

known lust, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet.' Those first stirrings and secret lingerings of heart and inclinations to that which is cross to the will of God, that they go before all consent of will, and all delight, these things we could never discern by the light of nature.

2. *Quoad subjectum*, what is the sinner, and who is guilty of it? So Rom. vii. 9, 'I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' He saw his lost, miserable, undone condition by the law of God. The acts of sin are discovered by the word of God; it discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart, Heb. iv. 12, and state of sin; our natural face, the condition wherein we are, is to be seen in this glass.

3. *Quoad reatum et magnitudinem peccati*, what will be the effects of it? Rom. v. 20, 'The law entered, that the offence might abound.' Therefore the law was given, that it might work a deep sense of the evil consequents of sin, and what wrath man was bound over to for violating the righteous law. The law represents the heinous nature of sin as it is *ἀνομία*, a transgression of the law, as it strikes at God's being or at God's authority, seeks to jostle him out of the throne; as it contradicts his sovereignty, and plucks the sceptre out of his hand and the crown from his head, and makes men to say, 'Who is lord over us?' As if we had nothing to guide us but our own lusts. The word of God discovers this pride of heart, and then the manifold mischiefs of sin are discovered; we get this understanding by the word. It is better to know these mischiefs of sin by the threatenings of the word, than by our own bitter experience. It is sin that separates from God, and renders us incapable of all blessings.

Use 1. Study yourselves, and take a view of the case and state of your souls by the glass of the word; see what you gain by every reading, hearing, every time you converse with him, what is given out to convince you of sin, or awaken your soul against sin.

Use 2. When you consult with the word, beg the light of the Spirit, which is only lively and efficacious. The apostle speaks of knowing things in the evidence and 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power,' 1 Cor. ii. 4. There is the same demonstration of the Spirit. There is a manifest difference between the evidence of reason and arguments held out from a natural understanding, and between the illumination or the demonstration of the Spirit. There are many that may have a full knowledge of the letter and the sense of the words, as they lie open to the evidence of reason, yet be without the light and power of those truths, for that is a fruit of the demonstration of the Spirit, the lively light of the Holy Ghost that goes along with the word.

SERMON CXII.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.—

VER. 105.

THE present world, as much as it suits with our carnal nature, it is but like a howling wilderness with respect to Canaan, in which there

are many crooked paths and dangerous precipices, yea, many privy snares and secret ambushes laid for us by the devil and his instruments; so that unless we have a faithful guide, a clear, full, and sure direction, we shall certainly miscarry, and every day run into the mouth of a thousand mischiefs. Now God, out of his abundant mercy, hath given us a light, a rule to walk by, to set us clear from these rocks and precipices, and to guide us safe to true happiness. And what is this light? It is his word; so David acknowledgeth in this verse, *thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto ym path.*

Here you may observe—(1.) The double notion by which the direction of the word is set forth. (2.) You have the object, or the matter wherein we are directed; that also is expressed by a double notion, ‘It is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.’ Let me explain these a little.

1. The two notions whereby the direction is expressed, it is *a light*, that is a more general expression; the other is more particular, it is *a lamp*, possibly with allusion to the lamp of the sanctuary. The use of a lamp is to light in the night, and the light shines in the day. The word of God is both a light and lamp; it is of use to us by day and night, in all conditions, in adversity, in prosperity, in all the conditions we pass through in this world. Chrysostom hath an observation, but I doubt a little too curious, *ὁ νόμος λύκνος ὀνομάζεται, ὁ Χρῖστος νόος*¹ *τῆς δικαιοσύνης*, saith he—The law shineth in narrow limits, within small bounds, therefore that is called a lamp; but Christ, in the gospel, is called a son¹ of righteousness.

2. Let us come to the term by which the object is expressed, *path* and *feet*. By *path* is meant our general choice and course of life; the law will direct to that; not only so, but it is a light to our *feet*, that is, will direct us in every step, in every particular action.

Doct. That the word of God is a clear and a full rule to direct us in all the conditions and affairs of the present life.

It is a clear rule, for it is called a lamp; and it is a full rule, for it is a lamp not only for our path, but for our feet. I shall speak of both severally, that it is a lamp and a light.

First, It is a clear rule, and therefore called a light, and that in three regards:—

1. By reason of its direction, as it shows us the right way to our desired end. He that would come to his journey’s end needs a way, and needs a light to see and find it out. Our end is eternal life, and that to be enjoyed in heaven: Prov. vi. 23, ‘The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.’ God hath stated the way that leads to eternal happiness by his wisdom and justice, and revealed it in the scriptures. See that place, Ps. xliii. 3, ‘Oh, send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.’ We should have wandered up and down in various uncertainties, and have neither pitched upon the right end nor way, but have lost ourselves in a maze of perplexities, if God had not sent forth his light and truth. Austin reckons up two hundred and eighty-eight opinions about the

¹ Qu. ἥλιος, and ‘sun’?—ED.

chiefest good. Men are seeking out many inventions, looking here and there to find happiness, but God hath showed the true way.

2. It is a light in regard of conviction, as it convinceth of all errors and mistakes both in judgment and practice—*Verum est index sui et obliqui*. In this respect it is said, Eph. v. 13, because of this convincing light that is in the word, ‘All things that are reprov’d, are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.’ It discovereth to us our sins as well as our duties; light doth manifest itself, and make all other things manifest. Now this convictive power of the word is double—by way of prevention, and by way of reproof.

[1.] By way of prevention. The word of God shows us our danger, pits, precipices, and stumbling-blocks that lie in our way to heaven; it shows us both our food and our poison, and therefore he that walks according to the direction of the word is prevented from falling into a great deal of mischief: 1 John ii. 10, 11, ‘He that abideth in the light, there is none occasion of stumbling in him: but he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.’ The meaning of that place is this, he that walks according to the light of scripture, and lives in obedience thereto, avoids stumbling; but he that is blinded by his own passion, he wants his light, knows not whither he goes, neither in what way he goes—*respectu vite, et respectu termini*. What will be the end of his going? He mistakes the way, sins for duties, and good for evil; or he mistakes the end, thinking he is going to heaven, when he is in the highway to hell.

[2.] By way of humiliation and reproof, it discovers our sins to us in their own colours, so as to affect the heart, yea, our secret sins, which could not be found out by any other light: 1 Cor. xiv. 24, ‘When he that believeth not, or is unlearned, comes in, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all.’ The light of the word it brings a sinner upon his face, makes him fall down, acknowledging the majesty of God in his word. God’s word it hath his signature upon it, it is like himself, and bewrayeth its author by its convictive power and majesty. So it is notable, Heb. iv. 12, 13, ‘The word of God is quick and powerful, &c., and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.’ Mark what he had said of the word. He proves the properties of the word by the properties of God; that God searcheth all things, God’s word is like himself.

3. It is light in regard of comfort: Eccles. xi. 7, ‘Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun;’ especially to those that have been shut up in darkness, and kept in a dungeon. Oh, it is a pleasant thing to behold the light again! So is the word of God light in this sense, to relieve us in all the dark and gloomy passages of the present life.

[1.] In outward darkness. When all outward comforts fail, and have spent their allowance, the comforts of the word are left; there is enough to support and strengthen our hearts in waiting upon God: Ps. xxiii. 4, ‘When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.’ The staff and rod they are instruments of a shepherd,

and Christ is our spiritual shepherd, so that this staff and rod are his word and Spirit, they are the instruments of the spiritual shepherd; and this comforts us when we are in the shadow of death; in our crosses, in confusions and difficulties, when we have nothing else left but the promises, this is a reviving to the soul.

