

# SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE CXIX. PSALM.

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## SERMON I.

*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.*—VER. 1.

THIS psalm is a choice piece of Scripture. In the Hebrew there is much exactness of composure to be observed. It is divided into twenty-two parts, according to the number of the Hebrew letters; every part containeth eight verses, all beginning with one and the same letter; in which I should think there is nothing of mystery intended, only a help to attention and memory. I shall go over the several verses in their order, the Lord giving life and assistance. And because the same matter will be of frequent recourse, I shall endeavour to discuss each verse in a sermon.

The Psalmist beginneth with a description of the way to true blessedness, as Christ began his Sermon on the Mount, and as the whole Book of Psalms is elsewhere begun. Blessedness is that which we all aim at, only we are either ignorant or reckless of the way that leadeth to it; therefore the holy Psalmist would first set us right in the true notion of a blessed man: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.'

In the words you have—

1. The privilege, *blessed*.
2. The manner and form of its consideration; not so much in the nature and formality of it, as the way that leadeth to it. Or,

First, Here is a *way* spoken of in the general.

Secondly, This way specified, *the law of the Lord*.

Thirdly, The qualification of the persons' sincerity, *the undefiled*; and constancy, *who walk*.

*Doct.* 1. That it standeth us much upon to have a true notion of blessedness and blessed men. David beginneth with that.

1. All desire it; Christians, pagans, all agree in this. When Paul was dealing with the heathens, he urgeth two notions wherein God might be taken up. That of a first cause: Acts xiv. 17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and

gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' And a chief good, Acts xvii. 27. As in the one place, there must be a cause of showers of rain and fruitful seasons; so in the other, there must be a universal good, or else the inclinations of nature were in vain. Among Christians, the good and bad, that do so seldom agree in anything, yet agree in this, every man would be happy, and not miserable: Ps. iv. 6, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good?' *Good, good*, is the cry of the world. It is intended in the very nature of desire; for everything that is desired is desired as good, *sub ratione boni*. As God implanted in us affections of aversion to avoid what is evil, so affections of choice and pursuit to follow after what is good. Well, then, out of a principle of self-love, all would be happy; they would have good, and they would have it for ever. Inanimate creatures are, by the guidance and direction of Providence, carried to the place of their perfection. The brute beasts seek the preservation and perfection of that life which they have; so do all men hunt about for contentment and satisfaction. To ask whether men would be happy or not, is to ask whether they love themselves, yea or nay; but whether holy, is another thing.

2. All without grace are much mistaken in it. (1.) Some mistake in the end. They desire good in common, not that which is indeed the true good; they seek happiness in riches, honours, pleasures; and so they fly from that which they seek, whilst they seek it. They intend happiness, but choose misery: Luke xvi. 25, 'Thy good things;' and Ps. iv. 7, 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.' *Their* corn, wine, and oil, not only possessed by them, but chosen by them as their felicity and portion. (2.) They fail in the means. They know them not, like them not, or else faint in the prosecution of the end by them. They discern them but weakly, as a spire at a distance; they see it so as they know not whether they see it, yea or nay, as the blind man saw men walking as trees. The light of nature being so dim, they consider them but weakly; the mind being diverted by other objects, they desire them but weakly; the affections being prepossessed and intercepted by things that come next to hand, velleities and cold inclinations they may have, but no serious volition or firm bent of heart. Or suppose a man under some conviction, both as to end and means, yet his endeavours are very cold and slack; they do not pursue it with that earnestness, exactness, and uniformity of endeavour which is requisite to obtain their happiness. They are like children that seem to desire a thing passionately, but are soon out of humour: 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing, for his hands refuse to labour.' When true happiness is sufficiently revealed, we like it not upon God's terms, John vi. 34. The Jews, when our Saviour told them of the bread of God that came down from heaven to give life to the world, said unto him, 'Lord, evermore give us of this bread.' But it is said, upon hearing the conditions of obtaining it, ver. 66. 'they murmured, went back, and walked no more with him.' All would live for ever; but when they must follow a despised Christ up and down the world, and incur censures and

dangers, they like none of that: Ps. cvi. 24, 'Yea, they despised the pleasant land, and believed not his word.' The land was a good land, but the way to it was through a howling wilderness. When they heard of the strength and stature of the men, their fortifications, they fell into passion and murmur, and gave over the pursuit of Canaan. Heaven is a good place, but men must get to it with such difficulty, therefore they are loath to be at the cost. Men would be happy with that kind of happiness which is true happiness, but not in the way which God propoundeth, being prepossessed with carnal fancies. It is counted a foolish thing to wait upon God in the midst of straits, conflicts, and temptations: 1 Cor. ii. 14, '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.' More prejudices lie against the means than the end; therefore, out of despair, they sit down with a carnal choice, as persons disappointed in a match take the next offer. Since they cannot have God's happiness, they resolve to be their own carvers, and to make themselves as happy as they can in the enjoyment of present things.

3. Our mistakes about it will cost us dear. God is very jealous of what we make our happiness, and therefore blasteth the carnal choice. Those that will try experiments, smart for it in the issue. Solomon came home by weeping-cross: Eccles. i. 14, 'I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.' He hath proved it to our hands. He had a large heart, and a large estate, and gave himself to pleasures, to extract happiness from the creatures, to hunt after worldly satisfactions in a more artificial way than brutish sots, that merely act according to lust and appetite: Eccles. ii. 1, 'I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold, this also is vanity.' He gave himself to pleasures, not merely upon sensual, but curious and artificial aims, yet found his heart secretly withdrawn from God. Whoever maketh trial will either run into utter mischief, or must come home again by a sound remorse. And so they learn it, and dearly to their cost.

*Use.* Let us study this point well.

1. That we may not take up with a false happiness, or set up our rest in temporal enjoyments, as height of honour, abundance of riches, favour of great men, &c.; things useful in their sphere, and beneficial to sweeten and comfort the life of man, who hath placed his happiness in God. Pleasures being enjoyed, they do not satisfy; being loved, they defile; being lost, they increase our trouble and sorrow.

[1.] They cannot satisfy, because of their imperfection and uncertainty. They do not answer the whole desire of man, carry no proportion with the conscience. That which maketh a man happy must bear a thorough proportion with all the wants, desires, and capacities of the soul, so as conscience and heart and all may say it is enough. But, alas! these things cannot give us solid peace and contentment: Isa. lv. 2, 'Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?' Till an hungry conscience be provided for, we cannot be happy. But besides their low use, consider the uncertainty of enjoyment. Nothing can give us

solid peace, but what doth make us eternally happy. These flowers wither in our hands while we smell at them. Nothing but the favour of God is from everlasting to everlasting. We have not a sure possession of these things in the world. They are possessed with fear, 1 Cor. vii. 30, 31. It is the apostle's counsel, that 'they that buy' should have such remiss affections to the world, 'as though they possessed not; and that they use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away.' A man must look for changes, and lay forth for several conditions in the world: Ps. xxxix. 11, 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth. Surely every man is vanity. Selah.' Like glass, brittle when most glistening.

[2.] Being inordinately loved, they defile. There is not only gall, but poison in them. They cannot make us better, but may easily make us worse, as they defile and draw the heart from God, and enslave us to our own lusts: 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10, 'But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.'

[3.] Being lost, they increase our trouble and sorrow. A man that hath not learned to be abased, as well as to abound, his abundance maketh his case the more miserable. It is hard to go back a degree or two. They are apt to bring much trouble upon the heart of him that is conversant about them: 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.' The more we make them our happiness, when lost they increase our trouble.

2. That we may not be prejudiced against the true happiness. Men think it a happiness to live without the yoke of religion, to speak, and think, and do what they please without restraint; but to be always in bonds, and held under the awe of the word, that they count unreasonable and grievous: Ps. ii. 3, 'Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.' In studying this point—(1.) 'Lean not to thine own understanding;' Prov. xxiii. 4, 'Labour not to be rich; cease from thy own wisdom;' but seek direction from God by his word and Spirit. God only can determine who is the blessed man, in whose hand alone it is to make us blessed. (2.) Take the light of faith; sense and carnal reason will deceive you. Blessedness is a riddle which can only be found out by faith, 'which is the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1. That a poor godly man, who is counted the filth and offscouring of all things, should be the only happy man, and that the great men of this world, who have all things at will, should be 'poor, blind, miserable, and naked,' is a paradox will never enter into the heart of a natural man, that hath only the light of sense and carnal reason to judge of things, for to sight and reason it is nothing so. (3.) Wait for the light and power of the Spirit to incline and draw thy heart to God. Many times we are doctrinally right in point of blessedness, but not practically; we content ourselves with the mere notion, but are not brought under the power of these truths; that is the work of the Spirit. It is easy to prove that it is the beasts' happiness to enjoy

pleasure without remorse ; easy to prove the uncertainty of riches, and what unstable foundations they are for the soul to rest on ; but to draw off the heart from these things to God is the work of the Holy Ghost : Ps. xlix. 13, ' This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings.' Many a man who stands over the grave of his ancestors will say, Ah ! how foolish were they to waste their time and strength in pleasure, and in hunting after worldly greatness and esteem and favour with men ; what doth it profit them now ? And yet their posterity approve the same—that is, they live by the same principles, are as greedy upon worldly satisfactions as ever those were that have gone before, that neglected God and heavenly things, and went down to the grave, and their honour was laid in the dust. Until the Lord take off our heart by the light and power of his grace, we remain as sottish and foolish and worldly as they. Thus you see how much it concerns you to be right in the notion of true blessedness.

*Doct. 2.* That sincere, constant, uniform obedience to God's law is the only way to true blessedness.

This is called a *way*, and this way is said to be *God's law*, and in this way we must be *undefiled* ; which implies not absolute purity and legal perfection, but gospel sincerity ; and in this way we must *walk*, which notes both uniformity and constancy ; it must be our course, and we must persevere therein.

Three things need to be opened :—

1. Speak to the rule.
2. Of conformity to the rule ; that it must be sincere, uniform, and constant.
3. How this is the way to true happiness ; what respect it hath to true blessedness.

First, The rule is the law of God. All created beings have a rule. Christ's human nature was the highest of all creatures, and yet it is to be in subjection to God ; he is under a rule : Gal. iv. 4, ' Made of a woman, made under the law.' The angels they have many immunities above man ; they are freed from death, from the necessities of meat and drink ; but they are not free from the law ; they are not *sui juris*, at their own dispose ; they ' obey his commands, hearkening unto the voice of his word,' Ps. ciii. 20. Inanimate creatures, sun, moon, stars, are under a law of providence, under a covenant of night and day : Ps. cxlix. 6, ' He has also stablished them for ever ; he hath made a decree which shall not pass.' They have their courses and appointed motions, and keep to the just points of their compass. All creatures are under a law, according to which they move and act. Much more now is man under a law, because he hath election and choice. But if the law were not a rule to a Christian (as some Antinomians have that opinion), if it were not in force, then there should be no sin or duty ; for ' where there is no law, there is no transgression ;' for the nature of ' sin is the transgression of the law,' 1 John iii. 4 ; Rom. iv. 15. Certainly the law as a rule is a very great privilege ; and surely Christ did not come to lessen or abolish the privileges of his people : Deut. iv. 4, ' There is no nation hath such statutes ;' Ps. cxlvii. 20, ' He hath made known his statutes to Israel,' was their prerogative. If the law might be disannulled as to new creatures,

then why doth the Spirit of God write it with such legible characters in their hearts? This is promised as the great blessing of the covenant of grace, Heb. viii. 10. Now, that which the Spirit engraves upon the heart, would Christ come to deface and abolish? The law was written upon tables of stone, and the great work of the Spirit is to write it upon the table of the heart; and the ark was a chest where the law was kept, and with allusion to it God saith, 'I will put my law into their heart.' Clearly, then, there is a rule, and this rule is the law of God. Now, this rule must be consulted with upon all occasions, if we would obtain true blessedness, both to inform us, and to awe us.

*First*, To inform us, that we may not act *short* or *over*.

1. Not *short*. There are many false rules with which men please themselves, and are but so many byways that lead us off from our own happiness. For instance, good meaning, that is a false rule; the world lives by guess and devout aims. But if good meaning were a rule, a man may oppose the interest of Christ, destroy his servants, and all upon good meaning: John xvi. 2, 'Those that kill you will think they do God good service.' Men may grossly err that follow a blind conscience. Custom, that is another. It is no matter what others have done before us, but what Christ did before them all. If custom carried it, most of Christ's institutions would be out of doors. Example of others; that is no good rule. It is not for us to go where others have gone before; but what is the true way: Mat. vii. 14, 'The broad way, *that* leads to destruction, and many walk therein.' The path to hell is most beaten; we are not always to follow the track; they are dead fishes which swim down the stream: we are not to be led away with custom and example, and do as others do. Our own desires and inclinations are not our rule. Oh, how miserable should we be if our lust were our law, if the bent of our hearts were our rule! Jude 16, 'Walking after their own lusts,' is the description of those that were monsters of men, that had outgrown all feelings of conscience. The laws of men are not our rule. It is too narrow and short to commend us to God, to be punctual to the laws of men and no more: Ps. xix. 7, 'The law of God is perfect, converting the soul.' To convince us of sin, to humble the heart, to reduce and bring us back to God, there is no rule for this but the law of God. Men make laws as tailors do garments, to fit the crooked bodies they serve for, to suit the humours of the people to be governed by these laws; surely they are not a sufficient rule to convince us of sin, and to guide us to true happiness. A civil orderly man is one thing, and a godly renewed man another. It is God's prerogative to give a law to the conscience and the renewed motions of the heart. Human laws are good to establish converse with man, but too short to establish communion with God; and, therefore, we must consult with the rule, which is the law of the Lord, that we may not come short of true blessedness.

2. That we may not act *over*. There is a superstitions and apocryphal holiness which is contrary to a genuine and scriptural holiness, yea, destructive to it: it is like the concubine to the wife: it draws away respects due to the true religion. Now, what is this kind

of holiness? It is a temporary flesh-pleasing religion, which consists in a conformity to outward rites and ceremonies and external mortifications, such as is practised by the Papists and formalists, 'after the commandments and doctrines of men:' Col. ii. 23, 'Which things indeed have a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.' God will not thank them that give more than he requireth. These things have a show of wisdom. As brass money may be fairer than true coin, though not of such a value, so this will-worship and superstitious holiness may seem to make a fair show, but it is destructive to true godliness and scriptural holiness, which guide us to communion with God. When men's zeal boils over in a false pretended holiness, it quencheth the fire and destroys true godliness and religion. Excess is monstrous, as well as defect. Therefore still we must consult with the law and rule, that we may not come short or over.

*Secondly*, As the law must be consulted with, that it may inform us, so that it may awe us, and hold us under a sense of our duty to God: 'By the law is the knowledge of sin,' Rom. iii. 19. Usually most Christians live by rote, and do not study their rule. Would a man worship God so coldly and customarily, if he did consider the rule which requires such heedfulness of soul, fervency of spirit, diligent attendance upon God in his ordinances? Would a man allow himself liberty of vain speeches, idle talk, and suffer his tongue to run riot, if he did consult with the rule, and remembered that light words would weigh heavy in God's balance? These are condemned by the law of liberty: James ii. 12, 'So speak, and so do, as those that shall be judged by the law of liberty.' Would a man be so slight in heavenly things? so disorderly and intemperate in the use of pleasure and pursuit of worldly profit, if he did consider the rule, and what a holy moderation God hath required of us upon all occasions? This is the first thing, namely, the rule, which is the law of God.

*Secondly*, There is a conformity to this rule. If you would be blessed, there must be a sincere, constant, uniform obedience. The will of God must not only be known but practised. Many will conclude that God's law in the theory is the only direction to true blessedness; but now, to take it for their rule, to keep close to it, not one of a thousand doth that.

1. Then, sincere obedience is required: 'Blessed is the undefiled in the way.' At first hearing of these words, a man might reply, Oh, then, none can be blessed, if that be the qualification; 'for who can say, My heart is clean?' Prov. xx. 9. I answer—This undefiledness is to be understood according to the tenor of the second covenant, which doth not exclude the mercy of God and the justification of penitent sinners: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, who shall stand? But there is mercy with thee.' There is no escaping condemnation and the curse, if God should deal with us according to strict justice, and require an absolute undefiledness. Well, then, this qualification must be understood, as I said, in the sense of the second covenant; and what is that? Sincerity of sanctification. When a man doth carefully endeavour to keep his garments unspotted from the world, and to approve himself to God; when this is

his constant exercise, 'to avoid all offence both towards God and man,' Acts xxiv. 16, and is cautious and watchful lest he should be defiled; when he is humbled more for his pollutions; when he is always purging his heart, and doth endeavour, and that with success, to walk in the way of God,—here is the undefiledness in a gospel sense: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'The Lord will be a sun and a shield,' &c. To whom? 'To those that walk uprightly.' This is possible enough; here is no ground of despair. This is that will lead us to blessedness, when we are troubled for our failings, and there is a diligent exercise in the purification of our hearts.

2. A constant obedience. Wicked men have their good moods and devout pangs in the way to heaven, but they are not lasting. They will go with God a step or two. But it is said, 'He that *walketh* in the law of the Lord.' A wicked man prays himself weary of prayer, and professeth himself weary of holiness. A man is judged by the tenor of his life; not by one action, but as he holdeth on his way to heaven, Job xxvii. 10. Many run well for a while, but are soon out of breath. Enoch walked with God three hundred and sixty-five years.

3. A uniform and an entire obedience: Exod. xx. 1, 'God spake all these words.' He commandeth one thing as well as another, and conscience takes hold of all. To single out what pleaseth us is to make ourselves gods.

A servant doth not choose his work, but the master. A child of God is uniform in one place as well as another, at home and abroad, in all the passages of his life, in prosperity and adversity, 'whether he abound, or whether he be abased,' Phil. iv. He is not like Ephraim, as 'a cake not turned;' but there is a uniformity. Doth he make conscience of piety and worship, and will he not make conscience of honesty and just dealing with men? Will he make conscience of his actions, and will he not of his words? He doth not give up himself to idle speech and vain discourse. A hypocrite is best when he is taken in pieces, but a sincere man is best when he is taken altogether. A Christian is always like himself. It is notable in the story of the creation that God views every day's work, and God 'saw that it was good;' he viewed it altogether, 'and God saw all things that he had made, and behold it was very good.' When he did consider the whole correspondence of his works, how they answered one another, then God was delighted in it. So a Christian is most delighted in the review of his course and walking according to the commandment.

Thirdly, What respect hath this to true blessedness? It is the way to it: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.' This will appear in two respects—(1.) It is the beginning of blessedness. Likeness to God is the foundation of glory. Conformity to him will be carried on 'from glory to glory,' 2 Cor. iii. 18. And as conformity unto, so communion with, God in the beauties of holiness is the beginning of happiness: 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness,' Ps. xvii. 15. (2.) Sincere and constant obedience is the evidence of our right to future blessedness. A man hath somewhat to show for it, Mat. v. 8. It is an inclusive evidence: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;' and it is an exclusive evidence: Heb.



xii. 14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Well, then, when this is our way and course, we may expect happiness hereafter.

The *uses* are—

1. To show you that carnal men live as if they sought misery rather than happiness: Prov. viii. 36, 'He that sins against me wrongs his own soul; all that hate me love death.' If a man were travelling to York, who would say his aim was to come to London? Do these men pursue happiness that walk in such defilement? It is the way of God's law that leads to true blessedness.

2. To press you to walk according to this rule, if you would be blessed. To this end let me press you to take the law of God for your rule, the Spirit of God for your guide, the promises for your encouragement, and the glory of God for your end.

[1.] Take the law of God for your rule. Study the mind of God, and know the way to heaven, and keep exactly in it. It is an argument of sincerity when a man is careful to practise all that he knows, and to be inquisitive to know more, even the whole will of God, and when the heart is held under awe of God's word. If a commandment stand in the way, it is more to a gracious heart than if a thousand bears and lions were in the way—more than if an angel stood in the way with a flaming sword: Prov. xiii. 13, 'He that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' Would you have blessings from God?—fear the commandment. It is not he that fears wrath, punishment, inconveniences, troubles of the world, molestations of the flesh; no, but he that dares not make bold with a commandment. As Jer. xxxv. 6, Go, bring a temptation, set pots of wine before the Rechabites. Oh, they durst not drink of them. Why? 'Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine.' Thus a child of God doth reason when the devil comes and sets a temptation before him, and being zealous for God, dares not comply with the lusts and humours of men, though they should promise him peace, happiness, and plenty. A wicked man makes no bones of a commandment; but a godly man, when he is in a right posture of spirit, and the awe of God is upon him, dare not knowingly and wittingly go aside and depart from God.

[2.] Take the Spirit of God for your guide. We can never walk in God's way without the conduct of God's Spirit. We must not only have a way, but a voice to direct us when we are wandering: Isa. xxx. 21, 'And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk in it.' Sheep have a shepherd as well as a fold, and children that learn to write must have a teacher as well as a copy; and so it is not enough to have a rule, but we must have a guide, a monitor, to put us in mind of our duty. The Israelites had a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. The gospel church is not destitute of a guide: Ps. xxxvii. 24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' The Spirit of God is the guide and director to warn us of our duty.

[3.] The promises for your encouragement. If you look elsewhere, and live by sense, and not by faith, you shall have discouragements enough. How shall a man carry himself through the temptations of the world with honour to God? 2 Pet. i. 4, 'Whereby are given unto

us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust.' When we have promises to bear us up, this will carry us clear through temptations, and make us act generously, nobly, and keep close to him.

[4.] Fix the glory of God for your aim; else it is but a carnal course. The spiritual life is a living to God, Gal. ii. 20, when he is made the end of every action. You have a journey to take, and whether you sleep or wake, your journey is still a-going. As in a ship, whether men sit, lie, or walk, whether they eat or sleep, the ship holds on its course, and makes towards its port, so you all are going into another world, either to heaven or hell, the broad or the narrow way. And then do but consider how comfortable it will be at your journey's end, in a dying hour, to have been undefiled in the way; then wicked men that are defiled in their way will wish they had kept more close and exact with God. Even those that now wonder at the niceness and zeal of others, when they see that they must in earnest into another world, oh, then that they had been more exact and watchful, and stuck closer to the rule in their practice, discourses, compliances! Men will have other notions then of holiness than they had before. Oh, then they will wish that they had been more circumspect. Christ commended the unjust steward for remembering that in time he should be put out of his stewardship. You will all fail within a little while; then your poor, shiftless, naked souls must launch out into another world, and immediately come to God. How comfortable will it be then to have walked closely according to the line of obedience!

*Doct. 3.* That a close walker not only shall be blessed, but is blessed, in hand as well as in hope.

How is he blessed?

1. He is freed from wrath. He hath his discharge, and the blessedness of a pardoned man: John v. 24, 'He that believeth on Christ hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, for he hath passed from death to life.' He is out of danger of perishing, which is a great mercy.

2. He is taken into favour and respect with God: John xv. 14, 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' There is a real friendship made up between us and Christ, not only in point of harmony and agreement of mind, but mutual delight and fellowship with each other.

3. He is under the special care and conduct of God's providence, that he may not miscarry: 1 Cor. iii. 23, 'All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' All the conditions of his life are overruled for good; his blessings are sanctified, and his miseries unstinged: Rom. viii. 28, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.'

4. He hath a sure covenant-right to everlasting glory: 1 John iii. 1, 'Behold, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be,' &c. Is a title nothing before we come to enjoy the estate? We count a worldly heir happy, as well as a possessor; and are not God's heirs happy?

5. He hath sweet experiences of God's goodness towards him here in this world : Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' The joy of the presence and sense of the Lord's love will counterbalance all worldly joys.

