinds of fear may be in some measure illustrated by the following instance. An excellent father has a son and a servant, both of whom have been guilty of injuring him, and have fallen under his just displeasure. The son heartily repents, and loves his father, and is restored to his favour. But he keeps constantly in view the evil which he justly deserves, and which his father is able to inflict; he feels that he depends entirely upon his father’s goodness for an escape from that evil, and that he stands in need of his constant aid and assistance to preserve him from offending again, and from that evil which he dreads so much. Both his father’s displeasure, and the evil consequence, are dreadful to him. He knows his father is able to punish in the most dreadful manner; he sees some of the family suffering the punishment every day, and others going in the way which will bring it upon them, unless they repent and reform in season; and has feelings answerable to what he sees. He knows he deserves to be thus punished as much as the worst of them, and depends entirely upon his father’s goodness to prevent it. He loves his father with all his heart, he approves of his conduct, and knows he does every thing right. He loves to have him supreme and independent in the family, and to have him order every thing, and to see his will done in all cases; he loves to be absolutely dependent upon him, and to have all the family so: and in the exercise of this love, and in the views now mentioned, he humbles himself before his father, and fears and trembles before him.

The servant who has offended his master, fears the rod, he dreads the punishment which is threatened, and knows he can inflict it; but he has no love to the father, his master; he wishes to be out of the family, and not dependent on him in any degree. He tries to pacify and please his master in his outward conduct, from the love of himself, because he fears the rod, and wishes to escape punishment. Thus he lives in continual *slavish fear* of his master, which disinterested love to him would cast out.

Every one must see the difference between the *filial fear* of the son, who loves his father, and the *servile fear* of the servant, who loves himself only; and the opposition of one to the other. And surely the difference and opposition between the *godly fear* of those who love God with disinterested benevolence, and the *servile fear* of those who do not love him, but are enemies to him, is much greater, and far more evident and striking.

Here it may be observed, that this *servile fear*, by which men are restrained from a careless, bold practice of open sin, and their attention to a future state, and pressing concern to escape hell and obtain salvation, is excited and kept up, this *servile fear* is necessarily awakened, and fills the soul with painful concern, when sinners are convinced of the truth of the doctrine in our text, and are made in some measure to *feel* it to be true. So long as God, in his greatness, omnipresence and terrible majesty, is not in their view, and they do

not feel or see their absolute dependence upon him for all good, and even to escape hell and obtain heaven, but feel as if they had their life in their own hands, in this respect, they will not be afraid of God, but live in ease and security. But when they come to feel that they are in the hands of God, and that he will destroy or save them, as he pleases, they being absolutely dependent on him, they will begin to fear and stand in awe of him. And the more fully convinced they are of the truth contained in our text, the greater will be their fear and terror respecting their state and situation. This every one can witness who has been an observer of others in these matters, or has attended to his own feelings. And it may be asked, Where has any person been found, who has disbelieved the doctrine of God's decrees, of his fore-ordaining *whatsoever comes to pass*, who has been under any soul-distressing fear of God, or of eternal destruction?

But pious, godly fear implies love to God, in a view of his infinite greatness and importance, and a sense of his infinitely beautiful and glorious character, unchangeably wise, good, upright, just, true and faithful, having decreed whatsoever comes to pass, and executing his decrees in creating, preserving and governing all his creatures and *all their actions*, for his own glory, and the greatest good of the universe; or, which is the same, the greatest happiness and glory of his eternal kingdom. And *this God*, who is the supreme object of love. Is also the object of pious reverence and fear, as necessarily implicated in true love. Thus pious love and fear imply and involve each other, and are really but one and the same affection, which this grand and glorious object is suited to excite. This fear of God implies a view and sense of his greatness and unlimited power, of his unchangeable designs, and our absolute and constant dependence on him, on his will, in every respect, for existence and every motion, and all good, he being our potter, and we the clay in his hand, living, moving and moved, and having our being, *in him*. It also implies a view and sense of our own infinite vileness and ill-desert, and of the infinite evil which God is able to inflict, and may justly bring upon us; and that his almighty power and sovereign grace alone can prevent our being destroyed forever, into which destruction many have fallen, and are falling continually; and that we depend wholly on him, even his sovereign, forfeited mercy, to prevent our going to eternal ruin, and on his constant energy and grace, to cause us to cleave to him, and go in the way to heaven, we being nothing but insufficiency and vanity, before the Infinite All-sufficient Being; and in this view exercising self-diffidence, humility, and trust and dependence in God, dreading his displeasure above all things, and submitting to him, with a disposition and desire to obey him in all things forever. All this is implied in the true fear of God. But it may be expressed in fewer words, and perhaps more clearly to some minds, thus: To fear God is to be properly affected with his infinite greatness and terrible majesty, threatening and punishing his implacable enemies with everlasting destruction; to feel ourselves and all the creation as nothing before him, and wholly dependent upon him; to be suitably affected



with our own guilt and vileness, and our absolute dependence on his sovereign, undeserved mercy for pardon, and the renovation of our minds to holy exercises.

The whole of this is expressed or implied in the following passages of scripture: [Luke xii. 5](#):—“Fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.” All will grant that Christ here enjoins religious, pious fear of God, upon all who love him. And God is represented in his *terrible majesty* as the object of this fear, they being wholly in his hands, and dependent upon him, who is able, and may justly, if he pleases, cast them into hell, and make them miserable forever. Upon this two things may be observed:

1. That it is here supposed that God does cast some into hell, and inflict eternal evil upon them. For if this could not be done consistent with his character and perfections, or with his known design, merely his having power to do that which it is known he never will do, and cannot do confident with his moral perfection, does not render him more an object of religious fear, than if he had no such power; and it would be only an empty bugbear and scarecrow, set up to excite fear without any reason; which cannot be supposed. If no such evil, as that of being cast into hell, had existence, or ever will be inflicted, in any instance, then it could not be reasonably proposed as an object of fear.

2. If this evil of being cast into hell be a reality, God having power to do it, and actually doing it, whenever and in whatever instances he pleases, that is, when it is necessary for his glory, and the greatest good of the whole; this represents God as an object of religious fear, to those who feel themselves in his hands, and deserving of this evil; even when they consider themselves as secured from suffering it, by a divine promise through a Mediator. For still eternal torment in hell is a reality, and they deserve it as much as those who are actually cast into it; and are constantly dependent on God’s sovereign will, to be saved from it: and their escape from hell, and full, absolute and unconditional security that they shall not perish, cannot be said to be perfect: and completed, so long as they are on this side of heaven, in a state of probation, and until they are actually admitted there. Besides, while they, in the exercise of benevolence, behold their fellow Christians by profession, and their fellow men, among whom they live, and are uncertain that they will all escape hell, and see them in the hands of God, who casts them into hell, or saves them from this infinitely dreadful evil, as he pleases, they must have a sensation and exercises independent of their own personal concerns, and however secure they may consider themselves, which is properly called the fear of the Lord, and of the glory of his majesty. This is therefore enjoined upon all the people of God, as included in their pious obedience to him. [[Deut. xxviii. 58](#):] “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law, that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord, thy God, then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful,” &c.

And an affection of this same nature and kind will be exercised by the inhabitants of heaven forever, as necessarily included in love to God, in a view of his glorious, fearful,

sovereign power and majesty, and of themselves and all creatures, as being infinitely below him, and as nothing in comparison with him, and wholly dependent upon him, for existence, every motion of their hearts, and all good, and in a clear view of his terrible wrath against sinners, and the dreadful punishment inflicted upon them. This is represented in the 15th chapter of the Revelation. John saw seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is *filled up the wrath of God*; and at the same time he observed the inhabitants of heaven looking on, singing and saying, "Great and marvellous are thy works. Lord, God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. *Who shall not fear thee*, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy; for thy judgments are made manifest." I proceed to mention another passage of scripture. [Phil. ii. 12, 13.] "Work out your own salvation *with fear and trembling*; for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure." Here fear and trembling must mean such exercises of mind as are suitable to their dependence on God and his operating energy, for all things, even every motion of their hearts, of will and choice; for this their dependence on God is given as a reason why they should go on in a Christian course *with fear and trembling*: For it is God who worketh in you both *to will* and to do of his good pleasure. They were hanging over hell, and must drop into it, unless supported and rescued by the omnipotent arm of God, working in them, and forming them both to will and to do that which was necessary in order to escape hell and obtain heaven; in which God was infinitely above all controul, and acted of his own good pleasure, after the counsel of his own will. Here the same idea is held up, and the same truth expressed, with that in our text, as the foundation and reason of man's *fearing before God*, and working out his salvation *with fear and trembling*, viz. Their absolute dependence on God in all things, even for every thought and motion of heart, which he effectually causes to exist by his invisible, secret, almighty energy, according to his own pleasure, which must be unchangeable, and according to his eternal purpose, including all he would do to eternity in producing every thing, and ordering every event: so that there is but one endless chain of events, made up of innumerable links, of which the least existence, event and motion, and every circumstance, the most minute, is a necessary part, as well as the greatest; the whole being formed by the wise counsel and will of God, and entirely dependent upon him, and executed by him; and which cannot admit the least possible change or alteration, it being as firmly established and fixed as the existence and throne of the Almighty.

I conclude this head with observing, that it is beyond all controversy certain, that the fear of God, as it has been explained, supposes *our dependence on him*, viewing him as what he is, and ourselves as what we are; and that, the more absolute, perfect; and universal this dependence is, the greater foundation there is for this fear, and this affection will be strong and constant in proportion to the view and sense we have of this dependence. Therefore the doctrine contained in our text says the best and most perfect foundation for the exercise of the fear of God, and is every way suited to promote it; and every opinion and sentiment

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which contradicts this, and represents man as in any degree self-sufficient, and independent in any respect, is contrary to the true fear of God, and tends to prevent or destroy it.

3. An entire, unreserved *trust in God* is an exercise of true piety, and essential to it. The only foundation for this is his all-sufficiency, his being unchangeable in his goodness, truth and faithfulness, and omnipotent, supreme, or doing every thing as he pleases, and guiding all things by his constant, universal agency, so as to answer the most wise and best end. Every thing contrary to such a character is inconsistent with his being an object of unreserved trust and confidence to the pious mind. If God were not unchangeable in his attributes and designs, and had he not all creatures and things under his direction and controul; and could there be one motion or action in the universe independent of his direction, agency and will; and did he not know what is the best end, and what are the wisest and best means to accomplish it; and was he not unchangeably determined what he would do, in the exercise of infinite wisdom and goodness; the benevolent, pious mind would have no foundation of unreserved trust and confidence.

But our God is not so, "He is *the Rock*, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity, *just and right* is he." The pious mind, feeling his absolute, entire dependence, and the universal dependence of all things, on this God, whom he loves with all his heart, puts his whole trust in him, and relies upon him with the most unreserved confidence, and the greatest satisfaction and pleasure, "He beholds the hand of God conducting *all the hidden springs and movements of the universe, and, with a secret but unerring operation, directing every event,*"⁹ so as to promote and effect the greatest possible good, his own glory and the greatest happiness of his kingdom, and of all who trust in him; and with pleasure places the greatest and most unreserved confidence in him, and calls all his care upon him. "He *rests* in the Lord, and waits patiently for him."

Thus the pious, benevolent man trusts in God to glorify himself by all things, and all events, that take place, however dark, and of a contrary tendency, they may appear to him to be. And he implicitly, without seeing how it may be done, relies upon Him to bring good, unspeakable good, out of all evil; so that no event shall take place that shall not be best, on the whole, and all shall issue to the greatest advantage to his servants. and his eternal kingdom. And he places his hope and trust wholly in this God, for all he desires and wants for himself personally, and for his fellow creatures, for body or soul, in time and to eternity: and the language of his heart is that of David, [*Psal. lxii. 5, &c.*] "My soul, wait thou *only* upon God: for my expectation is from him. He *only* is my *Rock* and my salvation; he is my defence: I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the Rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times, ye people; pour out your heart before him, God is a refuge for us."

9 Dr. Blair's Sermons, vol. i. p. 46.

In short, this doctrine, inculcated in our text, and taught through the whole Bible, being understandingly and cordially received, will pull down and destroy that self-confidence and self-dependence, which is natural to man, and with which self love inspires him; it is levelled directly against the selfishness and pride of man, and suited to cast down every high thing in his heart, which exalts itself against the knowledge of God; to exalt God, and humble man, and form him to cleave to God and the Redeemer, in a humble trust and dependence on Him alone. No wonder then that this doctrine is so disagreeable to those whose selfishness and pride have never been subdued, and has been so much opposed in this sinful world.

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4. An entire, unconditional resignation to the will of God, and pleasing acquiescence in it, is an essential part of true piety. In order to this, the will of God must be considered as unchangeably wise and good, and as wisely ordering and guiding all events to answer a good end; and ordering all evil as the necessary occasion and means of the greatest good. God cannot be omnipotent, infinitely wise and good, unless he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass; and therefore on any other supposition there would be no foundation or reason for an implicit, unreserved resignation to his will. The pious, benevolent mind cannot acquiesce in any thing or event which is not wise and good; it cannot be reconciled to evil, considered in itself, only as evil; but in order to be pleased with its taking place, it must be considered in its connection with the good of which it is the occasion. Therefore true resignation to the will of God does suppose him to guide all the movements in the universe, and order all events in infinite wisdom and goodness. In this view, and certain of this, the language of the pious, benevolent heart is, "Thy will be done;" without making any exception or condition. Whatever evil takes place respecting himself or others, he is ready to espouse the language of pious Eli: "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good unto him." He with pleasure exerciseth an unreserved submission and resignation to the all-wise and infinitely good Being.

5. Repentance towards God, and humbling ourselves in his fight for our sins, is included in the exercise of Christian piety. This consists in a sense and acknowledgment of the evil of sin, of its ill desert, feeling ourselves wholly blameable and answerable for it, abhorring it, and condemning ourselves for it, renouncing it, and turning from it; in which the sinner justifies God, and approves of his law, and condemns and takes shame to himself. This always takes place and is exercised in. the view of those truths, which are at least implied in the doctrine which we are considering. And it is impossible the heart should repent while it opposes this doctrine, and those truths which are contained in it. This can be done only by an impenitent, selfish, proud heart, which does always oppose and hate this doctrine, though the understanding and judgment may be convinced that it is true.

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The doctrine of the decrees of God, foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass, for his own glory and the greatest general good, necessarily includes his hatred of sin, and the evil and criminal nature of it, as it opposes. the glory of God, and the general good; and the

sinner, who is guilty of it, does herein express his enmity against God, and the good which is the object of his decrees: and were the natural tendency and consequence of sin to take place, without being counteracted, and overruled to answer an end which sin and the sinner oppose, God's end in his decrees would be frustrated, he would be dishonoured, and good be destroyed by unlimited evil.

The sinner is as blameable and criminal, as if his sin was not overruled for good; for the nature of it is just as bad and unreasonable as if no good came of it; and sin is as great a crime as it would be, were there no divine decrees; and in some respects greater: for the sinner acts as freely as he could were there no decrees; he has all the freedom that is in the nature of things possible; he acts voluntarily, and he opposes the wile, holy and benevolent decrees of God, and that infinitely wise, beautiful and benevolent plan which he has laid, and is executing, even in that very sin and rebellion by which he is accomplishing it. When the sinner's eyes are opened to see all this, he sees the evil of sin, as it is opposed to this infinitely great and glorious God, to all his wise and benevolent purposes and decrees, and to that wise, glorious and all-comprehending plan of his operations. He sees this, and adores, and his heart breaks and melts in contrition, and self-condemnation, humbling himself in the sight of this God. But the impenitent sinner is irreconcilable, and at enmity with such a God, and, in the pride and impiety of his heart, "replies against God," and says, "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?"