[2.] It is a comfort and refreshing to us in spiritual troubles, that arise from the guilt of sin, and want of the sense of God's love: Isa. 1. 10, 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.' What shall he do? Shall he compass himself about in his own sparks? Oh, how miserable are we then! No; but let him depend upon God according to his promise. The word of God is a great part of his name; let him stay his heart upon the word of God, when he walketh in darkness, and seeth no light.

Now, that the word of God is such a light, such a sure and clear direction, I shall—(1.) Give a direct proof of it from scripture; (2.) Some types of it; (3.) Prove it by experience; (4.) By reason.

1. For the proof from scripture, you have the notions of the text. So Prov. vi. 23, 'The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light.' It is that which keeps us from stumbling. So 2 Peter i. 19, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.' The world is a dark place. Ay! but now here is a light that shines in a dark place, and that is the Holy Scripture, 'the sure word of prophecy;' it sheweth us our way to heaven, and prevents us from stumbling into hell.

2. To prove it by types. Two types I shall mention; one is, Israel being directed by the pillar of a cloud; the other is, the lamp of the sanctuary.

[1.] The type of Israel's being directed by the pillar of the cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, till they came into the land of Canaan. Exod. xiii. 21. Still they moved up and down, hither and thither, as the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire went before them. Thus our whole course is to be ordered by God's direction. See how this type is expressed, Neh. ix. 19, 'The pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day to lead them in the way, neither the pillar of fire by night to show them light, and the way wherein they should go.' Mark, when they were in the wilderness, the pillar of cloud and fire showed them the way where they were to go; this is an emblem of the safe conduct the church may expect from Christ Jesus in all ages; God's pillar departed not from them by night nor day. So while we are travelling in the wilderness of this our pilgrimage, his word and Spirit is continued to us. When they entered into Canaan, that was a type of heaven, then this pillar of cloud was removed. It is notable, Josh. xiv., when Israel passed over Jordan, we do not read the pillar went before them, but the ark of God was carried before them. So when the church comes to heaven, the resting-place, then this conduct ceaseth; the word hath no more use. Jesus Christ, as the great shepherd, leads his flock into their everlasting fold.

[2.] The other type was the lamp of the sanctuary; we read of that, Exod. xxvii. 20, 21. There was a great lamp hung upon the veil, to

distinguish the holy of holies from the other part of the tabernacle, and was fed with pure oil-olive, and this lamp was prepared and trimmed up by the priest daily. Now what did this lamp signify? Mark the application. This pure olive-oil signified God's pure word; without the mixture of human traditions; this hung up in the veil, shined in the church, and every day it was prepared, furnished, set forth by them that are called thereunto, for the use of the faithful.

3. Let me prove it by experience, that the word is such a sure direction.

[1.] Because natural men have a sense of it, and upon that account fear it. See John iii. 20, 21, 'Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.' Natural men will not come to the word, they fear it as discovering, and therefore never feel it as refreshing. Evil-doers hate the light; they are afraid of the word lest it should convince them, and discover them to themselves; therefore they stand off, and shun all means of closing with it; there is such conviction in the oar,¹ a secret jealousy of the searching power that is in the word of God.

[2.] Godly men do find a great deal of comfort and satisfaction from this light as to all the doubts and fears of the soul: Ps. xix. 8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' All their scruples vanish; here is an apt and fit doctrine accommodated to the heart of man. A man hath never true and rational delight till he is fully satisfied in point of religion, till he can have rest for his soul, and commodious notions of God. Now, if you would have rest for your souls, Jer. vi. 16, here it is, the children of God find it. There is a fair compliance in this doctrine with all those natural principles and ingrafted notions within us concerning God and his will; they find satisfaction in it to conscience, though not to fond curiosity; the one is necessary, the other dangerous and unprofitable. Christians! there is a great deal of difference between these two, satisfying conscience and satisfying curiosity, as much as between quenching the thirst of a sober man and satisfying the lust and appetite of a drunkard. Here is enough to satisfy conscience, a fair accommodation of excellent truths to a reasonable nature, truths becoming God, truths suiting with the heart of man, and therefore here they find it to be light, that is a sure direction. The wicked feel the discovery of it, and the saints feel the impression of it.

[3.] We have this external and outward experience to assure us of our rule and light that shines in the word of God, because those that go against this light and direction do sensibly miscarry, and are sure to split themselves upon some rock or other. Our first parent, Adam, when he hearkened to the voice of the serpent rather than the voice of the Lord, destroyed himself and all his posterity. As long as he obeyed the word of God, he remained in a blessed estate in paradise, but when he gave heed to other counsels, he was cast out of paradise, and rendered liable to many sorrows, yea, eternal death. So all that walk in the imagination of their own hearts, and have not light from the word, they presently run themselves into sundry mischiefs. The young pro-

¹ Qu. 'ore'? That is, in a rudimentary state.—ED.

phet is an instance of this, 1 Kings xiii. 21. To go to particular instances would be innumerable, every day's experience will furnish us with enough of this; they that will not take the light of God's word, stumble upon dark mountains, for God hath owned his word to a tittle, owned both the tables: Rom. i. 18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven,' &c.; from heaven, by the effects of his wrath. If men be ungodly and unrighteous, they are punished; nay, not only in the general, but in particular: Heb. ii. 2, 'For if the word spoken by angels were steadfast'—why?—'for every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' By every transgression he means a sin of omission; by every disobedience, a sin of commission. And as he will do so for sins against the law, so sins against the gospel; that place where the gospel was first propounded smarted for the neglect of it: 1 Thes. ii. 16, 'Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost,' for despising the gospel. And still God secures the certainty of our direction by new judgments; those that will go contrary to the word, turn aside to paths of their own, they perish in their devices.

4. Let me prove it by reasons that certainly the word must needs be light, that is, a clear and sure direction. I prove it from the author, the instruments, and penmen, and from the ends why God hath given the word.

[1.] From the author of it, it is God's word. Everything that comes from God hath some resemblance of his majesty: 'God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all,' 1 John i. 5. His word is light. If God would give us anything to direct us, it must needs be clear and sure, it must have light. As at first God gave reason to direct man: John i. 4, 'That life was the light of men;' as it came from God, before it was weakened by the fall, it was a full direction, it discovered its author; and now since the fall, still it discovers its author. Conscience, which remains with us, it is called 'the candle of the Lord,' Prov. xx. 27. From a glorious sun now it is dwindled to a candle, yet it is called the candle of the Lord; it is a candle lighted by God himself. The understanding and conscience that is privy to our most secret motions, thoughts, and actions; though it may be maimed and lessened by sin, it is sensible of some distinction between good and evil, and acts God's part in the soul, sometimes condemning, sometimes approving, accusing and excusing by turns, Rom. ii. 15. But, alas! if we were only left to this light, we should be for ever miserable. The light of reason is too short for us now, and there is a double reason; partly, because our chief good and last end being altered by sin, we shall strangely mistake things, if we weigh them in the balance of the flesh, which we seek to please. Now our chief good is altered, or rather we are apt to mistake it; all our business is to please the flesh, and to gratify lust and appetite, Ps. xlix. 12. Therefore go to a man led by carnal and unsanctified reason, he shall 'put light for darkness, and darkness for light; good for evil, and evil for good,' Isa. v. 20. He shall confound the names and natures of things, so miserably grope in the dark, and not find out the way to true happiness, either stumbling, dashing his foot against a stone, or wander out of the way in a maze of a thousand uncertainties; therefore it is a blessed thing not to be left to this candle of reason, the light within us, for that will not guide