6. He hath a great deal of peace : Gal. vi. 16, 'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.' Obedience and holy walking bringeth peace : 'Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them,' Ps. cxix. 165 ; as there is peace in nature when all things keep their place and order. This peace others cannot have. There is a difference between a dead sea and a calm sea. A stupid conscience they may have, not a quiet conscience. The virtue of that opium will soon be spent ; conscience will again be awakened.

*Use.* Oh, then, let us put in for a share of this blessedness ! There are two encouragements in the service of Christ—our vails and our wages. Our wages should be enough, the eternal enjoyment of himself. But oh ! we cry out of the tediousness of the way. We have our vails also, that are not contemptible. If a man should offer a lordship or farm to another, and he should say, 'The way is dirty and dangerous, the weather very troublesome ; I will not look after it—would you not accuse this man of folly, that loves his ease and pleasure ? But now, if this man were assured of a pleasant path and good way, if he would but take a little pains to go over and see it, this were gross folly indeed to refuse it.' Our Lord hath made over a blessed inheritance to us upon gospel terms ; but we are full of prejudices, in that to keep close to the rule may bring trouble, and deprive us of many advantages of gain ; and we think we shall never see good day more. But we are assured there is a great blessing goeth along with God's yoke ; and we having a promise of the enjoyment of God's presence where there are pleasures for evermore, this should make us rouse up ourselves in the work of the Lord.

## SERMON II.

*Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart.*—VER. 2.

In this psalm the man of God begins with a description of the way to true blessedness. In the former verse a blessed man is described by the course of his actions, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way.' In this, by the frame of his heart, 'Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart.' The internal principle of good actions is the verity and purity of the heart.

Here you may take notice of two marks of a blessed man :—

1. They *keep his testimonies*.
2. They *seek him with the whole heart*.

*Doct.* 1. They that keep close to God's testimonies are blessed.

By way of explication, two things take notice of :—

1. The notion that is given to precepts and counsels in the word : they are called his *testimonies*.

2. The respect of the blessed man to these testimonies, to *keep* them.

First, The notion by which the word of God is expressed is *testimonies*, whereby is intended the whole declaration of God's will, in doctrines, commands, examples, threatenings, promises. The whole word is the testimony which God hath deposed for the satisfaction of the world about the way of their salvation. Now, because the word of God brancheth itself into two parts, the law and the gospel, this notion may be applied to both. First, To the law, in regard whereof the ark is called 'the ark of the testimony,' Exod. xxv. 16, because the two tables were laid up in it. The gospel is also called the testimony, 'the testimony of God concerning his Son : ' Isa. viii. 20, 'To the law, and to the testimony ; ' where testimony seems to be distinguished from the law. The gospel is so called, because there God hath testified how a man shall be pardoned, reconciled to God, and obtain a right to eternal life. We need a testimony in this case, because it is more unknown to us. The law was written upon the heart, but the gospel is a stranger. Natural light will discern something of the law, and pry into matters which are of a moral strain and concernment ; but evangelical truths are a mystery, and depend<sup>1</sup> by the mere testimony of God concerning his Son. Now, from this notion of testimonies we have this advantage :—

[1.] That the word is a full declaration of the Lord's mind. God would not leave us in the dark in the matters which concern the service of God and man's salvation. He hath given us his testimony, he hath told us his mind, what he approves and what he disallows, and upon what terms he will accept of sinners in Christ. It is a blessed thing that we are not left to the uncertainty of our own thoughts : Micah vi. 8, 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good.' The way of pleasing and enjoying God is clearly revealed in his word. There we may know what we must do, what we may expect, and upon what terms. We have his testimony.

[2.] Another advantage we have by this notion is the certainty of the word ; it is God's testimony. The apostle saith, 1 John v. 9, 'If we take the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater.' It is but reason we should allow God that value and esteem that we give to the testimony of men, who are fallible and deceitful. Among men, 'in the mouth of two or three witnesses everything is established,' Deut. xix. 15 ; 'Now there are three that bear witness in heaven, and three that bear witness on earth,' 1 John v. 8. We are apt to doubt of the gospel, and have suspicious thoughts of such an excellent doctrine ; but now there are three witnesses from heaven, the Father, Word, and Spirit ; the Father by a voice : Mat. iii. 7, 'And lo, a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son,' &c. And the Son also by a voice, when he appeared to Paul from heaven, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?' And the Holy Ghost gave his testimony, descending upon him in the form of a dove, and upon the apostles in cloven tongues of fire. 'And there are three that bear record on earth ; ' for he saith, 1 John v. 10, 'He that believeth, ἔχει τὴν μαρτυρίαν, he hath the

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'opened' ?—Ed.

testimony in himself.' What is that? The Spirit, water, and blood in the heart of a believer; these give testimony to the gospel. The Spirit bears witness to the gospel when it illuminateth the heart, enabling us to discern the doctrine to be of God, to discern those signatures and characters of majesty, goodness, power, truth, which God hath left upon the gospel; and water and blood testify when we feel those constant and sensible effects of God's power coming with the gospel (1 Thes. i. 5), both by pacifying the conscience, and bringing joy and satisfaction, and by sanctifying and freeing a man from the bondage of sin. Water signifies sanctification: John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth.' The sanctifying power of God, that goes along with the gospel, is a clear confirmation of the divine testimony in it: John viii. 32, 'The truth shall make you free.' By our disentanglement from lust we come to be settled in the truth. God's testimony is the ultimate resolution of our faith. Why do we believe? Because it is God's testimony. How do we know it is God's testimony? It evidenceth itself by its own light to the consciences of men; yet God for the greater satisfaction to the world, hath given us witnesses, three from heaven and three on earth. Every manifestation of God hath signatures and characters of God enough upon it to show from whence it came. The creation is a manifestation of God; now, whoever looks upon it seriously and considerately, may find God there, may track him by his footprints, 'By the things which are made, his invisible being and power,' Rom. i. 20. The creation discovers itself to be of God; and if the lower testimony hath plain evidences, much more the gospel. Why? For 'he hath magnified his word above all his name,' Ps. cxxxviii. 2. The *name* of God is that by which he is made known. Now, there are more sensible characters and impressions of God left upon the word, that doth evidence it to be of God, than upon any part of his name.

[3.] This advantage we have by this notion, a testimony is a ground of self-examination, or a rule whereby we may judge of our state and actions; for it witnesseth not only *de jure*, what we must do; or *de eventu*, what we may expect; but *de facto*, whether we do good or evil, what we are, and what we may look for from God upon our obedience or disobedience: Mat. xxiv. 14, 'The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, *εἰς μαρτύριον*, for a witness unto all nations;' first to them, next *against* them, Mark xiii. 9. The word is a testimony to them of God's will in Christ, if they receive it; against them if they reject, neglect, or believe it not. Hereby we may judge of our condition by our conformity, or difformity and contrariety, to the word of God. Christ saith at the day of judgment Moses will accuse you: John v. 45, 'There is one that accuseth you, even Moses in whom ye trust.' The gospel will accuse. What is now an offer will then be an accusation. God will not be without a witness at the day of judgment. The creatures, which had an evident impression of God upon them, they will witness against the Gentiles, 'so that they are without excuse,' Rom. i. 20; and the Jews, that were under the dispensation of Moses, he will accuse them; there was light sufficient to convince them. So the gospel, which is God's testimony concerning his Son, will accuse you if it be not received. Therefore

it is good to see what the word doth witness or testify ; doth it testify good or evil ? for accordingly shall we be treated with in the day of judgment. It is sad when we can only say of the scripture, as that king of the prophet of the Lord, ‘ He witnesseth nothing but evil against me,’ 1 Kings xxii. 8. Let us see what God’s testimony speaks, whether it will plead for us or against us at the great day of the Lord.

[4.] It upbraids our unbelief, that when God hath not only given us a law, but a testimony, still we are backward and careless. If the word of God were no more but a law, we were bound to obey it, because we are his creatures ; but when it is his testimony, we should regard it the more, for now God stands not only upon the honour of his authority, but of his truth : 1 John v. 10 ‘ He that believeth not hath made God a liar, because he believeth not the testimony which God hath given concerning his Son.’ We may urge it thus upon our hearts—What ! shall we make God a liar, after he hath so solemnly given his word, that word which hath many signatures, characters, and stamps of God upon it ? Carelessness now is not only disobedience, but unbelief ; it puts the highest affront upon God, to question his veracity and truth, and does not only unlord him, but ungod him, by making him a liar.

So much for the first thing, *the testimony of the Lord*.

Secondly, The respect of the blessed man to these testimonies ; they *keep* them. What is it to keep the testimonies of God ? *Keeping* is a word which relates to a charge or trust committed to us. Christ hath committed his testimonies to us as a trust and charge that we must be careful of. Look, as on our part we commit to Christ the charge of our souls to save them in his own day, 2 Tim. i. 12, so Christ chargeth us with his word—(1.) To lay it up in our hearts. (2.) To observe it in our practice. This is to keep the word.

[1.] To lay it up in our hearts. In the heart two things are considerable—the understanding and the affections. God undertakes in the covenant for both : Heb. viii. 10, ‘ I will put my law in their mind, and write it in their hearts.’ The meaning is, that he will enlighten our minds for the understanding of his will, and frame our affections to the obedience of it. Well, then, you must keep it in your minds and affections.

(1.) In your *minds*. We must understand the word of God, assent to it ; we must revolve it often in our thoughts, and have it ready upon all occasions. Understand it we must if we would be blessed : ‘ He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me,’ John xiv. 21. We cannot make conscience of obedience till we know our duty. He that would keep a thing must first have it ; we have the law in possession when we get knowledge of it : Mat. xiii. 23, ‘ He that receiveth the word into good ground is he that heareth the word and understands it ;’ and Luke viii. 13, ‘ They that hear the word and keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.’ It is not enough to hear the word, but we must understand it ; and yet that is not all : an adversary may understand a truth, or else he cannot rationally oppose it. There is assent required, that we believe it as God’s testimony, and accordingly embrace it, and give it place in the heart. Faith is a receiving of the word, Acts ii. 41 ; nay, we must have it ready upon

all occasions. Rational memory belongs to the mind or understanding; therefore we keep the word in our minds when it is ever ready with us, either to check sin, or warn us of our duty, Ps. cxix. 9. Forgetfulness is an ignorance for the time: Prov. iii. 1, 'My son, forget not my law; and let thine heart keep my commandments.' We should be ready to every good word and work, as occasion is offered to us.

(2.) To keep it in our *hearts* is to have an affection to it. Keeping the word relates to our chariness and tenderness of it, when we are as chary of the word as a man would be of a precious jewel: Prov. vi. 20, 21, 'My son, keep thy father's commandments; bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.' Sometimes it alludes to the apple of the eye: Prov. vii. 2, 'Keep them as the apple of thine eye.' Such tender affections should we have to the testimonies of the Lord, as a man has for his eye. The least offence to the eye is troublesome; a man should be as chary of the commandment as he would be of his eye. Sometimes it implies the similitude of keeping a way: Josh. i. 7, 'Turn not to the right hand or to the left.' A traveller is very careful to keep his way; so when we are thus careful, tender, chary of God's commandments and testimonies, this is an argument of a blessed condition. Thus we are to keep it in the heart.

[2.] We are to observe it in *practice*: Luke xi. 28, 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it;' that is, not only that hear it, but do it. Many have this word in their mind and memory, but not in their lives. Without this, hearing is nothing; liking, knowing, assent, pretended affection is all in vain: 1 John ii. 4, 'He that saith I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' Our actions are a better discovery of our thoughts than our words. When we get a little knowledge, and make a little profession, we think we observe his commands; but he is a liar if he be not exact, and walk close with God. It is not enough to understand the word, to be able to talk and dispute of the testimonies of God, but to keep them. It is not enough to assent to them that they are God's laws, but they must be obeyed. The laws of earthly princes are not obeyed as soon as believed to be the king's laws, but when we are punctual to observe them. This is to keep the commandment of God; it implies both exactness and perseverance: Rev. iii. 8, 'Thou hast kept my word;' that is, thou hast not apostatised as others have done; and Prov. vi. 20, 'Keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother,' that is perseverance. You see by the first note who are the blessed men; they which own God's testimony in his word, and accordingly look upon it as a great charge and trust Christ hath reposed in them and given to them that they should keep his law. Now, certainly these are blessed. Why?

(1.) They are blessed or cursed whom Christ in the last day will pronounce blessed or cursed. Now, in the last day to some he will say, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father;' to others, 'Go, ye cursed;' and he hath told us beforehand, that it is he that keepeth his testimonies whom he will own in that day, Mat. vii. 20-22. Many will come and challenge acquaintance with Christ: 'Lord, we have prophesied in thy name,' &c.; 'Thou hast taught in our streets' (so it is in Luke); but Christ will disown them: 'I know you not; depart from me, ye workers

of iniquity.' Many will pretend to be of Christ's side, take up the opinions of the country wherein they live, frequent ordinances, &c.; but because they kept not his testimonies, Christ will not own them. When men are to be posed, they count it a favour to know the questions aforehand. God hath told us what will be the great evidence according to which he will proceed in the day of judgment—Have you kept my testimonies? He that keeps close to God's word will find acceptance.

(2.) They are blessed for whom Christ mediateth. Now, Christ mediateth for those that keep his word: John xvii. 6, 'They have kept thy word.' It is a grief to your advocate when he cannot speak well of you in heaven. But as soon as he seeth any fruits of obedience, where they consult often with God's testimony, though they have many failings, yet are careful as much as in them lies, then he goes to the Father, and acquainteth him with it.

(3.) Those that are taken into sweet fellowship and communion with God, certainly they are in a blessed condition. Those to whom God will be intimate, and manifest himself in a way of gracious communion, are blessed. Now thus he doth to those that keep his testimonies: 'If any man love me, and keep my commandments, my Father will love him, and we will make our abode with him.' The whole Trinity will come and dwell in his heart.

But now you must know, there is a twofold keeping of God's testimonies—legal and evangelical. Legal keeping is in a way of perfect and absolute obedience, without the least failing; so none of us can be blessed. Moses will accuse us; there will be failings in the best. But now evangelical keeping—that is, a filial and sincere obedience—is accepted, and the imperfections Christ pardoneth. If God's pardon help us not, we are for ever miserable. The apostles had many failings; sometimes they manifested a weak faith, sometimes hardness of heart, sometimes passionateness when they met with disrespect, Luke ix.; yet Christ returns this general acknowledgment of them when he was pleading with his Father, 'Holy Father, they have kept thy word.' When the heart is sincere, God will pass by our failings, James v. 11, 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job.' Ay! and of his impatience too, his cursing the day of his birth; but the Spirit of God puts a finger upon the scar, and takes notice of what is good. So long as we bewail sin, seek remission of sin, strive after perfection, endeavour to keep close and be tender of a command, though a naughty heart will carry us aside sometimes, we keep the testimony of the Lord in a gospel sense. Bewailing sin, that owns the law; seeking pardon, that owns the gospel; striving after perfection, that argueth sincerity and uprightness. Well, then, here is the discriminating note; if we would know whether we come within the compass of David's blessed man, if we have a dear and tender esteem of God's testimonies, when we would fain have them impressed upon our hearts, and expressed in our lives and conversations, 'They keep his testimonies.'

The next now is:—

2. *They seek him with the whole heart.*

This is fitly subjoined to the former for a double reason; partly, because the end of God's testimonies is to direct us how to seek after God, to bring home the wandering creature to its centre and place of



rest; partly, because whoever keeps the commandments of God, he will be forced to seek God for light and help.

Obedience doth not only qualify us for communion with God, but (where it is regarded in good earnest) necessitates us to look after it; for we cannot come to God without God; and therefore, if we would keep his testimonies, we must be seeking of God. Well, then—

*Doct. 2.* Those that would be blessed must make this their business, sincerely to seek after God.

1. Observe the act of duty; they *seek the Lord.*

2. The manner of performance, *with the whole heart.*

First, What it is to seek the Lord.

1. To seek the Lord presupposeth our want of God: for no man seeks what he hath, but for what he hath not. All that are seeking are sensible of their want of God. For instance, when we begin to seek him at first, it begins with a sound remorse and sense of our natural estrangement from him. The first work and great care of returning penitents is to inquire after God. So long as men lie unconverted, they are wholly neglectful of him, and think they do not want God: Ps. xiv. 2, 'There is none that understands and seeks after God.' They have no affection or desire of communion with God. They seek such things as their hearts lust after, but it is not their desire or care to enjoy God. But when the conversion of the Jews is spoken of, Hosea iii. 5, it is said, 'They shall return and seek the Lord their God.' At first conversion men are sensible of their great distance from God, and are troubled they have been so long strangers to him. Go to another sort of seekers, they are sensible of the same thing; in case of desertion it is clear: Cant. v. 6, 'My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; I sought him, but I could not find him.' They never begin to recover until they are first sensible of their loss; when they see Christ is gone, they are left dead and comfortless; yea, all believers, their seeking or looking after communion with God is grounded upon a sense of want in some degree and measure; it is little they have in comparison of what they want and expect; and therefore still the children of God are a generation of seekers, that 'seek after God,' Ps. xxiv. 6; whatever they enjoy, they are still in pursuit of more. They are always breathing after God, and desire to enjoy more communion with him. A wicked man is always running from God, and is never better than when he is out of God's company, when he is rid of all thoughts of God. He runs from his own conscience, because he finds God there; he runs from the company of good men, because God is there—holy conference is as a prison; he runs from ordinances, because they bring God near to his conscience, and put him in mind of God: he avoids death, because he cannot endure to be with God. But men that have a sense and want of God upon them, will be inquiring and seeking after him.

2. This seeking may be known by the things sought. What do we seek for? Union and communion with God: Ps. cv. 4, 'Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face for evermore.' It is an allusion to the ark, which was a pledge of God's favourable and powerful presence; so that which we seek after is God's favourable and powerful presence, that we may find the Lord reconciled, comforting and quickening our heart. Communion with God is the main thing that we seek

after, as to the enjoyment of his favour in the acceptance of our persons and pardon of our sins. This is that the man of God expresseth, in his own name and in the name of all the saints: Ps. iv. 6, 7, 'Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;' that God would display his beams of favour upon the soul. So Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'Thy favour is better than life.' And then his strength too, that he may subdue our corruptions, temptations, enemies, Micah vii. 19; and that he may supply our wants inward and outward by his all-sufficiency, Phil. iv. 19. God telleth Abraham, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect.'

3. The formality of the duty may be explained with respect to graces and ordinances. It consists in the exercise of grace, and in the use of ordinances.

[1.] The exercise of grace—faith and love. (1.) Faith is often expressed by terms of motion—coming, running, going, seeking. Thus is the whole tendency of soul towards God expressed by terms that are proper to outward motion. *Coming* notes our serious resolution and purpose to make after God. *Going* notes the practice or progress in that resolution. *Running* notes the fervour and earnestness of the soul to enjoy God. And *seeking*, that notes our diligence in the use of means. That faith is implied in seeking appears by comparing these two scriptures: Isa. xi. 10, 'To it shall the Gentiles seek.' Now when this is spoken of in the New Testament, it is rendered thus, Rom. xv. 12, 'In him shall the Gentiles trust.' So that it notes confidence and hope. (2.) It notes love, which is exercised herein, which puts upon sallies and earnest egressions of soul after the party loved: Ps. lxxiii. 8, 'My soul follows hard after thee.' It is grievous to those who love God to think of separation from him, or to forbear to seek after him. The great care of their souls is to find God, that he may direct, comfort, strengthen, and sanctify them, and to have sweet experience of his grace. Thus the spouse 'sought him whom her soul loved,' and gave not over till she found him.

[2.] Again, it is exercised in the use of the ordinances, as the word and prayer. God will be sought in his own ordinances. Christ walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks. If you would find a man, mind where is his walk and usual resort. When Christ was lost, his parents sought him in the temple; there they found him. If you would find Christ, look to the shepherds' tents in the assemblies of his people, Cant. i. 7, 8; there shall you meet him. Only let me tell you, in these ordinances it is not enough to make Christ the *object* of them, to worship Christ, but he must be made the *end* of them. To serve God is one thing, to seek him another. To serve God is to make him the object of worship, to seek God is to make him the end of worship, when we will not go away from him without him: Gen. xxxii. 16, 'I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.' It is not enough to make use of ordinances, but we must see if we can find God there. There are many that hover about the palace, that yet do not speak with the prince; so possibly we may hover about ordinances, and not meet with God there. To go away with the husk and shell of an ordinance, and neglect the kernel, to please ourselves because we have been in the courts of God, though we have not met with the living God, that is

very sad. A traveller and merchant differ thus:—A traveller goes from place to place only that he may see; but a merchant goes from port to port that he may take in his lading, and grow rich by traffic. So a formal person goes from ordinance to ordinance, and is satisfied with the work; a godly man looks to take in his lading, that he may go away from God with God; that he may meet God here and there, in this duty and in that, and go away from God with God. A man that makes a visit only by constraint, and not by friendship, it is all one to him whether the person be at home or no; but another would be glad to find his friend there: so, if we from a principle of love come to God in these duties, our desires will be to find the living God.

Again, if God be not found in an ordinance, yet we must continue seeking; you may find him in the next. Sometimes God will not be found in public, that he may be found in private ordinances. The spouse 'sought him upon her bed,' then in every street of the city: Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.' In prayer we come most directly to enjoy God, and do more especially call him in to our help and relief; there all graces are acted. If you cannot find God in prayer, look for him in the supper, and in the word; if he be not comfortably present in the word, seek him by meditation: Cant. v. 6, 'My soul failed when he spake;' that is, when I considered his speaking, for his wooing was over, my beloved was gone; but when I thought of his speaking my soul failed. David consults with Nathan, but he could give him no clear answer; what then? 2 Sam. vii. 4, 'The word of the Lord came that night unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David,' &c. So when we have been inquiring after God all day in public worship, all this while the oracle is silent; but at night, when going over these things again, God may be found. Acts xvii. 12, it is said, 'Therefore many of them believed.' How?—when they searched the word; though in the hearing they did not discern the impressions of God upon the word; but when they searched and studied, going over them in private duties, God appeared. Heb. xi. 11, it is said, 'She judged him faithful that had promised.' How so? at first hearing? No; Sarah laughed when God promised her a son (for it was the Son of God that was in company with the angels, Gen. xviii.); but afterwards, when she considered of it, she judged him faithful.

Thus we must follow God from ordinance to ordinance. It argues a great deal of pride in carnal men, that if God doth not meet them presently they throw off all. Now and then they will see what they shall have for calling upon God; but if God do not answer at the first knock, they are gone.

### SERMON III.

*Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart.*—VER. 2.

Use 1. To press you to seek God. The motives are:—

1. It was the end of our creation. We do not live merely to live;

but for this end were we sent into the world, to seek God. Nature is sensible of it in part by the dissatisfaction it finds in other things; and therefore the apostle describes the Gentiles to be groping and feeling about for God, Acts xvii. 27. God is the cause of all things, and nature cannot be satisfied without him. We were made for God, and can never enjoy satisfaction until we come to enjoy him; therefore the Psalmist saith, Ps. xiv. 2, We are 'all gone aside, and altogether become filthy.' Nature is out of joint; we are quite out of our way to true happiness. We are seeking that for which we were created, when we seek and inquire after God.

2. We seek other things that we want with great solicitude and care; we are cumbered with much serving to obtain the world: and shall anything be sought more than God? We can least spare him. The chiefest good should be sought after with the chiefest care, and chiefest love, and chiefest delight; nothing should be so precious to us as God. It is the greatest baseness that can be, that anything should take up our time, our thoughts, and content us more than God. When we come to God we are earnest for other things: Hosea vii. 14, 'They howl upon their beds for corn and wine.' If anything be sought from God above God, more than God, and not for God, it is but a brutish cry.