6. Religious *joy* in God, and his government and kingdom, is a branch of true piety. This is inculcated abundantly in the holy scripture; and Christians are commanded to "rejoice always in the Lord." And we have many examples of the religious joy of pious persons. The fruit of the Spirit is *joy*. Believers rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and this *joy* no man can take from them. This is the joy of the benevolent heart, in the exercise of that love to God, which has been described above, beholding him infinitely great and most blessed forever, having an uncontrollable dominion over all, decreeing and fixing from eternity every thing, and all events, in the wisest and best manner, to promote and effect the most desirable and important end, and the greatest possible good of the whole. With this the benevolent mind is supported and pleased, in all the darkness, sin and evil which take place in this world, and in the view of what will exist forever in the world to come, knowing that God has ordered it all, for the sake of the good which he will bring out of it; that the wrath of man shall praise him; and the remainder of wrath, which would not answer this, or any good end, he will effectually restrain and prevent. In this view he has solid, lasting support, comfort and joy, and says, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous."



And as this truth, taken in the full latitude of it, is suited to support, comfort and rejoice the heart of the pious friends of God, in whatever Situation they may be, and whatever may be the appearance of things around them; so it is the *only truth* which can support them. If they give up or let go their hold of this strong foundation and prop, they must link into gloom, sorrow and despair. If they have no certainty that God cannot be disappointed in his counsel and designs, and that he has fixed the best plan, including all events, which cannot be altered for the better; if they know not but things may take place, which are not on the whole best, but God might have been more glorified, and his people more happy, had they not come to pass; and did they believe this to be the case; they must sink into darkness, grief and sorrow, which no consideration could remove, but must abide on their minds forever.

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And when they behold the sin and universal apostacy of mankind, and the infinitely dreadful evils that are the attendants and consequence of this, and know that this was not accidental, or aside from the divine plan; but has been ordered and determined by God, that the way might be opened for Redemption by the Son of God, the most glorious work of God, by which he is glorified, the Redeemer exalted and honoured forever; and the redeemed made most happy in the eternal kingdom of God, in which they hope also to share, and behold and love and serve and praise this God without end; their benevolent joy rises still higher. And the more they contemplate this divine contrivance and plan, with all its appendages, and discern the manifold wisdom, and boundless goodness of it, the more does their joy increase, and they are ready to exclaim, with St. Paul, “O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first; given to him? and it shall be recompensed unto him again. *For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things;* to whom, be glory forever. Amen,”

The selfish man may have a great degree of religious joy; but it is entirely of a different nature and kind from the joy of the truly pious and benevolent, and there is no true piety in it; because there is no true respect to God in it, no disinterested regard to his glory, and the public, general good, or the good of others. It is the joy of the hypocrite, of the false hearted man, who regards and seeks himself only, his own supposed private, personal good. If he thinks God loves him, and intends to make him happy forever, this gives him great joy, while his mind is contracted down to his little *self*, and he has no disinterested pleasure and joy, in beholding God, in his glorious character and unlimited dominion, and infinite, independent felicity, doing whatsoever he pleases, ordering all events for his own glory and the general good; nor is he willing to be so dependent on God, and so wholly indebted to him for all good, as is implied in his *foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass*. “A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this.” But the language of the pious friend of God is, “Thou, Lord, hast made me *glad* through thy work: I will *triumph* in the works of

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thy hands. O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are *very deep*. The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations:" [*Psal. xcii. 4, 5, 6; xxxiii. 11.*] "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: The *humble* shall hear thereof, and be glad. O, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together:" [*Psal. xxxiv. 2, 3.*]

7. Devotion, which consists in the worship of God, in Adoration, Confession, Profession, Self-dedication, Petition, Thanksgiving, and Praise, is a great and important branch of piety. I shall consider each of these parts of devotion now mentioned, and show that the doctrine which has been deduced from our text, and explained, is so far from being inconsistent with these, that it is suited to excite and promote them, and the only proper foundation of them.

Adoration consists in recollecting and attending to, and, with profound awe and religious fear, revering, the infinitely excellent and glorious perfections and character of the Most High God, manifested in his wonderful works, and most wise and universal government, in a solemn address to him.

Now, no arguments are needed to prove, that a Being of infinite greatness, power, rectitude, wisdom and goodness, who is above all controul, doing what he pleases, and ordering and directing every thing by his counsel and decree, with irresistible energy, to answer the best end—that *such a Being* is the only proper object of this adoration, and that the more clear conviction and greater impression and sense any one has of such a Being and character, the stronger and more fervent will the exercises of his heart be in humble adoration; and this is the only object that is suited to continue and increase it forever. And the thought that God might be changeable in his designs, and had not decreed whatsoever comes to pass, but that many things do take place contrary to his will, and so as to render his plan of operation less perfect than otherwise it would have been, must tend greatly to damp, if not wholly destroy, the most devout and rational adoration, and is inconsistent with the complete enjoyment and happiness of the devout mind.

Confession of sin, unworthiness, wretchedness, absolute dependence on God and his sovereign grace, &c. is essential to the devotion of a sinner: a conviction and feeling sense of all this is implied in all his pious exercises, and intermixed with them.

All this is implied in *repentance*, which has been considered; and it has been shown that the truth under consideration is suited to promote this. The more clear view the sinner has of the excellency of the divine character, of the absolute, independent supremacy of God, of his infinite wisdom, rectitude and goodness, and his entire dependence on the power and operation of God, the greater sense he must have of his obligation to love and obey him; and consequently of his own guilt, vileness and ill desert as a sinner and rebel against this God; and feel himself utterly lost and undone: and therefore the more freely and fully will he confess all this. Profession, self-dedication to God, Thanksgiving and praise, in which the devout worshipper of God expresses before him his love to him, and all the friendly,

pious feelings of his heart; devotes himself to God, willing to serve him, to be, do and suffer whatever God pleases and requires, and to be used by him to answer his wise purposes; acknowledging the goodness of God, admiring and praising him for what he is, and for what he does; all this is grounded on the infinite perfection, and glory of the Deity, who is “over all God blessed forever,” supreme, independent, “wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working;” whole energy guides every motion and event in the universe, according to the counsel of his own will. A being who is not supreme, not so powerful, wise and good, as necessarily to foreordain whatsoever comes to pass, could not be the proper object: of these devout exercises of the pious geart.



SERMON XIX.

The same Subject continued.

Eccl. iii. 14. I know that whatsoever God doth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God doth it, that men should fear before him.

IN the preceding discourse the exercise of piety has been considered in a number of particulars. The last mentioned was devotion, and several things included in this have been considered. Another branch of devotion now requires our attention.

Petition is that part of devotion in which we, in our address to God, express our desires, or ask him to do or grant that which to us appears good and desirable. This requires a more particular consideration, as some have thought it not consistent with the doctrine of God's decrees, foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass; because, according to this, every thing is fixed, and cannot be altered. It has been said, there cannot be any reason or motive to pray, or make any petition, to an *unchangeable God*, whose design cannot be altered, and who has fixed all events, without a possibility of any change.

Before any attempt is made to remove this objection, and supposed difficulty, it must be observed, that it equally lies against the *foreknowledge of God*. For if God certainly foreknows every thing that will take place, then every event is fixed and certain, otherwise it could not be foreknown. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." He has determined, and passed an unchangeable decree, with respect to all that he will do to eternity. Upon the plan of the objection under consideration, it may be allied, What reason or motive can any one have to ask God to do any thing for him, or any one else, since he infallibly knows from the beginning what he will do, and therefore it is unalterably fixed? Therefore if it be reasonable to pray to an *omniscient God*, it is equally reasonable to pray to an *unchangeable God*. For the former necessarily implies the latter. But in order to show that the objection is without foundation, the following things must be observed.

I. If God were not omniscient and unchangeable, and had not foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, he would not be the proper object of worship, and there would be no foundation, reason or encouragement to make any petition to him.

This it is presumed will be evident to any one who will well consider the following observations.

First. If there were no unchangeable, omniscient Being, there would be no God, no proper object of worship. A being who is capable of change is necessarily imperfect, and may change from bad to worse, and even cease to exist, and therefore could not be trusted. If we could know that such a being has existed, and that he was once wise and good and powerful, we could have no evidence that he would continue to be wise or good, or that he is so now, or that he is now disposed to pay any regard to our petitions, or is either willing or able to grant them; or even that he has any existence. What reason of encouragement

then can there be to pray to a changeable being? Surely none at all. Therefore, if there be no reason to pray to an *unchangeable* God, there can be no, reason to pray at all.

Secondly. If God be infinitely wise, and good, and omnipotent, supreme and independent; then he certainly is unchangeable, and has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. This has been proved above, or rather is self-evident. But if he be not infinitely wise and good, &c. then he cannot be trusted; he cannot be the object of that trust and confidence which is implied, and even expressed, in praying to him.

Thirdly. The truly pious, benevolent, devout man would not desire, or even *dare*, to pray to God for any tiling, if he were changeable, and disposed to alter his purpose and plan, in order to grant his petitions. Therefore he never does pray to any but an *unchangeable God*, whose counsel stands forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. He is sensible that he is a very imperfect creature; that his heart, his will, is awfully depraved and sinful; that he knows not what is wisest and best to be done in any one instance; what is best for him, for mankind in general, for the world, or for the universe; what is most for the glory of God, and the greatest general good; and that it would be infinitely undesirable and dreadful to have his own will regarded so as to govern in determining what shall be done for him or any other being, or what shall take place. If it could be left to him to determine in the least instance, he would not dare to do it, but would refer it back to God, and say, "Not *my will*, but *thine*, be done." But he could not do this, unless he were *certain* that the will of God was unchangeably wise and good, and that he had decreed to do what was most for his own glory, and the greatest good of the whole; at the same time infallibly knowing what must take place, in every instance, in order to answer this end; and consequently must have fixed upon the most wise and best plan, foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass. Therefore, whatever be his petitions for himself, or for others, he offers them to God, and asks, *on this condition*, always either expressed or implied, *If it be agreeable to thy will*: for *otherwise* he would not have his petitions granted, if it were possible. And he who asks any thing of God, without making this condition, but sets up his own will, and desires to have it gratified, whether it be for the dory of God, and the greatest good of his kingdom, or not; and would, were it in his power, compel his Maker to grant his petition, and bow the will of God to his own will; he who prays to God with such a disposition, is an impious enemy to God, exercises no true devotion, and cannot be heard; and it is desirable to all the friends of God that he should be rejected. Resignation to the will of God always supposes his will is unchangeably fixed and established, which it could not be, unless he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Thus it appears that if God were changeable, and had not foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, there would be no foundation for religious worship, or reason for praying to him; or that there can be no reason or encouragement for prayer and petition to any but an *unchangeable* God.—I proceed to observe,

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2. There is good reason, and all desirable and possible encouragement, to pray to an unchangeable God, who has from eternity determined what he will do, in every instance, and has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

This will doubtless be evident, to him who will duly consider the following particulars.

First. Prayer is as proper, important and necessary, in order to obtain favour from an unchangeable God, as it could be were he changeable, and had not foreordained any thing.

Means are as necessary in order to obtain the end, as if nothing were fixed and certain. Though it was decreed that Paul and all the men in the ship should get safe to land, when they were in a storm at sea; yet this must be accomplished by means, and unless the sailors had assisted in managing the ship, this event could not take place, and they could not be saved. Prayer is a means of obtaining what God has determined to grant; for he has determined to give it in answer to prayer, and no other way. "Ask, and ye shall receive," says our Saviour. When God had promised to do many and great things for Israel, he adds, "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them:" [*Ezek. xxxvi. 37.*] The granting the favours, which God had determined to bestow, was as much suspended on their asking for them, as if there had been nothing determined and fixed about it. There is as much regard had to prayer in granting favours, and the prayer is heard, and God gives them, as really and as much in answer to it, as if there were nothing determined and foreordained respecting them: for the decree includes and fixes the means, as much as the end; the method and way by which events are to take place, as much as those events themselves. The one depends on the other, as much as if there were no decree, and nothing fixed; yea, much more: for the decree *fixes* the dependence and connection between the means and the end: whereas if there were no decree, and nothing fixed, there would be no established connection, but all would be uncertain, and there would be no reason or encouragement to use means, or do any thing to obtain an end.

Surely, then, there is as much reason and encouragement to pray to an unchangeable God, and this is as important and necessary, as if there were nothing fixed by the divine decrees, and much more: yea, the unchangeable purposes of God are the necessary and only proper ground and reason of prayer.

Secondly. Though prayer is not designed to make any change in God, or alter his purpose, which is impossible; yet it is suited and designed to have an effect on the petitioner, and prepare him to receive that for which he prays. And this is a good reason why he should pray. It tends to make the petitioner to feel more and more sensibly his wants, and those of others for whom he prays, and the miserable state in which he and they are: for in prayer these are called up to view, and dwelt upon: and prayer tends to give a sense of the worth and importance of the favours asked. It is also suited to make persons feel, more and more, their own helplessness, and entire dependence on God for the favours for which they petition, of which their praying is an acknowledgement: and therefore tends to enhance them in the



eyes of the petitioner, when given in answer to prayer, and to make him more sensible of the free, sovereign goodness of God in granting them.¹⁰ In sum, this is suited to keep the exigence and character of God in view, and impress a sense of religious truths in general on the mind, and to form the mind to universal obedience, and a conscientious watchfulness and circumspection, in all religious exercises.

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Thirdly. It is reasonable, and highly proper and important, and for the honour of God, that the friends of God should express and acknowledge their entire dependence on him, and trust in him, for all they want for themselves and others, and their belief in the power, wisdom and goodness of God; and all this is acknowledged, expressly or implicitly, in prayer to God. It is also reasonable and proper that they should express their *desire* of those things which are needed by themselves or others, and which God alone can give or accomplish: and such desires are expressed in the best way and manner by petitioning for them. And in asking for blessings on others, and praying for their enemies, they express their disinterested benevolence, which is an advantage to themselves, and pleasing to God, even though their petitions should have no influence in procuring the favours which they ask. And in praying that God would honour himself, and advance his own kingdom, and accomplish all the great and glorious things which he has promised to do for his own honour, and the good of his people, they do not express any doubts of his fulfilling his promises, but are certain he will grant their petitions; but they hereby express their acquiescence in these things, and their earnest desire that they may be accomplished; and also profess and express their love to God, and friendship to his people and kingdom; and do that which the feelings of a pious, benevolent heart will naturally, and even necessarily, prompt them to do.

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. We have many examples of such petitions and prayers for those things and events, which the petitioners, antecedent to their prayers, knew would certainly, be accomplished. We have a decisive and remarkable instance of this in David, the King of Israel, in the following words: "And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it forever, *and do as thou hast said.* And let thy

10 A kind and wise father, who designs to give his child some particular favour, will bring the child to ask for it before he bestows it, and will suspend the gift upon this condition, for the benefit of the child, that what he grants may be a real advantage to him, and a greater than if it were given before the child was better prepared to receive it, by earnestly and humbly asking for it; and that the father may hereby receive a proper acknowledgement from the child, and be treated in a becoming manner. And in this case, the petition of the child is as really regarded, heard and granted, and the child's application and prayer to the father is as much a means of obtaining the favour, and as proper, important and necessary, as if the father had not previously determined the whole affair. And when the children of such a father know that this is his way of bestowing favours on them, they will have as proper motives, and as much encouragement, to ask for all they want, as if he had not determined what he would do antecedent to their asking him; yea, much more.

name be magnified forever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O Lord of Hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, *I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer before thee.* And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant. Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue forever before thee; for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it, and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed forever.” [2 Sam. vii. 25-29.] Here David not only prays God to do that which at the same time he knew and acknowledges God had promised to do; and therefore it was established as firm as the throne of the Almighty, and decreed that it should take place; but he says that this promise of God, making it certain, was the reason, motive and encouragement to him to make this prayer: “Thou, O Lord, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house. And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, *and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant;* therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer before thee.” We hence are warranted to assert that it is reasonable and proper to pray for that which God has promised; and that the certainty that it will be accomplished is a motive and encouragement to pray for it. How greatly then do they err who think that if every event is made certain by God’s decree, there is no reason or encouragement to pray for any thing!

Our Saviour, in the pattern of prayer which he has dictated, directs men to pray that God would bring to pass those events which were already fixed and decreed, and therefore must infallibly take place: “Our Father, who art in heaven, *hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done,*” &c.