us, but God hath drawn a straight line for us to heaven, which if we follow we cannot miss. Again, partly because man's condition since the fall is such that he needs a supernatural remedy; before he can be happy, he needs a redeemer. Now the gift of a redeemer depending upon the free grace of God, cannot be found out by natural light, for that can only judge of things necessary, and not of such things as depend upon the arbitrary love of God, therefore this light cannot guide, John iii. 16. Well, then, because the candle of the Lord that is within us is not enough to direct us, God hath set up a lamp in the sanctuary to give us light, and to guide us in the pursuit of true happiness, and that is the scripture. Now, if they have God for their author, surely they must needs be clear and full, for nothing indited by his Spirit can be dark, confused, and inconveniently expressed, either with respect to the things revealed, or to the persons to whom this revelation is made. For if God should speak darkly (here is my argument), especially in necessary things, it is either because God could not speak otherwise, or would not. The former is direct blasphemy; he that made the eye, cannot he see? and he that made the mouth, cannot he speak plainly and intelligibly to his people, so as to be understood by them? And the latter cannot be said, that God would not, for that is contrary to his goodness and love to mankind: Ps. xxv. 8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way.' If this be true, that God is a just good God, he will teach us plainly; the Psalmist infers it, he is just, and will not lead us wrong; he is an upright God, and he is a good God; and therefore, though we have fallen from the state of our creation, though the candle of the Lord burn dim in our hearts since the fall, yet he is a good God, therefore he will show us the way. Now it is not to be imagined that there should not be light in the word of God, that that should be dark, confused, and unintelligible; that the most powerful and wise monarch, and most loving of all, that he should write a book to teach men the way to heaven, and do it so cloudily, that we cannot tell what to make of it. Therefore if God be the author, this book must be true; here must be light, a clear and sure direction to guide us in all our ways.

[2.] I prove it by reason again, from the instruments used in this work. Shall I take those words for my groundwork? 2 Peter i. 21, 'For the prophecy came not, in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;' that is, it is not the fancies or dictates of men, but the word of God; for they were holy men, and holy men guided by the Holy Ghost, and so guided as that they were moved, borne up by the special motion of the Spirit. Let me reason thus: those that God hath employed to deliver his mind to the world, look either to the prophets of the Old Testament or apostles of the New, and you will find them to be holy men, burning with zeal for God and love to souls; and it is not to be imagined that they would deliver God's mind so darkly that nobody could understand their meaning. Christians they were, not men that were to act a part of their own upon the stage of the world, not men that aimed at ostentation of wisdom and curiosity of science; but they were holy men, they were free from ambition and envy, and other such vile affections, which are wont to make writers to affect obscurity;

therefore in all simplicity of style, plainness of heart, and faithfulness to their message, they minded their master's honour and the people's good; they renounced pomp of words and lofty speculations, minded that people might understand the mind of God published by them. As they were holy men, so they were acted by the Spirit of God. Now the Spirit of God is not a spirit of darkness but a spirit of light, which gives understanding to all men, therefore they spake luminously and clearly. Nay, they were not only acted by the Spirit, but they were borne up by the Spirit, carried by the Holy Ghost while they were employed in this work, publishing the mind of God to the church; they were carried beyond the line of their natural spirits, by an extraordinary impulse infallibly borne up, so that they could not err and miscarry. Now from such holy men that were not swayed by ambition and private aims, so guided, so acted by the Spirit, what can be expected but what is sure, clear, and plain?

[3.] I argue and reason again from the end of God in giving us the scriptures; all which doth clearly infer that here is a sure and plain direction that will lead you to heaven. There is a fourfold end wherefore God hath given us the scriptures:—

(1.) That by this means heavenly doctrine might be kept free from corruption, that men might not obtrude articles of faith upon us and fancies of their own brain, that heavenly doctrine might be put into a stated course and kept pure from corruption. When mankind sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, it was necessary that one way or other they should have light, that God by some way or other would reveal his mind to them, either by word of mouth or by writing. Now God did it by oracles and extraordinary messages at first, while there were but few truths revealed, and such as did not much burden the memory, and while men were long-lived, and so could a great while avouch their message from God, and while they were of great simplicity, and the church was confined to a few men, to a few families, within a small compass of ground, not liable to those miseries and changes now in latter days. Before Christ came it was fit God should send his messengers; but now in these latter days, when he hath spoken to us by his Son, Heb. i. 1, it is fit the rule of faith should be closed up. It is not for the honour of the Son of God that after him should come any extraordinary nuncio or ambassador from heaven, as if he had not fully discovered his Father's mind. Well, then, therefore God hath put all his messages into writing for the use of after-ages, and for this end that there might be some public standard for trying of things by. Now God's end would not be accomplished if this writing were not clear. Here is the argument, the world would be left at great uncertainties, far more than in old time, and so this end for preserving truth for the use and direction of the church would be wholly lost. Well, then, if God will make a writing serve instead of extraordinary messages, which brought their own evidence with them, certainly he will not put it into words liable to mistake, but that are intelligible. Wisdom saith, Prov. viii. 9, 'They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.' Certainly they that come in simplicity of heart, with a mind to learn God's will, not to cavil, they may know.

(2.) God's end in setting forth the scripture was that it might be read of all ages and of all sexes, as the book of the law was to be read in the congregation before the men, women, little ones, and strangers, Deut. xxi.; from day to day it was read in the synagogue, Acts xv. 21; and God would have them teach their children, Deut. vi. 6; and Timothy is commended for reading the scriptures from his youth, 2 Tim. iii. 5. And the apostles do express themselves to be 'debtors both to the wise and unwise, to Greeks and barbarians,' Rom. i. 14, to speak wisdom to the wise and plainness to the simple; and St John he writes to children and young men and fathers, 1 John ii. 13. Well, then, here is my argument, if God would write a book to be read by men, women, children, all sorts, surely it is that all might understand, not that they might repeat it by rote, and toss the words of it in their mouths as parrots do words they understand not; surely, then, they are compiled to profit all.

(3.) God's end in giving the word was for converting of men, or leaving them without excuse. Now take either end, and it shows there must be a plain direction. If for converting of men, then it must be so plain that it may be understood by them, for there is nothing gets to the heart but by the understanding: 'After I was instructed I smote upon my thigh.' And all influences are conveyed by light, and if God gains any heart it is by teaching and by light. Or if it were for leaving them without excuse, it must be by a clear revealing of his will, otherwise they might pretend obscurity. The apostle pleads this, 2 Cor. iv. 2-4; saith the apostle, there is such plain truth in the gospel that every man's conscience may take it up if he will; and if they cannot see the majesty of God in this doctrine they are blinded by Satan; the fault is not in gospel light, but in their own eyes; they cannot complain of God, but of themselves.

(4.) The end is, that it might be a rule of faith and manners by which all doctrines are to be tried. A rule of faith: Isa. viii. 20, 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' And Acts xvii. 11, 'They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.' So to be a rule of manners: Gal. vi. 16, 'As many as walk according to this rule,' &c. There are many actions which God requireth of us that expose us to great difficulty and hazard. Now, before the heart be gained to them, we had need have a plain proof that it is the will of God; for who will venture his all unless he have a clear warrant, that knows whither he goes, and whither to look for amends, if he suffer the loss of all things? Thus there is light in the word.

Secondly, But now it is a full direction, for David speaks it of his feet and path.

1. In general observe this: it is not a light to our brains to fill us with empty notions, but a light to our feet to regulate our practice and to guide our actions, Jer. vi. 16. He doth not say, *hearken after* the true religion, but *walk therein*. For a man to study the scripture only to satisfy curiosity, only to know what is right and good, and not follow it with all his heart, is but to make a rod for his own back, and doth but cause his own condemnation to be sore and terrible, Luke

xii. 47. To be able to dispute for truth and not lie under the power of it, to avoid heresy and live in vice, will never bring him to heaven, Gal. vi. 16. It is not them that are able to talk of it, but to 'walk according to this rule;' not to play with it, but to work with it. Knowledge and practice must be joined together; they do never well asunder, but excellent together.