3. It is our benefit to seek God. It is no benefit to God if we do not seek him. The Lord<sup>1</sup> hath no less, though we have less. He that hides himself from the sun, doth not impair the light. We derogate nothing from God if we do not seek him. He needed not the creature: he had happiness enough in himself; but we hide ourselves from our own happiness and our own peace. But what benefit have we by seeking God? A great deal of present benefit: Ps. xxii. 26, 'They that seek thee shall praise thy name.' You will have cause to bless God before the search be over. God hath passed his word, there are a great many experiences we taste. As they that continue in the pursuit of the philosopher's stone find out many experiences which are a satisfaction to their understandings, so, one way or other, we shall have cause to bless God. The God of Jacob hath openly professed we shall not seek him in vain, Isa. xlv. 19, that is, this is a truth God hath written as it were with a sunbeam, that something will come in seeking of God. By seeking him in prayer we carry away a great deal of comfort and strength. As we read of that emperor that sent not away any one sad out of his presence, so neither doth God; there is some comfort to be had in waiting upon him; and as it brings present comfort and satisfaction, so it brings an everlasting reward: Heb. xi. 6, 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' If you would have the fruit of your holy calling, that which is the result of that religion you do profess, you must diligently seek him, so that in effect we never seek ourselves more than when we seek the Lord: Amos v. 6, 'Seek the Lord, and ye shall live.' It is the undoubted way to get eternal life, to live for ever. They that seek not his face here shall never see his face for ever. With what diligence will men court an outward preferment, which is yet very uncertain? Prov. xxix. 26, 'All men seek the ruler's face; but every man's judgment is of the Lord.' What a deal of observance and

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'it is no benefit to God. If we do not seek him, the Lord,' &c.?—ED.

waiting is there for the ruler's face and favour! and yet God disposeth of every man's judgment. It is uncertain whether they shall obtain it, yea or nay; but now, if you seek the face of God in heaven, you shall live for ever.

4. If you do not sensibly find God, yet comfort thyself that thou art in a seeking way, and in the pursuit of him: Ps. xxiv. 6, God's people are described to be 'the generation of them that seek him.' This is the true mark of God's chosen people; they make it their business to get the favour of God, and to wrestle through discouragements. It is better to be a seeker than a wanderer. Though we do not feel the love of God, nor have the comfort of a pardon, have no sensible communion with him; yet the choice and bent of the heart is towards him, and you have the character of God's people upon you.

5. You have misspent a great deal of time already, and long neglected God; therefore, now you should seek him: Hosea x. 22. 'It is time to seek the Lord, until he come and rain righteousness upon you.' It is time, that is, it is not too late, while we are preserved and invited. And again, it is time, that is, it is high time; the business of your lives hath been too long neglected. It is such another expression as 1 Peter iv. 3, 'The time past is enough to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,' &c. God hath been too long kept out of his right, and we out of our happiness. The night is coming upon us, and will you not begin your day's work?

6. This is the reason of affliction: we are so backward in this work that we need to be whipped unto it: Hosea v. 15, 'I will go and return to my place, saith God, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face.' God knows that want is a spur to a lazy creature; and therefore doth God break in upon men, and scourge them as with scorpions, that they may bethink themselves, and look after God.

*Use 2.* For direction. If you would seek God—

1. Seek him *early*: Prov. viii. 32, 'Blessed are they that seek me early.' We cannot soon enough go about this work. Seek him when God is nigh, when the Spirit is nigh: Isa. lv. 6, 'Call upon the Lord while he is near.' There are certain seasons which you cannot easily get again; such times when God doth deal more pressingly with you, when the word bears in upon the heart, and when God is near unto us. David like a quick echo returns upon God: Ps. xxvii. 8, 'Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' It would be a great loss not to obey present impulses and invitations, and not make use of the advantages which God puts into our hands.

2. Seek him *daily*: Ps. cv. 4, 'Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore.' That is, from day to day you must be seeking the face of God, in the strength of God. Every hour we need his direction, protection, strength; and we are in danger to lose him, if we do not continue the search.

3. Seek him *unweariedly*, and do not give over your seeking until you find God. Wrestle through discouragements; though former endeavours have been in vain, yet still we should continue seeking after God. We have that command to enforce us to it: Luke v. 5, 'We have toiled all night; howbeit at thy command,' &c. Though we do not presently find, yet we must not cast off all endeavours. In

spiritual things many times a man hears and goes away with nothing ; but when he comes to meditate upon it, and work it upon the heart, then he finds the face of God, and the strength of God. Therefore, you must not give over your seeking.

4. Seek him *in Christ*. God will only be found in a mediator : Heb. vii. 25, 'Those are accepted 'that come to God by him.' Guilty creatures cannot enjoy God immediately ; and in Christ, God is more familiar with us : Hosea iii. 5, 'They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king.' None can seek him rightly but those that seek him in Christ. It is uncomfortable to think of God out of Christ. As the historian saith of Themistocles, when he sought the favour of the king, he snatched up the king's son, and so came and mediated for his grace and favour. Let us take the Son of God in the arms of our faith, and present him to God the Father, and seek his face, his strength.

5. God can only be sought *by the help of his own Spirit*. As our access to God, we have it by Christ, so we have it by the Spirit : Eph. ii. 18, 'For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.' As Christ gives us the leave, so the Spirit gives us the help. Bernard speaks fitly to this purpose : None can be aforehand with God, we cannot seek him till we find him in some sense : he will be sought that he may be found ; and he is found that he may be sought. It is his preventing grace which makes us restless in the use of means ; and when we are brought home to God, when we seek after God, it is by his own grace. The spouse was listless and careless until she could take God by the scent of his own grace, when he 'put his finger upon the handle of the lock, and dropped myrrh.' By the sweet and powerful influences of his grace, she was carried on in seeking after God. Thus much for the first part of the duty, *seek*.

Secondly, Now the manner, *with the whole heart*.

*Doct.* Whoever would seek God aright, they must seek him with their whole heart.

Here I shall inquire—

1. What doth this imply ?

2. Why God will be sought with the whole heart ?

1. What doth this imply ? It implies sincerity and integrity ; for it is not to be taken in the legal sense, with respect to absolute perfection, but in opposition to deceit : Jer. iii. 10, 'Judah has not turned to me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord.' It is spoken of the time of Josiah's reformation ; many men whirled about with the times, and were forced by preternatural motions. The Father of spirits above all things requireth the spirit, and he that is the searcher and judge of the heart requireth the heart should be consecrated to him. Integrity opposeth partiality. There are indeed two things in this expression, *the whole heart* ; it notes extension of parts, and intension of degrees.

[1.] The extension of parts ; with the understanding, will, and affections. Some seek God with a piece of their hearts, to explain it either in the work of faith or love. In the work of faith ; as Acts viii. 37, 'If thou believest with all thine heart.' There is a believing with a piece, and a believing with all the heart. There is an inactive know-

ledge, a naked assent, which may be real, yet it is not a true faith ; the devil may have this : Luke iv. 34, the devil makes an orthodox confession there, 'Thou art Jesus, the Son of the living God.' This is only a conviction upon the understanding, without any bent upon the heart. It is not enough to own Christ to be the true Messiah, but we must embrace him, put our whole trust in him. There may be an assent joined with some sense and conscience, and some vanishing sweetness and taste by the reasonableness of salvation by Christ, Heb. vi. 4 ; but this is not believing with all the heart ; it is but a taste, a lighter work upon the affections, and therefore bringeth in little experience. There may be some assent, such as may engage to profession and partial reformation, but the whole heart is not subdued to God. Then do we believe with the whole heart, when the heart is warmed with the things we know and assent to ; when there is a full and free consent to take Christ upon God's terms, to all the uses and purposes for which God hath appointed him : 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind ;' when there is an effective and an affective knowledge ; when we can not only discourse of God and Christ, and are inclined to believe ; but when these truths soak into the heart to frame it to the obedience of his will. When the Lord had spoken of practical obedience, 'Was not this to know me, saith the Lord ?' Jer. xxii. 16. And this is to believe. So for love : Deut. vi. 5, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' Every faculty must express love to God. Many will be content to give God a part. God hath their consciences, but the world their affections. Their heart is divided, and the evidence of it is plainly this : In their troubles and extremities they will seek after God, but this is not their constant work and delight. We are welcome to God when we are compelled to come into his presence. God will not say, as men, You come in your necessity. But we must then be sincere in our addresses, and rest in him as our portion and all-sufficient good.

[2.] For intension of degrees. To seek God with the whole heart, is to seek him with the highest elevation of our hearts. The whole heart must be carried out to God, and to other things for God's sake. As harbingers, when they go to take up room for a prince, they take up the whole house, none else must have place there ; so God, he will have the whole heart.

Again, it may be considered as to the exaction of the law, and as a rule of the gospel.

(1.) As an exaction of the law ; and so Christ urged it to the young man that was of a pharisaical institution, to abate his pride and confidence : Mat. xxii. 37, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.' Certainly these words there have a legal importance and signification ; for in another Evangelist, Luke x. 28, it is added, 'Do and live,' which is the tenor of the law. And Christ's intent was to abate the Pharisees' pride, by propounding the rigour of the first covenant. The law requireth complete love without the least defect ; according to the terms of it, a grain wanting would make the whole unacceptable ; as a hard landlord, when all the rent is not brought to the full, he accepteth none.

It is good to consider it under this sense, that we may seek God in Christ to quicken us, that we may value our deliverance by him from this burden, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear; a straggling thought, a wandering glance, the least outrunning of the heart, had rendered us accursed for ever.

(2.) It may be considered as a rule of the gospel, which requireth our utmost endeavours, our bewailing infirmities and defects, but accepts of sincerity. There will be a double principle in us to the last, but there should not be a double heart. So that this expression of seeking the Lord with the whole heart is reconcilable enough with the weaknesses of the present state. For instance: 1 Kings xiv. 8, 'My servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, and did that only which was right in mine eyes.' David had many failings, and some that left an indelible brand upon him, in the matter of Uriah, yet because of his sincerity, and habitual purpose, God saith, 'He hath kept all my commandments.' So in Josiah: 2 Kings xxiii. 25, 'Like to him there was no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might.' Yet he also had his imperfections; against the warning of the Lord he goes out with a wicked king, and dies in battle. So Asa: 2 Chron. xv. 17, 'The high places were not taken away'—it was a failing in that holy king—yet it is said, 'The heart of Asa was perfect all his days.' Well, then, when the whole heart is engaged in this work, when we do not only study to know God, but make it our work to enjoy him, to rest in him as our all-sufficient portion, though there will be many defects, yet then are we said to seek him with the whole heart.

2. The reasons why God will be sought with the whole heart are—

[1.] He that gives but part to God doth indeed give nothing. The devil keeps an interest as long as one lust remains unmortified, and one corner of the soul is kept for him. As Pharaoh stood huckling,—he would fain have some pawn of their return; either leave your children behind; no, no, they must go and see the sacrifices, and be trained up in the way of the Lord; then he would have their flocks and herds left behind; he knew that would draw their hearts back again,—so Satan must have either this lust or that; he knows by keeping part all will fall to his share in the end. A bird that is tied in a string seems to have more liberty than a bird in a cage; it flutters up and down, though it be held fast: so many seem to flutter up and down and do many things, as Herod; but his Herodias drew him back again into the fowler's net. Thus because of a sinner's danger.

[2.] Because of God's right. By creation he made the whole, therefore requires the whole; 'the Father of spirits' must have the whole spirit. We were not mangled in our creation; God, that made the whole, must have the whole. He preserves the whole. Christ hath bought the whole: 1 Cor. vi. 20, 'Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.' And God promiseth to glorify the whole. Christians, it would be uncomfortable to us if God should only take a part to heaven. All that you have is to be glorified in the day of Christ; all that you are and have must be given to him—whole spirit, soul, and body. Let us not deprive him of any part.



*Use.* Well, do we serve God and seek after God with the whole heart? The natural mother had rather part with the whole than see the child divided, 1 Kings iii. 26. God had rather part with the whole than take a piece. Either he will have the whole of your love, or leave the whole to Satan. The Lord complains, Hosea x. 2, 'Their heart is divided.' Men have some affections for God many times, but they have affections for their lusts too, the world hath a great share and portion of their heart.

*Quest.* But when, in a gospel sense, may we be said to seek God with the whole heart? Take it in these short propositions.

1. When the settled purpose of our souls is to cleave to God, to love and serve him with an entire obedience, both in the inward and outward man, when this is the full determination and consent of our hearts.

2. When we do what we can by all good means to maintain this purpose; for otherwise it is but a fruit of conviction, a freewill pang: Acts xxiv. 16, 'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards all men.'

3. When we search out our defects, and are ever bewailing them with kindly remorse: Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?'

4. When we run by faith to Christ Jesus, and sue out our pardon and peace in Christ's name, until we come to be complete in him: Col. i. 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.'

## SERMON IV.

*They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.*—VER. 3.

STILL the Psalmist continues the description of a blessed man. In the two first verses, holiness (which is the way to and evidence of blessedness) is considered with respect to the subject and the object of it, the life and the heart of man. The life of man, 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way.' The heart of man, they 'seek him with the whole heart.'

Now, holiness is considered, in the parts of it, negatively and positively. The two parts of holiness are an eschewing of sin and studying to please God. You have both in this verse, 'They also do no iniquity: they walk in His ways.'

First, You have the blessed man described negatively, *they do no iniquity*. Upon hearing the words, presently there occurs a doubt, how then can any man be blessed? for 'there is not a man that liveth and sinneth not,' Eccles. vii. 20; and James iii. 2, 'In many things we offend all.' To deny it, is a flat lie against the truth, and against our own experience. 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,' 1 John i. 8. The expression may be abused on the one side, to establish the impeccability and perfection of the saints. On the other side, it may be abused by persons of a weak and tender conscience, to the hindrance of their comfort

and rejoicing in God. When they shall hear this is the character of a blessed man, 'they do no iniquity,' they are very apt to conclude against their own regeneration, because of their daily failings.

To avoid these difficulties, I shall inquire—

1. What it is to do iniquity.
2. Who are the persons among the sons of men that may be said to do no iniquity.

*First*, What it is to do iniquity? If we make it our trade and practice to continue in wilful disobedience. To sin is one thing, but to make sin our work is another: 1 John iii. 9, 'He that is born of God doth not commit sin;' he doth not work sin; and Mat. vii. 23, 'Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' That is the character of the reprobate workers of iniquity. So John viii. 34, 'Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.' Sin is their constant trade: Ps. cxxxix. 24, 'See if there be any wicked way in me.' None are absolutely freed from sin, but it is not their trade, their way, their work. When a man makes it his study and business to carry on a course of sin, then he is said to do iniquity.

*Secondly*, Who are those that are said to do no iniquity in God's account, though they fail often through weakness of the flesh and violence of temptation? Answer—

1. All such as are renewed by grace, and reconciled to God by Christ Jesus; to these God imputeth no sin to condemnation, and in his account they do no iniquity. Notable is that, 1 Kings xiv. 8. It is said of David, 'He kept my commandments, and followed me with all his heart, and did that only which was right in mine eyes.' How can that be? We may trace David by his failings; they are upon record everywhere in the word; yet here a veil is drawn upon them; God laid them not to his charge. There is a double reason why their failings are not laid to their charge. Partly, because of their general state; they are in Christ, taken into favour through him; and 'there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ,' Rom. viii. 1; therefore particular errors and escapes do not alter their condition. Which is not to be understood as if a man should not be humbled, and ask God's pardon for his infirmities; no, for then they prove iniquities, they will lie upon record against us. It was a gross fancy of the Valentinians, that held they were not defiled with sin whatsoever they committed; though base and obscene persons, yet still they were as gold in the dirt. No, no; we are to recover ourselves by repentance, to sue out the favour of God. When David humbled himself, and had repented, then saith Nathan, 2 Sam. xii. 13, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin.' Partly, too, because their bent and habitual inclination is to do otherwise. They set themselves to comply with God's will, to seek and serve the Lord, though they are clogged with many infirmities. A wicked man sinneth with deliberation and delight; his bent is to do evil; he 'makes provision for lusts,' Rom. xiii. 12, and serves them by a voluntary subjection, Titus iii. 3. But those that are renewed by grace are not debtors to the flesh; they have taken another debt and obligation upon them, which is to serve the Lord, Rom. viii. 12. Partly, too, because their general course and way is to do otherwise. *Unumquodque operatur secundum suam for-*

*mam*—everything works according to its form; the constant actions of nature are according to the kind. So the new creature, his constant operations are according to grace. A man is known by his custom, and the course of his endeavours, what is his business. If a man be constantly, easily, frequently carried away to sin, it discovers a habit of soul, and the temper of his heart. Meadows may be overflowed, but marsh ground is drowned with the return of every tide. A child of God may be carried away, and act contrary to the bent and inclination of the new nature; but when men are drowned and overcome with the return of every temptation, and carried away, it argues a habit of sin. And partly, because sin never carries it away clearly, but with some dislikes and resistances of the new nature. The children of God make it their business to avoid all sin, by watching, praying, mortifying: Ps. xxxix. 1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue.' And then there is a resistance of the sin. God hath planted graces in their hearts; the fear of his majesty, that works a resistance; and therefore there is not a full allowance of what they do. This resistance sometimes is more strong; then the temptation is overcome: 'How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?' Gen. xxxix. 9. Sometimes it is more weak, and then sin carries it, though against the will of a holy man: Rom. vii. 15, 18, 'The evil which I hate, that do I.' It is the evil which they hate; they protest against it; they are like men which are oppressed by the power of the enemy. And then there is a remorse after the sin: 'David's heart smote him.' It grieves and shames them that they do evil. There is tenderness goes with the new nature; Peter sinned foully, but he went out and wept bitterly.

Well, then, the point is this:—

*Doct.* 1. They that are and shall be blessed are such as make it their business to avoid all sin.

I may illustrate it by these reasons:—

1. Surely they shall be blessed, for they take care to remove the makebate, the wall of partition between God and them. It is sin which separates: Isa. lix. 2, 'But your iniquities have separated between you and your God.' This was that which cast angels out of heaven; when they had sinned, God could endure their company no longer. This cast Adam out of paradise. This is that which hinders men from communion with God.

2. These are men fitting and preparing themselves for the enjoyment of their great hopes: Col. i. 12, 'Who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;' 1 John iii. 3, 'He that hath this hope purifieth himself, even as he is pure.' Esther, when she was chosen to be bride and spouse to that great king, had her months of purification. The time we spend in the world are the months of our purification; it is a sign they mind their business, they are fitting for eternal happiness. They remember they are shortly to appear before the great God, therefore they would not be uncomely. Joseph washed his garments when he was to go before Pharaoh. They have these hopes that they shall see God as he is, that they shall be like him, and he will appear for their comfort; therefore they are fitting themselves more and more.

3. In them true happiness is begun. There are degrees in blessed-

ness; the angels they never sinned; the glorified saints they have sinned, but sin no more; the saints upon earth, in them sin reigns not; therefore here is their happiness begun. As sin is taken away, so our happiness increaseth; first God begins with us in a way of justification, *ne damnet*; he takes away the damning power that is in sin; and in sanctification the work goes on, *ne regnet*, that sin may not reign; afterward *ne sit*, that sin may not be; therefore these have begun their happiness, they are hastening towards it apace.

*Use 1.* For trial and examination, whether we may be reckoned among the blessed men, yea or nay. There are some think, because the children of God are liable to so many failings, and there being so many wiles and circuits in the heart of man, that there can be no judgment made upon the case between the sins of the regenerate and unregenerate. But surely there is a difference between the sinning of the one, and the sinning of the other, and such a difference as may be discerned: 1 John iii. 9, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.' Now mark, ver. 10, 'In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.' This is that which distinguisheth the children of God from the children of the devil. Well, then, how shall we manage this discovery, that we may be able to judge of our own estates?

*First,* Let us consider how far sin may be in a blessed man, in a child of God.

1. They have a corrupt nature, they have sin in them as well as others; it is their misery to the last: Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am,' saith the holy apostle. Sin, though it be *dejectum*, cast down in regard of regency, yet it is not *ejectum*, cast out in regard of inherency; their corrupt nature sticks by them to the last. One compares it to a wild fig-tree, or to ivy in a wall; cut off the body, the boughs, sprigs, branches, yet still there will be something that will be sprouting up again until the wall be digged down. Such an indwelling sin is in us, though we pray, strive, and cut off the excrescences, the buddings out of it here and there, yet till it be plucked asunder by death, it continueth with us.

2. They have their daily failings and infirmities: Eccles. vii. 20, 'There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.' Those that for their general state are just and righteous men, yet certain sins they cannot get rid of, and are unavoidable; as sins of ignorance, incogitancy, sudden surreption, indeliberate incursions, which we shall never be freed from as long as we are in this imperfect state. So also imperfections of duty, for we cannot serve God with that high degree of reverence, delight, and perfection which he requireth. There are unavoidable infirmities which are pardoned of course.

3. They may be guilty of some sins which by watchfulness might be prevented, as vain thoughts, idle, passionate speeches, and many carnal actions. It is possible that these may be prevented by the ordinary assistances of grace, and if we will keep a strict guard over our own hearts. But in this case God's children may be overtaken and overborne; overtaken by the suddenness, or overborne by the violence of temptation: overtaken, Gal. vi. 1, 'If a man be overtaken in a fault, restore such an one,' &c.; and overborne, James i. 14, 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.'

4. They may now and then fall foully; as Noah by excess of drink,

Lot's incest, David's adultery, Peter's denial. Failings and infirmities they are not determined either by the smallness or by the greatness of the act, but by other concomitant circumstances. Not by the smallness of the act. There is as much treason in coining pence as shillings and pounds. Allowed affection to small sins is deadly and damnable: he that is unfaithful in little will be unfaithful in much. Christians, where temptations are weak and impotent, and of slight concernment and importance, they may be sooner confuted, and obedience is the more easy; so that our rebellion to God by small sins may be greater. A man may have great affections to small sins; so it may prove an iniquity, a damnable sin.

On the other side, great sins may be infirmities; as Lot's incest, David's adultery, when they are not done with full consent of soul, when their hearts are not wholly carried away with them. Iniquities are determined by their manner: Jude 15, 'Their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed:' when with full consent of will, and it is their course that argues an habitual hatred and contempt of God.

5. A child of God may have some particular evils, which may be called predominant sins (not with respect to grace, that is impossible, that a man should be renewed and have such sins that sin should carry the mastery over grace); but they may be said to have a predominancy in comparison of other sins; he may have some particular inclination to some evil above others. David had *his* iniquity, Ps. xviii. 23. Look, as the saints have particular graces; Abraham was eminent for faith, Timothy for sobriety, Moses for meekness, &c.; so they have their particular corruptions which are more suitable to their temper and course of life. Peter seems to be inclined to tergiversation, and to shrinking in a time of trouble. We find him often tripping in that kind; in the denial of his master; again, Gal. ii. 12. it is said he dissembled and complied with the Jews, therefore Paul 'withstood him to his face, for he was to be blamed.' It is evident by experience there are particular corruptions to which the children of God are more inclinable: this appears by the great power and sway they bear in commanding other evils to be committed, by their falling into them out of inward propensity when outward temptations are few or weak, or none at all; and when resistance is made, yet they are more pestered and haunted with them than with other temptations, which is a constant matter of exercise and humiliation to them.

*Secondly*, Wherein doth grace now discover itself, where is the difference?

1. In that they cannot fall into those iniquities wherein there is an absolute contrariety to grace, as hatred of God, total apostasy, so they cannot sin the sin unto death, 1 John v. 16.

2. In that they do not sin with the whole heart: Ps. cxix. 176, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments.' There was somewhat of God in the heart, when he was conscious to himself of strayings and wanderings; and David saith elsewhere, 'I have not departed wickedly from thy precepts.' When they sin, it is with the dislike and reluctancy of the new nature; it is rather a rape than a consent. Bernard saith, A child of God *suffers* sin rather than *acts* it, and his heart's protest is against it.