Christ himself, in the 17th chapter of John, prays for those whom the Father had given to him, that he would keep them through his own name, and that they might be *one*, as the Father and Son were one; might be kept from the evil in the world, and be sanctified through the truth; that they might be with him in heaven forever, and behold his glory. At the same time he knew that all this was made certain to them; for he had before said, that all that were given to him should come to him, and he would raise them up at the last day; that he would give unto them eternal life, and not one of them should perish, as none should be able to pluck them out of his hands, or his Father’s. He prays, “Father, glorify thy name;” not because this event was uncertain, but to express his earnest desire of that which he knew was decreed, and could not but take place, and his willingness to give up every thing, even his own life, to promote this. Again, Christ prays in the following words: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” The event for which Christ prays in these words was decreed from eternity, and the decree had been long before published, in the 2d and 110th Psalms. “I will declare the decree: The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I

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will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." And he had declared the certainty of that for which he here prays, since his incarnation. He had said, that all power in heaven and earth was given unto him; that "the Father had committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. St. Paul, when speaking of God, often introduces the following words: "To whom be glory forever, Amen;" which is not to be considered as a mere doxology, by which glory is ascribed to God; but it is rather a *wish*, or *desire*, that God may be glorified forever; and the *Amen* corroborates it: as if he had said, "Let it be so; this is the most ardent desire of my soul, including the sum of all my petitions." Here then the Apostle utters a desire and petition for that which he knew was decreed, and would take place.

The last words of Christ to his church are, "Surely I come quickly." Upon which promise the following petition of the church, and of every friend of his, is presented to him: "Amen, even so come Lord Jesus." Here is a petition, in which all Christians join, praying Christ to do what he has promised; and which therefore was as certain as a declared decree could possibly make it: and the petition is grounded on this promise and decree published by Christ, in which the petitioners express their hearty approbation of the coming of Christ, and earnest desire of this important and happy event. And if it be reasonable thus to pray for an event which is fixed and made certain by an unchangeable decree, and cannot be altered, as in the instance before us; then it is reasonable and proper to pray for any thing or any event which appears to us desirable and important, though we know God is unchangeable, and that all things and every event are fixed by an unalterable decree.

The apostle John says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing *according to his will*, he heareth us. And if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him:" [1 John v. 14, 15.] To ask for any thing *according to his will*, is to ask for those things which it is agreeable to his will to grant; and this is to be known only by what he has revealed. When we ask him to do what he has declared he will do, then we know we ask for that which is according to his will; and consequently, that we have our petitions. But it will be asked. What are these things? I answer, That God will glorify himself in all things, and make the brightest display of his perfections and character forever; that he will promote and effect the greatest possible good of the universe; that he will make his church and kingdom perfectly happy and glorious forever; that he will accomplish all his designs and predictions, and fulfil all his promises to his church and people; and cause all things to work for the good of those who love him; and give his Holy Spirit to all who ask him. These, I think, must be the things we ask, when we know that we pray for any thing *according to the will of God*, and consequently know that he heareth us, and that we have the petitions that we desired of him. But in all these instances we asks: for that which God has said he will do, that is, has decreed that he will



do them. And as it has been said before, if a decree in these instances does not render it unreasonable or improper to pray for their accomplishment; then, if God has decreed *whatsoever comes to pass*, this is not in the least inconsistent with our praying for whatever appears to us desirable and good, and may not be contrary to the will of God to grant. But here it must be observed, that when we ask for any particular things or events which, though it may not be contrary to the will of God to grant, yet he has in no way revealed that it is his will to grant our petitions; when we ask for any such thing, we must do it with an express or implicit reserve—*If it be according to the will of God*. Otherwise, or if it be not according to his will, we must withdraw our petition, and not desire to have it granted. Resignation to the will of God, whatever it may be, in all such instances, is essential to the pious petitions of a benevolent friend of God. And by thus referring to the will of God, and resigning to that, desiring it may be done in all cases, whatever petitions we may make, we do refer to the decrees of God, by which he has determined what he will do in every particular instance; for his will and his decrees are in this case one and the same, being fixed and unchangeable.

Fourthly. It is not only proper and important that the worshippers of God should express their desires of those things which they want, in praying for them; but were this not true, and were not asking for them the means and way of obtaining them; yet the pious friends of God would esteem it a privilege and enjoyment to be allowed and invited, “by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make known their requests unto him.” To them prayer is not a *task*, from which they would be glad to be excused, but they practise it with pleasure. They have great support, enjoyment and happiness in calling their cares upon God, and expressing the desires of their hearts to him. While others restrain prayer before God, and say, “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?” the benevolent friend of God would pray, were it only for the enjoyment which he has in the exercise; and says in his heart, “I will call upon God as long as I live.” And though he is certain that God is unchangeable, and that nothing is done, or will come to pass, which is not foreordained by him, this does not tend to prevent or in the least abate the pleasure and enjoyment he has in making known his requests to God, or his desire constantly to practise it: but this truth gives him support and consolation, and increases his delight in calling upon God, and renders it more desirable and pleasant unto him: yea, were not this a truth, he could not find any reason for making his requests known to him, or any delight in doing it; and would not have any encouragement, or even *dare*, to ask for any thing, as has been observed and shewn.

And now this matter is to be left to the judgment of every one who will attend to it. It is hoped that it appears evident, beyond all dispute, from the light in which this subject; has been now set, that the doctrine of God’s decreeing whatsoever comes to pass is not only confident with all the exercises of true piety, but is the proper foundation for this, and is

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suited to excite and promote these exercises; and that there can be no real piety which is not consistent with this truth.

Improvement of the Subject.

I. It appears from what has been said on this subject, that they who are in their hearts opposed to this doctrine of the decrees of God, are strangers to true piety, and do not fear before God. Though they may have exercises which they call and think to be piety and real religion, and it may have an *appearance* of it to others; yet it has nothing: of the real nature of true piety, but is enmity and opposition to the true God. They may think they love God, and are speaking for him, and to his honour, and in favour of religion, while they are strenuously opposing this doctrine, as dishonourable to God, and destructive to all virtue and true religion: but they are deceived, and are really opposing and dishonouring the true God, and denying and renouncing that truth which is the only foundation or true piety.

This will, without doubt, be thought very *uncharitable* by many, as it condemns a great part of professing Christians, as destitute of true piety, and not real Christians. But is it the office of *charity* to give up the truth because it condemns ourselves or our fellow men? Is it uncharitable to think and speak according to the truth, and to censure those who are censured by the God of truth? True charity, or love, “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth *in the truth*.” If the subject we have been considering has been justly represented, and the truth established by undeniable evidence; then this inference that has now been made follows with the greatest certainty, and must be admitted, however many are censured and condemned by it, and be they who they may.

It is to be carefully observed, that the inference is, “Whosoever *in their hearts*, and in the exercise of what they call piety, oppose this doctrine of God’s foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass, have no real real religion.” Persons may, through the prejudices of education, or some other way, be led to misunderstand this doctrine, and have very wrong conceptions of it, and imbibe prejudices against it, in their speculations; and yet *the exercise of their hearts* be in some measure agreeable to it, in the practice of real piety. Their piety may not prevent or remove all their wrong and mistaken speculations and conceptions on this point. But if *their hearts* oppose this truth, which is the foundation of all true piety, their hearts are not right with God, but they must be enemies to him, and in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity, whatever specious pretences they may make of love to God, and of devotion.

On the other hand, persons may be right in their speculations on this point, and be fully convinced of the truth of this doctrine, yea, be very zealous in arguing for it, and vindicating it against opposers; and yet never *heartily submit* to it, but really oppose it in their hearts, and be wholly strangers to every exercise of true piety.

On the whole, he who *cordially* submits to this doctrine, and *has exercises of heart* answerable to it, is a pious man, and fears before God, whatever his speculations may be. And he whose heart opposes this doctrine, in the whole tenor of his exercises, is a stranger to true piety, though he may be orthodox in his speculative opinion. It is desirable, however, that every man's judgment and speculations should be according to the truth: and it cannot be easily accounted for that a person whose heart is truly pious and benevolent should continue to disbelieve and reject this doctrine, when under all proper and desirable advantages to get light and instruction, to have all his false conceptions of it removed, to know what it is, what is, and what is not, implied in it, and to learn the foundation and reason of it, and how expressly and abundantly, and in a variety of ways, it is taught and inculcated in the holy scriptures.

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And if a person under all these advantages and instructions perseveres in renouncing and opposing this doctrine, as very disagreeable, and overthrowing all religion, with an obstinacy and zeal which appear to proceed from the disposition and feelings of the *heart*, we have reason to fear, yea, to determine, that the heart is not right with God, and that such opposition flows from this root of bitterness.

That the unrenewed, selfish, impenitent man should dislike and oppose this doctrine, can be easily accounted for. For it appears from what has been said on this subject, that it must be, of all things most disagreeable to him, and that to which one of such a disposition and character can never submit. But that he who is born of God, and has a humble, benevolent heart, and loves and fears God, and delights in the Bible, meditating therein day and night, is pleased to have God exalted, as a glorious, omnipotent, unchangeable, infinitely wise and good sovereign of the universe, and to have proud man humbled and abased before him; that such an one should not believe that God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, but oppose and be displeased with such a doctrine, is quite unaccountable.

II. This subject teaches us the reason and importance of making the glory of God our supreme end in all we do.

1. Because this is the highest, best and most important end that can be proposed and pursued, and therefore most agreeable to wisdom and benevolence.

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2. Because God himself makes this his end in all his works. This is asserted in the truth which is established in the foregoing discourse, viz. That God hath, *for his own glory*, foreordained whatsoever comes to pass; and it has been shown that this must be the supreme end of the infinitely wise and benevolent Being, in all he does, and that this is necessarily included in the assertion in our text, "That whatsoever God doth, it shall be forever." It is certainly reasonable that we should pursue the same end that God does in his works, and herein imitate him, as his children. If it be wise and benevolent in God to lay a plan and pursue it to glorify himself, to make the brightest display of his own perfections, wisdom and benevolence will lead us to do all for the same end.

3. Because the glory of God, the greatest manifestation and display of the divine character and perfections, includes the greatest possible good of the created universe; for in producing and effecting this, the omnipotence, infinite wisdom and goodness of God are acted out and manifested to the greatest advantage, to be seen by creatures. The glory of God, and the greatest happiness of the creation, therefore, cannot be separated, as two distinct and different ends, since the one necessarily implies and involves the other. The highest happiness of a creature consists in the knowledge and enjoyment of God, in beholding, loving and glorifying him; and therefore the more his perfections are manifested to the creation, the more happy will creatures be; and the greater the happiness and glory of the creation is, the more is God glorified, the greater is the display of his power, wisdom and goodness. Does it not hence follow, that the glory of God implies all possible good, and therefore is to be fought as the supreme end? How reasonable and important then is it that we should with zeal and fervour of mind constantly aim at this end, in obedience to the apostolic injunction, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or *whatsoever ye do*, do all to the glory of God!"

4. Because he who makes the glory of God his supreme end, and consequently seeks the greatest good and happiness of the creation, in the kingdom of God, IS necessarily happy himself. His benevolence, by which he makes this grand object his supreme end, and places his happiness in the glory of God, and the greatest general good, will necessarily render him happy, in seeing this end completely accomplished, as it will be to the utmost of his wishes, and far beyond his present conceptions. He must necessarily share in all this good, when it takes place; because, by the supposition, this is his chosen good. And while he seeks this as the grand object of his desire and happiness, and is at the same time allured that it shall be accomplished, he has a great degree of enjoyment. He in a measure enjoys the good he seeks, in the allured prospect that it will take place. Thus universal, disinterested benevolence, which seeks the glory of God, and the general good, is the only affection which can interest us in that good which will take place to the highest degree, and give us our full share in it: whereas the contrary affection, *self love* necessarily excludes from all true happiness, because the selfish person places not his happiness in the glory of God, and the public good, the happiness and glory of his kingdom; but in his own exaltation and private, personal good. He is, of course, an enemy to the only true good and happiness, and so far as that takes place he is necessarily excluded and unhappy.

He therefore who, in this sense, *denies himself*, gives up all that separate, personal, private interest which *self love* seeks, and, in this sense, loses his own life, shall find or save his life; that is, shall be truly and eternally happy, in the exercise of disinterested affection to God and the members of his kingdom, which necessarily puts him in possession of the public good and happiness, and gives him his share in this *social* felicity, as one of the members of the society. But he who *saves his life*, that is, who, having no public, disinterested affection, seeks himself only, and is pursuing and seeking to save to himself a separate, private interest,

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for the sake of which he is ready to sacrifice and oppose the glory of God, and the general good—he shall lose his life; that is, shall lose or miss of all happiness, and must necessarily be miserable.

Thus we see in what respects, and for what reasons, it is our indispensable duty, and of the highest importance to us, to make the glory of God our supreme end in all we do; and, by what has been observed, we may learn what is implied in this. It is to set this above every thing else; to aim at and pursue nothing but this, and what is implied in it; to subordinate every thing with which we are concerned to the glory of God; to give lip and devote ourselves, with all we have and are, to answer this end, without making any reserve, freely renouncing all supposable or possible interest or good, for ourselves or others, which is inconsistent with the glory of God, or which will not conduce to it and promote it.

III. They who desire to know their own character, and the nature of their religious exercises, whether they bear the stamp of true piety, may examine and try themselves by what has been exhibited on this subject: whether the God which is revealed in the Bible, unchangeable in his being, perfections, designs, decrees and works, is the chosen and delightful object of their religious affections; of their love, fear, hope and trust; of their gratitude and joy; of their adoration and praise, to whom they make confession, and pray with perseverance and pleasure; and whether they are conscious that a God, who has not foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, could not be the object of these their pious affections.

As to those who dislike and oppose this doctrine, and say, they cannot love and worship such a God; and yet think themselves truly pious, and in the way to heaven, and that they are serving and honouring God in their opposition to this doctrine; we will leave them to the day which shall try every man's work, of what sort it is; at the same time being certain that if *their hearts* and all the exercises of them do oppose and reject the God who has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, and they live and die with such hearts, they will be found to be *workers of iniquity*, and ranked with them who “know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

IV. Let all who believe this doctrine be concerned to live answerable to it, and constantly *fear before this God*, and live in the exercise and practice of every branch of true godliness; and not, as many do, hold the truth in unrighteousness, and pervert it to bad purposes.

The Christian has learned to unite a conviction and sense of entire dependence on God, who orders and works all things according to his unchangeable decree, for every motion and right exercise of heart, with zeal and activity in religion, working out his own. salvation with fear and trembling, with self-diffidence, and. a sense of his own insufficiency for any good thing, and a humble dependence on God for grace to do his duty; because he knows that God worketh in him both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure: [*Phil. ii. 12, 13.*] And the stronger and more steady conviction he has that God overrules and orders all things for his own glory and the greatest good of the whole, even all the sin and rebellion of men,

the more unreasonable and criminal does sin appear to him, as it is in its nature and tendency direct opposition to this event. And therefore the more does he loathe, abhor and condemn himself for his sins, and acknowledge his desert of eternal destruction: knowing that God's foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass, leaves the sinner as free a moral agent, and as inexcusable and criminal, as if there were no decree in the case.

Blessed are they who understand these things, and know the only true God, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working; and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, who exerciseth loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth.



SERMON XX.

WRITTEN IN THE YEAR 1800.

The sins of men are so under the direction and controul of God, as to glorify him, and subserve the good of his kingdom, in every instance of it which he suffers to take place.

Psalm lxxvi. 10. Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

IN this psalm God's care and protection of his church is celebrated. In the midst of all revolutions, wars, and confusions, which take place in the world, and the various and strong combinations of wicked men against his people, they are safe and happy under his care, who will effectually restrain all their enemies, and finally utterly defeat and destroy them, and give deliverance, peace and salvation to his church.