2. In our practice.

[1.] Our path, our general choice. A man that consults with God's word, 'The Lord will teach him the way that he shall choose,' Ps. xxv. 12. Everything appointed to an end must have all things absolutely necessary to that end, else it is not perfect in its kind; though perfect to guide us to eternal life; therefore it must contain all things that belong or conduce to that end. It is not a rule given us to be rich or safe, but to be eternally happy.

[2.] As it is a light to our path, so to our feet. How? In the particular actions that we perform, and in the particular conditions that we pass through.

(1.) In the particular actions that we perform. Every action we go about must be guided by the word. Why? Because obedience in particular actions we are most apt to miscarry in. Many are wise in generals, but in particulars they quite mistake their way. We have general notions that we must be holy; ay! but we are not 'holy in all manner of conversation,' 1 Peter i. 15. In every creek and turning of our lives, in all our actions of eating, drinking, sleeping, and waking, we are to be mindful and respect the command of God in all these. No path of a Christian's conversation but ought to savour of grace and holiness; not only his religious, but his common and civil actions. Every action is a step to heaven or hell, for this life is compared to a walk, and in a walk every step brings us onward in our way. Briefly, in every act, either sin or grace interposeth, therefore we had need look to every step, and still to walk according to rule.

(2.) It guides us in all the conditions that we pass through. In every age; here is milk for the weak, and strong meat for men of ripe age. In every calling, from the king to the lowest beggar. In every state of life, adversity, prosperity, still here is light for you.

There are two parties whose interest it is to decry the clearness of scripture, papists and libertines. Papists, they are afraid to stand to this trial, they would bring all to the judgment of the church; therefore, it is for their interest that the scriptures were not a clear, safe, and a full direction. Libertines, they decry the clearness of scripture upon several grounds. Those that plead for a boundless toleration, what is their great argument? Nothing is certain in religion. If the word be a clear rule, then, &c.

SERMON CXIII.

The word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.—
VER. 105.

HERE I shall answer five objections that are made by cavillers.

Object. 1. First, If it be so clear a light, why do men so often mistake that have the scriptures, and consult with them? yea, why is there such differences among good men?

Ans. I answer, in general, there is light in the scriptures, but there is darkness in men that are conversant about them. The object may be well represented when the faculty is not well disposed. There are defects in them to whom this discovery is made; though they have light, yet they want eyes. The sun giveth light enough, though blind men cannot see it; the word doth whatsoever is necessary on its own part. To the beholding of anything by the outward sense, there must not only be light to make the object conspicuous, but also a faculty of seeing in the eye; blind men cannot see at noonday, nor the sharpest-sighted at midnight. There is light in the scriptures surely, for God would not deal hypocritically with us that are his people; if he hath given us a rule, he would not wrap it up in darkness, so as we should not know his meaning; so that the defect is in us. This in general.

But, secondly, there are many causes of men's mistake.

1. Some come to the word with a presumption of their own wit, and leaning upon their own understanding, as if that should discover the whole counsel of God, and these God never undertook to teach: Ps. xxv. 9, 'The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.' Those that, in a humble sense of their own nothingness, depend upon his direction, them will he teach: James i. 21, 'Receive with meekness the ingrafted word of God.' We have caution given us, and admonitions against pride and arrogance and self-dependence, Prov. iii. 3-6.

2. Many bring their prejudicate opinions along with them, and are biassed and prepossessed before they come to the word of God, and so do not so much take up the sense which the scriptures offer, as seek to impose their own sense on them, and regulate the scriptures to their own hearts, not regulating their hearts and principles and senses according to the word of God. *Optimus ille lector est*, saith Hilary, *qui dictorum intelligentiam expectat*, &c. That mind which is preoccupied with evil opinions, and enslaved to preconceived conclusions, they do not take anything from the word, but impose something upon it which God never revealed there. If the weights be equal, yet if the balance be not equipendent, wrong may be done. They come with an idol in their own hearts, Ezek. xiv. 2, as those that would ask counsel of the Lord, that were resolved beforehand, Jer. xlii. While we look through the spectacles of our own fancies and preconceptions, the mind, poisoned with error, seemeth to see what we see not.

3. Some search the scriptures not out of any love to the truth, or to know the mind of God, but to oppose it rather, and so seek a pretence from thence to justify their private faction in way of opposition

against God. The devil gets scripture to wrest it to his own purpose, Mat. iv. 6. They read not to be better, but to cavil, and put a greater varnish upon the devil's cause, as Julian did search the scriptures to pick an advantage against the true religion, and scoff at them that professed it; and Herod inquired after the place where Jesus was born, not to adore him, but to kill him, Mat. ii. 8. Our great rule is, John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' When you come to study the scriptures, to be the better for them, and not to cavil, then you are in the way to find profit from them.

4. Some come to the word leavened with some carnal affections, and so their hearts are blinded by their lusts and passion: 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4, 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.' There is evidence enough in the truth, but their hearts are wedded to their sins, and so cannot see it; they are ambitious, and seek after honour and worldly greatness; and the whole bent and scope of the scripture being against their design, they can never have a perfect understanding of it; their hearts are full of avarice, earthly-mindedness, and some other beloved sin that they cherish, which doth defile all that they touch, even the very word of God. Hag. ii. 13, A man that was unclean by a dead body, whatsoever he touched was also unclean, even holy things; and, Titus i. 15, 'To the impure all things are impure;' and so by the just judgment of God are blinded and hardened in their own prejudices, for the light they have hindereth them from discerning the truth.

5. Some content themselves with some superficial apprehensions, and do not dig deep in the mines of knowledge, and therefore no wonder they mistake in many things: Prov. ii. 4, 5, 'If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.' No excellent things are to be had without pain and industry and search; certainly the knowledge of God's word must cost us great pains.

6. Where men are right in the main, and give diligence to know God's mind, there will be mistakes in lesser things. All have not parts alike, and gifts and graces alike, and therefore there is some variety of opinions and interpretations of scripture among the godly wise. Every man is not so happy to be so well studied, nor hath not that ability to understand, nor so furnished with acquired helps of arts and tongues, nor such a degree of the Spirit. There is a difference in age, growth, and experience among good men; some are babes, and some grown in years in Christianity, Phil. iii. 15. Grace is bewrayed in knowledge, as well as in holiness.

Object. 2. If there be such a light in the scriptures, what need is there of the Spirit?

Ans. I answer—The scriptures are the means of light, the Spirit is the author of light, both together enlighten the eyes, Ps. xix. 8. These two must be taken in conjunction, not in exclusion. To pretend to the Spirit and neglect the scriptures, makes way for error and fond conceits: Isa. viii. 20, 'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Light is not contrary to light; so to study the scriptures, and neglect

the Spirit, who 'searcheth out the deep things of God,' 1 Cor. ii. 11, leaveth us in darkness about God's mind. The object to be known is fixed in the scriptures, but the faculty that knoweth must be enlightened by the Spirit. There is a literal understanding of the scriptures and a spiritual understanding, 1 Cor. ii. 14. Now, as to the spiritual understanding of them, there needs the Spirit, 'for the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit;' so that here is a fair correspondence between the word and the Spirit.

Object. 3. If the scriptures be so plain, what need of the ministry?

Ans. 1. I answer—It is God's institution, and we must submit to it, though we could see no reason for it. That it is God's institution is plain, for he hath set some in the church, not only apostles and prophets, but pastors and teachers, to apply scriptures to us; and, 1 Cor. i. 21, 'It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' If there were no reason but this, because it is God's institution, we should submit to it.