3. It is not their course ; not constant, easy, and frequent. Relapses into gross sins, they argue an habitual aversion from God, for a habit is determined by the constancy and uniformity of acts ; therefore it is but now and then under some great temptation. There is *sin*, and there is a *way* of sin : Ps. cxxxix. 24, 'Search me and see if there be any way of wickedness in me,' as Chrysostom glosseth.

4. When they fall they do not rest in sin : 'Shall they fall, and shall they not arise?' Jer. viii. 4. They may fall into the dirt, but they do not lie and wallow there like swine in the mire. A fountain may be mudded, but it works itself clean again. The needle that hath been touched with the loadstone may be jogged and discomposed, but it never leaves till it turns towards the pole again. God's children have their failings, but they sue out their pardon, run to their advocate, 1 John ii. 1, humble themselves before God.

5. Their falls are sanctified. When they have smarted under sin, they grow more watchful and more circumspect. A child of God may have the worse *in pralio*, in the battle, but not *in bello*, in the war. Sometimes the carnal part may get the victory, and they may fall foul, but see the issue : Ps. li. 6, 'In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.' David had sinned against the Lord, but I have learned wisdom, never to trust a naughty heart more, but to look to myself better.

6. Grace discovers itself by the constant endeavours which they make against sin. What is the constant course a Christian takes? They groan under the relics of sin ; it is their burden that they have such an evil nature, Rom. vii. 24. They fly to God's grace in Christ for daily pardon, 1 John i. 9. They are ever washing their garments in the Lamb's blood, Rev. vii., and every day are cleansing themselves from the filthiness and defilement they contract by sin : John xiii. 10, 'He that is washed, needeth not save to wash his feet.' An allusion to a man that hath been a journey, in those countries where they went barefoot, when he came home he must wash his feet. So a man that is reconciled to God, though he hath been in the bath, in the fountain which God hath opened for uncleanness, yet every day he must be washing his feet, cleansing himself by the blood of Christ more and more, because he contracts new defilement. Then by using all endeavours against it, Col. iii. 5 ; as prayer, striving, watching, cutting off the provisions of the flesh, improving the death of Christ. They do not voluntarily and without opposition live under sin, and the slavish tyranny of it. Their bent and habitual inclination is to do otherwise ; therefore they are said to do no iniquity : whereas those that are reckless and careless of their souls, sin, and never lay it to heart ; they are the workers of iniquity.

*Use 2.* If this be the character of a blessed man, to make it our business to avoid sin, then here is caution to God's people :

1. To beware of all sin.

2. To be very cautious against gross sins, committed against the light of conscience.

3. To beware of continuance in sin.

First, To beware of all sin. The more you have the mark of a blessed man : 1 John ii. 1, 'These things I write unto you, that you

sin not.' Though you have a pardon and cleansing by the blood of Christ, though you have an advocate, yet sin not. Now the motives to set on this caution are taken from God, from ourselves, from the nature of sin.

1. From God. Sin not. Why? Because it is an offence to God. Consider how contrary sin is to all the persons in the Trinity. To God the Father as a lawgiver, being a contempt of his authority, 1 John iii. 4. Sin is *ἀνομία*, 'a transgression of the law,' that is, an act of disloyalty and rebellion against the crown of heaven. Open sin doth as it were proclaim rebellion and war against God; and privy sin is conspiracy against him. All creatures have a law: Ps. cxlviii. 6, 'Thou hast set to them a decree, beyond which they cannot pass.' And they are less exorbitant in their motions than we are. It is a greater violation to the law of nature for man to sin, than for the sea to break its bounds. The creatures have not sense and reason, yet they do not pass beyond the law which God hath set them. This should prevail with the new creature especially, whose hearts God hath suited to the law, so that they offer a violence to their own conscience. Take heed of entering into the lists with God, of despising his authority. Every sin that is committed slights the law which forbids it: 2 Sam. xii. 9, 'Wherefore despisest thou his commandments?' God stands much upon his law,—one tittle shall not pass away,—and you despise it, go about to make it void, when you give way to sin. Nay, it is an abuse of his love: 1 John iii. 1, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath showed us;' you are children and sons of God, and will you slight his love? Your sins are like Absalom's treason against his father. The Rechabites are commended for keeping their father's command, Jer. xxxv. Set pots before them, &c.—No, our father hath forbidden us to drink wine. Their father was dead, but ours is living; will you that are sons renounce God, and side with the devil's party, and commit sin,—you to whom the Father hath showed such love that you should be called his children? Then it is a wrong to Jesus Christ—to his merit, to his example. To his merit. Christ came to take away sin, and will you bind those cords the faster which Christ came to loosen? Then you go about to defeat the purpose of his death, and put your Redeemer to shame. You seek to make void the great end for which Christ came, which was to dissolve sin. And, besides, you disparage the worth of the price he paid down; you make the blood of Christ a cheap thing, when you despise grace and holiness; you make nothing of that which cost him so dear—you lessen the greatness of his sufferings. And it is a wrong to his pattern. You should be 'pure as Christ is pure,' 1 John iii. 3; and ver. 7, be 'righteous as he is righteous.' You should discover what a holy person Christ was, by a conformity to him in your conversation. Now, will you dishonour him? What a strange Christ will you hold forth to the world, when his name is upon you—will you give way to sin and folly? And it is a wrong to God the Spirit, a grief to him. His great and first work was to wash us from sin, Titus iii. 5. You forget that such a work was past upon your hearts, and that you 'have been purged from your old sins,' when you return to them again, 2 Peter i. 9; and his constant residence in the heart is to check the lusts of

the flesh, to prevent the actings of sin. 'If ye through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live,' Rom. viii. 13; therefore you go about to make void his personal operation. Thus it is a wrong to God.

2. By an argument drawn from ourselves; it is very unsuitable to you. We profess ourselves to be 'regenerate' and born of God: 1 John iii. 9, 'He that is born of God cannot sin.' It is not only contrary to thy duty, but to thy nature, as thou art a new creature. It were monstrous for the egg of one creature to bring forth a brood of another kind, for a crow or a kite to come from the egg of a hen. It is as unnatural a production for a new creature to sin; therefore you that are born of God, it is very uncomely and unsuitable. Do not dishonour your high birth.

3. Consider the nature of sin; if you give way to it, it will encroach further. Sins steal into the throne insensibly; and being habituated in us by long custom, we cannot easily shake off the yoke or redeem ourselves from their tyranny. They go on from little to little, and get strength by multiplied acts. Therefore we should be very careful to avoid all sin.

The second part of the caution is, beware of gross sins, committed against light and conscience. When we are tempted to sin, say with Joseph: Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?' The more of deliberation and will there is in any action, the sin is the fouler. Consider, foul sins are a blot that will stick long by us. See 1 Kings xv. 5; it is said, 'David walked in all the ways of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.' Why, there were many other things wherein David failed; you read of his diffidence and distrust in God: 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' We read of his dissimulation, and feigning himself mad in the company of the Philistines. We read of his injustice to Mephibosheth, his fond affection to Absalom, his indulgence to Amnon. We read of his numbering the people, which cost the lives of thousands all on a sudden: all these are great failings, but these are not taken notice of; but the matter of Uriah left a scar and blot that was not easily washed off.

Thirdly, Beware of continuance in sin. How may we continue in sin? In what sense? Three things I shall take notice of in sin—*culpa*, *reatus*, *macula*; there is the *fault*, the *guilt*, the *blot*; and then we continue in sin, when the fault, the guilt, or blot is continued upon us.

1. The *fault* is continued when the acts of it are repeated, when we fall into the same sin again and again. Relapses are very dangerous, as a bone often broken in the same place; you are in danger of this, before the breach be well made up between God and you; as Lot doubling his incest: to venture once and again is very dangerous.

2. The *guilt* doth continue upon a man till serious and solemn repentance, till he sue out pardon in the name of Christ. Though a man should forbear the act, never commit it more; yet unless he retracts it by a serious remorse, and humbleth himself before God, and sueth out his pardon in a repenting way, the guilt continues.



'If we confess'—he speaks to believers—then sin is forgiven, not otherwise.

3. There is the *macula*, the *blot*, by which the schoolmen understand an inclination to sin again; the evil influence of the sin continueth until we use serious endeavours to mortify the root of it. When we have been foiled by any lust, that lust must be more mortified. For instance, Jonah, he repented for forsaking his call, when he was cast into the whale's belly; but the sin broke out again, because he did not mortify the root; what was that?—his pride. So that it is not enough to bewail the sin, but we must lance the sore, and discover the root and core of it before all will be well. A man may repent of the eruption of sin, the former act, but the inclination to sin again is not taken off. Judges xvi. 2. Sampson loves a woman of Gaza, and she had betrayed him; but by carrying away the gates of the city he saves his life: possibly upon that experience he might repent of his folly and inordinate love to that woman. Ay! but the root remains: therefore he falls in love with another woman, with Delilah. Therefore if you would do what is your duty, you must look to the *fault*, that that be not renewed; the *guilt*, that that be not continued by omission of repentance; and that the *blot* also do not remain upon you, by not searching to the root of the distemper, the cause of that sin by which we have been foiled. So much for the first part of the text, *They do no iniquity*.

The second note is, *they walk in his ways*. This is the positive part; not only avoiding of sin, but practice of holiness, is implied. Observe—

*Doct.* 2. It is not enough only to avoid evil, but we must do good.

'They do no iniquity;' then 'they walk in his ways.' Why?

1. The law of God is positive as well as negative. In every command there are precepts and prohibitions, that we might own God, as well as renounce the devil; and maintain communion with him, as well as avoid our own misery: Amos v. 15, 'Hate the evil, and love the good;' Rom. xii. 9, 'Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good.'

2. The mercies of God they are positive as well as privative. Our obedience should correspond with God's mercies. Now, God doth not only deliver us from hell, but he hath called us to glory. John iii. 16, 'The end of Christ's coming is, that we should 'not perish' (there is the privative part), but 'come to everlasting life' (there is the positive). In the covenant God hath undertaken to be 'a sun and a shield,' Ps. lxxxiv. 11; not only a sun, which is the fountain of life and vegetation and blessing, but a shield to defend us from danger in the world; therefore our obedience should be positive as well as privative.

*Use.* It reproves those that rest in negatives. As it was said of the emperor, he was rather *not vicious* than *virtuous*. Many men, all their religion runs upon *nots*: Luke xviii. 11, 'I am *not* as this publican.' That ground is naught, though it brings not forth briars and thorns, if it yields not good increase. Not only the *unruly* servant is cast into hell, that beat his fellow-servant, that ate and drank with the drunken, but the *idle* servant, that wrapped up his talent in a napkin.

Meroz is cursed, not for opposing and fighting, but for not helping, Judges v. 23. Dives did not take away food from Lazarus, but he did not give him of his crumbs. Many will say, I set up no other gods; ay! but dost thou love, reverence, and obey the true God? In the second commandment, I abhor idols; but dost thou delight in ordinances? I do not swear and rend the name of God by cursed oaths; ay! but dost thou glorify God and honour him? I do not profane the Sabbath; but dost thou sanctify it? Thou dost not plough and dance; but thou art idle, toyst away the Sabbath. Thou dost not wrong thy parents; but dost thou reverence them? Thou dost not murder; but dost thou do good to thy neighbour? Thou art no adulterer; but dost thou study temperance and a holy sobriety in all things? Thou art no slanderer; but art thou tender of thy neighbour's honour and credit as of thy own? Usually men cut off half their bill, as the unjust steward, when he owed a hundred, bade him set down fifty. We do not think of sins of omission. If we are not drunkards, adulterers, and profane persons, we do not think what it is to omit respects to God, and want of reverence to his holy majesty; to delight in him and his ways.

In the next place, take notice of the notion, by which the precepts of God are expressed; here they are called *ways*, 'that walk in his ways;' how is that?—not as he hath given us an example, to be holy as he is holy, just as he is just; but his ways are his precepts. Why are they his ways? Because they are appointed by God, and prescribed by him. Which shows the evil of defection and going astray from him. It is a despising God's wisdom and authority. The great and wise God hath found out a way for the creature to walk in, that he may attain true happiness; and we must still be running out into bypaths; yea, it is a despising of his goodness: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good;' how to walk step by step. Then they are God's ways, as they lead to the enjoyment of him. From thence we may learn that many that wish to be where he is, shall never come there, because they do not walk in the way that leads to him. A man can never come to a place, that will not go in the way that will bring him thither: so they will never come to the enjoyment of God in a blessed estate, that will not take the Lord's way to blessedness, that follow not the course God hath prescribed to them in his word.

## SERMON V.

*Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.*—VER. 4.

THE Psalmist having laid down the description of the blessed man by the frame of his heart, and the course of his life, and the integrity of his obedience, he comes now to another argument whereby to enforce the entire observation of God's law. The argument in the text is taken from God's authority enjoining this course, and he propounds it by way of address and appeal to God for the greater emphasis and force, 'Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.'

In the words take notice of two things—

1. The fundamental ground and reason of our obedience, which is God's *command* or will declared in his word.

2. The manner of this obedience. God will not be put off with anything, but served with the greatest diligence and exactness, 'to keep thy precepts *diligently*.' The Septuagint renders it, 'That thy commands should be kept exceeding much.'

In the first part take notice—

1. Of the lawgiver, *thou*.

2. His authority interposed, or positive injunction, *hast commanded us*. It is not left to our arbitrament whether we will take up the course which leads to true happiness, yea or nay.

3. The thing commanded, *to keep thy precepts*.

*Doct.* To gain the heart to a full obedience, it is good to consider the authority of God in his word.

There are many courses we must use to draw the heart to an obedience of God. We may urge—

1. The reasonableness of obedience; so that if we are left at our liberty, we should take up the ways of God rather than any other: Rom. vii. 12, 'The commandment is holy, just, and good.' All that God hath required, it carrieth a great suitableness to the reasonable nature, so that if a man were well in his wits, and were to choose a law, he would of his own accord prefer the laws of God before liberty and any other service. Certainly there is an excellency in them which is in part discerned by carnal men; they admire those that practise the duties which God hath required, though they are loth to submit to them themselves. It is no heavy burden to live chastely, humbly, soberly, and to maintain a communion and correspondence with God; and whosoever doth so hath much the sweeter life of him that liveth sinfully. We may urge—

2. The profitableness of obedience, and how much it conduceth to our good: Deut. x. 13, 'The statutes which I command thee for thy good.' Our labour in the work of obedience is not lost or misspent. A godly course is refreshed with many sweet experiences for the present, and will bring in a full reward for the future.

3. The next motive is that of the text, to urge the command of God. It is a course enjoined and imposed upon us by our sovereign lawgiver. It is not in our choice, as if it were an indifferent thing whether we will walk in the laws of God or not, but of absolute necessity, unless we renounce the authority of God. This is the argument in the text, therefore let us see how it is laid down here.

[1.] Take notice of the lawgiver, *thou*. It is not our equal, or one that will be baffled, but the great God, upon whom thou dependest every moment. Men are easily carried away to please those that have power over them, even sometimes to the wrong of God and conscience: Hosea v. 11, 'Ephraim walked willingly after the commandment;' meaning Jeroboam's law for the worshipping the calves in Dan and Bethel. When we depend upon men we consent to their commands, and study a compliance, though contrary to our own inclinations. And is not God's authority to be regarded? Surely he hath the greatest right to command us, for he made us—there is none

hath such dominion and lordship over us as God hath; and our dependence upon him is more than can be upon any created being, for 'in him we live, and move, and have our being;' and therefore, *thou hast commanded*, this should be a powerful argument. And mark, none can enforce his command with such threatenings and rewards as he can. Not with such threats: Mat. x. 28, 'Fear not him that can kill the body, and after that hath no more,' &c. Men can threaten us with strapados, dungeons, halters, and other instruments of persecution; but God, with a pit without a bottom, with a worm that never dies, with a fire that shall never be quenched, with torments without end, and without ease. Then for rewards. As Saul said, 'Can the son of Jesse give you vineyards, and make you captains of fifties, of hundreds, and of thousands?' The world takes him to have most right to command that can bid most for our obedience. Who can promise more than God, who is a plentiful 'rewarder of them that diligently seek him'? Heb. xi. 6. Who hath told us of a kingdom prepared for us; of a body glorious like unto Christ's body; of a soul enlarged to the greatest capacities of a creature; and yet filled up with God, and satisfied with the fruition of himself. This is the person spoken of in the text, to whom the Psalmist saith, 'Thou hast commanded us.' And surely if we would willingly walk after any commandment, we should after the commandment of the great God.

[2.] The second circumstance is, *hast commanded*; he hath interposed his authority. Besides the particular precept and rule of duty, there are general commands or significations of God's authority to bind all the rest, 'Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts.' If the word of God, or rule of obedience, were only given us as a direction, we should regard it as coming from the wisdom of God. But now it is an injunction as coming from the authority of God; therefore in his name we may charge you, as you will answer it another day, that these precepts be dear and precious to you. Unless you mean to renounce the sovereign majesty of God, and put him besides the throne, and break out into open rebellion against him, you must do what he hath commanded: 1 Tim. i. 9, 'Charge them that be rich in the world,' &c., not only *advise* but *charge* them. And Titus ii. 15, 'These things exhort, and rebuke with all authority.' God will have the creatures know that he expects this duty and homage from them.

[3.] Here is the nature of this obedience, or the thing commanded, *to keep thy precepts*. What is that?—to observe the whole rule of faith and manners. Believing in Christ, that falls under a command: 1 John iii. 23, 'This is his command, that we should believe in him whom he hath sent.' Repentance is under a command: Acts xvii. 30, 'He hath commanded all men everywhere to repent.' Upon your peril be it, if you refuse his grace. So gospel obedience falls under a command, the great God hath charged us to keep all his precepts; to make conscience of all duties that we owe to God and man, Acts xxiv. 6; the smaller as well as the greater, Mat. v. 19. God counts his authority to be despised and laid aside, and the command and obligatory power of his law to be made void, if a man shall either in doctrine or practice count any transgression of his laws so light and

venial as not to be stood upon, as if it were but a trifle. Christians, if we had the awe of God's authority upon our hearts, what kind of persons would we be at all times, in all places, and in all company? what a check would this be to a proud thought, a light word, or a passionate speech?—what exactness would we study in our conversations, had we but serious thoughts of the sovereign majesty of God, and of his authority forbidding these things in the word!

To offer some reasons of the point, why it is of so much profit to consider the authority of God in the command.

1. Because then the heart would not be so loose, off and on in point of duty; when a thing is counted arbitrary (as generally we count so of strictness), the heart hangs off more from God. When we press men to pray in secret, to be full of good works, to meditate of God, to examine conscience, to redeem time, to be watchful, they think these be counsels of perfection, not rules of duty, enforced by the positive command of God; therefore are men so slight and careless in them. But now, when a man hath learned to urge a naughty heart with the authority of God, and charge them in the name of God, he lies more under the awe of duty. Hath God said I must search and try my ways, and shall I live in a constant neglect of it? Hath God bidden me to redeem my time, and shall I make no conscience how I waste away my precious hours? Hath God bidden me keep my heart with all keepings, and shall I let it run at large without any restraint and regard? It is my debt, and I must pay it, or I shall answer it at my peril in the great day of accounts; it is not only commended but commanded: 2 Kings v. 13, 'If the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?'

2. We cannot be so bold and venturous in sinning, when we remember how the authority of God stands in the way: Prov. xiii. 13, 'He that fears the commandment, he shall be blessed;' not only the *penalty*, but the *command*. The heart is never right until we be brought to fear a commandment more than any inconveniencies whatsoever. To a wicked man there seems to be nothing so light as a command, and therefore he breaks through against checks of conscience. But a man that hath the awe of God upon him, when mindful of God's authority, he fears a command. Jude 9, it is said of Michael the archangel, 'He durst not bring a railing accusation.' He had not the boldness, when the commandment of God was in his way.

3. Many times we are doubtful of success, and so our hands are weakened thereby. We forbear duty, because we do not know what will come of it. Now, a sense of God's authority and command doth fortify the heart against these discouragements: Luke v. 5, 'Master, we have toiled all the night, howbeit at thy command we will cast down the net.' A poor soul that hath long lain at the pool, that hath been labouring, following God from one duty to another, and nothing comes sensibly of it, yet 'at thy command,' &c., he will keep up his endeavours still. This is the very case in the text, 'Blessed is the man that keeps thy precepts, and that seeks him with the whole heart.' Then, presently, 'Thou hast commanded;' that is, though our obedience had no promise of reward, and our felicity were

not proposed as the fruit of it, yet the command itself, and the authority of God, is a reason sufficient.

4. In some duties that are not evident by natural light, as believing and owning of Christ, the heart is more bound to them by the sense of a command, than by any other encouragement. It is God's pleasure it should be so: John vi. 29, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent;' 1 John iii. 23, 'This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.' It is enough to set a servant about his work, that it is his master's pleasure. 'Thou dost not stand disputing whether thou shouldst repent or not, obey or not, abstain from fleshly idols, yea or nay, or from fornication. And why should you stand aloof from the work of faith, and doubt whether you should believe or not? We have many natural prejudices, but this, his command, is a mighty relief to the soul. It is his command we should believe in his Son. It is not only a matter of comfort and privilege, but also a matter of duty and obedience; and therefore, though we have discouragements upon us—I am unworthy to be received to mercy—yet this will bend the heart to the work. God is worthy to be obeyed; it is his commandment. 'Thou dost not question whether thou shouldst grieve for thy sins—why should you question whether you should believe in Christ? If God had only given us leave to believe, we could not have had such an advantage, as now he hath interposed his authority, and commanded us to believe: 'Rejoice in the Lord; and again I say, Rejoice,' Phil. iv. If God had only given us leave to refresh ourselves in a sense of his love, it were an invaluable mercy; but we have not only leave to rejoice, but a charge. It is our duty to work up our heart to a comfortable sense of the love of God, and a fruition of his favour.

5. Obedience is never right but when it is done out of a conscience of God's authority, *intuitu voluntatis*. The bare sight of God's will should be reason enough to a gracious heart. It is the will of God; it is his command. So it is often urged: 1 Thes. iv. 3, the apostle bids them follow holiness, 'for this is the will of God, your sanctification.' And servants should be faithful in their burdensome and hard labours: 1 Peter ii. 15, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' And 1 Thes. v. 18, 'In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' That is argument enough to a godly Christian, that God hath signified his will and good pleasure, though the duty were never so cross to his own desires and interests. They obey simply for the commandment sake, without any other reason and inducement. There is indeed *ratio formalis*, and *ratio motiva*. There are encouragements to God's service, but the formal reason of obedience is God's will. And this is pure obedience, to do what he wills, because he wills it.

The *uses* are:—1. To exhort thee to take this course with thy naughty heart. When it hangs back from any duty, or from any course of strictness, urge it with the authority of God. These precepts are not the advices and counsels of men who wish well to us, and who would advise us to the best, but they are the commands of God, who must and will be obeyed. Or, when thou art carried out to any sin,

it is forbidden fruit; there is a commandment in the way, and that is as terrible to a gracious heart as an angel with a flaming sword.

To back these thoughts, let me propound a few considerations. Consider—

1. God can command what he will. He is absolute. His will is the supreme reason of all things. It is notable that God backs his laws with the consideration of his sovereignty. You shall do thus and thus. Why? 'I am the Lord.' That is all his reason, Lev. xviii. 4, 5. It is repeated in that and many places in the next chapter. The Papists speak much of blind obedience, obeying their superiors without inquiring into the reason of it. Surely we owe God blind obedience, as 'Abraham obeyed God, not knowing whither he went,' Heb. xi. 8. John Cassian makes mention of one who willingly fetched water near two miles every day, for a whole year together, to pour it upon a dead dry stick, at the command of his superior, when no reason else could be given for it. And I have read of another who professed that, if he were enjoined by his superior to put forth to sea in a ship that had neither mast, tackling, nor any other furniture, he would do it; and when he was asked how he could do this without hazard of his discretion, he answered, The wisdom must be in him that hath power to command, not in him that hath power to obey. Thus do they place merit in this blind obedience, in giving up their wills absolutely to the power of their superior. Certainly, in God's commands, his sovereignty is enough; the uttermost latitude of this blind obedience is due to him. If he hath said it is his will, how contrary soever it be to our reason, lusts, interests, it must be done. It is enough for us to know that we are commanded. To command is God's part, and to obey that is ours, whatever shall be declared to be his will and pleasure.