In the words now to be considered, the absolute and universal dominion of God over all creatures and things, is asserted, so that he can and will turn all the opposition which is made to him and his government, however strong and violent, and however long it may continue, to promote his own glory, and answer the best ends possible; and all the sins which would not subserve these good ends, he can and will effectually restrain, so that they shall not exist.

This very important and useful sentiment will be illustrated and established by a particular explanation of this passage of scripture, and the inferences to be made from it,

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee,” This is asserted not only as a truth, but as a most evident and certain truth, and of great importance to be believed and relied upon with the greatest confidence and assurance at all times, whatever seeming appearances there may be against it, and though we may not be able to see how it can possibly be true. This is expressed by the word *surely*, with which the sentiment is introduced.

The wrath of man comprehends all the rebellion and sins of men, that ever have or ever will take place, by which their hatred of God and his law and government, and strong opposition to these, is expressed. Mankind, ever since they have multiplied on earth, have, in general, been in arms, at war with God, and with each other; and this war has in numerous instances been carried on with great apparent engagedness, wrath and fury, in some more directly against God, and in others immediately against each other. All this is comprehended in the wrath of man, in our text: and so are all the thoughts and exercises of heart and conduct, however private, and more or less apparent and strong, which are contrary to the law of God; for all these are of the same nature and kind with those sinful actions in which men are more apparently, and with greater wrath and violence, combined against God and each other. And all the sins of good men, whether committed before they were converted or after, are included in this expression, as they are as really in opposition to God and his law, as the most open and avowed rebellion and rage against him, though not so strong and visible.

Thus, all the sins of which men are guilty, whether greater or less, more secret or open, under whatever form or pretence they are committed, are included in the wrath of man, as they are all rebellion against God, and a violation of his law, and opposition to his cause, church and kingdom; though the more open and violent opposition to the divine government, to the church and people of God, and to each other, may be more particularly intended by the expression. This is evident and certain, not only as all the sins of men are of the same nature and evil tendency, but they are all so united and combined, that if any instance and degree of sin is made to praise God, it must do so in every instance for the same reason; and if it were not so, the assertion in the words before us would be so partial as to be attended with great uncertainty, and of little use and importance in the application of it, as will appear in our further attention to the subject.

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“The wrath of man *shall praise thee;*” that is, shall honour and glorify thee. The sin of man shall, in every instance of it, be the occasion and made the means of the manifestation and display of the glorious character and perfections of God, which could not have been made to such advantage and in so great a degree, in any other way, had not sin existed in every instance in which it has done, or ever will do. This is not owing to the nature and tendency of sin, considered in itself; for it tends to directly the contrary, to dishonour him, and is a direct and awful opposition to the moral government, perfections and existence of God; but to his power, wisdom and goodness, by which he is able and disposed to overrule all the rebellion against him, even every sin which is committed, to answer his ends, and promote his own glory.

“The remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain:” that is, that wrath and those sins of men which are not suited and necessary to answer this end, to be so governed and overruled as to praise and glorify God, he will effectually restrain, and not suffer it to exist. This represents God as the supreme, sovereign disposer of all things and events, ordering what shall and, what shall not exist, from the greatest to the least, and directing the will and actions of men in every motion and exertion, so that all depend upon his will whether they shall have an existence or not; and this includes all the sins of men, as really as any other event whatever. The counsel of God’s own will determined whether there should be any such thing as sin and rebellion, and how much of this should exist, even just so much as should praise him, and no more; which necessarily includes a determination concerning every instance or act of sin, whether greater or less; as his determining that this earth should exist includes a determination how large it should be, of what materials it should be composed, and concerning every part, and every grain of sand, &c. of which it should consist. All this is necessarily implied in the words under consideration. For in determining that sin should exist, and just so much as would praise him, and no more, there must be a determination concerning every act of sin that should take place.

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The existence of the wrath of man, the continuance of it, the height to which it should rise, and all the consequences of it, depended as much upon the will of God, as did the existence of man, and of a particular providence to be exercised with respect to him from the first to the last, containing the wisest and best plan, by which God is most praised and glorified, and the greatest good promoted. These are so united and blended together, the one implying the other, that all must exist together, in order to form a perfectly wise plan, which shall be most to the glory of God, and the greatest good of the universe. For when it is said, the wrath of man shall praise God, it is equally asserted, that all the sin which does or ever shall take place shall promote the greatest glory and happiness of his kingdom, and of all his friends, who shall dwell in it forever; for their glory and happiness depend upon the glory of God, the manifestation and display of his glorious perfections, and will keep pace with this forever, the former necessarily taking place and rising in proportion to the greatness and increase of the latter, there being a necessary and infallible connection between them; so that whatever praises God, and serves to manifest and display his character and glory, equally promotes the happiness of all who are his friends, and the glory of his everlasting kingdom.

Of all this there is the greatest assurance and certainty, expressed by the Psalmist in our text; but we have other strong, corroborative evidence of these same truths, both from the scriptures and from reason, which demands our careful attention.

The scriptures will appear, beyond a possible doubt, to an attentive, honest mind, to be on the same plan, and to exhibit these same truths, from the beginning to the end. This is manifest in so many ways and instances that they cannot be all mentioned here. It will be sufficient to suggest the following: "The scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." The wrath of Pharaoh was ordered and brought about by God in his providence on purpose that he might be praised and glorified; that his name, his character and perfections might hereby be declared thou throughout all the earth. "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction? Here the sin and destruction of those who perish is represented as ordered by God for his praise, to manifest his hatred of sin, and his dreadful power in punishing sinners who are finally impenitent.

The innumerable predictions in the scripture of events to be brought about, and which have been fulfilled by millions of millions of sinful exercises and actions of wicked men, and predictions of many particular sins which men should commit, are an incontestible evidence that God has the direction of all the sins of men, and that none can take place unless by his disposal, so as to answer his ends, and promote his glory. Two or three instances may be mentioned to illustrate this remark.



The sin of the brethren of Joseph in selling him into Egypt, and all their anger and wrath which led to this, was determined and ordered by God for good, for his own praise and glory, and the good of his church. Therefore, God is said to have done it, and to send Joseph into Egypt, meaning it all for good. And in this way the wrath of Joseph's mistress in Egypt, and of her husband, did praise God, and could not have taken place, had it not been necessary to accomplish the benevolent purpose of God; and they and the brethren of Joseph were restrained from all that wrath and sin, which would defeat the prediction by the two dreams of Joseph, and not answer the purpose of God, and praise him. The former were restrained from putting Joseph to death, as they once proposed. And though Potiphar's "wrath was kindled," when he heard the false accusation against Joseph by his wicked wife, yet his wrath was so restrained that he did not take away his life, which had either of them done, the divine plan could not have been executed.

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But the most remarkable instance of this is the sin and wrath exercised by men in the treatment of the Saviour of the world, and putting him to death in the most cruel manner. This was all particularly determined and appointed long before by God, and foretold by the prophets. Hear what they who were inspired say of this in their solemn address to God: "Lord, thou art God, who had made heaven and earth and the sea, and all tint is in them; who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said. Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

All this scene of sin and wrath against Jesus Christ was determined and directed by the hand and counsel, the power and wisdom, of God, which was necessary for the greatest display of the divine perfections in the redemption of sinful man, which has ever been made, and could not have been made in any other way, and will be to his praise and glory forever, and the means of the unspeakably greater happiness and glory of all his friends, the members of his eternal kingdom.

And all this sin was ordered, to praise and glorify God, that he might hereby accomplish his wise and infinitely important designs. These sinners were restrained, and prevented committing all those sinful acts which would not praise God, but, contrary to this, would counteract his wise purposes. Thus Herod was not able to put Christ to death in his infancy, when he attempted to do it. And the Jews were not allowed to lay their hands upon him and kill him, though they desired and often attempted to do it, as this would not have been to the praise of God, but the contrary. They were restrained from effecting their purpose, till the proper time came, when this horrid deed would praise God, and was necessary to his accomplishing the infinitely wise and important ends he had in view.

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And indeed there is the greatest certainty that the sins of men, in general, and the universal depravity, rebellion and guilt of mankind, were necessary in order to there being such a character as that of Jesus Christ the Redeemer, and the wonderful, glorious events which do and will take place in consequence of what he has done and suffered. For had there been no sin, by which the human race are fallen into a state of total ruin, there could not have been any Redeemer or redemption, by which God will be more praised and glorified than by all his other works. And indeed all his other works have reference to, and centre in, the glorious work of Redemption, and derive their chief glory from this, of which the sin of man laid the foundation, which therefore is necessary for the greatest and most bright display of the perfections of God, and the consequent praises from all his friends, and their happiness in the enjoyment of him forever.

And as sin in general, and the most remarkable instances of it recorded in scripture, some of which have been mentioned, are made to praise God, there is hence ground of assurance that it does so in every instance, and that this is true of every sin that ever has been or will see committed by man, and that not one sin which would not praise God will ever take place, had not this been expressly asserted in our text. And it is important to be observed, that all the natural evil which is the consequence of sin, which does or ever will exist, will answer this end, and is necessary for the brightest manifestation and display of the divine perfections, and consequently for the greatest happiness of all the friends of God. This is implied in the words of the apostle Paul, when he says, "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." According to this, the gospel produces that which is pleasing to God in the effect it has, not only in them who are saved, but also that which it has on those who perish. It is the occasion of discovering the total depravity, and exceeding hardness, and strength of the obstinacy, of the human heart, in the universal, strong and fixed disposition to reject the offers of mercy, which no means will overcome and subdue; which discovery could not be made so fully in any other conceivable way. The clear and striking manifestation of this will serve to display the righteousness and holy displeasure of God in punishing sinners with everlasting destruction, and inflicting a greatly aggravated punishment on those who perish under the gospel, as neglecters and despisers of Christ and the great salvation.

The same sentiment is expressed by this Apostle in the following words: "What if God willing [determining] to shew his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?" Here God is represented, not only as designing to shew his power, and his displeasure with sinners by fitting them for destruction; but also by this to make known the riches of his grace, in the salvation of the redeemed.



Thus it appears that there is the most clear and certain evidence from the holy scripture, that all the sins of men that have or ever will take place, with all their circumstances, attendants and consequences, shall praise God, shall serve to manifest and display his perfections, as otherwise could not have been done, and shall be the occasion of all that good, that glory and happiness of his eternal kingdom, which is implied in this; that it is the will of God that all this sin should exist just as it does and will do, to answer this end, and no more; therefore all that sin which would not praise him, he wills shall not exist, and effectually restrains.

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And all this appears most reasonable, and may be argued from the being and perfections of God revealed in the scriptures, in so short and plain a way as to amount to a clear demonstration, to the reason of every honest, unprejudiced person who will carefully attend to the subject.

God is omnipotent, and can do what he pleases. He is omniscient; his knowledge extends to every thing. He is infinitely wise and good. He sees what is the greatest good on the whole, what is the wisest and best end, and what are the most wise and best way and means to accomplish it, and is disposed, yea, has an infinite propensity, to do it. It is therefore certain that all things and events absolutely depended on his will from eternity, for their existence, and the manner of it; therefore the plan of all future existence, of all creatures and events, and the particular manner and circumstances in which they should exist, was in the Divine Mind from eternity. And as it must be the wisest and best possible plan, containing all the possible good that Infinite Wisdom and Goodness could devise and desire, and Omnipotence execute, it cannot be altered in the most minute particular or circumstance, to eternity. And if this were possible, it would be infinitely undesirable and calamitous, yea, an infinite evil. It is matter of the greatest joy that the work of God is perfect," being decreed by him from eternity; that "whatsoever God doth, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it;" that "the counsel of he Lord standeth forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations;" that "he is of *one* mind, and none can turn or disappoint him," who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own wise, unchangeable will."

This leads directly to the point before us. It must be determined by God whether there should be any sin and rebellion under his government, and among mankind. This depended wholly on the will of God. He was able to forbid and prevent the exigence of it; and it it was contrary to wisdom, perfect rectitude and goodness, that is, if he saw it was not wisest and best, and necessary to effect the greatest good, on the whole, that sin should exist, he could and certainly would prevent the existence of it. There is therefore the greatest possible certainty, from the divine perfections, that sin does exist just in the manner and in that degree, and in every instance of it, with all the attendants and consequences of it which do or will take place, agreeable to the dictates and will of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness, as being necessary to accomplish the most wise and best end, the greatest possible good of the universe; and the sin and misery which are not necessary to promote this end shall never exist, as it

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is contrary to infinite wisdom and goodness that it should. We may be as sure of this, as we are or can be of the being and perfections of God, or of any truth whatever, or even of our own existence. And to disbelieve and deny, or even to doubt of it, tends to atheism, and is really a degree of it.

To suppose that God has not power and skill enough to prevent the existence of sin, and was not able to withhold man from sinning, consistent with the perfect moral freedom of man, if he had chosen to do it, is to suppose he is really unable to govern the world agreeable to his will, and therefore is not to be trusted in a matter of infinite importance, and that he cannot be perfectly happy, but infinitely to the contrary, while he cannot prevent sin and misery taking place in a most awful, undesirable and even infinite degree, most contrary to what he would desire and wish, were he able to prevent it! And if God were not able thus to prevent the existence of any of the sins which have been committed by man since his creation, then he cannot be supposed to be able to prevent the existence of any supposed degree of sin in future in any moral agent; consequently therefore there can be no ground of assurance, or the least evidence, either from God, or from moral agents, or from any other quarter, that sin will not take place in every moral agent, even in all those who are now perfectly holy, and those who are holy in some degree, in the greatest strength and to the utmost degree of which they are capable, and that as long as they shall exist! On this supposition, how could God know what would take place among his creatures? And how can he declare and promise that sin shall be forever excluded from the holy angels and the redeemed from among men? What shall we do with the declarations and promises of this kind abundantly made in the Bible? Can there be any reliance upon them? And what reason has any one to trust in God to preserve him from sin, and form him to holiness, or to ask him to do this? Dreadful and horrible and presumptuous supposition! most unreasonable, and big with consequences most terrible and destructive! It leads to the exclusion of divine revelation, and cuts off all trust and confidence in God in all matters of the greatest importance, and excludes all belief of a particular and universal divine providence, and naturally leads to, and lands men in, the horrible darkness of infidelity and atheism!

But if God be able to prevent the existence of sin, and it was wisest and best, on the whole, that there should be no sin, then wisdom and goodness must oppose the existence of it; so that to suppose that it is not best on the whole that sin should take place just as it does, is to suppose that God is neither wise nor good: for infinite wisdom and goodness, clothed with omnipotence, always prefer and effect that which is most wise and best, most for the glory of God and the greatest good of his eternal kingdom; and will certainly and effectually prevent the existence of every thing which cannot be made to promote this end. To deny or even to entertain the least doubt of this, and that all the sin with its attendants and consequences, which does or ever will exist, is necessary to effect the greatest good of the universe, the brightest display of the divine perfections, and the highest glory and hap-

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pineness of his kingdom, is equally to deny or doubt of the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, and to represent him unworthy of the implicit trust and confidence of his creatures, and so to leave them without any God, or one who is rather to be dreaded, than loved and adored. How dishonourable to God this is, being as gloomy and shocking as atheism itself, every truly pious person cannot but discern and feel!

The holy scriptures, and our reason from the perfections of God, therefore join in declaring this truth, and oblige us to believe and say, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise God, and the remainder of wrath he shall restrain," in the sense in which these words have been explained and vindicated, viz. that all the evil which has taken place, or ever will exist, both moral and natural, sin and misery, does take place, in every the least and greatest instance of it, under the superintendency and direction of the infinitely wise and benevolent will of God, as necessary to promote the greatest: possible good of the universe, his own glory, and the highest happiness of his moral, eternal kingdom. And he will restrain and prevent the existence of all that which is not necessary to answer this end.¹¹

This is equally true of all the sin and rebellion of the fallen angels, with all the attendants and consequences of this. Their sins are many ways connected with the sins of men. They were the wicked instruments of introducing sin among mankind, and are represented ill the scriptures, as having a great hand in all the sins which are committed by men, and deceiving and tempting the whole world of mankind. They are allowed to come down to the earth in great wrath against God and man, and to go forth to the whole world, to excite them to unite in horrible war against God. But they are in the hand of God, and under his restraints; and when they have done all the work he designs they shall do, he will call them into the bottomless pit, and shut them up, and set a seal upon them, that they should deceive the nations no more, till the proper time shall come to let them loose again. Thus the wrath of devils shall praise God, and the remainder of their wrath he shall restrain.