2. The use of the ministry is to explain and vindicate truth. Men darken counsel with words, and render plain things obscure by their litigations and unprofitable debates. Now they are set for the defence of the truth, εἰς ἀπολόγιστον, Phil. i. 7. And the ministry must be ἀντεχόμενος, Titus i. 9, 'Able to convince the gainsayers;' good at holding and drawing; it is the human help for weak understandings. The eunuch was reading, and could not tell what to make of it, then God sent him an interpreter, Acts viii. Now God's help should not be despised; when he will employ men to solve doubts, to guide us in our way to heaven, we should thankfully accept of it, rather than quarrel at the institution.

3. They are of use to apply generals to particular cases, and to teach us how to deduce genuine inferences from those truths laid down in the scriptures. Mal. ii. 7, in this sense it is said, 'The priest's lips should preserve knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.' God hath appointed this office to some, to solve the doubts that do arise about particular exigencies and cases, and to make out the mind of God to his people, otherwise they need go no farther than the tables and books of Moses to seek the law; but God hath appointed some in the church that are skilled in consequences and deductions, to raise matter therefrom, so that it is a minister's work to open and explain scripture.

4. There is a use of the ministry to keep doctrines still afoot in the church, and to keep us in remembrance. Ministers are the Lord's remembrancers; it is a great part of their office to mind people of their duty. The word is a light, but it must be set in the candlestick of the church; they are to hold out the light for our direction and guidance.

5. There is a peculiar blessing and efficacy to a Christian from their calling: Mat. xxviii. 20, 'Lo, I am with you to the end of the world.'

Object. 4. It is said, 2 Peter iii. 16, that there are some things hard to be understood, therefore how should it be a clear rule to us? Thereupon many take occasion to tax the scriptures of obscurity, and cry out that nothing is certain in religion, and so hinder and discourage men from the study of the word.

Ans. 1. I answer—The apostle saith there are *δυσνόητα*, some things *hard* to be understood, but doth not say there are *ἀνόητα*, things that *cannot* be understood; not there are things impossible to be understood, but there is some difficulty in them, to exercise our diligence, to subdue our pride, for the humbling of us, for the prevention of the contempt of things easy and plain, that are soon despised, to excite us to prayer for knowledge, to avoid satiety in this holy banquet.

2. The second thing that I answer is this; he doth not say there are *πολλὰ*, but *τίνα*; *many* things, but *some*. Though there are some things propounded which are difficult, to exercise our diligence, yet other things are plainly delivered, to invite our search. *Multa sunt aperta et manifesta* (saith Austin) *unde aperiuntur*, &c. Though there are some things obscure, there are many things will help to clear them, and whatsoever is necessary to salvation is clear. There are some things hidden like spots in the moon and stones in the earth, things that serve for plenitude of knowledge and curiosity. He saith these things are hid, but now things necessary to salvation are made obvious to us; as water and bread, they are not hard to come by, but gold and silver is hid in the bowels of the earth; and therefore though there be some things hard to be understood, he doth not say they are not to be understood. Now the question between us and the papists is not, whether some things in the scripture be obscure, but whether they be so obscure as that people ought not to read them, or cannot with any profit, and that there can be no certainty thence deduced? As to the defining things controverted in matters necessary to salvation, we say there are some things hard to be understood, to keep us humble, to quicken us to pray for the Spirit, yet for the most part God's mind is plain and easy to be understood by them that humbly depend upon Christ teaching in the use of the appointed means.

Object. 5. Another objection is from experience; a poor Christian complaineth, as Job xix. 8, 'He hath set darkness in my path that I cannot pass.' They would fain know the mind of God in some particular cases, but they cannot see it.

Ans. I answer—This darkness of ours should not be urged to the disparagement of the word. We are under many doubts, we are divided between light and interest, we puzzle and grope, and would reconcile the light of the scriptures and our interests together, but this should not disparage the word. The scriptures complain of our darkness, not of its own, and the saints always say, Lord, do not make a plainer law; but open our eyes, in the 18th verse of this psalm; this is Chrysostom's gloss upon that place. When a man walketh in the way of his own heart, his way may be darkness, and he may stumble, and know not whither he goeth. But you that give up yourselves sincerely to the directions of his word, he will make your path clear and plain before you; that is, when you seek nothing but God's glory, and your own eternal salvation for your end, and come with a humble meek mind to seek God's counsel, being free from the preoccupations of self-conceits, being resolved to follow God's directions whatever they be, and use that diligence which is necessary; you will not be long kept in the dark.

Use 1.—[1.] To inform us how to answer this question, how to know whether the scriptures be the word of God. It shows itself, and evidenceth itself to be so; for it is a light that discovers itself, and all things else, without any other testimony. When the sun is up, there needs no witness and proof that it is light. Let the least child bring a candle into a room, and as it discovers other things, so it discovers itself. So the word of God is that which discovers itself to us, yea, it hath a self-evidencing light.

[2.] If the word be a light, it informs us, then, there is none that are above the scriptures. There is a fond conceit that men take up, that the scriptures are for novices and young beginners, not for strong Christians. David was no novice, yet he saith, 'Thy word is a light.' And Daniel was no novice, yet he got understanding by the prophecy of the prophet Jeremiah, Dan. ix. 2. Timothy was no novice, who was to 'give attendance to reading, and exhortation, and doctrine,' 1 Tim. iv. 13. Aye! but what is meant by that place, 2 Peter i. 19? 'We have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.' From thence many gather that as soon as Christ is revealed in us, we should not look after the scriptures, for it is said, 'until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.' Some understand this place of the light of glory, and others of the light of the gospel; you do well to take heed to the Old Testament light, till you have the New Testament light, which is most agreeable to the mind of God. For my part, I pitch upon the former, and shall understand it of the dawning of eternity, or Christ's second coming, which is called in scripture a day which shall then begin and never be ended, after which there is no night, nor any other day, but a blessed eternity; and sometimes it is called 'the day,' 2 Tim. iv. 8, and 'that day,' 1 Thes. v. 4; and Christ is called 'the bright morning star,' Rev. xxii. 16, and 'the glorious' shall shine like the morning stars, Dan. xii. 3, and Rev. ii. 28. Our happiness is expressed by a day-star; so that the meaning is, take heed unto this word until the day of eternity dawn upon you, till you come to the light of glory, till you have a greater light than that of the gospel.

Now, I rather pitch upon this interpretation, because they to whom the apostle wrote were converted Jews, and did not only own the Old Testament, but had already received the gospel light, the day-star was risen upon their hearts, so that he bids them take heed to the sure word of prophecy, till the light of glory was revealed to them. I know there are some divines understand it of a more clear and plentiful knowledge of the gospel, who take prophecy to be the scriptures of the Old Testament that they were to take heed to, till the gospel light did arise upon them; and the times of the Old Testament were called night, Rom. xiii. 12, but now the gospel time is called day. But if it be understood thus, then some say that the law must be cast off when the gospel appeared to them, because it is said, 'until the day.' Those divines explain themselves safely enough herein, for, say they, *until* doth not always note *terminum temporis*, the end of time, but *continuationem actus*, the continuation of the act, until the time, and

¹ Qu. 'wise'?—ED.

afterwards, as it is spoken in other scriptures, 'their sin shall not be blotted out till they die,' that is never ; but for the former reason that I have given before, I think it is meant of the light of glory.

Use 2. Reproof.—[1.] Of those that walk in the midst of this light, and yet perceive no more of the things of God, than if they were in darkness, these lose the benefit which God vouchsafeth to them : John i. 5, 'The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not ;' and John iii. 19, 'The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.' It had been better for them they had never heard of the scriptures, and that God had never set up such a lamp in the church. These men believe the word of God is a light and a lamp, yet never take care of, nor give heed to it ; they are careless, and never measure their actions according to this rule.

[2.] It reproves those that set up another rule, and look for an infallible interpreter.