2. God can most severely punish our disobedience, and therefore his commands should have a power upon us: James iv. 12, 'There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy;' with a destruction indeed, and salvation indeed. So there is but one lawgiver in this sense. He truly hath *potestatem vitæ et necis*. God hath the power of life and death. Why? Because he can punish with eternal death, and bestow eternal life.

3. He is neither ignorant nor forgetful of our prevarications and disobedience. The Rechabites were tender of the commandment of their dead father, Jer. xxxv., who could not take cognisance of their actions: 'Our father commanded us.' Certainly we should be tender of the commands of the great God: Prov. xv. 3, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' He is not so shut up within the curtain of the heavens but that he takes notice how his laws are kept and observed. Saith the prophet to Gehazi, 'Went not my spirit with thee?' meaning his prophetic spirit. So doth God, as it were, appeal to the conscience of a sinner. Doth not my spirit go along with thee? Is not he conscious to our works, and observes all we do?

4. God stands much upon the authority of his law: Hosea viii. 12, 'I have written to them the great things of my law,' &c. Mark, he calls them 'the great things of his law;' they are not things to be slighted and contemned. They are not directions of little moment; there is no small hazard in contemning them, or not walking according

to them. Indeed, we think it a small matter to stand upon every circumstance; but God doth not think so. Uzzah was struck dead in the place for failing in a circumstance—he would stay the ark, which shook. The Bethshemites, sinning in a circumstance, it cost them the lives of many thousands. Lot's wife, for looking back, was turned into a pillar of salt. Let these things beget an awe upon our hearts of the great God, and of what he hath enjoined us.

*Use 2.* It informs us of the heinous nature of sin. Of sin in general, it is *ἀνομία*, 'a transgression of the law,' 1 John iii. 4; that is, a contempt of God's authority. It is an unlording of him and putting him out of the throne. Every sin is an affront to God's authority; it is a despising of the command, 2 Sam. xii. 9; you rise up in defiance to God, and cast off his sovereignty in despising his command; more particularly, sins against knowledge, or against conscience. You may see the heinousness of these sins by this—all sins, they proceed either from ignorance, or from oblivion, or from rebellion. Sins of ignorance, they are not so heinous, though they are sins. A man is bound to know the will of his creator; but then ignorance of it is not so heinous. To strike a friend in the dark is not so ill taken as in the open light. So there are sins of oblivion, which is an ignorance for the time, for a man hath not such explicit thoughts as to revive his knowledge upon himself. He is overtaken, Gal. vi. 1. This a great sin too. Why? For the awe of God should ever be fresh and great upon the heart, and we are to 'remember his statutes to do them.' But now, there are sins of rebellion, that are committed against light and conscience, whether they be of omission or commission. We are troubled for sins of commission against light; we should be as much for sins of omission, for they are rebellions against God, when we omit a duty of which we are convinced: James iv. 17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin.'

Secondly, Come we to the manner of this obedience, *Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.* From thence note—

*Doct.* That we should not only do what God hath required, but we should do it diligently.

1. Because the *matter* of keeping God's precepts doth not only fall under his authority, but the *manner* also. God hath not only required service, but service with all its circumstances: 1 Cor. ix. 24, 'I so run that I may obtain.' It is our duty, not only to run, but so run, not as in jest, but as in good earnest: Rom. xii. 11, 'Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' Not only serving the Lord, but seething hot in spirit, when our affections are so strong that they boil over in our lives. And James v. 16, 'The fervent effectual prayer;' that prayer which hath a spirit and a life in it. Not only prayer is required, but fervency, not dead and drowsy devotion. So Luke vii. 18, not only it is required that we hear, but to 'take heed *how* we hear,' with what reverence and seriousness. And Acts xxvi. 7, 'The twelve tribes served God instantly, day and night,' with the uttermost extension of their strength, so the word signifies. And for charity, it is not enough to give, but with readiness and freeness. Be 'ready to communicate;' like life-honey it must drop of its own accord.



2. The manner is the great thing which God requires; it is very valuable upon several grounds: Prov. xvi. 2, 'The ways of man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.' What doth God put into the balance of the sanctuary when he comes to make a judgment? When he would weigh an action he weighs the spirits. He considers not only the bulk, the matter of the action, but the spirit, with what heart it was done. A man may sin in doing *good*, but he cannot sin in doing *well*; therefore the manner should be looked to as well as the matter.

3. It is a good help against slightness. We are apt to put off God with anything, and therefore we had need to rouse up ourselves to serve him with diligence: Josh. xxiv. 19, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a jealous God,' &c. It is another matter to serve the Lord than the world thinks of. Why? For he is holy and jealous; he is holy, and so hates the least failing; and very jealous, sin awakens the displeasure of his jealousy—he will punish for very little failings. Ananias and Sapphira struck dead in the place for one lie; Zacharias struck dumb for an act of unbelief; Moses, for a few rash words, never entered into the land of Canaan; David, for a proud conceit in numbering the people, lost seventy thousand men with the pestilence; the Corinthians, many of them died for unworthy receiving. God is the same God still: he hates sin as much as ever; therefore we should not be slight.

4. It is a dishonour to God to do his work negligently: Mal. i. 14, 'Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing, for I am a great king, saith the Lord;' implying that it is a lessening of his majesty. It is a sign we have cheap thoughts of God, when we are slight in his service. Christians, we owe our best to God, and are to serve him with all our might: Deut. vi. 5, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' It is a lessening of his excellency in our thoughts when everything serves the turn.

5. Keeping the commandment, it is a great trust. God hath left this trust with us that we should keep his precepts, therefore it is to be discharged seriously. A man is very careful that hath taken a trust upon him to preserve it. No men that have given up their names to Christ, but they have taken up this trust upon them to keep his precepts; therefore we should do it with all diligence and heedfulness of soul.

6. We have no other plea to evidence our sincerity; we are guilty of many defects, and cannot do as we would,—where lies our evidence then? When we set ourselves to obey, and aim at the highest exactness to serve him with our best affections and strength. A child of God, he doth not do all that God hath required, but he doth his best, and then that is a sign the heart is upright. For what is this diligence, but our utmost study and endeavour after perfection, to avoid all known evils, and to practise all known duties, and that with as much care as we can? Now, this is an argument of our sincerity, and then our slips are but failings which God will spare, pity, pardon: Mal. iii. 17, 'I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him,' &c. Where a man is careless, and failings are allowed, then they are iniquities. A father, out of indulgence, may pass by a failing when

his son waits upon him, suppose when he spills the wine and breaks the glass ; but surely will not allow him to throw it down carelessly or wilfully. We have no other plea to evidence our sincerity but this.

*Use.* It presseth us, whatever we do for the great God, to do it with all our might, Eccles. ix. 10. There is no weighty thing can be done without diligence ; much more the keeping the commandment. Satan is diligent in tempting, and we ourselves are weak and infirm ; we cannot do the least thing as we should. And the danger of miscarrying is so great, that surely it will require all our care. Wherein should we show this diligence and exactness ? When we keep all the parts of the law, and that at all times and places, and that with the whole man.

1. When we strive to keep the law in all the points of it. This was Paul's exercise : Acts xxiv. 16, 'To keep a good conscience void of offence both towards God and man.' Mark, here was his great business ; this is to be diligent, when a man labours to keep a good conscience always. And saith he, *Herein*, or *upon this* do I exercise myself ; that is, upon this encouragement, upon hope of a blessed resurrection, for that is spoken of there. There are wages and recompenses enough in heaven, therefore we should not grudge at a little work, that we may not be drawn willingly from the least part of our duty.

2. When we do it at all times and places, and in all company, then it is a sign we mind the work, then are we diligent : Ps. cvi. 3, 'Blessed is he that doth righteousness at all times.' Not only now and then, but it is his constant course. We do not judge men's complexions by the colour they have when they sit before the fire. We cannot judge of men by a fit and pang when they are under the awe of an ordinance, or in good company ; but when at all times he labours to keep up a warmth of heart towards God.

3. When he labours to do this with his whole man, not only in pretence, and with his body, or outward man, but with inward affections : Rom. i. 9, 'My God, whom I serve in the spirit.' And the true people of God are described : Phil iii. 3, 'To worship God in the spirit.' When they labour to bring their hearts under the power of God's precepts, and do not only mind conformity of the outward man, this is to keep the precepts of God diligently. All this is to be understood, not in exact perfection ; but it is to be understood of our striving, labouring, watching ; of our praying, and of our exercising ourselves hereunto, that we may with our whole man come under the full obedience of the law of God, and may manifest it upon all occasions, at all times, in all companies and places ; and this is an evidence of our sincerity.

## SERMON VI.

*Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes !—VER. 5.*

IN the former verse he had spoken of God's authority ; now he beggeth grace to obey : 'Thou hast commanded ;' and 'Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes !'

1. Note, that it is the use and duty of the people of God to turn precepts into prayers.

That this is the practice of God's children appeareth : Jer. xxxi. 18, 'Turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; for thou art the Lord my God.' God had said, 'Turn you, and you shall live ;' and they ask it of God, 'Turn us,' as he required it of them. It was Austin's prayer, *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis*, Give what thou requirest, and require what thou wilt. It is the duty of the saints ; for—1. It suiteth with the gospel-covenant, where precepts and promises go hand in hand, where God giveth what he commandeth, and 'worketh all our works in us,' and for us. They are not conditions of the covenant only, but a part of it. What God hath required at our hands, that we may desire at his hands. God is no Pharaoh, to require brick where he giveth no straw. *Lex jubet, gratia juvat*. The articles of the new covenant are not only put into the form of precepts, but promises. The law giveth no strength to perform anything, but the gospel offereth grace. 2. Because by this means the ends of God are fulfilled. Why doth God require what we cannot perform by our own strength ? He doth it—(1.) To keep up his right ; (2.) To convince us of our impotency, and that upon a trial ; without his grace we cannot do his work ; (3.) That the creature may express his readiness to obey ; (4.) To bring us to lie at his feet for grace.

Now, when we turn precepts into prayers, all these ends are accomplished.

[1.] To keep up his right. If we have lost our power, there is no reason God should lose his right. A drunken servant is under the obligation and duty of a servant still ; he is unable to do his master's work, but he is bound to it. It is unreasonable that another should suffer through my default. Well, then, God may well command the fallen creature to keep his precepts diligently. Now, when we deal earnestly with God about it, it argueth a sense of his authority upon our hearts. If we were not held under the awe of the commandment, why should we be so earnest about it ? If men were more sensible of their obligations, we should have more prayers in this kind. This is the will of God, and how shall I do to observe it ?

[2.] To convince us of our impotency, and that upon a trial. Practical conviction is best. We may discourse of the weakness and insufficiency of the creature, but we are not affected with it till we try. A diseased man as long as he sits still feels not the lameness of his joints, but upon exercise it is sensible. Now, these prayers are a profession of weakness upon a trial : Rom. vii. 18, 'For to will is present with me ; but how to perform that which is good, I find not.' That presupposeth a search, not *I cannot*, but *I find not*, and then we run to prayer. Every prayer is an acknowledgment of our weakness and dependence. Who would ask that of another which he thinketh to be in his own power ?

[3.] That the creature may express his readiness. God will have us will, though we cannot do. It is true he giveth both : Phil. ii. 13, 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' But the one by preventing, the other by assisting grace, Rom. vii. 18. Though we are unable to do what we should, yet it is

the desire of our hearts. Prayer is the expression of our desire. When we heartily beg grace, it is a sign the commandment is not grievous, but our lusts. It much discovereth a man's heart, what he counteth to be his bondage and the yoke: 1 John v. 3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.' Which do we groan under? the burden of the law, or the body of death? That is best seen by our heartiness in prayer.

[4.] To bring us to lie at his feet. God will be owned not only as a lawgiver, but as a fountain of grace. The precept cometh from God to drive us to God; his sovereignty maketh way for his grace. He calleth upon us for obedience, that we may call upon him for help. First, he giveth us a law, that he may afterwards give us a heart. God's end is to bring us upon our knees. As hard providences conduce to bring God and us together, so do hard commandments. Till we be reduced to a distress, we never think seriously of dealing with God.

*Use.* It teacheth us what to do when we meet with anything that is difficult and impossible to us; as to repent, believe, to renounce a bewitching lust, or perform a spiritual duty. Two ways we are apt to miscarry in such a case; either by murmuring against God, as if he were harsh and austere, and had 'reaped where he hath not sown, and gathered where he hath not strewed;' or by casting off all out of a foolish despondency: cut at heart, or else wax faint. These are the two evils. I shall never get rid of this naughty heart. Or else we fret against God: Prov. xix. 3, 'The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord.' Now to prevent these evils, spread the case before the Lord in this manner—

(1.) Acknowledge the debt. God will keep up the sense of his authority; his command must be the reason of our care, as well as his promise the ground of our hope. (2.) Confess your impotency: 2 Cor. iii. 5, 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.' This is to empty the bucket before we go to the fountain. When we are full of self, there is no room for grace. (3.) Own God's power: Mat. xix. 26, 'But Jesus beheld them, and saith unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.' The difficulties that we meet with in the way to heaven should serve only to make us despair of our own strength and abilities, not of God's, with whom nothing is impossible. It is a relief to consider of the divine power, from whence we fetch all our supplies necessary to life and godliness. (4.) Deal with God earnestly about help. The command sheweth how pleasing such requests are to God, and you own God not only as a lawgiver, but author of grace. Do not come in a lukewarm, careless fashion, but 'Oh that my heart were directed!' Sluggish wishes will do no good; you bespeak your own denial when you ask grace as a thing of course: Jer. xxxi. 18, 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.'

2. The next thing that we may note, is the serious desire that is in God's people after holiness. Mark, it is not a velleity, but a volition, *Oh that*, noteth the vehemency and heartiness.

It is his first desire. David had hitherto spoken assertively ; when he cometh to speak supplications, his first and chief request to God is, 'Oh that my ways were directed !' &c.

Mark again, it is not a desire of happiness, but holiness ; not 'Oh that I were blessed !' but 'Oh that my ways were directed !' A mind to know, a will to obey, and a memory to keep in mind God's precepts.

It is practical holiness : 'Oh that my ways !' God hath his ways : 'They walk in *his* ways,' ver. 3. And we have our ways : 'Oh that *my* ways were directed !' that is, all my thoughts, counsels, inclinations, speeches, actions, were directed by thy statutes. Every commandment is a royal edict, a statute which God hath made for the governing of the world.

Now the saints have this desire of holiness—

[1.] From the new nature that is in them. The appetite followeth the nature : Gal. v. 17, '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.' Desires being the vigorous bent of the soul, discover the temper of it. The carnal nature puts forth itself in lustings, so doth the new nature. The main thing we have by grace is a new heart, that is, new loves, new desires, and new delights : Rom. viii. 5, 'For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit the things of the spirit.'

[2.] Out of love to God, which implieth subjection and conformity to him. Love to God is testified by a desire of subjection ; for his love is a love of bounty, ours a love of duty : 1 John v. 3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments ; and his commandments are not grievous.' It is the great desire of their souls that they may be subject to God. As he that loveth would not offend the party loved, so it is their desire to please God in all things ; and as holiness implieth a conformity to God, they study to be like him. It is their hope, their desire, their care. Their hope : 1 John iii. 2, 'But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is.' It is their desire and care in every ordinance : 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' And it is their constant endeavour : 1 Peter i. 15, 'But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.'

[3.] Out of experience of the ways of God, of that goodness and enlargement of heart that is to be found in them. They have tasted and seen how good his laws are. They can answer God's appeal, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly ?' Yea, doubtless, it is good : Ps. xix. 10, 11, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold ; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward.' The spiritual life is interlined and refreshed with many sweet experiences.

The *use* here is, first, a note of discovery ; for men are judged by their desires, rather than their practices, as being freest from con-

strait; and this is humbly represented by the children of God, to incline his favour and compassion to them: Neh. i. 11, 'Let thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name.' They come short in many things, but they desire to fear God: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'The desires of our soul are to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.' They could speak little of what they had done for God. Paul was better at willing than performing, till freed from 'this body of death:' Rom. vii. 18, 'For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.' This will be our best evidence to the last, 'Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!'

But may not wicked men have good desires?

*Ans.* They may have a loose inclination to good things, but not a full resolution for God. Wicked men have an enlightened conscience, but no renewed wills. This enlightened conscience may carry them so far, as to some general approbation of the things of God, which may produce a wish that they were so and so; but this doth no good to the heart. Sparks do not kindle the fire, but coals: a spark is enough to set us on fire in carnal matters, but not in spiritual. More distinctly—

[1.] Wicked men may desire their own happiness, though not upon God's terms: Num. xxiii. 10, 'Oh that I might die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!' *At oportuit sic vixisse.* John vi. 34, 'Evermore give us of this bread' of life. Every man would be blessed, and go to heaven, if it were left to his option and choice; they like the end, but not the means. There was not a murmuring Israelite but would count Canaan a good land; but the giants and sons of Anak were there.

[2.] They may have some languid and vanishing motions towards the means as well as the end, being convinced of the necessity of holiness; yea, they may draw out their wishes into a cold prayer that God would make them better; as lazy persons sometimes express their desires, 'Would I were at such a place, and never travel! Would I had written such a task, and never put pen to paper!'—*Vellent sed nolunt.* When it cometh to trial, they do not set themselves in good earnest to get that grace they wish for.

What is the difference between a volition and a velleity?

(1.) Such desires as are not wavering, but resolute and fixed. Aquinas saith, *Velleitas est voluntas incompleta*, a half will. They have a month's mind to that which is good, but not a thorough resolution; as Agrippa, almost persuaded, but not altogether: such a desire as will bear up against a strong tide of opposition. It is called the 'setting of the heart:' 1 Chron. xxii. 19, 'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.' Whatever cometh of it, they must and will have grace: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.'

(2.) Such desires as are absolute, and do not stand upon terms. There is an hypothetical and conditional will. We would, but with such

conditions. I would have Christ, if it did not cost me so dear—to deny lusts, interests, friends, relations, much waiting, praying, watching, striving. So Mat. xxii. 5, they would come to the supper; but house, oxen, farm, merchandise—there was something in the way that hindered them: there was no full and perfect will. A chapman no doubt would have the wares he liketh, but will not come to the price. I will have heaven, whatever it cost me, is the voice of a desiring saint.

(3.) Such desires as are active and industrious; not a remiss will: Prov. xiii. 4, 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.' Cold, raw wishes are unuseful and fruitless; we must work as well as wish. Poor, languid, inactive desires come to nothing, when men do not put forth their endeavours, and apply themselves to the prosecution of what is desired. Faint and sluggish velleities do hurt: Prov. xxi. 25, 'The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuseth labour.' Whatever a man doth seriously desire to have, he will use proper means to procure it. Wishes are but the fruits of a speculative fancy, rather than an industrious affection.

(4.) Such desires as are constant, and not easily controlled by other desires. Idle, lazy wishes, ineffectual glances, sudden motions, while their hearts are detained in the speculation of holiness, are like children's desires, soon put out of the humour. There may be vehement and sudden lustings in an unregenerated person; free-will hath its pangs of devotion. But the apostle declares: Rom. vii. 18, 'To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.' It is a constant habitual will, not a volatile devotion, that cometh upon us now and then; but such a will as is present, as sin is present. He had said before, 'When I would do good, evil is present with me.' Whithersoever you go, you carry a sinning nature about with you. It is present, urging the heart to vanity, folly, lust; so should this will be present with you, urging the heart to good.

(5.) Such desires are joined with serious groans and sorrow for our defects. He cannot be so good as he would, but desireth and complaineth; therefore God accepteth of the will for the deed: Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Though an unrenewed man seem to desire grace, yet he feelth no grief in the want of grace, it never troubleth him; his desires do not break out into groans and bitter complaints, because of indwelling corruption. Now, by these things may you try your hearts.

3. The third thing observable from hence, is the necessity of directing grace, 'Oh that my ways were directed!'

I shall first premise some distinctions—

[1.] There is a general direction, and a particular direction. (1.) The general direction is in the word; there God hath declared his mind in his statutes: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good,' Micah vi. 8. (2.) A particular direction by his Spirit, who doth order and direct us how to apply the rule to all our ways: Isa. lviii. 11, 'The Lord shall guide thee continually.' Now, this particular direction is either to our general choice: Ps. xvi. 7, 'I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel.' It is the work of God only to teach us how

to apply the rule so as to choose him for our portion. Or secondly, as to acts and orderly exercise of any particular grace; so 2 Thes. iii. 5, 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.' Or thirdly, as to the management of our civil actions; as the pillar of the cloud went before the Israelites in their journeys, so doth God still guide his people in all their affairs, both as to duty and success. As to duty: Prov. iii. 6, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Ask his counsel, leave, and blessing: in doubtful things ask his counsel; in clear cases ask his leave, 'Shall I go up or not?' and then ask his blessing. As to success: Prov. xvi. 9, 'A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps.' Events cross expectation; we cannot foresee the event of things in the course of a man's life, what is expedient, and what not: Prov. xx. 24, 'Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?' We purpose and determine many things rightly, and according to rule, but God disposeth of all events: Rom. i. 10, 'Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God, to come unto you.' God brought Paul to Rome by a way he little thought of. Therefore we need to call God to counsel, and to inquire of the oracle in all matters that concern family, commonwealth, or church. We need a guide: Jer. x. 23, 'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; neither is it in man that walketh to direct his steps.' Affairs do not depend on our policy or integrity, but on the divine providence, who ordereth every step, to give such success as he pleaseth.

[2.] Distinction. There is a literal direction, and an effectual direction. (1.) The literal direction is by that speculative knowledge that we get by the word: Ps. cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,' sufficient not only for general courses, but particular actions. (2.) The effectual direction is by the Holy Ghost applying the word, and bending the heart to the obedience of it: Isa. lxi. 8, 'I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them,'—that is, I will so show them their way, as to work their hearts to the sincere obedience of it.

Now, to give you the reasons for the necessity of this direction, three things prove it—

(1.) The blindness of our minds. We are wise in generals, but know not how to apply the rule to particular cases. The heathens were 'vain *ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς*, in their imaginations,' Rom. i. 21. And the same is true of us Christians: though we have a clearer knowledge of God, and the way how he will be served and glorified; yet to suit it to particular cases, how dark are we! A dial may be well set, yet, if the sun shine not upon it, we cannot tell the time of the day. The scriptures are sufficient to make us wise; but without the light of the Spirit, how do we grope at noonday!

(2.) The forgetfulness of our memories. We need a monitor to stir up in us diligence, watchfulness, and earnest endeavours: Isa. xxx. 21, 'And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.' The cares and businesses of the world do often drive the sense of our duty out of our minds. One great end of God's



Spirit is to put us in remembrance, to revive truths upon us in their season. A ship, though never so well rigged, needs a pilot; we need a good guide to put us in mind of our duty.

(3.) The obstinacy of our heart. So that we need every moment to enforce the authority of God upon us; and to persuade us to what is right and good. The Spirit's light is so directive, that it is also persuasive; there needs not only counsel, but efficacy and power. We have boisterous lusts, and wandering hearts; we need not only to be conducted, but governed. We have hearts that 'love to wander,' Jer. xiv. 10; we are sheep that need a shepherd, for no creature is more apt to stray: Ps. xcv. 10, 'It is a people that do err in their hearts;' not only ignorant, but perverse; not in mind only apt to err, but love to err. Thus you see the necessity of this direction, 'Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!'