¹¹ This truth has been and still is greatly opposed, and many objections are made to it. It has been often and by many asserted, that if sin answers so good an end, then sin is a good thing, and the more there is of it the better; that this is the greatest encouragement to sin; and there is really no crime in sin, if so much good comes by it, and therefore sinners cannot be justly blamed and punished for it. And it has been often said by those who think and profess themselves to be wise, that this doctrine is inconsistent with human liberty, and really makes God the author of all the sin that takes place. But the truth is great, and must and will prevail; and the folly of all these objectors, who understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm, shall be manifest unto all men. It is needless to attempt to answer any of these objections here, as this has been publicly done over and over again. If any have a desire to see them answered, they may find it done, in President Edwards's Treatise on Freedom of Will, Dr. Well's Essay on Moral Agency, Dr. Edwards's Dissertation concerning Liberty and Necessity, the author's System of Doctrines contained in Divine Revelation, and his Sermons on [Rom. iii. 5, 6, 7, 8](#).

IMPROVEMENT.

This subject affords matter of sufficient support, of great comfort and joy, to the true friends of God, in the midst of all the evil, both sin and misery, which may take place. The Lord reigneth, clothed with omnipotence, infinitely wise and good, just and true. He is above all controul. He hath done, and will do, whatever he pleaseth, in heaven and in the earth. He is infinitely above all possibility of any disappointment, or of being opposed so as not to accomplish all his designs in the best and most perfect manner. All the rebellion, sin and suffering of creatures, that do or ever will, take place, are so far from frustrating his designs, that they are intended and ordered to take place just as they do, as necessary to make the greatest possible manifestation of his perfections, and promote the greatest good of his kingdom. There is not the least sin in thought, word or deed, nor the least instance of pain, nor can any evil exist, greater or less, which is not designed to answer some good end, so that it is best that it should exist just as it does. Then let the friends of God rejoice in him who made them and all things else, and orders every event, great and small, for the best. Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King: yea, let them always rejoice.

The Lord Jesus Christ, our God, who was once manifested in flesh, is received up into glory, has sat down on the throne of the universe, possessed of all power in heaven and earth, and having all things, angels, men and devils, in his hand, reigns over all, and will reign, till he has, in the best time and manner, completely accomplished his infinitely wise and good designs; destroyed the works of the devil, by wholly defeating, confounding and disappointing him and all who join with him, in all their attempts against him, and opposition to him, and turning all they have done or will do, and all that does or will take place respecting them, to answer his own ends, to the greater glory of God, and to make his work in the redemption of sinners more perfect and glorious. He having by his sufferings and obedience made an atonement for sin, and obtained righteousness for the justification of sinners, is thus exalted to give repentance and forgiveness of sins, and everlasting life to all who believe on his name, and come unto him; being able to save to the uttermost all them who come unto God by him. And as none of the human race will come to him, though all who hear the gospel are invited, unless they be drawn by the Spirit of God, and made willing by his power and grace, he in this exerciseth his sovereignty, and has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. And his will is infinitely wise, right and good. It is not best that all mankind should be saved, most for the glory of God, and the greatest good of the whole; but, that the design of Christ in dying to redeem sinners may in the best manner and highest degree be answered, some must be given up to the destruction which they deserve; and who is better able to determine this, and how many and what individuals shall be saved, than He who is infinite in wisdom, rectitude and goodness, who cannot make any mistake, or do the least wrong to any creature? Yea, who can do it but He? Every one who has a spark of true

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wisdom and goodness will earnestly desire that He may fix this matter with respect to every individual; and rejoice that it is, and will be, done by Him. And who has a better, or any *right* to do this, than He who has made and is the absolute and only proprietor of all creatures? “Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?”

To every benevolent friend of Christ the Saviour, it is most desirable and pleasing that he should have all things in his hand, and save as many and whom he will, and leave whom he will to destruction. He has a peculiar right to this, since he has been at such infinite expense to redeem sinners, that he should accomplish the end of his sufferings and death in the best manner, and see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, to have every thing effected with regard to the redemption of man so as in the highest degree to please his wisdom and goodness. To this end he has every creature and thing in the universe put into his hands, and he directs every motion and event among creatures to answer the purpose for which he died, which he will accomplish in the best manner, perfectly agreeable to infinite wisdom and goodness. He will save all of the human race who can be saved consistent with wisdom and infinite goodness. And to all who trust in him he is an almighty friend and protector, and will secure them from all evil, and cause all things to work together for their good, and will make them perfectly holy, and carry them through death to heaven in the best manner and time, and they shall inherit all things forever.

In sum, all things and every event are constantly under the direction and controul of infinite wisdom, rectitude and goodness, and are conducted and going on in the best manner, as fast as can be, to the most agreeable and happy issue possible, the greatest, most bright and happifying exhibition of the divine character, and the highest glory and felicity of the everlasting kingdom of God, from which no creature will be excluded, but those whose presence there is inconsistent with the glory of God, and the greatest good of his kingdom, and therefore contrary to wisdom and goodness, and who do at the same time exclude themselves. Every thing, circumstance and event is right; and all conspire to promote the greatest good, and, all things considered, it is on the whole best that they should be just what they are, and take place exactly as they do. No alteration can possibly be made, without injuring and spoiling the divine plan, formed by infinite understanding, wisdom and goodness. All this is to be seen with the greatest certainty in the infinitely important and excellent character, works, and revealed designs, of the glorious Saviour of the world.

Surely no intelligent and truly benevolent person can believe and realize all this without feeling a peculiar pleasure and joy, which will more than support him under, and counter-balance, all the evil which he may feel, or that is in his view. He can, with peculiar satisfaction and joy, say, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou shalt restrain. The Lord Jesus Christ reigns, let the earth rejoice. Rejoice always in the Lord, and again I say, rejoice evermore; for he brings the greatest good out of all evil, and this



shall certainly be the happy issue of all. He is the rock, his work is perfect for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is He.”

Here it may be useful to attend to and answer several questions which may arise in the minds of some.

Question. How can we have any joy or comfort in any or all of this, while we do not know, and have little or no evidence or hope, that we are interested in all this good, but fear that Christ does not intend to save us, and that we shall perish forever? If we knew we were Christians, and real friends to Christ, and should be saved, this would give us comfort and joy; but as we know not that this is true, and do often much doubt of it, what is all the good, which has been represented as the issue of all evil, to us, while we know not that we shall have any part in it; but may be cast off, and miserable forever?

Answer. If you are wholly selfish, and have no desire that God may be glorified, and the greatest good of his kingdom promoted, and can take no pleasure in the prospect and assurance of this, unless you are certain your own personal happiness will be secured and promoted hereby, then this discovers and decides your state and character, that you are not a real friend to Christ and his church, and no true Christian. All your hope and thoughts of this are a mere delusion, and ought to be immediately dismissed. You must be born again of the Holy Spirit, and become new creatures, before you can be Christians. But if you have any true benevolence, and are friends to Christ and his cause and interest, and the greatest happiness of his church and kingdom, you cannot but have comfort, pleasure and joy in the view and assurance that all things and every event, however evil and of a bad tendency in itself, will be overruled by him for his honour and the greatest good of his kingdom; that his interest is secure, and will be promoted by every thing that takes place, without considering your own personal interest, whether this is secure or not. And indeed you cannot know or have any ground to think or hope that you have an interest in Christ, and shall be saved, until you have this benevolent affection towards Christ and his people, and are conscious that it does take place in your heart!; in some degree, or those exercises which imply this, or are implied in it. But when these exercises and benevolent affections take place in your hearts, and arise to such strength and constancy, that, when you relied upon your own views and feelings, you are conscious that you have them, that you are pleased and have enjoyment and comfort in the thought and assurance that Christ will get honour by all the (ins of men, and opposition made to him by men and devils, and the consequent ruin of those who perish, and that all will issue in the greatest possible good, on the whole, you will have reason to hope and conclude that you are friends to Christ, and shall partake in all the happiness and glory of his eternal kingdom, and may, in this way arrive to a degree of assurance of it. And this is the only proper and safe way of obtaining a true and well grounded hope and confidence that you are real Christians, and shall be saved. And as this hope increases and continues, your comfort and joy will be increased. But your comfort

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and joy does not so depend upon or consist in this, that, if this confidence and hope should give way to doubt and fear, all your comfort and joy would cease; you could and would even then rejoice in the character, glory and happiness of the Saviour, and that all things were conduced by him so as to answer the best end; that he would save all that can be saved consistent with wisdom and goodness, with his glory and the great est good of his church, whether you are included in that number or not: and if you find you can and do rejoice in this view, it is a good, perhaps the best evidence, that you belong to that number.

There are too many professing Christians whose religious comfort and joy appear to consist wholly in a hope or confidence that they shall be saved; their comfort rises in proportion to the degree and strength of their hope, and when that sinks and fails, and is even given up, their comfort is all gone, and all is darkness and gloom: so that all light and comfort with them in their religion consists in thinking, or a hope, that their own personal interest is secure, and all their religious darkness and trouble arise from doubts of this. Their comfort first began in a hope and belief that they should be saved, and still depends wholly upon this. This does not look like the experience of true Christians, but to be a wholly selfish religion, as different from real Christian exercises, as darkness is from light.

Question II. But must Christians pay no regard to their own interest? May they not feel and dread personal pain and misery? And may not their own sins and sufferings occasion grief and sorrow? And ought they not to feel for the sins and calamities of others, and the sinful, wretched state of mankind in general, and mourn and lament, in the view of these evils? Must they always be all joy and gladness, and feel no mental pain and sorrow?

Answer. A Christian ought to regard his personal interest according to its comparative greatness and real worth; but must have no interest of his own, distinct and separate from the general interest, or the highest and best interest of the whole universe. This is the interest to be regarded and fought supremely, and the interest of every individual of this whole, according to the importance and worth of it; and as this must be small and inconsiderable in comparison with the grand interest of the whole, it must be disregarded and given up, if it be inconsistent with the greatest good of the whole. And he must and will have an aversion from and dread of personal pain and suffering, as it is in itself an evil; but this is consistent with rejoicing at the same time in the happiness of others, and in the greatest general good, and he will have a peculiar satisfaction and joy when he believes and realizes that his pain and suffering will promote the good of the whole, which is in all instances true by the superintending care of the Redeemer. Thus the apostles, when they were beaten and put to shame by the council of the Jews, “departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”

And Christians ought, and cannot but be affected with the sin and misery of mankind so far as it comes under their view, and to be pained and grieved, when they attend more particularly to it; for it is in itself a great, and to us incomprehensible evil, and might well

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fill a benevolent man with insupportable pain and for row, and sink him into the most distressing gloom and overwhelming grief, were he not certain that all this is under the direction and particular care and regulation of uncontrollable wisdom and goodness, and has taken place because it is necessary for the greatest good, on the whole, and no more shall exist than shall answer this end, the glory of God and the greatest possible happiness of his kingdom; so that it is on the whole best there should be just so much evil in the universe as there is and ever will be. But when he attends to this his sorrow is in a great measure turned into joy. And could he have as clear and comprehensive a view of the good that will be the issue of all the evil that takes place, as the inhabitants of heaven have, all his sorrow would entirely cease, and nothing would interrupt or abate his pleasure and holy joy. But in this imperfect state, where so much evil is felt, and present before our eyes, and the good which will be the consequence of all this, though believed to be certain, is not so present and in so full and clear view as the evil, the latter, especially at times, will occasion pain and sorrow. The good man, in this very imperfect state especially, cannot be equally attentive to every object at the same time, and when his attention is particularly turned to the evils that take place, and his mind is impressed with them, he will have pain and sorrow, though he does not doubt that all things are ordered for the best, and that all the evil will issue in the greatest good, while the latter is more out of sight, or less the object of his attention, and consequently makes a less impression on his mind. At other times his attention is fixed on Christ, his character, works and designs, and the good he will bring out of all evil, his faith is strong, and realizes invisible things, that all things are going on well, and could not be better, as they are guided by infinite wisdom and goodness. His pain and sorrow are turned into comfort, joy and praise.

Thus the Christian has his joys and sorrows in this imperfect, sinful state: but the latter never takes place to that degree as wholly to exclude the former; but in the midst of sorrow he has joy, and, in a sense and degree, rejoices *always*. So the apostle Paul “had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart,” in a view of the sin and misery of his nation; yet in the midst of his sorrow he had matter of joy. Therefore he represents himself, “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” And he commands Christians to rejoice in the Lord *always*, and repeats the injunction: “And again I say, *rejoice*. Rejoice *evermore*.” And our glorious Saviour, when in a state of humiliation on earth, did in his human nature rejoice in spirit, in the divine will, and sovereign, wise disposal of all things and events, respecting the children of men: [[Luke x. 21, 22.](#)] Yet he wept over Jerusalem, when his mind was impressed with the sin and ruin of the inhabitants of that city. And though he rejoiced and was glad that Lazarus was dead, as it was necessary for the glory of God and the good of his disciples, yet when he saw Mary and her friends who were with her weeping, he groaned in spirit, was troubled, and wept.

Question III. We believe a Christian may have such comfort and joy as has been described; but as some are doubtless deceived, and make great pretensions to this joy, who have only a false and spurious kind of joy, we should be glad to know how, and by what, the former may be distinguished from the latter?

Answer. This may be in some measure illustrated and decided by the following particulars:

1. The Christian's joy is pure, calm and serene, and is better felt than expressed; therefore does not make him talkative, and forward to tell of *his* joy, unless when it appears necessary for the instruction and benefit of others; and then he is disposed rather to speak of the matter and reason there is of comfort and joy, than to dwell on his own comfort and enjoyment. He is humble, and has a low and mean opinion of himself, in proportion to the degree of his comfort and joy.

2. This joy does not tend to exclude or abate a sense of the evil of sin, and the ill-desert of it, and of the misery which takes place in consequence of it: but, on the contrary, the Christian has a clear view of his own sinfulness, the hatefulness of it, and of his desert of evil, when he rejoiceth in the Lord: his joy does not abate his sense of this, but rather increases it. Nor is he insensible of the evil of sin in general, and of the misery that comes and will come on men for their sins, while he rejoices that the wrath, even all the sins and misery, of man, shall praise God.

Therefore they whose religious joy arises from a belief that there is no great evil in sin, and that God cannot justly, or if he could, will not, punish it with everlasting destruction, have only a groundless and false

3. This joy is so far from making persons careless, slothful and inactive in religion, that it is attended with directly the contrary. They hate sin, and endeavour to avoid it, and seek deliverance from it, and strive to prevent and suppress it in others as far as they have opportunity and ability. They are fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. When they rejoice that he is praised, *they* seek to honour and praise him in all possible ways. These cannot be separated, as it would imply an express contradiction. They not only praise God, but pray to him. Their comfort and joy is not inconsistent with engagedness and pleasure in prayer; for the latter is implied in the former. They pray for deliverance from all that which appears to them to be evil, and for all things which they judge desirable for themselves and others, and which appear most for the glory of God, and the advancement of his interest and kingdom among men.

But, in all their desires and prayers, they are resigned to the will of God. They subordinate all to that, and say. *If it be consistent with thy will*—desiring that his will may be done, which they know is best, most wise and good, however contrary it may be to their partial views and particular desires. And in this resignation to the divine will, and acquiescence in it, there is implied an earnest desire and prayer. “Thy will be done,” may be a strong and



earnest petition, and always is so, when it is attended with a proper sense of the desirableness and importance that it should be done in all instances, as implying the greatest possible good, and with a disposition to rejoice in it.