(1.) Those that set up reason instead of the word of God. Alas ! this is an imperfect rule ; these men would bring down all things before the tribunal of their own reason ; these are not disciples of Christ, but masters ; they will not be taught by the directions of the word, but by their own dark hearts. I have told you the candle of the Lord did burn bright within us ; but alas ! now it is weakened by sin, it is an imperfect irrational thing, we can never be saved by it.

(2.) Others are guided by their passions and lusts ; this is their direction and their lamp ; this will surely lead them to utter darkness : 'If you live after the flesh, you shall die,' Rom. viii. 13.

(3.) Some take the counsel and example of others, this will leave them comfortless, and make them fall into the snare.

(4.) Some go to witches in straits, as the prophet reproves such, Isa. viii. 19, 20, 'Should not a people seek unto their God ?'

(5.) Others expect new revelations from heaven to counsel them ; they would converse with angels now God hath spoken to us by his Son : Gal. i. 8, 'If an angel from heaven should bring another gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.'

Use 3. Caution to enterprise nothing but what you have a warrant for out of the word of God. When you are going about any action, say, Where is my warrant ? If I do it upon my own brain, I must stand to my own hazard ; and all the evil that comes upon me, it is the fruit of my own counsel. Num. xxvii. 21, the priest was to ask counsel of the Lord, who shall go out, and who shall go in ; and 1 Sam. xxiii. 9, 10. To do things with a doubting conscience, with an uncertainty, whether it be good or bad, it is a sin ; for 'whatsoever is not of faith, is sin ;' still seek your direction from the word.

Use 4.—[1.] It exhorts us to bless God, and be thankful for this light : Isa. ix. 2, 'The people that sat in darkness saw great light.' There is the same difference between the church and other places, as there was between Egypt and Goshen, Exod. x. 23. Here is light, and in other places thick darkness. What a mercy it is that we have present direction, a light to guide us here in grace, that will bring us to glory. Give thanks to God for so great a benefit.

[2.] Walk according to the directions of the word ; walk in the light, Eph. v. 8 ; believe it, Heb. iv. 2, the true and infallible truth

that came out of God's mouth; and then apply it; say, This truth which is spoken is spoken to me, Mat. xiii. 37, and urge thy heart with the duties of it; this was spoken for our learning, be persuaded of this truth, and so walk and so do, and you shall not find any miscarriage, 1 Cor. xv. 58. Here is my warrant and my direction, I will keep to it, though it expose me to many hazards and straits, I know it will be made up at last, it will not be lost labour to do what God biddeth thee to do.

SERMON CXIV.

I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.—VER. 106.

IN the former verse David had commended the word for a sure direction; it is a light and a lamp. How so? Not only by God's designation and appointment, but by David's choice, 'It was a light to my feet, and a lamp to my steps.' Now, in this verse, he speaks of his firmness and constancy to that choice; I have taken thy word for my guidance and direction, and there he did resolve to stick. His constancy was grounded upon a vow, or upon a promissory oath, which he saw no cause to retract or repent of: 'I have sworn, and I will perform it,' &c.

In which words you may observe—

1. The strength of David's resolution and purpose, expressed in his oath; not I must, or I will keep, but *I have sworn*, &c.

2. The matter of this purpose or oath, and that was to *keep God's judgments*.

3. One great motive and reason that inclined him so to do, in the word, *thy righteous judgments*; the marvellous equity that was to be observed in the things commanded by God.

4. The conscience that lay upon him of observing this oath, *I will perform it*. As if he had said, I saw a great deal of reason to make the promise so solemnly to God, and I see no reason at all to retract it.

Four points I shall observe:—

1. That it is not only lawful, but good and profitable, to bind ourselves to our duty by a vow, solemnly declared purpose, and holy oath; so David, *I have sworn*.

2. That this help of an oath or vow should be used in a matter lawful, weighty, and necessary, 'I have sworn,' saith David; but what hath he sworn? *To keep thy righteous judgments*. A great duty which God had enjoined him in his covenant.

3. Those that are entered into the bond of a holy oath must religiously observe and perform what they have sworn to God: I have sworn, *and I will perform*.

4. That we may perform our oaths, and lie under a sense and conscience of our engagements to God, it is good that they should be often revived and renewed upon us; for so doth David here recognise his oath, *I have sworn that*, &c.

Doct. 1. That it concerns us sometimes to bind ourselves to God, and the duty that we owe to him, by an oath.

1. That it is lawful so to do appears from God's injunction, and the practice of the saints.

[1.] From God's injunction. He hath commanded us to accept of the gospel covenant, and not barely so, but to submit unto the seals and rites by which it is confirmed, which submission of ours implieth an oath made to God. Baptism is our *sacramentum militare*, sacramental vow, our oath of allegiance to God; and therefore it is called, 1 Peter iii. 21, ἐπερώτημα, 'The answer of a good conscience towards God,' an answer upon God's demands in the covenant. God does, as it were, in the covenant of grace, put us to the question, Will you renounce all your sins, and all the vanities you have doted upon? And we answer to God, enter into a solemn oath, that we will renounce sin, that we will accept of Christ as our Saviour, and will walk before him in all holy obedience. Among the Romans, when any soldier was pressed for war, he took an oath to serve his captain faithfully, and not to forsake him, and then he was called *miles per sacramentum*, a soldier by sacrifice or by oath; and sometimes one took an oath for all the rest, and the others only said, The same oath he took, the same do I; and these were called *milites per conjurationem, et milites evocati*. Thus every Christian is a professed soldier of Christ; he hath sworn to become the Lord's, to cleave faithfully to him; and this oath, that it may not be forgotten, is renewed at the Lord's supper, where again we solemnly engage, by the public rites that are there used, to stand to our covenant. We do not only come and take God's enfeoffment, take a pledge out of God's hands, to be assured of the privileges of the covenant, but we bind ourselves to perform the duty thereof; for as the blood of the beast, Exod. xxiv. 7, 8, that was offered in the sacrifice, which is called there the blood of the covenant, was sprinkled not only upon the altar, to show that God was engaged to bless, but sprinkled half upon the people, to show they were engaged to obey; there was a confirmation of that promise made to God, 'All that the Lord hath commanded us, that will we do.' Well, now, if God thought such a course necessary and profitable for us, certainly we may upon occasion use the like means for our confirmation, for our strengthening in the work of obedience. That there is such a vow expressed or implied in every prayer may be easily made good in the whole tenor of our Christianity; therefore certainly it is lawful so to do, to make our duty more urgent and explicit upon our souls, by solemn vow and serious oath of dedication of ourselves to God's use and service.

[2.] The practice of the saints, who have publicly and privately engaged themselves to God, do show the lawfulness of it. Public instances: 2 Chron. xv. 12-14, 'They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul; and they sware unto the Lord,' &c. So in Josiah's time: 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31, 'And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and keep his commandments,' &c. So Neh. x. 29, 'They entered into an oath to walk in God's laws.' And for private oaths, we have David's instance here in the text; and Job

xxx. 1, 'I made covenant with mine eyes.' He had bound himself by a holy vow and purpose to guard his senses, and take heed his heart did not take fire by the gazing of his eye, that it was not inflamed with lust and sin.

2. That it is convenient so to do.

[1.] To answer God's love and condescension to us in the covenant. God thinks he can never be bound fast enough to us, and therefore interposeth by an oath. An oath is properly conversant about a doubtful matter, of which there is some question or scruple, which cannot otherwise be decided; then the law saith, he should give his oath to his neighbour. Why then doth the Lord swear? Is there any doubtfulness in his promises? No; the apostle saith, Heb. vi. 18, the Lord swears, being willing over and above to give 'the heirs of promise' ample satisfaction. Now for God, that cannot lie, and whose word is above all assurance, to stoop to us, and put himself to an oath, certainly this should work upon our hearts, and draw from us some answerable return on our part, there being great and visible danger of our breaking with God, none of God's breaking with us; therefore, that we may not play fast and loose with him, we should come under this engagement to him of vow and public promise to God.