The *uses*. Well, then, give the Lord this honour, of being your continual guide: Ps. xlviii. 14, 'For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.' You do not own him as a God, unless you make him your guide: Ps. lxxiii. 24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' In vain do you hope for eternal life else. Therefore—

1. Commit yourselves to the tuition of his grace. A man is to choose God for a guide, as well as to take him for a lord; to ask his counsel as well as submit to his commandments: Jer. iii. 4, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?'

2. Depend upon him in every action. 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord;' all his particular actions: Rom. viii. 26, 'For we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.'

3. Seek his counsel out of a desire to follow it: John vii. 17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' Still walk according to light received, and it will increase upon you. Such as make conscience of known truth shall know more. He that cometh with a subjected mind, and fixed resolution to receive and obey, shall have a discerning spirit. God answereth men according to the fidelity of their own hearts.

## SERMON VII.

*Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*—VER. 6.

THE Psalmist had prayed for direction to keep God's commandments: here he sheweth the fruit and benefit of that direction.

In the words two things are observable—

1. The description of sincere obedience: *respect to all the commandments.*

2. The fruit of it: *then shall I not be ashamed.*

First, Observe; a sincere heart aimeth at universal obedience to God's law. Here are to be illustrated—

1. 'All thy commandments.'

2. 'Having respect' to them. The object; and the act of the soul.

[1.] All the commandments must be taken notice of, small and great. (1.) Small, we cannot dispense with ourselves in the least: Mat. v. 19, 'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.' We are apt to say, 'It is but a little one, and my soul shall live.' No sin can be little that is committed against the great God. It argueth the more wickedness and corruption to break with God upon every trifling occasion. A little force will make a heavy body move downward. (2.) As small, so great. The ceremonialist is apt to stand much upon lesser things: John xviii. 28, the Jews would not enter into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled, yet they sought the life of the Lord of glory. Hypocrites make a great business about small matters, and in the meantime reject weighty duties, τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου: Mat. xxiii. 23, 'Ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone;' like one that cometh into a shop to buy a pennyworth and steals a pound's worth, or is punctual in paying a small debt that he may get deeper into our books, and cheat us of a greater sum, comply in circumstances and terms, which yet have their place, but make no conscience of greater.

[2.] Commandments that require public, and commandments that require private duties: 2 Cor. vii. 1, 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' In times of trouble men content themselves that their hearts are right, as the libertines in Corinth, and think it is no matter whether they own God publicly, yea or nay. Then for private duties, some make a fair show to the world, but in their family converse are loose and careless: David saith, Ps. ci. 2, 'I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.' If a man be truly holy he will show it at home as well as abroad; in his family, where his constant converse is, yea, in his closet and secret retirements. A Christian is alike everywhere, because God is alike everywhere. We strain ourselves to put forth our gifts in public; God will be served with our uttermost in secret also.

[3.] There are commandments that concern the inward as well as the outward man; we must make conscience of both: Isa. lv. 7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy,' &c. We must not only make conscience of our way, or outward actions, but also of our thoughts; as we must not do evil before man, so not think evil before God. Thoughts fall under a law as well as our actions: James iv. 8, 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.'

[4.] There are commands that concern God, and commands that concern man. There is a first table and a second; some are very

punctual in dealing with men, but neglectful of God: Rom. i. 18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.' Both the tables are owned from heaven. Some there are that will not wrong their neighbour of a farthing, yet stick not to rob God of that fear, faith, and love that is due to him. Many will not defile their bodies with promiscuous copulation, but are adulterers and adulteresses, James iv. 4, running a-whoring from their spiritual husband, and doting on the creature. Many there are who condemned the rebellion of Absalom, but rise up against their heavenly Father; are not murderers, but strike at the being of God. Some there are who are very tender of wronging the reputation of men, yet dishonour God, and are never troubled for it. Others there are who are much in worship, but in their dealings with men are very unconscionable: they will not swear an oath, yet are very uncharitable, censuring their brethren without any pity or remorse. This is the fashion of the world, to be in with one duty, and out with another. The commandments are ushered in with this preface, 'God spake all these words;' he that hath enjoined one hath enjoined another. But now, as the echo rendereth but part of the speech, so do we in our return of obedience. God spake all, and we return but part.

2. Having respect unto the commandments; that needeth illustration also. Though we cannot keep all, or any one of them as we should, yet we must have regard to all, and that equally without any distinction.

When have we an equal respect to all? I answer, Three ways—(1.) *Proposito*; (2.) *Affectu*; (3.) *Conatu*.

[1.] *Proposito*, in vow and purpose. We must approve of all, and choose all for our rule, without reservation and indulgence. Some commands are more contrary than others to our lusts and interests, and are less in our power to perform. Now, a sanctified judgment must approve all, and a sanctified will accept and choose all as equally good, necessary, and profitable for us: Rom. vii. 12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good'—the law in general, nay, that commandment which had wrought such tragical effects in his heart. It is holy, as being the copy of God's purity; just, as doing us no wrong, being no infringement of our just freedom; good, as being very profitable to direct and perfect our operations, and to make us happy here and hereafter. But this approbation is not enough, there must be consent: ver. 16, 'I consent to the law that it is good,' though it is contrary to my natural inclinations. It is a good law, the heart must be engaged, 'I will write my laws upon their hearts, and put them into their minds.' God doth not only give us a knowledge, or a single approbation of his will, but a will to choose it as our rule to live by. The heart is suited and inclined to it, and a man giveth up himself faithfully and entirely to serve God according to the direction of his word.

[2.] *Affectu*. There must be a sincere affection to all, or a care to keep them. We must not entertain affection to any known sin: Ps. lxxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me.' A man may have a great deal of sin in his heart, but if he cherish and

dandle it, and have a regard to it, he is one whom God will not accept. His desire is not to offend God, and it is his trouble when corruption gets the start of grace. If a king warneth a city of traitors, and calleth upon them to search them out, and send them away, and they never regard the message, but willingly give them harbour and entertainment, then it is a sign they are disaffected to him: to cherish a sin after warning is an open rebellion against God.

[3.] *Conatu*, in endeavour. We must keep all, *conatu*, *licet non eventu*; it is our labour, though not our success. Those that dispense with any commandment voluntarily and willingly, have never yet learned the way of true obedience to God: 2 Kings v. 18, 'In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.' This is to set up a toleration in our hearts, and to make Satan some allowance, to part stakes between God and the devil. There is something wherein we would be excused, and expect favour in fashions, customs, ways of profit and advantage. The endeavour must be to keep all, though the success be not answerable. A mariner that is beaten back by the winds, yet proveth<sup>1</sup> to hold on his course to make his port. A man that would sit warm shutteth the door and windows, yet the wind will creep in, though he doth not leave any open passage for it.

Now, the reasons why we are to have respect to all the commandments are these following:—

1. Because they are all ratified by the same authority. There is a connection between them, as there is between links in a chain; take away one, and all falleth to pieces: James ii. 10, 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' The authority of the law is lost if men may pick and choose as they please. He that said, 'Thou shalt do no murder,' hath also said, 'Thou shalt keep my Sabbaths.' *A quatenus ad omne*, the argument holds. Do one thing as a duty, and that will enforce the practice of all duties that we are convinced of: Col. i. 10, 'Walk worthy of God in all well-pleasing.' He that seeketh not to please God in all things, seeketh not to please God in anything.

2. Because in conversion grace is given to observe all. There is a universal principle to incline the heart impartially to all. God infuseth all grace together; not one particular only in the hearts of his children, but the whole law. There is a form of grace introduced into the soul that suits with every point of the law. The heart is framed to resist every sin, to observe all that God hath commanded. A new-born infant hath all the parts of a man, though not the strength and bulk; so every Christian in regeneration. Men may be born without hands or feet, but the new creature never cometh out maimed and imperfect. It is small and weak at first, but it groweth and gathereth strength. There is no commandment to which it is not suited. Well, then, not to have respect to all were to hide our talent in a napkin, and to receive one of God's best gifts in vain. The apostle inferreth it out of

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'striveth'?—Ed.

their calling: 1 Peter i. 15, 'But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy, *ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ*, in all manner of conversation,' at home and abroad, among infidels and with their fellow Christians, in prosperity and in adversity, walk worthy of your calling. As the sun is placed in heaven, and spreadeth his beams everywhere, nothing is hidden from his light; or as the lines run from the centre to every part of the circumference, so doth grace distil itself in a uniform obedience.

3. A Christian can never be perfect in degrees if he be not perfect in parts. What is defective in the parts cannot be made up by any growth. If a man should be born without an arm or a leg, this cannot be supplied by future growth, he is a maimed man still; so if a man be not perfect in parts, hath not respect to all the commandments, he can never be perfect in heaven. You cannot be 'presented as perfect in Christ Jesus,' Col. i. 28.

4. They that do not obey all, will not long obey any; but where profit or lust requireth it, they will break all, as Mark vi. 20, 'Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.' But one command stuck with him; being pleased with Herodias and the dancing damsel, that bringeth him to murder, &c. Keep but your passion a-foot, or your lust a-foot, or your worldliness a-foot, and it will carry you farther. One sin keepeth possession for Satan; allow but one lust and corruption in the heart, and that will undermine all, and become thine eternal ruin; as one leak may sink a ship. A bird tied by the leg, may make some show of escape. You never totally renounced Satan's government, and wholly gave up yourselves to God. By keeping a part, the whole falleth to his share.

*Use 1.* It reproveth those that make one duty excuse another. Two sorts there are,—some that go from sins to duties, and others from duties to sins, that antedate or postdate indulgences. (1.) Those that antedate, that hope to make amends for their evil course by their duties, as when men allow themselves in a present carnal practice, upon the purpose of an after-repentance. It is as if men should distemper the body by excess, and then hope to amend all by giving themselves a vomit; or contract a sickness voluntarily, because they will take physic. Certainly men would not sin so freely, if they were not borne up by promises of future reformation. (2.) That postdate. They go from duties to sins: Ezek. xxxiii. 13, 'When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.' If he shall commit a sin upon that confidence of his own righteousness. Josiah's breach with God, was after the preparing of the temple, 2 Chron. xxxv. 20; even God's children take the more carnal liberty because of their duties.

*Use 2.* Is trial. Have we this sincere respect to all the commandments? This may be known—

1. By a constant desire, resolution, and endeavour to be informed of God's will: Rom. xii. 2, 'And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, that acceptable and perfect will of God.' And

Eph. v. 17, 'Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' A man that desireth to follow God fully, would fain know the whole latitude and breadth of his duty. A child of God is inquisitive. He that desireth to keep all, doth also desire to know all. It is his business to study the mind of God in all things; gross negligence sheweth we are afraid of understanding our duty.

2. By often searching and trying his own heart, that he may find where the matter sticketh: Lam. iii. 40, 'Let us search and try our ways, that we may turn unto the Lord.' Complete reformation is grounded on a serious search. A chief cause of our going wrong is because we do not bring our hearts and ways together.

3. Desire God to show it if there be anything in the heart allowed contrary to the word: Job xxxiv. 32, 'That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' And Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked thing in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.' He would not hold on in any evil course. There is no sin so dear and near to him which he is not willing to see and judge in himself.

4. When they fail through human infirmity or imprudence, they seek to renew their peace with God: 1 John ii. 1, 'My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' They sue out their discharge in Christ's name. If a man were unclean under the law, he was to wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water before evening, and not rest in his uncleanness. Now if we still abide in our filthiness, and do not fly to our advocate, and sue out our pardon in Christ's name, it argueth that we have not a respect to the commandment.

5. They diligently use all holy means which are appointed by God for growth in faith and obedience: 2 Cor. vii. 1, 'Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God,' and coming up to a greater conformity.

6. A care of their bosom-sin, to get that weakened: Ps. xviii. 23, 'I was also upright before him; and I kept myself from mine iniquity.' Such as are most incident to us by temper of nature, course of life, or posture of interests; the right hand must be cut off, the right eye plucked out, Mat. v. 29, 30. If thou seekest to cross that sin that is most pleasing to thine own heart, seekest to dry up that unclean issue that runneth upon thee; by that and the other signs may we determine whether we have a sincere respect to all God's commandments.

Secondly. The next circumstance in the text is the fruit and benefit. They that have an entire respect to God's laws shall not be ashamed.

There is a twofold shame: the shame of a guilty conscience, and the shame of a tender conscience.

The one is the merit and fruit of sin; the other is an act of grace. This here spoken of is to be understood not of a holy self-loathing, but a confounding shame.

This shame may be considered either with respect to their own hearts, or the world, or before God at the day of judgment.

1. With respect to their own hearts; and thus the upright and sincere shall not be ashamed. There is a generous confidence betrayed in duties, in troubles, and in death. (1.) In duties. They can look God in the face; uprightness giveth boldness; and the more respect we have unto the commandments, the greater liberty have we in prayer: 1 John iii. 21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' But when men walk crookedly and loosely, they sin away the liberty of their hearts, and cannot come to God with such a free spirit. A man that hath wronged another, and knoweth not how to pay, cannot endure to see him; so doth sin work a shyness of God. (2.) In troubles and afflictions. Nothing sooner abashed than a corrupt conscience; they cannot hold up their heads when crossed in the world; a burden sits very uneasy upon a galled back; their crosses revive their guilt, are parts of the curse; therefore they are soon blank. But now a godly man is bold and courageous. Two things make one bold, innocency and independency; and both are found in him that hath a sincere respect to God's commandments. Innocency, when the soul doth not look pale under any secret guilt, and when we can live above the creatures, it puts an heroic spirit or lion-like boldness into the children of God. (3.) In death. To be able to look death in the face, it is a comfort in your greatest distresses. When Hezekiah was arrested with the sentence of death in the mouth of the prophet, here was his comfort and support, 'O Lord, thou knowest that I have walked before thee with a perfect heart.' And Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.'

2. Before the world, a man will be able to hold up his head that is sincere. It is true, he may be reproached and scoffed at, and suffer disgrace for his strictness; yet he is not ashamed. Though we displease men, yet if we please God, it is enough, if we have his approbation: 1 Cor. iv. 3, 'With me it is ἐλάχιστον, a very small thing, that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.' To depend on the words of man is a foolish thing. There is more ground of rejoicing than of shame. You have the approbation of their consciences, when not of their tongues. In the issue God will vindicate the righteousness of his faithful servants: Ps. xxxvii. 6, 'He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.' There will be no cause in the issue for a Christian to repent of his strict observance of God's commands.

3. Before God at the day of judgment: 1 John ii. 28, 'And now, little children, abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.' He is the brave man that can hold up his head in that day. Wicked men will then be ashamed—(1.) Because their secret sins are then divulged and made public: 1 Cor. 4, 5, 'Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, will who both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall every man have praise of God.' (2.) Because of the frustration of their hopes. Disappointment bringeth shame. Some do many things, and make full account of their acceptance with God and reception to glory; but when all is disappointed, how much are they confounded! Rom. v. 5, 'Hope maketh not ashamed,' because it is not frustrated. (3.) By the con-

tempt and dishonour God puts upon them, banishing them out of his presence. They become the scorn of saints and angels : Dan. xii. 2, 'And many of them that sleep in the dust shall arise, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' But now the godly are bold and confident : Ps. i. 5, 'The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous ;' but the godly shall lift up their head with joy and rejoicing.

Now the reasons of this.

Where sin is not allowed, there is a threefold comfort. (1.) Justification : 1 John i. 7, 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' It is an evidence that giveth us the comfort. He hath failings, but they are blotted out for Christ's sake. (2.) It is an evidence of sanctification, that a work of grace hath passed upon us : 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward ;' Heb. xiii. 18, 'We trust that we have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly.' A universal purpose and an unfeigned respect hath the full room of an evidence. (3.) A pledge of glory to ensue : Rom. v. 5, 'And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.'

*Use.* It informeth us, by the rule of contraries, that we deceive ourselves if we look for anything from sin but shame : Rom. vi. 21, 'For the wages of sin is death.' Sin and shame entered into the world together. How were Adam and Eve confounded after the fall ! Sin is odious to God, it grieveth the Spirit ; but the person that committeth it shall be filled with shame. In the greatest privacy, sin bringeth shame. Men are not solitary when they are by themselves ; there is an eye and ear which seeth and observeth them. There is a law in our hearts which upbraids our sins to us as soon as we have committed them—a secret bosom-witness.

2. It informeth us what hard hearts they have that have respect to no commandments, yet are not ashamed. They have outgrown all feelings of conscience, and so 'glory in their shame :' Phil. iii. 19, 'Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.' *Erubuit, salva res est.* By how much less they are ashamed now, the more they shall be ; their shamelessness will increase their shame : Jer. iii. 3, 'Thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.' The conscience of a sinner is like a clock, dull, calm, and at rest, when the weights are down ; but wound up, it is full of motion.

3. Here is caution to God's children. The less respect you have to the commandments, the more shame will you have in yourselves. Partiality in obedience breaketh your confidence, and over-clouds your peace. Therefore, that we may not blemish our profession, let us walk more exactly. 'So shall we not be ashamed when we have respect to all God's commandments.'



## SERMON VIII.

*I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.*—VER. 7.

IN this verse David expresseth his esteem of the word, by telling what he would give for the knowledge and practice of it. As we use to tell a man how thankful we would be if he would do thus and thus for us; so, Lord, if thou wilt give me to learn thy righteous judgments, then I will praise thee, &c.

His promise of praise manifesteth his esteem, which should affect our stupid hearts. The canon is now larger, and the mysteries of the word are more clearly unfolded. If the saints of God were so taken with it before, when there were so scanty and dark representations in comparison of what is now, oh, what honour and praise do we now owe to God!

In this verse observe—

1. The title that is given to the word, *thy righteous judgments*.
2. His act of duty about it, or the benefit which he desireth, sound erudition, *when I shall have learned*.

3. The fruit of this benefit obtained, *then will I praise thee*.

4. The manner of performing this duty, *with uprightness of heart*.

*First*, The title that is given to the word, 'Thy righteous judgments,' or as it is in the margin, 'The judgments of thy righteousness.' Hence observe—

*Doct.* God's precepts are, and are so accounted of by his people as, righteous judgments, or judgments of righteousness.

There are two terms to be explained—

1. What is meant by *judgments*.
2. By *righteousness*.

For the first. *Righteousness* is sometimes put alone for the word, and so also *judgments* (as we shall find in this psalm); but here both are put together to increase the signification. The precepts of the word are called judgments for two reasons—

1. Because they are the judicial sentence of God concerning our state and actions.

2. Because of the suitable execution that is to follow.

1. They are the judicial sentence of God concerning our state and actions. The judicial sentence; that is, they are the decrees of the almighty lawgiver, given forth with an authority uncontrollable. A man may appeal from the sentence of men, but this is judgment. This is as certain as if he were executed presently. There is injustice and oppression many times in the courts of men, but 'there is a higher than the highest regards it, and there be higher than they,' Eccles. v. 8. There may be another tribunal to which we may appeal from the unjust sentences of men; but there is no appeal from God, for there is no higher judicature. Paschalis, a minister of the Albigenses, when he was burnt at Rome, cited the Pope and his cardinals before the tribunal of the Lamb. When we are wronged and oppressed here, we may cite them before the tribunal of God and Christ; but who can appeal from the tribunal of Christ himself?

And then this sentence is concerning our state and actions.

[1.] Our state, whether it be good or evil, The word sentenceth you now; for instance, if a man be in a carnal state: John iii. 18, 'He that believeth not is condemned.' How condemned? 'already.' In the sentence of the law, so he is gone and lost. Every unbeliever, such as all are by nature, is condemned already, having only the slender thread of a frail life between him and the execution of it. The sentence of the law standeth in force against him, since he will not come to Christ to get it repealed. This sentence standeth in force against all heathens which never heard of Christ, and are condemned already by the law. But now Christians, or those that take up such a profession, and have heard of the gospel, on them it is confirmed by a new sentence, since they will not fly to another court, to the chancery of the gospel, and take sanctuary at the Lord's grace offered in Jesus Christ: 'He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,' Mark xvi. 16. Again, when it is good, the sentence of the word, it is judgment: Rom. viii. 33, 'It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?' What hath the officer to do, when a man is absolved by the judge in court? Conscience is God's deputy, Satan is God's executioner. The witness is silenced; the executioner hath no more to do when the judge absolveth, as God doth all by the sentence of the gospel that are willing to come under Christ's shadow.

[2.] As the word judgeth and passeth sentence upon our states, so also upon our actions, thought, word, or deed; for all these in this regard come under the notion of acts.

(1.) Thoughts. They are liable to God's tribunal, which can be arraigned before no other bar, yet the word doth find them out. It doth not only discover the evil of them: Heb. iv. 12, 'The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart;' but judgeth and sentenceth them: Jer. vi. 19, 'I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts.' Men have only a process against others either for words or actions, but God hath a process against them for their thoughts. Though in men's courts thoughts are free, as not liable to their cognisance, yet they are subject to another judicature.

(2.) Words. Idle words weigh heavy in God's balance. God, that hath given a law to the heart, hath also given a law to the lips, Mat. xii. 36, 'Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.' Words will come to be judged: either we are to give an account of them here, or hereafter; either to condemn ourselves for them, and seek pardon, or to be condemned hereafter before God. A loose and ungoverned tongue will be one evidence brought against men as a sign of their unrenewed hearts in the day of judgment.

(3.) All our actions. They are sentenced in the word. God hath declared his mind concerning them: Eccles. xii. 14, 'God will bring every work into judgment;' things will not be huddled up in that day. God will not accept of a general bill of account by lump,

but every action he will judge it according to the tenor of his word. This is an amplification of the first reason, why the word or precepts of God are called judgments, because they are judicial sentences of God the lawgiver, given forth with an authority uncontrollable concerning our estate and actions.

2. The next reason is, because of the suitable execution that is to follow in this world and in the next.

[1.] In this world. It is an easy matter to reconcile the word and providence together, for providence is but a comment upon the word; and you may even transcribe God's dispensations from the threatenings and promises of the law. The story of the people of the Jews might have been transcribed from the threatenings of the law, so that the comminations of the law were but as a calendar and prognostication what kind of weather it would be with that people. So still the apostle makes the observation: Heb. ii. 2, 'Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' Mark, it is notable to observe how God hath been punctual in executing the sentence of every command; the breach of it hath had a just recompense and reward—as I might instance in all the law of God. Moses and Aaron, if they will not sanctify God according to the first commandment, they shall be shut out of the land of Canaan; and if the people will have their false worship, how will God punctually accomplish it that he will ruin them and their posterity? So Rom. i. 18, you have this general a little more specified; God hath not only taken notice of the first table, but of the second: 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven,' not only 'against all ungodliness,' but 'unrighteousness of men,' &c. God from heaven hath owned both tables, and executed the sentence of the law against sinners: Hosea vii. 12, 'I will chastise them as their congregation hath heard.' If a man would observe providence, he might find not only justice in God's dispensations, but truth. I rather note this, because God's children may smart in this life for breach of the law. Though sentence of absolution takes place as to their persons and state, yet in this life they may smart sorely for the breach of the law. In time of trial God will make the world know he is impartial, that none shall go free, but the sentence of the word shall be executed: Prov. xi. 31, 'The righteous shall be recompensed in the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner.' Recompensed; that is, with a recompense of punishment: so Peter reads it out of the Septuagint, i. Peter iv. 18, 'And if the righteous scarcely be saved,' &c. It is a hard matter to keep a righteous man from falling under the vengeance of God: God stands so much upon the credit of his word, that he deals out smart blows and stripes for their iniquity here in this world.

[2.] In the next world, there is no other sentence given but what is according to the word: John xii. 48, 'The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge you in the last day.' God will pronounce sentence then according to what is said now, either to believers or unbelievers.