It is therefore certain that they are strangers to the joy of true Christians, who, under a pretence of believing that all things and events are fixed by the will of God, and take place in the best manner, and that whatever is right and best, are wholly careless and easy with regard to their own state and conduct, and whatever sins and evils take place; have no desires to cross any of their inclinations, and to be virtuous and holy, living in the neglect of fervent devotion, prayer and praise.

On the whole,

This subject is suited to excite Christians to attend to and improve the truth contained in the text which has been explained, so as constantly to enjoy the support and comfort which they need, and which is offered to them, in the present dark and seemingly evil state of things in this world. "Were it not for *this truth*, there would be no support for Christians, but their minds would be involved in the most painful gloom, in the view of their own sinful state, and the sin and misery which abound in the world, directly tending to the dishonour of God, and the ruin of all that is desirable; attended with disorder and confusion, of which no bounds or end can be realized or known, or so much as conjectured. The good man would have no place on which he could set his foot, to prevent his sinking and being overwhelmed in darkness and despair.

But when the Christian attends to *this truth*, and feels the certainty of it, his feet stand on a solid foundation, on a *rock* which cannot be moved: he feels calm, and has divine support and comfort, in the midst of the storms and raging waves which toss themselves as if they would overwhelm the world. He looks above all these threatening appearances, and beholds a serene sky, and knows the storm will soon be over, and the dashing waves will cease, and the sun will shine more bright and pleasant than if there had been no storm. The Christian, whose mind is firmly established in this everlasting truth, and is sure that all things will issue well, and that it is best they should take place just as they do, that good will be the issue of all the evil, though he cannot but be affected with the evils, moral and natural, with which he is surrounded, and that more or less at different times, yet will have sufficient support, and be filled with comfort and joy, especially at times, knowing that the Lord reigns, that the wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain.

It therefore becomes Christians, as their duty and interest, to attend to this truth, taken in the whole extent of it, to keep it in their minds, and maintain a constant assurance of it, whatever appearances there may be to the contrary. It is to be feared that many Christians are greatly deficient in this. They dwell too much, if not wholly, on the dark Tide of things, on the evils which are in their view, and suffer much gloom, dejection and pain of mind, for which there is no good reason, and which they might escape, if they looked more at the



bright side, presented in the truth which has been considered, and kept it always in view; and their tears of sorrow would be in a measure dried up, and succeeded by tears of joy. It is observable that Christians, when they meet with great disappointments and calamities, either personal or public, in which the interest of the church and religion is concerned, are obliged to make use of this truth for their support and comfort—"The Lord reigns, and orders every thing right and well," &c. And if Christians would keep this in constant view, and see and realize the hand of God in every event, they would have constant support and comfort, and live more to the glory of God. And this tends to destroy all contracted, selfish views and feelings, and to enlarge their minds, while they attend to the divine character, government and kingdom, and the power, wisdom and goodness by which all things in the universe are directed and governed. And the more they realize and are pleased with this, the more they resemble the inhabitants of heaven, and are prepared to be members of that happy society, and join with them in rejoicing and praising the only wise God their Saviour forever and ever. Amen.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE author hopes the candid reader will not be displeas'd with his speaking so much in the first person singular in the following discourse. Such egotism in general is disagreeable to him; and he has therefore avoid'd it in his other discourses, as the reader will perceive. But the following being of a peculiar kind, seem'd to render it necessary; and it is hop'd will not be thought selfish, assuming, or improper.

SERMON XXI.

The Author's Farewell to the World.

[Psalm lxxvi. 10.](#) *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*

THESE words have been explained in the preceding discourse, and it appears that they contain the following important truth:

That God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has determined that there should be just so much evil, both moral and natural, as has been, now is, and ever will be, and no more; as it is most suitable and necessary to make the brightest display of his perfections, and effect the greatest good, glory and happiness of his eternal kingdom; therefore it is most wise and best that all this evil should exist: and every instance of it, greater or less, God will overrule to answer this end, in the highest possible degree.

It has been shown that this truth, being believed and properly improved, is a sufficient and the only foundation for the support, comfort and joy of the benevolent friends of God, in all the darkness, confusion, sin and misery with which they are surrounded.

And now, standing on this sure, firm foundation, this immovable, everlasting rock, I look around, and, as far as I am able, view the world of mankind, and take my leave of them, expecting soon to put off this my tabernacle.

I am old, having lived near fourscore years, and I know not the day of my death; but have no reason to think it is far distant.

It is my earnest wish to leave a blessing behind me when I shall go hence: and I have the consolation to know I shall. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. He lives and reigns head over all things to the church. He will reign till all his enemies are put under his feet; till he has destroyed the works of the devil, and perfectly completed the work of redemption; yea, he will reign forever. He will cause all the kingdoms of this world, in which Satan has reigned so long, to become his own kingdom, and all nations shall serve him, and be holy and happy under his influence, protection and smiles. Of this blessed time the Bible is full of predictions and promises. This blessing I leave behind me for the world to enjoy long after I am dead; for I am sure that the time is coming when all the families and nations of the earth shall be *blessed* in Jesus Christ. The assurance of this affords support and consolation to me, while I am surveying mankind in their present sinful and wretched state.

It is doubtless impossible to make an exact calculation of the number of inhabitants now living in this world, which shall be agreeable to the truth, and may not err in fixing on millions less or more than do actually exist. But they who have attended to this point, and perhaps are best able to judge, have supposed that there are not less, but perhaps more, than *eight hundred millions* of people now living on earth: that of these, four hundred and eighty-

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one millions are Heathens; one hundred and forty millions are Mahometans; and nine millions are Jews. All which amount to six hundred and thirty millions. There remain one hundred and seventy millions, which are supposed to be nominal Christians. Of these, ninety millions are Papists, thirty millions of the Greek church, and fifty millions Protestants.

It is not probable that this computation is exact, according to the truth, and some may make a different one; but this is perhaps as near the truth as any that can at present be made. I cannot speak to all these, so as to be heard, and there is but a very small number, compared with the whole, whom I shall ever know in this world, or who will know or hear of me. But I am sure to meet not only all who are now in the world, but all the countless millions who ever have lived, or shall exist hereafter to the end of the world, at the day of judgment, when I shall know the character of every individual person, and mine will be inspected and known by all.

The earth is far from being filled with inhabitants. There is room for many more, probably a thousand, yea many thousands, to one of the present inhabitants. The earth when properly and fully cultivated, and the produce prudently used to answer the ends of living, would support a multitude of inhabitants, even beyond all our present calculation. Noah and his sons, and in them every generation of mankind who have descended from them, received a command from God to multiply and *fill* the earth. This command has not yet been properly regarded by mankind; but, instead of this, they have in a great measure depopulated the earth, by wars and cruel slaughters of each other, and the practice of a variety of destructive vices, by which multitudes have been immaturely cut off in every age. And, by reason of the great corruption and horrid rebellion of mankind in every age, God has been pleased to show his displeasure by destroying the bigger half that have been born, in their infancy, or the early days of youth. But the time is coming when a generation shall rise up who shall know and fear the Lord, and love their neighbour as themselves, and shall learn war no more, and there shall be none to destroy or hurt in all the earth: and, in the practice of piety and every social virtue, under the smiles of Heaven, they will be happy, and multiply and fill the earth.

According to the foregoing calculation, the greater part of mankind now on the earth are in a state of Heathenism; and there are near as many Jews and Mahometans, as nominal Christians, who are professed enemies to Christianity, and are in as bad, yea, worse state, than are the heathen.

It is the preceptive will of God our Saviour, that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. He commanded his disciples to “go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” And every one to whom the gospel is preached is commanded to repent and believe the saving truth. It is therefore wholly owing to the disobedience and wickedness of man, both Christians and Heathen, Mahometans and Jews, Infidels and



Atheists, that the gospel has not been preached to all mankind, and that they have not all embraced it, to the salvation of their souls.

Notwithstanding man's natural disposition to oppose, hate and reject the gospel, and the many difficulties and dangers which hence arise, in attempts to spread the gospel among the Heathen and others, it is the duty of Christians to exert themselves, and take every proper method to propagate it far and wide, to the utmost of their power, looking to and trusting in Christ, to cause his word to run and be glorified. Love to Christ, and benevolence to men who are perishing in darkness and sin, are sufficient, if properly exercised, to induce Christians to unite in the prosecution of this most important affair. Christians enjoy the richest treasure by the gospel, and they will not diminish but increase their own part in it by their attempts to impart it to others.

Within a few years past a great and extraordinary zeal and engagedness to propagate the gospel among the Heathen, and others who have it not preached to them, has appeared, and been uncommonly exerted, both in Europe and America. And I observe with approbation and pleasure, that all the societies which have been formed are agreed in the great and leading doctrines of the gospel, which have been called *the doctrines of grace*, or Calvinism; and that they appear, in all their publications, to express a spirit of true piety, and zeal to maintain and propagate these doctrines, and to approve of no missionaries who do not appear cordially to embrace them, and to be truly pious, as I am certain that this is the only scheme of doctrines which is consistent with itself, and with the Bible, and suited to convey saving truths to the minds of men.

This is an important and commendable design and work, and worthy to be pursued with increasing zeal and steady perseverance by all Christians, whatever difficulties, disappointments and apparent discouragements may occur. And though the attempts should not be succeeded in the conversion of one heathen, yet they who honestly, and from truly Christian principles, engage in this cause, however much they risk or expend, and even if they lose their own lives in it, they will really lose nothing by it, but meet with a rich reward. And if but few souls shall be gathered to Christ and be saved, this will more than compensate for all the cost and pains that can be bestowed in the cause; for one soul is worth more than ten thousand worlds. And though Israel be not now gathered, and there shall be no great and remarkable success at present; yet they shall be acceptable in the eyes of the Lord, and it will, in some way, though now unknown to us, serve to promote and hasten on the happy day when the Heathen shall be given to Christ for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

In this view I rejoice when I am taking my leave of the world, and heartily wish success and God speed to all who are, and the many more who hereafter shall be, engaged in this happy, glorious work.

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Of nominal Christians above two thirds are Papists, or of the Greek church, and near one third are Protestants, who are not more than the sixteenth part of the inhabitants of the earth. The Popish church has corrupted the gospel, introduced innumerable superstitious institutions and practices, and an idolatry, in many respects more gross and wicked than that of the Heathen. In scripture the head of this church, the Pope, is called Antichrist and the Beast, who, with all his followers, who receive his mark, are doomed to destruction. The Greek church is sunk into ignorance and superstition, and have departed from the essential truths and duties of Christianity. We are not therefore to look into either of these churches for many, if any, real Christians. As public bodies, they will cease to exist, when real Christianity, in the truth and power of it, shall prevail through all the world. I therefore take my leave of them, as by the scripture doomed to destruction.

The Protestants, who began their separation from the church of Rome in the sixteenth century, when what is called the reformation from Popery took place, under the preaching and writings of Luther and Calvin, and many other reformers, are now divided into various different sects, parties and denominations, differing in the doctrines which they hold, and in their manner of discipline, and in the mode of administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, and the proper subjects of these ordinances, and in the mode of worship, &c. In the time of the reformation, and for some time after, the body of the reformed agreed in the most important and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, which appears by their confessions of faith and catechisms, which they published, and are the same, as to substance, with the doctrines which Calvin published in his Institutions. The articles of faith of the church of England, formed not long after the reformation from Popery, are after the same model, Calvinistic. About the middle of the seventeenth century, a confession of faith and catechisms were formed by an assembly of divines, called together from England and Scotland, by both houses of the English parliament; which confession and larger and smaller catechisms were approved and ordered to be published by both houses of said parliament, and the parliament and general assembly of the church of Scotland. And they were subscribed or assented to by all ranks of people in England, Scotland, and Ireland. This confession of faith, and these catechisms, are what may be, and is generally, called *strict Calvinism*. And they have been assented to, taught and maintained by many to this day.

But doctrines contrary to those contained in this confession of faith were introduced among Protestants not long after the reformation from Popery, and were considerably spread, when the above said confession was formed; such as are called Arminianism and Antinomianism, and those held by Arians and Socinians, who not only agree with Arminians in rejecting Calvinism, or what are called *the doctrines of grace*, but deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. These doctrines have had a great increase and spread among Protestants, since that time, especially in this century; and the prevalence of Deism, to which these doctrines have a direct lead, has taken place, and real, practical religion has decayed, and vice of almost

every kind has increased and abounded in proportion to the propagation of these doctrines, which are opposed to Calvinism, and have a tendency to spread infidelity.

About the middle of this century the attention of multitudes was roused, and there was a great and remarkable revival of religion, in Britain, Ireland and America, principally under the preaching of Whitefield, and those who joined with him. Great numbers were hopefully converted, and embraced the doctrines of Calvinism. But there was too great a mixture of delusion and false religion, which has continued and been spreading since that time, while the whole has been the mean of the increase of light and knowledge of the truth, by which true religion has been distinguished from that which is false, and the important doctrines of the gospel have been pointed out and vindicated, in opposition to the various errors which have been embraced by many, by the writings or preaching of those who have appeared to have come to the knowledge of the truth. But by far the greater part, even the body of the people, appear not to have partook of the benefit of this revival of religion; and most who lived in the time of it were prejudiced against it, and opposers of it, and many of those who at first appeared friendly to it apostatized, and either embraced errors and false religion, or abandoned themselves to vice and infidelity; and on the whole it has been the means of hardening men in sin, and against the truth and all true religion, and against Christianity itself; so that religion has been gradually decaying, in general, from that time to this, and the above mentioned errors, and Deism, and even Atheism, have been fast spreading, and greedily embraced by multitudes, in opposition to all truth. And vice and immorality have kept pace with this, as the natural effect.

Deism and Atheism, which are near akind, as the former really implies the latter, and naturally runs into it, both being not only opposition to Christianity, but to all religion, have for a century had a rapid spread in Germany, and more or less in all parts of Europe. This has been promoted with uncommon zeal, and secret cunning, by a number of pretended philosophers, who, with their abettors, have at length effected the public expulsion of Christianity from France. And they do not stop here, but are determined, as soon as possible, to effect the extirpation of Christianity and all religion from the Christian world. Yea, they extend their views farther, and are attempting, as far as they shall have opportunity, to put an end to all religion of every kind, and all civil government, in every nation on earth, where there is any degree of these. They have extended their views to America, and have emissaries, both secret and more open, attempting to spread these pernicious principles; and there are multitudes, especially of the rising generation, who are prepared to receive them.

Though there have been of late some instances of apparent revival of religion, both by zealously embracing and promoting Calvinism, or the true doctrines of the gospel, and exhibiting the power and life of experimental religion in practice, both in Europe and America; yet the great body and mass of the people are evidently fast growing more and more corrupt in principle and practice. But very few of the whole are willing to make a profession of reli-

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gion, and by far the greater part of professors do not understand or believe the important, essential doctrines of the gospel, and are far from a steady, zealous conformity to the holy rules of it in practice, and shining as lights, in distinction from the world. Attending on public worship is more and more neglected and despised; and profanation of the sabbath is more common, by irreligious visits, vain companies, and walking or riding abroad in companies. Family religion is generally excluded; and family government and good order, and the religious instruction and education of children, are become very rare, and generally neglected; which gives a dark and melancholy prospect respecting the religion and morals of the rising and future generations. And in proportion to the neglect of public worship, and the profanation of the sabbath, and the increase of profaneness and other vices, there is an increasing desire and engagedness to attend the foolish, wicked and corrupting diversions of the stage or theatre, and other sinful assemblies and amusements.



The present state of religion, both as to the doctrines and practice of those who profess to believe that Christianity is a divine institution, and of those who are professed infidels, affords a clear practical demonstration of what the Bible abundantly holds forth, viz. that true religion, in principle and practice, cannot be preserved and maintained in the world, but will soon vanish, be rejected and lost, if the powerful influences of the Spirit be withheld, and do not attend the preaching of the gospel, and the administration of the instituted ordinances of it, to the saving conversion of sinners, and the quickening, strengthening, and comfort of believers. When men remain under the power of the natural corruption and ignorance of their minds, not being born of the Spirit, and taught of God so as to come to the knowledge of the truth, by the renewing of their minds, their carnal mind, which is enmity against God, will either lead them to reject the gospel wholly as a mere fable, and not worthy of credit, or to corrupt it in the doctrines and duties which it inculcates, so as to render it conformable to the corrupt inclinations of their own hearts. And this is no new discovery, but the evidence of it has existed and been increasing ever since Christianity has been published to the world, by the treatment it has received from all to whom it has been preached, except those who have known and acknowledged that they were brought to understand and embrace it by the invisible and powerful operations of the Spirit of God; that, were it not for this distinguishing, sovereign goodness of God, and they had been left to themselves, they should not have believed and embraced the gospel, and discerned and loved the truths and duties there revealed, but should have persevered in ignorance and disobedience.