[2.] To testify our affection to his service, we should put ourselves under the most high and sacred bonds that can be found out. Many have some slight and wandering motions towards God, and cold purposes of serving him, which soon vanish, and come to nothing; but now it argueth the heart is more thoroughly bent and set towards God, and that we have a deep sense of our duty, when we seriously confirm our purpose by a vow and holy oath. There are divers sorts of men in the world, some that are of that spirit as to break all bonds, cast away all cords, and think they can never be loose enough in point of religion, Ps. ii. 3. They seek to deface and blot out of their conscience the natural sense which they have of religion and of their duty to God, and so give up themselves headlong to all manner of impiety. There are others have some cold approbation of the way of God, and which manifests itself by some faint, weak, and wavering purposes, and slight attempts upon religion, but are soon discouraged, and never come to a fixed resolution, or serious dedication or surrender of themselves to the Lord's use. Now, a gracious heart thinks it can never be bound fast enough to God, therefore doth not only approve the ways of God, or desire to walk therein, but issues forth a purpose, a practical decree in his soul. Besides the approbation of conscience, there is a desire of heart, and this desire backed with a purpose, and this promise backed with an oath, which is the highest way of obligation; and thus doth he dedicate himself to the Lord and his service, in the strictest way of expressing his consent, for an oath binds more than a promise.

3. It is very profitable so to do, because of our backwardness, laziness, and fickleness.

[1.] Because of our backwardness; we need to thrust forth the heart into the ways of obedience, for we hang off from God. Though we are his by every kind of right and title, yet we are very slow of heart to do his will, and therefore an oath is profitable to increase the sense of our

duty; a threefold cord is not easily broken. Now there is a triple tie and bond upon a man.

(1.) There is God's natural right that he hath over us and to our service, the sovereignty and dominion that he hath over us. We are not free as to obedience before the oath, but are bound by creation; for God hath created us, not only as he created other things, ultimately and terminatively, but immediately, for his service. All things were created for his glory, so that ultimately they are for his use; but the proper end and use wherefore man was created was for the immediate service of God. He that planteth a vine expecteth fruit from it. By continual preservation; he giveth us maintenance, and therefore justly expecteth service. By redemption, as having bought us with a dear price, 1 Cor. vi. 20. From all which there resulteth a natural duty which we owe to him as our sovereign, and he may command us what he will.

(2.) There is the bond of voluntary consent, that our duty may be more active and urging upon our hearts. God doth not only interpose his own authority and command us to keep his laws diligently, Ps. cxix. 4, but requires a consent on the creature's part. All the treaties and tenders of grace are made to draw us to this consent, that we may voluntarily and by the inclination of our own hearts present ourselves before the Lord, and yield up ourselves to his service, Rom. vi. 13.

(3.) Besides this there is the bond of an oath, which is the strictest way of voluntary resolution and highest engagement that a man can make; therefore when the heart is so backward, and hangs off from God and duties we owe to him, it is good to declare our assent in the most solemn way. That the saints have made use of purposes thus solemnly declared in case of backwardness, appears in scripture. David, when his heart was shy of God's presence, and had sinned away his liberty and peace, and so could not endure to come to God, what course doth he take? He issues forth a practical decree in his soul, and binds his heart by a fixed purpose that he would come to God, Ps. xxxii. 5. So Acts xi. 23; he exhorteth them with full purpose of heart to draw nigh to God; it should be the fixed resolution of the soul. And Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.' We should lay the strongest bonds and engagements we possibly can, whereby God's authority may be backed, and his right confirmed, by the most solemn assent that we can make.

[2.] In regard of our fickleness and inconstancy; we are slippery, off and on with God: 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways,' James i. 8. We have unsettled hearts, and when we meet with temptations from without we shall soon give up at the first assault, and so be now for God, anon for Satan; therefore this is a lawful and sanctified means to help us to constancy. Indeed, before we come to this fixed settled purpose we lie open to temptation; and when our first heats are spent we tire and wax weary in the Lord's service, therefore we had need make the most sacred engagements to God, that we may keep to God and persist in our duty. Now a solemn oath seems to be the most serviceable for this use. Why? For it implies a severe and dreadful imprecation. In an oath God is not only invoked as a

witness but as a judge. We appeal to his omniscieny for the sincerity of our hearts in making promise, and to his vindictive power as a judge if we shall act contrary to what we have sworn. Saith Plutarch, Every oath implies a curse, or a desire of vengeance, in case of the breach of that oath; therefore it is said, Neh. x. 29, ‘They entered into a curse to walk in God’s law;’ that is, a curse in case of disobedience. And this was supposed to be the meaning of that rite by which they were wont to confirm their covenants. Jer. xxxiv. 18, when the calf was cut in twain they did as it were devote themselves thus to be cut in twain and torn in pieces, and to be destroyed as that creature was, if they violated the covenant thus solemnly sworn; and though this imprecation or execration should not be expressed, yet every promissory oath necessarily implies a curse in case of unfaithfulness. Well, now, this is a good means to keep us constant when we have bound ourselves to God upon such strict terms; therefore some derive ὄρκος from εἰργω, to hedge, because it is as a hedge to keep us within the compass of our duty, and confirm our hearts in that which is good. Well, then, because of our fickleness it is not enough to leave the soul to the mere bonds of duty, but confirm our resolution by an oath. I may illustrate this by that passage, when Hooper the blessed martyr was at the stake, and the officers came to fasten him to it, saith he, Let me alone; God that hath called me hither, he will keep me from stirring; and yet, because I am but flesh and blood, I am willing; tie me fast, lest I stir. So we may say in this case, though the authority of God commanding his right in us and sovereignty over us is reason enough to enforce the duty we owe to him, and bind the heart and sway the conscience, yet because of the weakness of our hearts we should make this bond the more urging upon us by a solemn consent, thus ratified and confirmed by the solemnity of an oath, vow, or promise made to God.

[3.] It will be very profitable because of our laziness; by resolution we are quickened to more seriousness and diligence. When a man hath the bond of an oath upon him, then he will make a business of religion, whereas otherwise he will make but a sport and a thing he only regards by the by. Oh! but when his heart is fixed this is the thing he will look after, Ps. xxvii. 4. When our heart is set upon a thing we follow it close; and when it is so set upon a thing as that we have bound ourselves by the strictest bonds we can lay upon our heart, it will engage us more seriously.

Doct. 2. That this help of an oath or holy vow should be used in a matter lawful, weighty, necessary.

1. In a matter lawful. There is a vow and covenanting in that which is evil; as those that ‘bound themselves with a curse that they would not eat nor drink until they had killed Paul,’ Acts xxiii. 12. And many will make a vow and promise with themselves that they will never forgive their neighbour such an offence. And we read of a covenant made with death and hell: whether it be meant of the king of Babylon or no, as he is called death and hell by the prophet, some evil covenant is intended thereby; and thus a vow is made the bond of iniquity, and must be broken rather than kept, or indeed it must not be made. To vow that which is sinful, this is like the hire of a

where, or the price of a dog offered to the Lord for a vow, Deut. xxiii. 18.