Well, then, upon these grounds you see the execution is not only judgment, but the very law is judgment. A man that is to be examined and tried for life and death would fain know how it would speed with him, and how matters shall be carried beforehand. God will not deal with you by way of surprise; he hath plainly told you

according to what rule he will proceed: saith he, 'The word which I have spoken, the same shall judge you at the last day.'

*Use.* I would apply this first term, *judgments*, thus: to press us to regard the sentence of the word more. If you cannot stand before the word of God, how will you stand before Christ's tribunal at the last day? Many times there is a conviction in the ore, though not refined to full conviction, and that discovers itself thus, by a fear to be tried and searched: John iii. 20, 'They will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd.' They that are loath to know are loath to search: you can have no comfort but what is according to the tenor of the word, and no happiness but what is according to the sentence of the word. What the word doth say to you, as sure as God is true it will be accomplished to a tittle. God stands upon his word more than anything: when 'heaven and earth shall pass away,' and be 'burned like a scroll,' 'not a jot of the word,' either law or gospel, 'shall pass away.' If we did think of this with seriousness, then one part of the word would drive us to another; we would run from the law to the gospel. Sinners could not lie in a carnal state: this law is not only my rule, but my judgment; and believers could not be so listless, and secure, and negligent as they are in their holy calling. Their doom in the word, this would make them seek more earnestly for pardon and grace, and make them strictly watch over their hearts and ways. Either we do not believe that the word is true, or that God will be so punctual and exact as he hath declared. We dream of strange indulgences for which we have no cause, or else we would be more frequent at the throne of grace, and more exact and watchful in the course of our conversations.

Secondly, The next term to be opened is *righteousness*, another title given to the word in this psalm: it is so called, Heb. v. 13, 'Unskilful in the word of righteousness;' and 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17, it is 'profitable for instruction in righteousness.' But why is the word called righteousness? Because it shows how a man shall be justified, and how a justified man should approve himself both to God and man.

1. It sheweth how a man shall be justified and accepted as righteous before God; therefore the word is called righteousness. This is a great secret and riddle which was hidden from the wise men of the world; they could never have found it out by all the profound researches and inquiries of nature into natural things; unless the word of God had made it known, it should still have been in the dark. For righteousness to plead for you, and to find acceptance, alas we should be thinking of going up to heaven, and going down into the deep; no, no, 'the word is nigh thee,' Rom. x. 8. This notion of the righteousness of Christ was the best notion the world was ever acquainted with; that when we all lay guilty, obnoxious to the wrath of God, and to the revenges of his angry justice, that then the Lord should reveal a righteousness, 'even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe;' as the apostle amplifies it, Rom. iii. 22. What a rich and glorious discovery was this of the mind and counsel of God to poor sinners, that he hath revealed such a righteousness!

2. The word is called righteousness, because it shows how a justified

man should approve himself both to God and man, by a holy conversation. It is the rule of moral righteousness: 1 John iii. 7, 'He is righteous that doth righteousness,' in the judgment of the word. There is not only righteousness wrought by Christ for believers, but also righteousness wrought by Christ in believers, when a man doth exercise himself in performing his duties to God and man.

*Use.* Well, then, if we would be skilful in the matters of righteousness—

1. Consult often with the word, which is the copy of God's most righteous will. A man need go no further either for direction, quickening, or encouragement. The world despiseth the plain directions of the word, and crieth up the notion of things, and looketh for quaint conceits, and things of a more sublime speculation. If we should only bring scripture, and urge men by God's authority, and call upon them in Christ's name, and by Christ's arguments, this would be too low for them. But this is to tax the wisdom of God. He that 'hath the key of David' knew what kind of wards would fit the lock—what directions, what quickening notions and encouragements were fittest to be used in the case, to gain men to a sense of their duty both to God and man, and bring them into a way of righteousness.

2. Do you manifest the word to be righteousness: 'Wisdom should be justified of her children,' Mat. xi. 19. You should evidence it to the carnal world by taking off their prejudices, that the word may be justified. The world hath a suspicion; now evidence it to the conscience that it is a holy rule, a perfect direction for righteousness. The world prieth into the conversation of the saints; they live much by sensible things; therefore declare and evidence it to be a righteous thing.

So much for the title that is given to the word of God, *thy judgments and righteousness*.

*Secondly,* We come now to his act of duty about the word, or the benefit which he desired, 'When I shall have learned.' By *learning* he means his attaining not only to the knowledge of the word, but the practice of it. It is not a speculative light, or a bare notion of things: John vi. 45, 'Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.' It is such a learning as the effect will necessarily follow, such a light and illumination as doth convert the soul, and frame our hearts and ways according to the will of God; for otherwise if we get understanding of the word, nay, if we get it imprinted in our memories, it will do us no good without practice.

*Doct.* The best of God's servants are but scholars and students in the knowledge and obedience of his word.

For saith David, which had so much acquaintance, 'When I shall have *learned*.' The professors of the Christian religion were primitively called *disciples* or *learners*: Acts vi. 2, τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν, 'The multitude of the disciples.' This seems to be the true definition of a church, the *genus* and *difference*; the *genus* is the community or multitude of men united among themselves, as a corporation, city, or household. The *difference* or *form* is disciples, those that gave up themselves to Christ to be taught and governed, and to be instructed in this way and doctrine. So Acts xi. 26, it is said there, 'The dis-

ciples were called Christians first at Antioch.' Christians are disciples, and to difference them from the disciples of other men, they are the disciples of Christ. (1.) The school, that is, the church, where there are public lectures read to all visible professors; but the elect getting saving knowledge, they are not only taught of men, but taught of God, they have an inward light. (2.) The book, that is, the scripture, 'which is able to make wise to salvation,' to 'make the man of God perfect,' 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. Some run to tradition, others cry up their own reason to the wrong of the scripture; they make Christ to be their disciple rather than they his, when they will not receive things upon his testimony and revelation, as the Socinians. (3.) The teacher is either supreme or subordinate. The supreme teacher is Christ; he is the great prophet of the church: so it is said, John vi. 45, 'They shall be taught of God.' This is, such a teacher that not only opens the scripture, but 'opens the understanding,' Luke xxiv. 45. The subordinate teachers are the ministers of the gospel, whom God useth for this work; not out of any indigence, but indulgence; not for any efficacy in the preacher, but out of a suitableness to the hearer, as a means most agreeable to our frail estate, to deal with us by way of counsel. God can teach us without men, by the secret illapses of his Spirit; but he will use those that are of the same nature with ourselves, that have the same temptations, necessities, and affections, which know the heart of a man. He would use them who, if they deceive us, must deceive themselves; he would use men of whose conversation and course we are conscious; we know their walk and way; he would use them as 'ambassadors' to 'pray us in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God,' 2 Cor. v. 20. (4.) The lesson which we learn is not only to know, but to obey. Science without conscience will not fit our turn, nor suit with the dignity of our teacher. To be like children that have the rickets, swollen in the head, when the feet are weak; we do not learn truth as it is in Jesus till we be regenerated, for that is a truth for practice and walking, not for talk, Eph. iv. 21. He is most learned that turns God's word into works: 1 John ii. 4, 5, 'He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.' In this school there is no man counted a proficient, but he that grows in practice. It is not the curious searcher that is the best scholar, but the humble practitioner; when we are cast into the mould of this doctrine, and have the prints, the stamp and character of it upon our heart; as Rom. vi. 17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.' In the original it is, 'Whereto ye were delivered.' When we come to a physician, it is not enough to know his prescriptions, but they must be followed. We do not come to Christ as students of physick, to be trained up in the theory, but as patients; not as one that minds the art, but the cure, to do what is prescribed, that we may know how to get rid of our soul-diseases. Therefore Christ saith, John viii. 31, 'Then are ye my disciples indeed, if my word abide in you.' There are Christ's disciples in pretence, and Christ's disciples indeed; those that make it their work to get from Christ a power and virtue to carry on a uniform and constant obedience, these are the

true learners. Therefore it will not fit our turn unless we labour to come under the power of what we learn, as well as get the knowledge; and it will not suit with the dignity of our teacher, who doth not only enlighten the mind, but change us by his efficacy, and leaves a suitable impression upon the soul. God writeth the lesson upon our hearts; that is, not only gives us the lesson, but a heart to learn it. Man's teaching is a pouring it into the ears. This is God's teaching, to inform our reason, and move our will: Phil. ii. 13, 'It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.' He teacheth us promises so as to make us believe them; and commandments so as to make us obey them; and the doctrine of the gospel teacheth us so as to stamp the impression of it upon the soul, to change us into his image and likeness, 2 Cor. iii. 18.

*Use.* It presseth us to give up ourselves to this learning. Study the word, but take God for your teacher. Look to him that speaks from heaven if you would learn to purpose, otherwise our natural blindness will never be cured, nor our prejudices removed, nor our wills gained to God; or if they should be gained to a profession of truth, it will never hold long. When men lead us into a truth, we shall easily be led off again by other men; and all a man's teaching will never reform the heart. Man's light is like a March sun, which raiseth vapours, but doth not dispel and scatter them; so it discovers lust, but doth not give us power to suppress it; therefore our main business must be to be taught of God.

Further, Observe your proficiency in this knowledge: Heb. v. 14, To 'have your senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' We should every day grow more 'skilful in the word of righteousness.' John xiv. 9, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?' To be backward in the knowledge of grace after long teaching, and to be still conflicting with fleshly lusts, which is the exercise of beginners—so much means and so small experience, and get no further—this is sad!

*Thirdly,* The fruit of this benefit obtained, 'Then shall I praise him.' From hence observe—

1. Upon receipt of every mercy we should praise God. We are forward in supplication, but backward in gratulation. This is a more noble duty, and continueth with us in heaven. It is the work of glorified saints and angels to praise God. All the lepers could beg health, yet but one returned to give God the glory. This is sad when it is so; for this is a more sublime duty, therefore it should have more of our care. This is a profitable duty: Ps. lxxvii. 5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O Lord, let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us.' The more vapours go up, the more showers come down; and the more praises go up, the more mercies. There is a reciprocal intercourse between us and God, by mercies and praises, as there is between the earth and the lower heavens, by vapours and showers. There are two words by which our thankfulness to God is expressed, *praising* and *blessing*: Ps. cxlv. 10, 'All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee.' What is the difference? Praise respecteth God's excellences, and blessing respecteth God's benefits.

We may praise a man that never hath done us good, if he be excellent and praiseworthy; but blessing respecteth God's bounty and benefits; yet they are promiscuously taken sometimes, as here praise is taken for blessing.

2. Observe: We should praise God especially for spiritual blessings, Eph. i. 3. Why? Partly because these come from the special love of God. God bestows corn, wine, and oil in the general upon the world; but now knowledge, and grace, and blessed experiences of communion with God, these are special things, he bestows them upon the saints, therefore deserves more thankfulness. Protection, it is the common benefit of every subject; but preferment and favour is for friends, and those that are near to the prince; so this is the favour of his people, called so Ps. cvi. 5, 'Show me the favour of thy people.' This is a special blessing God bestoweth upon his own children. Again, these concern the better part, the inward man, the spirit, the soul, which is the man. He doth us more favour which heals a wound in the body than he that only seweth up a rent in our garment (for the body is more than raiment); so he that doth good to our souls is more than he that doth good to our bodies, which gives outward blessings, because these are above the body. Again, these are pledges of eternal blessings in heavenly places: 'He hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places.' But why is it said, 'He hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places'? Why, there they began, and there they are consummated; there was their first purpose, and there is the final accomplishment. A man may have the world, and yet never the nearer heaven; but when he hath grace, and learned God's statutes, and his heart is gained to obedience of God's will, this is more than gold, silver, and great riches. Again, these dispose the heart to thankfulness. There is an occasion to praise God, and a heart to praise him; outward mercies give us an occasion, but spiritual mercies give a disposition. Other things are but motives to praise God, but these are preparations. And then other things, they are given in judgment; these things cannot. A man may have an estate in judgment, but he cannot have Christ and grace in judgment. These things are always given in mercy.

*Use.* Well, then, the use is to reprove us that we are no more sensible of spiritual benefits. We love the body more than the soul, and therefore have a quick sense of bodily mercies. But now, in soul concerns we are not the like affected. It is for want of observation to descry the progress of grace, and God's dealings with the inward man: Col. iv. 2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' And it is for want of affection. We are wrought upon by carnal arguments, mercies of flesh and blood, and showers of rain, food, and gladness. These things make us praise God; but that which we get from God in an ordinance, we are not so sensible of.

3. I observe again, those that have learned God's righteous judgments, they are only fit to praise God: Ps. xxxiii. 1, 'Praise is comely for the upright.' It is unseemly in a wicked man's mouth that he should be praising of God. It is his duty, but it is not so comely; but praise to the upright, this is suitable. *Canticum novum et vetus*



*homo male concordant*, saith Austin. The new song, the psalm of praise, and the old man, make but ill music. We need a new heart, if we would go about this work. It is an exercise becoming the godly. We should be reconciled to God, and have his grace and favour. Under the law they were to bring their peace-offering, and lay it on the top of the burnt-offering, Lev. iii. When we come to offer a thank-offering to God, we should be in a state of amity and friendship with him. That is the clear moral of that ceremony: 'Sing with grace in your hearts,' Col. iii. 16. Others have not such matter nor such hearts to praise God; they are but tinkling cymbals. But those that have grace, it is acceptable and comely for them.

4. I observe again, 'I will praise thee when I shall have learned,' &c. Those that profit by the word, they are bound to praise God, and acknowledge him as the author of all that they have got. The grace of a teachable heart, we have it from him, therefore the honour must be his. He that gave the law, he it is that writes it upon the heart. Alas! we in ourselves are but 'like the wild ass's colt,' Job xi. 12, both for rudeness of understanding, and also for unruliness of affection. Well, then, if we be tamed and subdued, he must have all the glory and the praise: Ps. xvi. 7, 'Blessed be God that gave me counsel in my reins.' It was God which made the word effectual, and counselled us how to choose him for our portion. We were as indocile and incapable as others. If God had left us to our own swing, what fools should we have been!

*Use.* It reproves us because we are so apt to intercept the revenues of the crown of heaven, and to convert them to our own use, like rebels against God. This proud pronoun *ego*, *I*, *I*, is always interposing: 'This Babel which *I* have built.' We are sacrificing to this proud self: This *I* have done; and if God be mentioned, it is but for fashion's sake, as those women in the prophet Isaiah, 'Only call us by thy name; we will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel'—I allude to it. God must bear the name, but we sacrifice to ourselves in all we get, as if it were our own acquiring. 'God, I thank thee,' saith the Pharisee; yet he trusted in himself that he was righteous, Luke viii. Oh, learn, then, the commendable modesty of God's servants, of ascribing all to God: Luke xix. 16, he doth not say *my industry*, but '*thy pound* hath gained another.' And 'by the grace of God I am what I am.' And 'I laboured more abundantly than they all.' He corrects it presently, 'Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me,' 1 Cor. xv. 10. So again: Gal. ii. 20, 'I live;' and then, presently, 'not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Thus should we learn to be faithful and loyal to God, and deal with him as Joab did to David when he was like to surprise Rabbah, and take it: 2 Sam. xii. 28, 'Encamp against the city, and take it, lest I take the city, and it be called after my name.' Let us be very jealous that we do not get into God's place, and self interpose, and perk up with what we have attained unto; for the Lord must have all the glory, the praise must be his.

The *fourth* circumstance in the text is the manner of performing this duty of rendering praise; *with an upright heart*. I shall not discourse of uprightness in general, but uprightness in praising God.

God must be praised with a great deal of uprightness of soul ; that is the note. This uprightness in praising lieth in two things,—not only with the tongue, but the heart ; not only with the heart, but the life.

1. Not only with the tongue, but with the heart: Ps. ciii. 1, ‘Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.’ Mark, not only with my tongue, ‘with my glory,’ as he calls it, but with my soul. Formal speeches are but an empty prattle, which God regards not: Ps. xlvii. 7, ‘Sing ye praises with understanding.’ It is fit the noblest faculty should be employed in the noblest work. This is the noblest work, to praise God ; therefore all that is within us must be summoned. Church adversaries took up a customary form : Zech. xi. 5, ‘Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich.’ And in Nehemiah it is said, ‘Your brethren that hated me said, Let God be glorious.’ In instruments of music, the deeper the belly of the instrument, the sweeter the melody ; so praise, the more it comes from the heart, the more acceptable to God.

2. This uprightness implies the life as well as the heart. Honour given to God in words is many times retracted and disproved by the dishonour we do to him in our conversations. This is the carrying Christ on the top of the pinnacle, as the devil did, with an intent he might throw down himself again. So we seem to advance and carry him high in praises, that we may throw him down in our lives: Titus i. 16, ‘They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.’ Empty compliments God accepteth not, as long as there is blasphemy in their lives. Our lives must glorify him : Mat. v. 16, ‘Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.’

*Use.* It reproves us that we are no more hearty and serious in the praises of God. In our necessities, when we want, then we can howl upon our bed. Our necessity doth put a shrill accent upon our groans, and sharpen our affections in prayer ; but in praise, how cold and dull are we ! Surely we should be as warm in the one as in the other. Then it may press you to live praises, and show forth the praises of him in your conversation, 1 Peter ii. 7. Hezekiah had been sick, God recovered him, he penned a psalm of thanksgiving, Isa. xxxviii. 9. Yet it is said, ‘He rendered not according to what he received,’ &c., 2 Chron. xxxii., because his heart was proud and lifted up. If you do not walk more humbly and closely with God, it is not praise with uprightness of heart ; it must issue and break out in our actions and course of our conversation.

## SERMON IX.

*I will keep thy statutes. O forsake me not utterly.*—VER. 8.

This verse, being the last of this portion, is the result of his meditation concerning the utility and necessity of keeping the law of God. Here take notice—

1. Of his resolution, *I will keep thy statutes.*
2. His prayer, *O forsake me not utterly.*

It is his purpose to keep the law; yet because he is conscious to himself of many infirmities, he prays against desertion. In the prayer there is a *litotes*, more is intended than is expressed. *O forsake me not.* He means, strengthen me in this work. And if thou shouldest desert me, yet but for a while, Lord, not for ever; if in part, not in whole. Four points we may observe from hence—

1. That it is a great advantage to come to a resolution in a course of godliness.

2. Those that resolve upon a course of obedience had need to fly to God's help.

3. Though we fly to God's help, yet sometimes God may withdraw, and seem to forsake us.

4. Though God seem to forsake us, and really doth so in part, yet we should pray that it may not be a total and utter desertion.

The notion of *statutes* I have opened, and also what it is to *keep* them in mind, heart, and life. That which we are now to take notice of is David's resolution. Hence observe—

*Doct.* 1. That it is a great advantage to come to a resolution in a course of godliness.

*Negatively*, let me speak to this point.

1. This is not to be understood as if our resolutions had any strength in themselves to bear us out. Peter is a sad instance how little our confidence and purposes will come to: and therefore David here, when he was most upright in his own resolution, is most diffident of his own strength; 'O forsake me not:' implying, if God should forsake him, all would come to nothing. God must enable us to do what we resolve.

2. Nor is it to be understood that it is in a man's power to resolve; this would put grace under the dominion of our will; it is by preventing grace that we are brought to a serious purpose: Phil. ii. 13, 'He giveth to will and to do.' Man's will is the toughest sinew in the whole creation. The very purpose and bent of the heart is the fruit of regeneration. Free-will hath its pangs, its velleities, which are like a little morning-dew, that is soon dried up: Hosea vi. 4, 'Our righteousness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.' But the will and resolution that we are to understand here is the fruit of grace.

3. Not as if the obligation to obedience did arise from our own purpose and promise, rather than from God's command; this were to set man's authority above God's, and to lay aside the precept, which is the surer bond and obligation, and to bind the soul with the slender thread of our own resolutions. When we purpose and promise obedience, we do but make the old bond and engagement of duty the more active and sensible upon the soul, so that it is not to jostle out God's authority, but to yield our consent. However, the obligation is the greater; for to disobey after we have acknowledged an authority, among men it is counted a more heinous crime than standing out against the authority itself. A thing that is not due before, yet when we have promised or dedicated it to God, then it is not in our power; as in the case of Ananias, Acts v. But now we are not free before the contract, we have bonds upon us; and the business of our promise and resolution is only to make our obligation more powerful upon the conscience.

4. Not as if it were an arbitrary thing thus to do, and practised by the saints only for the more convenience of the spiritual life. No; but it is a thing required: Acts xi. 23, He 'exhorteth them that, with full purpose of heart, they would cleave to the Lord.'

*Positively*: 1. It is a course which God will bless; he hath appointed ordinances for this end and purpose that we might come to this resolution. The promise is first implicitly made in baptism; therefore is it called, 1 Peter iii. 21, 'the answer of a good conscience towards God.' How so? Why, the covenant binds mutually on God's part and on ours, and so do the seals which belong to the covenant. It doth not only seal pardon and sanctification on God's part, but there is a promise and answer on our part. An answer to what? To the demands of the covenant. In the covenant of grace God saith, I will be your God; baptism seals that, and we promise to be his people. Now our answer to this demand of God, and to this interrogatory he puts to us in the covenant, it is sealed by us in baptism, and it is renewed in the Lord's Supper. Look, as in the old sacrifices, they were all a renewing of the oath of allegiance to God, or confirming their purposes and resolutions, you have the same notion to the sacrifice that is given to the Lord's Supper, for it is called 'the blood of the covenant,' Exod. xxiv. 7, 8. In the ordinance of the Lord's Supper there we come to take an obligation upon us; half of the blood is sprinkled upon us. And this purpose and resolution to it is still continued and kept afoot in our daily exercise, invocation, and prayer, wherein either we explicitly or implicitly renew our obedience; for every prayer is an implicit vow, wherewith we bind ourselves to seek those things we ask, or else we do not engage God to bestow them. Thus it is a course that God will bless.

2. It is of great necessity to prevent uncertainty of spirit. Until we come to resolution we shall be liable to temptation; until we fully set our faces towards God, and have a bent and serious purpose of heart, we shall never be free from temptation from the devil, and from evil men, or from ourselves. From the devil: James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' As long as we are wavering, and suspensive, we can never carry on uniformity of obedience. While we halt between God and Baal, Satan hath an advantage against us. So from evil men: David doth express himself as coming to a resolution in this psalm, ver. 115, 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.' There is no way to shake off those evil companions and associates till there be a bent seriously towards heaven. So from ourselves: we have changeable hearts, that 'love to wander,' Jer. xiv. 10. We have many revoltings and reluctancies; therefore, until a sanctified judgment and will concur to make up a resolution and holy purpose, we shall still be up and down. The saints, being sensible of their weakness, often bind this upon themselves: Ps. cxix. 57, 'I have said that I would keep thy words;' there was a practical decree past upon the conscience. And ver. 106, 'I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.' An oath is the highest assurance among men, and most solemn engagement, and all little enough to hold a backsliding heart under a sense and care of our duty. As long as the Israelites had a will to Canaan,

so long they digested the inconveniences of the wilderness. Every difficulty and trouble will put us out of the way, and we cannot be secured against an unsteady heart, but by taking up such a course, a serious resolve of maintaining communion with God. And as it is useful to prevent temptation, so to excite and quicken our dulness: we forget our vow and purpose, and therefore we relapse into sin. The apostle saith, 2 Peter i. 9, 'He hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins;' that he did renounce these things in baptism. And Paul puts us in mind of our engagement: Rom. viii. 12, 'We are not debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh.' You make vows and promises to God, to renounce the flesh and vanities of the world, and to give up yourselves to God's service; and these things are forgotten, and therefore we grow slight, cold, careless in the profession of godliness.

*Use.* The first use is to press us to come to a declared resolution to serve and please God, and to direct us in what manner.