This evident fact is a continual, standing evidence of two things, viz. that Christianity is a wise and holy institution, and from heaven, and that mankind are totally depraved.

1. This is an evidence that Christianity is from heaven, and a holy institution; and that two ways. It is an evidence that it is from heaven, from its being continued and maintained in the world to this day, notwithstanding the great and continual opposition of mankind to it, and their unwearied attempts to extirpate or corrupt it. Had not Jesus Christ been from

heaven, and was he not gone there to maintain his cause and church on earth, so that the gates of hell should not prevail against it, agreeable to his promise, by the constant exertion of his power and invisible influence, Christianity and the church could not have lived to this time, but the great truths on which the true church of Christ is built would have been discarded and forgotten long ago. And it is an evidence that Christianity and all the essential doctrines of it are from heaven, and that it is a holy institution, that it is so disagreeable and displeasing to fallen, depraved men, by which they are disposed to oppose and reject it, unless corrupted and altered so as to be agreeable to their taste, and their reigning lusts. Had the gospel been of men, a mere human contrivance, it would have been suited to the natural humour, taste, and inclinations of man, so that there would be no need of a supernatural change of heart in order to their cordial approbation of it, and compliance with the doctrines and precepts of it. But if it be from heaven, it must be a holy institution, and therefore disagreeable to fallen man. Were it suited to please the corrupt taste and sinful inclinations of man, it would be worse than nothing, and could not be from heaven. But since the true doctrines and precepts of Christianity are directly contrary to the heart and reigning inclinations of fallen man, so that he must be born again and be a new creature, in order to his being a friend to the gospel, or even understanding and believing it, it is certainly an excellent, holy institution, and must be from heaven. Agreeable to this, Christ said to the Jews, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not. If another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." And Paul said, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

2. This is an evidence of the total depravity of mankind; not only that they are fallen and depraved, but that they are *wholly depraved* in all their moral powers—have not the least degree of right moral taste and inclination, but are wholly under the power of the contrary. As the scripture says, "They are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one." When a revelation comes from heaven perfectly wise, holy and good, and suited to relieve and save man from his fallen, wretched state, revealing a Saviour infinitely excellent and glorious, full of grace and truth, and offering complete, eternal salvation to every one who is willing to have it; if man had the least degree or spark of moral goodness or inclination; yea, if he were not wholly an enemy to God and every thing right and holy; he would not hate and reject such an offer, but gladly embrace it. Mankind would not join together to invent some way to corrupt and spoil it, or root it out of the world, were they not total and strong enemies to God and all that is wise and good, and consequently enemies to their own good. "This is the condemnation" of man, as totally corrupt and an exceedingly criminal enemy to God, "that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

But to return to the view which has been given of the present state of the world: It appears to me, as it also doth to some noted writers on the Revelation, that the sixth vial, mentioned

[Rev. xvi. 12-16](#), is now running, and began to be poured out at the beginning of the eighteenth century, or some years before, and will continue to run some part of the nineteenth century, perhaps near fifty years of it. Under this vial John “saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, [or wonders] which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty.” Eight years ago I published a particular explanation of this passage in a Treatise on the Millennium. It is needless to repeat that. I shall only observe here, that this is a representation of the uncommon spread and prevalence of error and wickedness of every kind over all the world, among all orders of men, especially the Christian world, under the influence of the devil, by which men in general will be in an unusual degree combined, engaged and armed against the reigning God the Saviour, and shall produce great, strange and wonderful events. And when the iniquity of the world is become full, and men in general are ripe for destruction, God will come forth out of his place to punish the world for their wickedness, in a most terrible battle against them, by pouring the most dreadful calamities and destruction upon them, under the seventh and last vial of the wrath of God, which is represented in this chapter, [verse seventeenth to the end](#), and in the [nineteenth chapter, verse eleventh to the end](#). This will prepare the way for the introduction of the millennium, when the church of Christ shall increase and prosper, in an unexampled state of purity and happiness, for a thousand years.

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In the view of this present dark and evil state of the world, and the prospect of yet greater wickedness and more dreadful calamities which are to take place for ages and generations to come on the stage, I now take my leave of it, with a mixture of grief and joy; knowing that all this wrath of man shall praise God, and all the sin and misery that will take place is necessary for, and will issue in, the most glorious display of the Divine Character, and the greatest glory and happiness of Christ and his church; and that he will hasten an end to these evils in this world as fast and as soon as it can be done consistent with his wisdom and goodness, and so as to bring on the millennium in the best manner and time.

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I think their notion is entirely without foundation, yea, contrary to scripture, who imagine that the end of the world may come, and Christ come to judgment immediately, at any day or hour now. Christ has foretold many things which must come to pass between this time and that grand event. Nor, as they think, would the preaching of such a doctrine tend to awaken people, and prevent their going on in security and sin, more than what constantly takes place before the eyes of all, in the death of others, and reminding people that no one is secure from death one hour; that Christ may come when they think not, and carry them out of the world, which will be as fatal to them, if they are living in sin, as if he had come to judgment.

Nor is their opinion founded on any reason or scripture, who think that but few of mankind, on the whole, will be saved. What our Saviour says of this respected the then present time. His words are in the present tense: "Few *are* saved." He does not say what will be in other ages of the world. He has foretold a time when all the kingdoms of the world shall be brought into his church and kingdom; and so many may exist in this time as to outnumber all that will be left.

Therefore while I am taking my leave of the world of mankind, who now lie in the wicked one, and are going on from bad to worse, I may look beyond this evil time, and with pleasure hail the incalculable millions of holy and happy sons and daughters of Adam who shall yet arise and live on the earth, and be glad and rejoice in the glory of Christ and their salvation.

How many and which of the nations which are now Heathen or Mahometans will be preserved as a distinct people through all the revolutions and dreadful judgments which are to take place preparatory to the millennium, and will be then, or before, converted, and share in the blessings of that day, cannot be now determined. And this is true with regard to the various nations now in Christendom. Some of them, and we know not how many, may become extinct, in the evil times that are coming, and the gospel be carried to other nations, who do not now enjoy it. It is enough for us to know that every event and circumstance, with respect to this, will be ordered in the wisest and best manner by Christ, so as to accomplish his purpose, to glorify himself, and effect the greatest good of his church. As to the Jews, we know that mercy is in store for them. They shall, more or less of them, be preserved a distinct nation, through all the terrible shakings of the earth which are coming, down to the millennium, and have a large share in the blessings of that day.

I take my leave of them, being now in a scattered, afflicted state, under the power of an evil heart of unbelief, in the assured, joyful prospect of the great good that is coming to them, when their reception into the church of Christ will be life from the dead, and the unsearchable depth of the riches both of the wisdom, goodness and knowledge of Christ will be forever adored by all the redeemed. Oh, how shall all their past and present wrath, together with their future reconciliation, praise Him!

When I turn my attention to Christendom, with pain and abhorrence I pass over the beast, the Pope and his adherents, even all who receive the mark of this beast, as doomed to certain destruction: and I am without any assurance that those who belong to the apostate Greek church will escape this dreadful evil.

But what shall I say of or to those who are called Protestants? Great numbers who live among Protestants have professed to disbelieve and renounce Christianity, and many have written against it, and attempt to prove that it is a mere fable, not worthy of the least credit. And though all they have written has been fully and often refuted, they persist in their infidelity, and their number appears to be greatly increasing, either openly or more secretly;

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while they are assiduously endeavouring to insinuate their tenets by all possible means wherever they can have any influence, which they appear to have, especially on the rising generation: so that they will soon be greatly the majority, if they are not so now, unless Christ interpose by his irresistible power.

I take my leave of all these, knowing that if they persist in their unbelief, they will die in their sins, and perish in a greatly aggravated and everlasting destruction. But at the same time I have the peace and comfort, which no man can take from me, in the assurance that, though they are infinitely worse than lost to themselves, they are not lost to Christ and his church. For this their infidelity, a peculiar kind of aggravated wrath, and all the consequent evil which is coming upon them, will turn to the praise of the Redeemer forever, and he will be more honoured, and the redeemed more happy, than if such infidels had not existed.

Still a more affecting and dreadful sight, if possible, opens to my view. There is in the Protestant world, and among us, an innumerable host of people, who, though they do not profess to disbelieve the gospel, yet do not obey it, but *live* in opposition to it, and in a constant, allowed disobedience to Christ, and that not only by refusing to do what he has commanded, but by greedily practising what he has forbidden. It would take many pages to enumerate half of the open vices which are practised by Protestants, notwithstanding all the restraints of civil government. These vices abound among those in high stations, and in the low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, old and young. From all these I take my sorrowful departure, knowing that, unless they repent, the time is coming when Christ will say to them, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting punishment." But, in all this sorrow, I am rejoicing, that Christ will cleanse the world from this wickedness, and when the wicked are turned into hell, he will fill it with holy inhabitants; and he will be more glorified, and the church more happy, than could be if all this wickedness had not taken place.

Another numerous class of Protestants now come into view, who are too ignorant or erroneous to be saved. Many of these are included in the class last mentioned, but not all; for whether their lives be vicious, or what may be called moral, if they be ignorant of the gospel and the truths of which it consists, or if they do not believe these truths, but deny and reject them, they cannot be saved by it.

I am sensible that I am now exposing myself to the indignation and contempt of an increasing number, whose sentiments on this head are what they call catholic and liberal. These will say to me, What right have *you* to make a creed for us, or any other man, and insist that all must believe and cordially embrace the doctrines you hold, in order to be saved? We believe it is of no great importance what a man's creed is, or whether he has any, if he be honest and sincere in what he *does*, and worships God, and lives a good moral life.

To these I have to say, Ye are some of those whom I mean to include in the above description. You assert that the doctrines or truths revealed in the gospel, if there be any, are

of no importance, so that he who does not believe them, and whatever he believes, and he who is totally ignorant of the truth, may be saved, as well as if they understood and believed the truth. You are yourselves totally ignorant of the gospel, and appear to be real enemies to it; for if what you assert were true, the gospel is worth nothing, and men may be saved without as well as by it.

He only who believes the gospel, as preached by the inspired apostles, can be saved. If we exclude the system of truth contained in the gospel, we exclude the gospel; for it wholly consists in a revelation of these truths. Some of them are these: That all mankind are sinners, in a state of total moral depravity by nature, in consequence of the apostasy of their first parents, and under the curse of the righteous law of God: that Jesus Christ came into the world to save such lost sinners, by making a full atonement for their sins, by suffering in their stead, and meriting eternal life for them by his obedience, and power by the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify them: all which is infinitely too great for any mere creature to do; therefore he must be a Divine Person, really God with us, manifested in the human nature: that, in order to be saved, men must be renewed unto holiness by the Spirit of God, in which he is the first mover, by regenerating them; of which none have any desert or claim. Therefore he has mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth; which naturally and even necessarily introduces the doctrine of the divine decrees with respect to man and his salvation, and consequently respecting every thing else; and of election, and the certain perseverance of believers to complete salvation: that men obtain pardon and justification by their union to Christ, by their believing on and trusting in him for this, and all they want, which they receive, not out of respect to any goodness, worth or desert in themselves, or any thing they do; that they are wholly dependent on God, for every degree of right disposition and will to do what God requires, and not in the least on themselves; and this absolute dependence on God extends to every thing in which they have any concern: that their salvation is therefore altogether, from beginning to end, the effect of undeserved, free, sovereign grace: that true holiness consists not at all in selfish affections, but in disinterested love to God and man: that they who do not believe this gospel, and are not partakers of this holiness, and persevere in this way, will perish in everlasting destruction.

These doctrines are all contained in the gospel; and, with others not mentioned, which are implied in these, compose a system of truth, which is really the gospel, and is often in the scripture called The Truth; to which Christ came to bear witness; which men must come to the knowledge of, in order to be saved; which all true Christians are represented as cordially embracing and walking in, as the bond of their union and love to each other. They therefore who do not receive this *truth*, and love it, but in their hearts hate and oppose it, do not believe the gospel, are not friends to it, and cannot be saved.

This is evidently true of the Arians and Socinians, who deny the divinity of Christ, and consequently the need of any proper atonement for sin, and oppose many other doctrines

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of the gospel, in which they agree with those called Arminians. These latter deny the depravity of man by the sin of Adam, or that he is totally depraved, and that they stand in any need to be regenerated by the irresistible influence of the Spirit of God, in order to love God, and do those good works by which they may please God and be saved. They are of consequence enemies to the doctrine of the decrees of God, as they respect the agency of man, in the concerns of his salvation, as being, with the other doctrines which they deny, contrary to the natural selfishness, pride and imagined independence of man. There are others who hold a mixture of inconsistent doctrines, and do not professedly join with Arminians, but evidently symbolize with them in many respects, and so as to exclude the pure, consistent and essential doctrines of the gospel.

Some there are, who have been properly called Antinomians, who hold that Christ has so abolished the moral law, that Christians are not under obligation to obey it. And there are many others who are real Antinomians, who deny that any man can or ought to love the moral law, or God who made it, so long as he is under the curse of this law, and considers himself so, and has no hope of being delivered from it; but he must have some discovery that God is merciful to sinners, and that there is salvation for them by Christ, before he can love God or his law. And many, perhaps the most of this class, hold that no man can love God or the Redeemer, until he sees and believes, on good ground, that God loves him, and designs to save him; that Christ died for him in particular, and will save him. The love, and all the religion, for which all these plead, is altogether selfish, and has not a spark of real Christianity in it, but is directly contrary to it. Jesus Christ has declared it to be so: [*Matth. v. 43, to the end of the chapter.*] He says that the love to others which is grounded on their love to us is a selfish, wicked love, which men of the worst character do exercise; that Christian love is of a different and contrary nature, and so disinterested that it will extend to its worst enemies.

There are many, who, though they do not expressly avow this selfish doctrine, by which all religion is bottomed on self love, but discard it, yet describe the religious views and exercises of Christians as consisting very much or altogether in selfishness, and urge the choice and practice of religion wholly from selfish motives. And if it be urged that true religion will lead Christians to those disinterested affections, and that conduct, of which Christ has set us an example, they cannot understand, but rather oppose it.

There is another class of people called Universalists, who hold that all men will be finally saved. There has been for a few years past a considerable increase of those who profess to embrace this sentiment. Of these some are Arminians, others are Antinomians, and some enthusiasts. Few or none of them appear to understand and believe the pure, consistent doctrines of the gospel. They do not of late appear to increase who openly espouse this doctrine, and yet adhere to the Bible; and most of these soon lose their zeal in their cause. And their belief appears to have its natural effect on them, and leads them to live a careless,



irreligious life; and numbers by degrees give up the Bible, and sink into infidelity. There is reason to believe that there are many who do not profess to embrace this doctrine, to whom it is so pleasing, that they wish and hope it to be true; and it has great influence upon them, and leads them to a careless neglect of and concern about religion, and of strict morality, and so hardens their hearts, that they are deaf to all admonitions, and will rather give up the Bible, and turn infidels, than admit that any will be miserable forever.

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All these, even those whose outward conduct is not immoral, and who appear religious, who yet cordially embrace and are at heart pleased with the errors which have been now mentioned, and whose religious exercises are grounded upon and conformable to them, are strangers to true religion, and in the way to destruction: and all these false doctrines and notions of religion, and all the practical religion that is built upon them, will be consumed by Christ with the Spirit of his mouth, and destroyed with the brightness of his coming. Of these therefore I must now take my leave, without the least disposition to flatter them, or hope of their prosperity in the way they are going; and with a pleasing certainty that all their errors and false religion shall be utterly abolished by Christ, and that he will be praised and honoured by all these errors and this opposition to him, however wide may be their spread, and though they may continue yet a considerable time, even to the end determined.

I must now turn to the public professors of religion, the members of the Christian churches, of various different denominations, among Protestants.

The pastors of churches, or the clergy of every degree and character, come first into view. It is doubtless true that the clergy are the leaders and principal instruments in all the moral good and evil which takes place in Christendom. All of the clergy in the Protestant world, who must be classed with those before described, by the erroneous doctrines they hold, or not preaching any scheme of doctrines, but who really leave out all the essential truths of the gospel, and confine themselves to what may be called spurious heathen morality, and all of immoral lives, whatever doctrines they preach, are of course excluded from the number of truly Christian ministers. Jesus Christ has fixed their doom. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? &c. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." To these I cannot say, "God speed," when I take my leave of them, lest I be a partaker of their evil deeds.

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But I must be allowed to sift the clergy more closely; especially those of the United States of America, who are not excluded by the foregoing. A great body of ministers in these states are professed Calvinists, differing however in some points, and are generally irreproachable in their moral conduct. But they are asked seriously to consider whether they have good evidence that they have been born again, agreeably to the scripture account of that great change, and find themselves real friends to Christ and his cause, expressed in all proper ways.

It is to be feared that many not having ever passed this change is the reason why they bring forth no more good fruit, and so much which is more like bad than good; in that they do not appear to encourage experimental religion, or preach upon it clearly or much, if at any time. And though they would be thought to be Calvinists, they appear to dislike, and never preach, some of the most important doctrines of Calvinism; such as, the total depravity of man; God's first moving, and sovereign grace, in the regeneration and conversion of sinners; and the doctrine of the decrees of God, taken in the only proper, strict and extensive sense; that he has declared *whatsoever comes to pass*. They ignorantly say, It would be better to say, God *foreknew* whatsoever comes to pass. They choose to call themselves *moderate Calvinists*; but might as well, and perhaps more properly, be called *moderate Arminians*. But I should be willing to lay all these names aside, as many appear to wish, were it not the shortest and most convenient way to denote the general scheme of doctrines which different persons embrace. This is agreeable to the practice of the Christian church in all the ages of it, whether more corrupt, or more pure. And no inconvenience has attended it, that I know of, which would not attend any other method. All of this class I must leave, with the fears concerning them, expressed above. And while I fall under their resentment and censure, as narrow and bigoted in my sentiments, and very censorious, I cheerfully leave the matter to the day when the Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart.

But I return to those who embrace the doctrines of the reformation, of Calvin, and the chief and leading doctrines contained in the Westminster confession of faith, as being agreeable to the holy scriptures, and who give satisfactory evidence that they are the subjects of divine, regenerating grace, and are friends to Christ, and heartily engaged in his cause. I embrace you with cordial, benevolent affection, wishing you success in your work, and that you may be faithful unto death. It is to be wished you would give yourselves wholly to the work of the ministry, and that you were all *students*, constantly labouring to make advances in the knowledge of divinity, by reading, meditation, and conversing with those who are pursuing the same study of the scripture. We live in evil times, when Christianity, and especially true religion in principle and practice, is greatly opposed, and fast decaying in general, as if it would soon all be gone; and we have reason to believe these evil times will grow much worse. But this is so far from being a reason for sitting still and unactive, that it ought to be a motive to great and constant exertion to promote the cause of Christ, and oppose the flood of error and iniquity, which is coming in with a mighty, rapid stream. The cause of Christ will not be lost. His truth is great, and will prevail. Good is to be done now, and some sinners must be converted; and blessed is the man who has the greatest hand in this work. We are commanded to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth more labourers into his harvest.

And we have assurance that our prayers will be answered, in his own way and time. He will fill the church and the world with ministers, furnished with such abilities, fortitude, diligence, zeal, knowledge and true wisdom, as to exceed any of us, beyond, far beyond our present conception. In this view, I overlook the present dark scene, and take a cheerful farewell of you and of the world.

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Having taken my leave of the clergy and pastors of churches among Protestants, I must not pass over the private members of these churches, in very different worldly circumstances and stations, and of various denominations. When all of this class, who are either ignorant of the essential doctrines of the gospel, or deny and oppose them, and imbibe contrary errors, as most agreeable to their hearts; and all those who take the name of Christians, but do not depart from iniquity, and lead vicious lives; also all mere formal professors, who do not live up to their profession, and bring forth good fruit, but in their general conversation and conduct mix with the men of the world, and live more conformable to them than like real Christians; finally, all those who appear strangers to experimental religion, or any thing like being born again; when all these are excluded and set aside, as not the proper objects of Christian charity, how comparatively small will be the number of the remnant who are left! And yet it is probable that among these, some, if not many, are, under a fair appearance, but mere hypocrites! The happy number of true Christians cannot be certainly known by any man, and some of them are not known by themselves to be real Christians; but the Lord knows who are his, and will own and take care of them.

They are all united in believing and loving the truth as it is in Jesus, and have all drank into the same Spirit, under whatever form they worship, and whatever denomination they have taken. The distinctions by which the various denominations of Christians are now divided will doubtless vanish, when a greater degree of holiness and light shall take place, and prejudices by education or any other means shall be removed; and Christians will be united and of one mind in those things about which they are now divided, and their creed, in which they agree, as to substance, now, will remain the great bond of union. They who understand and believe that the wrath of man shall praise God, and that the remainder of wrath he will restrain, as all true Christians do, must, to be consistent, believe the doctrines preached and written by that great reformer John Calvin, and consequently the above mentioned confession of faith, in the substance of it; and therefore must be agreed in the chief articles of their creed; for all this is really contained in this passage of scripture; of which every unprejudiced, candid person must be convinced, if he will carefully attend to the words, and to the explanation that has been given of them.

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To you I address myself with peculiar pleasure. You live in a time pointed out in scripture prophecy as peculiarly evil; and present evils, which have lately increased, both moral and natural, doubtless will yet make a rapid progress, till they shall rise to a height which is beyond your present conception; and you have no reason to expect to live to see the end of

them. Yet these words of the text, and the abundant promises made to the church, and to every true believer, are a sufficient ground of constant support and consolation to all real Christians. It is a ground of support and comfort to reflect and know that but a small part of the whole time of the trouble of the church yet remains to fill up the measure of her suffering, though the last conflict may be most severe. I believe we have not yet attained any light from scripture, from which we can be sure that Christians will not suffer persecution, and that a more trying and severe one than any that has yet taken place, before the millennium comes on. But this will not be, unless it be necessary for the good of the church, and to introduce the time of her prosperity in the best manner; and all this wrath of man, be it more or less, of longer or shorter duration, shall praise the Redeemer.

The church will live and prosper, and will come forth from the furnace of affliction as gold purified seven times. "And the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." And why may not Christians begin their song now? Though you do not see the glorious Redeemer, yet, believing, you love him who orders all things perfectly well, takes the best care of the church, and of every one who trusts in him, and will glorify himself by all things to the highest degree. Well may you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; while you watch and keep your garments, striving together for the faith of the gospel, and in nothing terrified by your adversaries. With joy I now bid you a hearty, though I hope not a long farewell.

But New-England, the place of my nativity, demands my more particular attention. Aside from my partiality in favour of this part of the world, I believe that all men of observation and judgment in this matter, who are acquainted with the Protestant world in general, and with the religious state of New-England, from the first settlement of it, will grant there has been the appearance of more true religion in principle, profession and practice, and a more regular, moral conduct among all orders and ages of persons, in this part of America, than in any other part of the Christian world of equal extent. Boston, the metropolis of New-England, has been, till within less than fifty years past, a place of more religious order in the observation of the sabbath and other religious duties, a better education of children, and of a more decent, sober, moral conduct of the inhabitants in general, than of any other equally or more populous city or town on the face of the earth. And the people in general in New-England were disposed to pay respect to religion, to maintain family religion and worship. The sabbath and public worship were regarded and attended upon, by the inhabitants in general. The churches were considerably large, and a degree of discipline kept up. Children were under government, instructed and catechised. Gross, open vices were in a great degree restrained. Leading men in public stations were in general exemplary, and the bigger part of people were intelligent in things of morality and religion, and of a good behaviour.

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But, alas! "How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed!" Of late years a great and rapid degeneracy has taken place, both in the doctrines and duties of religion. Family worship, and a proper government and religious education of children, are generally neglected. Error and ignorance in religious concerns, and vice and immorality in conduct, are greatly increasing. Infidelity, Deism, and Atheism are spreading as an irresistible torrent, and many, if not most, of the youth and rising generation are growing up ready to imbibe error and infidelity. If these shall have their natural course, unless divine influence interpose, and put a stop to them, New-England will soon become as famous for irreligion, infidelity, atheism, immorality and heathenism, as it has been for the contrary; and Christianity will be wholly excluded and forgotten. It is true that all Christian ministers, and others in public and private stations, who are friends to the cause of Christ, ought to hope, pray and strive against this evil, and exert themselves to the utmost in all proper ways in opposition to the cause of sin, Satan and evil men; and be ready to die in the cause of truth and religion. In the pleasing hope of this, I embrace you all, whether personally acquainted with you or not, with the most cordial affection and benevolent farewell. At the same time I take my leave of New-England, with the painful fear and prospect of the evils which have been mentioned, flying to my text and the truths contained in it for support and comfort.

Rhode-Island, particularly Newport the capital, in which I have lived near thirty of the last years of my life, now demands my special attention.

This town has been long noted for the many different religious sects and denominations into which the inhabitants are divided, while the body of the people have been considered, I believe justly, to have very little true religion, if any; and they have appeared more dissolute, vicious, erroneous and ignorant than people in general are in other parts of New-England. And there has been no general revival of religion, or reformation, to this day; and the moral state and character of the inhabitants in general has not become better, but the contrary. The extraordinary and general revival of religion in New-England and many other places, about sixty years ago, did not reach Newport in any considerable degree. While the heavenly dew fell copiously on other places, this town received but a few scattering drops, and remained almost wholly dry. There are a great number of families in this place who have no appearance of any sort of religion in their houses, and who never attend on any public worship; and there are many individuals of this character in other families; and many others, who, though they attend public worship sometimes, yet not constantly nor often. All these doubtless include the greatest number of the whole inhabitants; and a great part of them are so inattentive to religion, and so ignorant, that they have really no religious principles: others have imbibed, and are strongly fixed in, religious maxims and notions, as contrary to the Bible as darkness is to the light. Of those who constantly attend public worship, including the professors of religion, very few of them maintain any family worship or religion, and by far the greater



part are so immoral in their conduct, or ignorant or erroneous in their notions of religion, as to fall vastly short of the scripture character of true Christians.

There have been a number of real and excellent Christians in this town, of different denominations, who are now in heaven; and doubtless there are some yet among us, but there is reason to conclude that the number of such is greatly lessened, and that there are now but very few. Of you I take my affectionate leave, wishing you may increase in number, and shine, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, as lights in the world.

The slave trade, and the slavery of the Africans in which this town has had a greater hand than any other town in New-England, must not be passed over unmentioned here. This inhuman trade has been the first and chief spring of all the trade and business by which this town has risen and flourished: which has therefore been built up, in a great measure, by the blood and unrighteous sufferings of the poor Africans. And this trade is yet carried on here, in the face of all the light and matter of conviction of the unrighteousness and aggravated iniquity of it, which has of late years been offered, and against the express laws of God and man. And there is no evidence that the citizens in general have a proper sense of the evil of this business, of the guilt which has been contracted by it, and of the displeasure of God for it, or that they have a just abhorrence of it; but there is much evidence of the contrary, and that there is little or no true repentance of it.

In this dark, unpleasant and melancholy view of the state and character of the body of the inhabitants of this town, I must take my leave, with a painful prospect of the evil which is coming upon them and their posterity; which they would not believe, were they told. To most of them I cannot speak, and if I could, and they should know what I think and say of them, it would only serve to excite the resentment and indignation of the most.

But there is a bright side, to which the Christian may look for support and comfort, in the midst of all this dark and evil state of things, which cannot be too often brought into view. All this sin and wrath of man, and the evils which attend and follow it, will praise Christ, and turn to the greatest good of his kingdom. And all the wicked shall be shaken from the earth, and from this island too; and it shall yet be full of meek, humble, and holy inhabitants, who shall praise the Lord, and delight themselves in the abundance of peace and happiness. Amen. Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

But I must now come nearer home, and, not without sensible and affectionate emotions, take my farewell of the church and congregation in this town with whom I have lived, ministering to them most of the time for above thirty years.

When I first came among you the church was not small, and increased in number; and the congregation appeared to flourish. Above a hundred young persons used to repair to my house at appointed times for religious instruction. But when the war with the British came on, we were, for a time, broken up, and many of us scattered into the country, a number of whom never returned again. In this time, our parsonage house was destroyed,

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the bell of the meeting-house was taken away, and the inside of the house was so defaced and destroyed by the enemy, that public worship could not be attended in it; and those who staid in the town during the residence of the British here, and those who went out and returned again, suffered losses in their worldly interest. By these events, and by the deaths that have taken place, both on the land, and of the men who have used the sea, we are become few in number, and in a degree poor in worldly circumstances. Most of the church and congregation which were on the stage when I first came here are gone to the grave. But the greatest calamity of all is, the good people who have deceased have none, or very few, to succeed them and fill up their places, and have left us in a great and awful degree destitute of the power and practice of true religion. In these dark and disagreeable circumstances, I now take my leave of you; yet with a hope, though a faint one, that after I am gone God will build you up, and grant you and your children greater spiritual blessings than you have had while I have been with you.



I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God, so far as I have understood what it was. In doing this I am sensible I have preached and published doctrines which are very offensive and odious to many, though I hope to but few if any of you. I have opposed evil practices, by which I have incurred the displeasure and resentment of many; and have taught and inculcated duties, and an experimental, practical religion, which consists most essentially in self-denial, as the only way to heaven, which are disagreeable to many, and not believed to be true. Some of the doctrines which I have preached and published have been opposed from the press and the pulpit, and more privately, and have not been understood, and represented as horrible and mischievous, tending to destroy all true religion, &c. But all this has no impression on me, to excite the least doubt of the truth of the doctrines so opposed, or to incline me to cease to assert and vindicate them. I have such clear and full conviction, and unshaken confidence, that the doctrines which I have for a long course of years preached and maintained, are the truths contained in the Bible, that I stand as a brazen wall, unhurt, and not moved by all the shafts of opposition and reproach which have been levelled at me, and the system of truth and religion which I have espoused; being assured that it will stand forever; and certain beyond a doubt, from scripture, reason and experience, that a cordial belief and love of these truths, with religious exercises and conduct agreeable to them, is connected with salvation, and is a sufficient ground of support and comfort under the greatest trials, and in the nearest view of death and eternity. On this foundation I cheerfully rest my eternal interest, which indeed is infinite, and invite all to do the same.

To you therefore, my dear people, both old and young, as a dying man, and in the view of a judgment and eternity to come, I recommend the religion which I have endeavoured to preach and inculcate among you for a number of years, and to exemplify in practice, both publicly, more privately and in secret. Being assured that he only is safe and happy who is a real Christian, I recommend Christ to you with my dying breath as the only refuge for



sinners: for “He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Finally, I take my leave of all my acquaintance, friends, and relatives, whether nearer or farther off, wishing they may all partake of the saving blessings of the gospel: and if I have any enemies, I forgive them, and wish to them the same blessings. To my kind benefactors, I wish the abundant rewards promised in the word of God to the charitable and bountiful, even to all who give so much as a cup of cold water to any of the professed disciples of Christ, because they belong to Him. To my particular *Christian friends*, in whom has been my chief delight, and who, I have often said, are my greatest treasure on earth, I leave my best wishes, with a fond and animating hope of living forever with you in the most intimate, perfect, and uninterrupted friendship. Amen.

FINIS.

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