First, Make it with a full bent of heart. Rest not upon a *Shall I?* *shall I?* but '*I will keep thy statutes.*' As Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian, but not altogether, so men stand hovering and debating. You should resolve, Ps. cxix. 112, 'I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes alway to the end.' It is God's work to incline the heart; but when the work of grace is passed upon us, then the believer doth voluntarily incline himself; his will is bent to serve God, not by fits and starts, but alway to the end: 1 Chron. xxii. 19, 'Now set your hearts to seek the Lord;' that is, resolve, be not off and on.

But, secondly, In what manner shall we make it?

1. Seriously and advisedly, not in a rash humour. The people, when they heard the law, and were startled with the majesty of God, Deut. v. 28, 29, answered, 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.' It was well done to come to a purpose and resolution; but 'Oh, that there were such a heart within them,' saith God, 'that they would fear me,' &c.: Josh. xxiv. 19, 'We will serve the Lord,' say the people; 'You cannot serve the Lord,' saith Joshua. Do you know what it is? Rash undertakings will necessarily be accompanied with a feeble prosecution; and therefore count the charges, lest you repent of the bargain, Luke xiv. 23.

2. Make Christ a liberal allowance, if you would come to a resolution: Mat. xvi. 24, 'He that will come after me,' he that hath a heart set upon this business, let him know what he must do; 'let him deny himself,' &c. When we engage for God, he would have us reckon for the worst, to be provided for all difficulties. A man that builds, when he hath set apart such a sum of money to compass it, while he keeps within allowance, all is well; but when that is exceeded, every penny is disbursed with grudging. So if you do anything in this holy business, make Christ a liberal allowance at first, lest we think of returning into Egypt afterward, when we meet with fiery flying serpents, and difficulties and hardships in our passage to heaven. Let it be a thorough resolution, that, come what will come, we will be the Lord's. There should be a holy wilfulness. Paul was resolved to go to Jerusalem, because he was bound in spirit; and though they did even break his heart, yet they could not break his purpose.

3. Resolve as trusting upon the Lord's grace. You are poor weak creatures; how changeable in an hour! not a feather so tossed to and fro in the air; therefore we shall fail, falter, and break promise every day, if we go forth in the strength of our own resolutions. Resolve as trusting in the direction and assistance of God's Holy Spirit: if God undertake for us, then, under God, we may undertake. To resolve is more easy than to perform, as articles are sooner consented to than made good; a castle is more easily built in time of peace than maintained and kept in a time of war; and therefore still wait, and depend upon God for his grace.

4. You cannot promise absolute and thorough obedience, though you should strive after it, for this you will never be able to perform; and your own promises, purposes, and resolutions will but increase your trouble, though you are still to be aiming after it.

*Doct. 2.* Those that will keep God's statutes must fly to God's help.

As David doth here, 'Oh, forsake me not utterly;' that is, Oh, strengthen me in this work. Three reasons for this—

1. We are weak and mutable creatures.

2. Our strength lies in God's hands.

3. God gives out his strength according to his own pleasure.

1. We are weak and mutable creatures. When we were at our best we were so. Adam in innocency was not able to stand without confirming grace, but gave out at the first assault. And still we are mutable, though we have a strong inclination for the present. When the precepts of God are propounded with evidence, and backed with promises and threatenings, and a resolution follows thereupon, the fruit of rational conviction and moral suasion, which is not for the present false and hypocritical, yet it will not hold without the bottom of grace. It hath not supernatural, yet it may have moral sincerity. Such a resolution was that of the Israelites after the terrible delivery of God's law. They promised universal obedience, and did not lie in it; for God saith, They have done well in their promise; there was a moral sincerity, but there wanted a renewed sanctified heart. And those captains which came to Jeremiah, chap. xlii. 5, intended not to deceive for the present, when they called God to witness that they 'would do according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us.' And Hazael, 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' Certainly he had abomination of it, when the prophet mentioned that cruelty of ripping up women with child. But suppose the resolution to be a fruit of grace and regeneration, yet we have not full power to stand of ourselves: still we are very changeable creatures in matters that do not absolutely and immediately concern life and death. Lot, that was chaste in Sodom, in the midst of so many temptations, you will find him committing incest in the mountains, where were none but his two daughters. What a change was here! David, that was so tender, that his heart smote him for cutting off the lap of Saul's garment, one would wonder that he should plot lust, be guilty of murder, and lie in that stupid condition for a long time. Peter, which had such courage to venture upon a band of men, and to cut off Malchus's ear, should be so faint-hearted at a damsel's question! So, while the strength of the present impulse and the grace of God is

warm upon the heart, we may keep close to our work while the influence continues; but afterward, how cold and dead do men grow! as vapours drawn up by the sun, at night fall down again in a dew. The people were upon a high point of willingness, mighty forward, and ready to offer whole cart-loads of gold and silver, 1 Chron. xxix. 18. What saith David? 'O Lord God, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and stablish their heart unto thee.' We are not always in a like frame.

2. Our strength lies in God, and not in ourselves. When the apostle had exhorted his Ephesians to all Christian duties, he concludes it thus: Eph. vi. 10, 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' This might is in God, he is our strength. And 2 Tim. ii. 1, 'Be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.' God would not trust us with the stock in our own hands, now we have spent our portion, and played the prodigals, but would have us wait upon him from morning to morning: Ps. xxv. 4, 'Show me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths; lead me in thy truth, and teach me.' We are apt to embezzle it, or forget God, both which are very mischievous. When the prodigal got his stock in his own hands, he went into a far country, out of his father's house. God would not hear from us, there would not be such a constant communion and correspondence between him and us, if our daily necessities did not force us to him. Therefore, that the throne of grace might not lie unfrequented, God keeps the strength in his own hands. We need to consult with him on all occasions.

3. God gives out his strength according to his own pleasure. God many times gives the will, when he suspendeth the strength that is necessary for the performance. Sometimes God gives *scire*, a sense and conscience of duty; at other times he gives *velle*, to will, to have a purpose; and when he gives to will, he doth not always give *posse*, to be able—not such a lively performance. It is possible he may give the will where he doth not give the deed; for it is said, Phil. ii. 13, 'He worketh both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' And Paul certainly doth not speak as a convinced, but as a renewed man, when he saith, 'To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not.' He had received the will, and not the deed—finding presupposeth searching. When we have done all we can, yet how to bring our purposes into actions, we cannot tell. Peter had his resolutions (and no doubt they were hearty and real), yet when he comes to make them good, what a poor weakling was Peter! *Putabat se posse, quod se velle sentiebat*—he thought he could do that which he could will, saith Austin: John xiii. 37, 'Lord, whycannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thee.' We look upon the willing spirit, and not upon the weak flesh. It is possible we may lean upon recent dispositions and affections, as if they would carry us out, without dependence upon God. Therefore, for all the parts of spiritual strength he must be sought to.

The use is—

*Use.* To press you to beware of presumption and self-confidence, when your resolutions are at the highest for God, and your hearts in the best frame. Resolution is needful, as was said before; but all our confidences must arise from God's promises, not our own, if we mean

not to be left in the dirt. This self-confidence in spiritual things I shall show—

1. How it discovereth itself.

2. How to cure it.

1. It discovereth itself—

[1.] Partly thus, by venturing upon temptations without a call and warrant. When men will lay their heads in the lap of a temptation, and run into the mouth of danger, they tempt God, but trust to themselves. Peter would be venturing into the devil's quarters; but what is the issue? He denies his master. Dependence upon God is ever accompanied with a holy solicitude and cautious fear, Phil. ii. 12, 13. When we go out of God's way it is a presuming upon our own strength; for he will keep us *in viis*, in his ways; not *in precipitiis*, when we run headlong into danger.

[2.] When men neglect those means whereby their graces or comforts may be fed and supplied. A man that is kept humble and depending will be always waiting for his dole at wisdom's gates, Prov. viii. 34. We cannot regularly expect anything from God but in God's way. They who depend upon God will be much in prayer, hearing, and taking all opportunities. But when men begin to think they need not pray so much, need not make such conscience of hearing; when we are more arbitrary and negligent in the use of means, then we begin to live upon ourselves and our own stock, and do not depend upon the free grace of God to carry us out in our work.

[3.] When you go forth to any work or conflict, without an actual renewing of your dependence upon God. It is a sign you lean upon the strength of your own resolutions, or present frame of your heart. The Ephraimites took it ill that Gideon would go to war, and not call them into the field when they went out against the enemy, Judges viii. 1. Oh, may not God much more take it ill that we will go forth to grapple with the devil and temptations, and go about any business in our own strength? Therefore, still a sense of our weakness must be upon us, that we may 'do all in the name of the Lord Jesus;' that is, by help and assistance from him, Col. iii. 17.

[4.] When we boast of our courage before we are called to a trial. They that crack in their quarters do not always do most valiantly in the field. Peter's boast, 'Though all men should leave thee, yet will not I,' came to very little; and you know the story of Mr Saunders in the *Book of Martyrs*. 'Let not him that puts on his harness boast as he that puts it off.' A temptation will show us how little service that grace will do us which we are proud of, and boast of.

2. To cure carnal confidence, remember your work and your impediments. (1.) Consider your work. A full view of duty will check our rash presumptions. Can you deny yourselves, take up your cross, maintain and carry on a holy course to your life's end? And (2.) Remember your impediments. Partly from a naughty heart. You are to row against the stream of flesh and blood. Satan will be sure to trouble you, and will assault you again and again. Though he be never so fully foiled, he will not give over the combat: Luke iv. 13, he departed from Christ 'for a season.' He had a mind to try the other bout. And the world will be your let—many discouragements and



snare from the love and fear of it: 1 John v. 3, 4, 'He that loves God keeps his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous'; and presently he saith, 'And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;' implying there is no keeping the commandments without victory over the world. Now, can you do all these things in your own strength? The young man was forward in resolving to keep the commandments, but he went away sad, for he had great possessions, Mat. xix. 22. Therefore consider these things, that you may fly to the Lord Jesus.

*Doct. 3.* Though we fly to God's help, yet sometimes God may withdraw and forsake us.

Here I shall speak of the kinds of desertion, and then of the reasons.

First, For the kinds, take these distinctions:—

1. There is a real desertion and a seeming. Christ may be out of sight, and yet you not out of mind. When the dam is abroad for meat, the young brood in the nest are not forgotten nor forsaken. The child cries as if the mother was gone, but she is but hidden, or about other business: Isa. xlix. 14, 15, 'Sion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me.' In the misgivings of our hearts, we think God hath cast off all care and all thought of us. But God's affectionate answer sheweth that all this was but a fond surmise: 'Can a woman forget her sucking-child?' &c. So Ps. xxxi. 22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.' We are never more in God's heart many times than when we think he hath quite cast us off. Surely when the heart is drawn after him he is not wholly gone. We often mistake God's dispensations. When he is preparing for us more ample relief, and emptying us of all carnal dependence, we judge that that is a forsaking; as Ps. xciv. 18, 'When I said, My foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.' Sometimes in point of comfort we are at a loss, and filled with distractions and troubles, and all is that God may come in for our relief. So in point of grace: 2 Cor. xii. 10, 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' There is also a real desertion; for God grants his people are forsaken sometimes: 'Though I have forsaken you for a little moment,' Isa. liv. 7, 8, And Christ, that could not be mistaken, complaineth of it; and the saints feel it to their bitter cost.

2. There is internal and external desertion. Internal is with respect to the withdrawals of the Spirit: Ps. li. 11, 'Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.' Now external desertion is in point of affliction, when God leaves us under sharp crosses in his wise providence. These must be distinguished; sometimes they are asunder, sometimes together. And when they are together, God may return as to our inward comfort and support, yet not for our deliverance: Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' David was in great straits, and God affords him soul-relief; that was all the answer he could get then; support and strength to bear the troubles, but not deliverance from the affliction. Sometimes the ebb of outward comfort doth make way for a greater tide and influx of inward comfort:

2 Cor. i. 5, 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.' Cordials are for a fainting time. When children are sick and weakly, we treat them with the more indulgence. God may return, and may never less forsake us inwardly than when he doth forsake us outwardly: 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' God makes sickly bodies make way for the health of the soul, and an aching head for a better heart. When he seems to cast us off in point of our external condition, it is to draw us into a more inward communion with himself, that we might receive greater supplies of his grace.

3. There is a desertion as to comfort, and a desertion as to grace. The children of God may sometimes lose the feelings of God's love: Ps. lxxvii. 1-3, 'My soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God, and was troubled; my spirit was overwhelmed.' Oh, what a word was that! Remembering of God revives the heart; but to think of God, and to think of his loss, that was his great trouble. Yet all this while God may hold communion in point of grace: Ps. lxxiii. 23, 'Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.' He had been under a conflict, lost his comfort, yet he acknowledgeth support; God held him in his right hand. Trouble and discomfort hath its use; want of comfort makes way many times for increase of grace; and therefore, though a man may be deserted as to comfort, yet he may have a greater influence of grace from God. How often doth it fall out thus with God's children, that their right is more confirmed to spiritual blessings when their sense is lost! Then they are more industrious and diligent to get a sense of God's love again. A summer's sun that is clouded yields more comfort and warmth to the earth than a winter's sun that shines brightest. These cloudy times have their use and their fruit; and Christians have the less of a happy part of communion with God, that they may have more holiness; and less of sweetness and sensible consolation, that they may have more grace.

4. There is *desertio correctiva et eruditiva*—a desertion for correction, and a desertion for instruction. Sometimes the aim of it is merely for correction for former sin; it is a penal overclouding for our unkind and ungracious dealing with him. God may do it for sins; nay, many times for old sins long ago committed; he may charge them anew upon the conscience: Job xiii. 24, compared with ver. 26, 'Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?' 'Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.' An old bruise may trouble us long after, upon every change of weather. Many that have grieved God's Spirit in their youth, after they have been converted, God will reckon with them about it in their age. A man will smart for his ungracious courses first or last. Sometimes it is merely for instruction; it instructs us chiefly to show us God's sovereignty, with the changeableness of the best comfort on this side heaven; to show us his sovereignty, that he will be free to go and come at his own pleasure. He will have his people know he is lord, and may do with his own as pleaseth him. The heavenly eradiations and outshinings of his love are not at our beck; God will dispense them according to his pleasure. A mariner hath no cause to murmur and quarrel with God

because the wind bloweth out of the east when he desireth a westerly gale. Why? Because it is his wind, and he will dispose these things according to his pleasure. So the comfort and outshinings of his love are his, and he will take them and give them as he thinks good. Again, to show us the changeableness of the best comforts on this side heaven. When Christ hath been in the soul with a full and high influx of comfort, this doth not remain long with us; God may withdraw. Observe it, often after the highest enlargements there may be some forsaking. Cant. v. 1, there we read of a feast between Christ and his beloved: 'Come eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.' Here they are feasted with love; presently we read of desertion, the spouse waxeth lazy and drowsy, and Christ is gone; then she is forced to go up and down to find him. Paul had his raptures; then a messenger of Satan to buffet him. The same disciples that were conscious to Christ's transfiguration—Peter, James, and John, Mat. xvii.—the same disciples are chosen also to be conscious to his agonies: Mat. xxvi. 37, 'He took with him Peter, James, and John.' First they had a glimpse of his glory, then a sight of his bitter agonies and sufferings. Jeremiah in one line singing of praise, and in the next cursing the day of his birth, Jer. xx. 13, 14. After the most ravishing comforts may be a sad suspension. Jacob saw the face of God, and wrestled with him, but his thigh halted. There needs something to humble the creature after these experiences.

5. Desertion is either felt or not felt. Not felt, and then it is more dangerous, and usually ends in some notable fall; as Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. God left him, and he was not sensible, and then he runs into pride and vainglory, and draweth wrath upon him and his people. God's children, when they do not observe his comings and goings, they fall into mischief, it begins their woe. We do not observe what experiences we have of God, then we faint: we do not observe his goings, then that makes way for some scandal and imprudent and unseemly action, and that makes way for some bitter and sharp affliction. But if it be felt, it is the better provided against. If we do not murmur, but seek to God in Christ to get the loss made up, then it is better. Meek acknowledgments are better than complaining expostulations. It is a sign it works kindly.

6. There is a total and a partial desertion. Those who are bent to obey God may for a while and in some degree be left to themselves. We cannot promise ourselves an utter immunity from desertion, but it is not total. We shall find, for his great name's sake 'The Lord will not forsake his people,' 1 Sam. xii. 22; and Heb. xiii. 5, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' Not utterly, yet in part they may be forsaken. Elijah was forsaken, but not as Ahab; Peter was forsaken in part, but not as Judas, that was utterly forsaken, until he was made a prey to the devil. So carnal professors are forsaken utterly until they are made a prey fit for the devil's tooth. David was forsaken to be humbled and bettered; but Saul was forsaken utterly to be destroyed. Saith Theophylact, God may forsake his people so as to shut out their prayers, Ps. lxxx. 4, so as to interrupt the peace and joy of their heart, to abate their strength; the spiritual life may be much at a stand, and so as sin may break

out, and they fall foully; but not utterly forsaken. But one way or other God is present; present in light sometimes when he is not present in strength, when he manifests the evil of their present condition, so as to mourn under it; and present in awakening desires, though not in giving enjoyment. As long as there is any esteem of God, he is not yet gone; there is some light and love yet left, manifested by our desires of communion with him.

7. There is a temporary desertion and an eternal desertion. One is spoken of, Isa. liv. 7, 8, 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee.' God may forsake his servants for a little while: indeed they may have a long winter of it sometimes; as David lay for many months under his sin, until Nathan roused him; but this is but a moment to the eternity wherein God loves them. But the eternal forsaking is of the final impenitent, when God saith, 'Never see my face more, go ye cursed,' &c. Thus for the kinds.

Secondly, The reasons of desertion.

1. To correct us for our wantonness, and our unkind dealing with Christ. If we neglect him upon frivolous pretences, certainly he will be gone: Cant. v. 3, 'I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on?' See ver. 6, 'My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone.' When we are not at God's call, he will not be at our beck. She that would not open to Christ, when she opened, Christ was gone.

2. To acquaint us with our weakness. What feathers are we when the blast of a temptation is let loose upon us! God will show what we are by his withdrawing. God left Hezekiah, 'That he might try him, that he might know all that was in his heart,' 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. When Christ was asleep, the storm arose, and the ship was in danger. If God be gone but a little, or suspend his influence, we cannot stand our ground.

3. To subdue our carnal confidence: Ps. xxx. 6, 7, 'In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.' We fall asleep upon a carnal pillow, then God draws it away: 'Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled.' The nurse lets the child get a knock, to make it more cautious. God withdraws, that we may learn more to depend upon him.

4. To heighten our esteem of Christ, that love may be sharpened by absence. When once we feel the loss of it to our bitter cost, we will not part with him again upon easy terms. The spouse when she caught him would not let him go, Cant. iii. 2, 3, 4; then are we more tender to observe him in his motions.

5. That by our own bitter experience we may learn how to value the sufferings of Christ, when we taste of the bitter cup of which he drank for us. Christians, you do not know what it was for Christ to cry out, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mat. xxvii. 46, until we are sensible in our measure and degree of the like. He tasted of the hell of being forsaken, and we must pledge him in that cup first or last, that we may know what our Saviour endured for us; and what it is for a holy man to want the light of God's countenance, and those sensible consolations that he formerly had.

6. To prevent evil to come, especially pride, that we might not be lifted up; and to entender our hearts to others: 2 Cor. i. 4, 'That we

might comfort others with the comforts wherewith we were comforted of God.'

*Use 1.* This informs us that we are not therefore cast out of the love of God because there may be some forsaking. Desertion is incident to the most heavenly spirits. Christ hath legitimated this condition, and made it consistent with grace. It is a disease this which follows the royal seed; David, Heman, Hezekiah, these were forsaken, yet were children of God. It is more incident to the godly than the wicked and carnal. The carnal may be under bondage; sometimes their peace may be troubled and disturbed; but this desertion properly is a disease incident to the godly, and none are so affected with it as they: they have a tender heart; when God is gone how are they troubled! They are very observant, and therefore we cannot say they are not godly because they are forsaken. But those that never felt the love of Christ, never knew what communion with God means, were never troubled with sin, have none of this affliction; but this is incident to the richest and most heavenly spirit whom God hath taken into communion with himself.

*Use 2.* For direction to the children of God.

1. Observe God's comings and goings; see whether you be forsaken. When God hides himself from your prayers, when means have not such a lively influence, when you have a strong affection to obey, but not such help to bring it into act, and you begin to stumble, observe it; God is withdrawn, and many times seems to withdraw, to observe whether you will take notice of it. Christ made as if he would go further, but they constrained him to stay; so he makes as if he would be gone, to see if you will constrain him to tarry.

2. Inquire after the reason: Ps. lxxvii. 6, 'I communed with mine own heart.' What then? 'My spirit made diligent search.' Ay! this is the time to make diligent search what it is divides between God and you. Though God doth it out of sovereignty and instruction sometimes, yet there is ever cause for creatures to humble themselves, and make diligent search what is the matter.

3. Submit to the dispensation: murmuring doth but entangle you more; God will have us stoop to his sovereignty and wisdom before he hath done. A husband must be absent for necessary occasions; a frown is as necessary for a child as a smile. David refuseth not to be tried, only he prays, 'Lord, forsake me not utterly.' It is a fond child that will not let its parent go out of sight.

4. Learn to trust in a withdrawing God, and depend upon him; to stay ourselves upon his name when we see no light, Isa. l. 10. Never leave until you find him. Look, as Esther would go into the king's presence when there was no golden sceptre held forth, so venture into God's presence when you have no smile and countenance from heaven; trust in a withdrawing God; nay, when wrath breaks out, when God killeth you: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him.' With such a holy obstinacy of faith should we follow God in this case.

*Doct.* 4. When God seemeth to forsake us, and really doth so in part, yet we should pray that it be not an utter and total desertion.

Isa. lxiv. 9, 'Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember

iniquity for ever. Behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.' (1.) Do not despond; we are very apt to do so: Ps. lxxvii. 7-9, 'Will the Lord cast off for ever? will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.' The worst kind of despondency is to lie in sin. To lie in the dirt, because we are fallen, is foolish obstinacy. (2.) Pray to God—(1st.) Acknowledging that we have deserved it; (2d.) By supplication. There is nothing which God hath promised to perform, but we may ask it in prayer: Heb. xiii. 5, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' If thou provest me, let me not miscarry; if thou exercisest me, let me not be cut off. Beg his returns. (3.) Give thanks that God is not wholly gone, as certainly he is not, as long as you are sensible of your loss, and have a tender heart left. Though he hath withdrawn the light of his countenance, yet he hath left the esteem of it, a thirst after God, and a desire of communion with himself. As long as there is any attraction left, you may find him by the smell of his ointments.

## SERMON X.

*Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*—VER. 2.

In the former part the Psalmist sheweth that the word of God pointeth out the only true way to blessedness. Now, the main thing which the word enforceth is holiness. This is the way which we must take if we intend to come to our journey's end. This David applieth to the young man in the text, 'Wherewith shall a young man cleanse,' &c.

In the words there is—(1.) A question asked; (2.) An answer given.

In the question there is the person spoken of, *a young man*. And his work, *wherewith shall he cleanse his way?* *Omnis questio supponit unum, et inquiri aliud.* In this question there are several things supposed.

1. That we are from the birth polluted with sin; for we must be cleansed. It is not, '*direct his way,*' but '*cleanse his way.*'

2. That we should be very early and timeously sensible of this evil; for the question is propounded concerning the young man.

3. That we should earnestly seek for a remedy how to dry up the issue of sin that runneth upon us. All this is to be supposed.

That which is inquired after is, what remedy there is against it? what course is to be taken? So that the sum of the question is this: How shall a man that is impure, and naturally defiled with sin, be made able, as soon as he cometh to the use of reason, to purge out that natural corruption, and live a holy and pure life to God? The answer given is, '*By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*' Where two things are to be observed—(1.) The remedy; (2.) The manner how it is applied and made use of.

1. The remedy is the word—by way of address to God, called *thy*