2. It must be in a matter weighty, necessary, and acceptable unto God. There are two things come under our vow and oath :—

[1.] That which is our necessary work, religious obedience to God in the way of his commandment ; for this is not a rash and unnecessary vow, but that we were sworn to in baptism ; this is that which David promiseth here, ‘ I have sworn, and I will perform it, to keep thy righteous judgments.’ And this is the vow which Jacob made, though there was something of a particularity he adds to it, Gen. xxviii. 20, 21 ; but the substance of it was this, ‘ If the Lord will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, then shall the Lord be my God.’ There are many that will vow and promise trifles, and so infringe their own Christian liberty, and needlessly bind themselves in chains of their own making, where God hath left them free. This help is for the weighty things of Christianity, not for by-matters. Those monkish by-laws have filled the world with superstition, not with religion, while they have been only conversant about some indifferent things, as pilgrimages, abstinences from meats and marriages, wherein they place the height of Christian perfection.

[2.] Helps to obedience. Such things as we shall find to be helps, and do conduce to the removal of impediments, such should come under a vow and solemn promise to God : Job xxxi. 1, ‘ I made a covenant with my eyes ;’ that was a help to the preserving of his chastity, that he would not allow himself to gaze, to take a view of the beauty of others. And the apostle, when it was for the glory of God, makes a vow or kind of solemn promise that he would take no maintenance in Achaia, 2 Cor. xi. 10 ; he solemnly binds himself, that he might not hinder the progress of the gospel. So when we find our heart ready to betray us by this or that evil occasion, we may in this case interpose a vow and promise, but then with this caution, that we do not unreasonably destroy our Christian liberty, and so occasion a snare to our souls, and that we do not think this to be a perfect cure of these distempers, while we neglect the main things ; as many will make a vow to play no more at such a game, or drink no more at such a house, or use such a creature, or come into such a particular company, and so place all their religion in these things ; this is but like cutting off the branches when the root remains, or stopping one hole in a leaky or ruinous ship and vessel, when everywhere it is ready to let in water upon us, and to be broken in pieces. Therefore when you rest in those by-matters, without resolving to cleave to God in a course of obedience, it but like mending a hole in the wall of a house when the whole building is on fire, or troubling ourselves with a sore finger when we are languishing of a consumption ; it is but stopping this or that particular sin when the whole soul lies under the power and slavery of the kingdom of Satan.

Object. But here is a doubt may arise, How can I promise to keep God’s law, since it is not in my power to do it exactly ? it is impossible.

Ans. 1. When David saith, ‘ I have sworn,’ &c., he speaks not from a presumption of his own strength, but only declareth the sense of his duty, and useth his oath as a sanctified means to bind his heart

to God ; and therefore it is not to exclude the power of God's grace, or to presume of his own strength : God's assistance is best expected in God's way.

2. Such vows and promises they are always to be interpreted to be made in the sense of the covenant of grace, for no particular voluntary or accessory covenant of ours can take away the general covenant wherein we stand engaged to God, but rather it must be included in it. Therefore when David saith, 'I will keep thy righteous judgments,' he means according to the sense of the covenant of grace, that is, expecting help for duties and pardon for failings.

[1.] As expecting help from God, for so the new covenant gives strength to observe what it requires. *Lex jubet, evangelium juvat*—the law enforceth duty, the covenant of grace helps us to perform the duty required of us. The gospel it is a 'ministration of the Spirit,' 2 Cor. iii. 8, and therefore promissory oaths, according to the sense of the new covenant, are made with a confidence upon the Lord's strength and assistance.

[2.] Seeking pardon for his failings. Infirmities may stand with the covenant of grace, provided we crave mercy and recover ourselves by repentance, and so make no final breach with God ; therefore this is a keeping according to the measure of grace received, and as human frailty will permit.

Briefly, then, when are sins to be looked upon as infirmities, and not as perjuries and breach of covenant ?

Ans. When we would not voluntarily yield to the least sin ; but in case of great sin, we grow more watchful, more humble, more holy ; when our falls are such as David's when he had fallen foully : Ps. lvi. 6, 'Now thou shalt make me to know wisdom.' When upon our failings we are more ashamed of ourselves, more afraid of our weakness, more earnest to renew our former resolutions, more careful to wait upon God for grace to perform what he hath required of us, more watchful, more circumspect ; when we begin to grow wise by our own smarting, in such cases an oath is not broken. Look, as every failing of the wife doth not dissolve the marriage covenant, so every failing on our part doth not dissolve the covenant between God and us ; and therefore, though there will be some infirmities, but yet when we are careful to sue out our pardon in the name of Christ Jesus, and you shall by your failings be more watchful, circumspect, then we keep the covenant in a gospel sense.

Doct. 3. That when we have sworn obedience to God, we must religiously perform and observe what we have sworn to God.

So Ps. lxxvi. 11, 'Vow and pay unto the Lord.' When we come under the bond of a vow, we must be careful to make payment ; it is a binding upon the heart. See how it is expressed, Num. xxx. 2, 'If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word.' When we have bound ourselves with a bond, that is, when we have increased our bonds (for the ingeminating words in the Hebrew doth exceedingly increase the sense). When a man is bound upon a bond he should not play fast and loose with God, but be very careful to perform what he hath sworn. God, on his part, hath sworn to the covenant, and he is con-

stant in all his promises, and he certainly expects the like constancy from us, especially when we are so deeply bound, not only by his laws and obligation of his mercies, but by the solemn consent of our own vows. We have bound ourselves, then, to keep them, whether we will or no. Now, what reasons are there why we must perform?

1. The same motives that inclined us at first to take our oath should persuade us to keep it whatever falls out. After trial we shall see no cause to repent of our resolution, for God is ever the same that he was, and his commands are ever the same in all his righteous judgments, holy, just, good, profitable to the creature. Christians! if we meet with any change in our outward condition, any new impediments, oppositions, and discouragements that we were not aware of when we first entered into our oath, it was our rashness, for we should sit down and count the charges, we should allow for it. The first article of the new covenant was that we should deny ourselves, Mat. xvi. 24; and after vows we should not make inquiry, but before. Prov. xx. 25. When we are bound we must take our lot and hazard, and whatever comes we must perform them to God.

2. Because our oath is a further aggravation of our sin, therefore better never swear than not to keep it: Eccles. v. 5, 'Better it is that thou shouldest not vow, than vow and not pay.' God is mocked by an oath and a covenant when it is not observed. A man that refuseth to be listed doth not meet with the like punishment as he that runs from his colours; so he that never came under the oath of God, doth not sin so much as he that hath sworn to his covenant. That which is but simple fornication in the Gentiles, in Christians it is adultery, breach of vow. Indeed, in things that are absolutely and indispensably necessary to salvation, we are bound to consent. Ay! but when a consent thus solemnly made is broken, it aggravates the sin; but when we shall be like the man in the Gospel that was possessed with the devil, whom no chains could hold fast, when neither the bond of duty, nor the bonds of our own oaths and engagements will hold us, but we break all cords, the greater is our rebellion and disobedience to God.

3. Therefore must we perform the obedience that we have sworn to God, because God hath ever been a severe and just avenger of breach of covenants. By way of argument, *à minori ad majus*, those made with man; and therefore certainly he will avenge his covenant so solemnly made with himself, and everywhere in scripture you will find it is propounded as a sure mark of vengeance. When one man hath sworn to another, and hath called upon the most high God to confirm that covenant that he makes with him, if there be a failure, a trespass, though it be in point of omission, God hath avenged that covenant. An instance for this you have Amos i. 9, 'For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant.' Tyrus and Judah they were in covenant one with another, a mutual league offensive and defensive that were solemnly sworn. Now though God had many causes of his vengeance, and many quarrels with Tyrus because of their idolatries, but chiefly because of breach of covenant, they forgat

the friendship that was between the children of Israel and Judah, and did not assist the people of Judah as they should, and were bound to do, but suffered them to be led into captivity, and spoiled by the Edomites and other nations. So for a sin of commission; it is spoken of as a mark of sore vengeance: Ps. lv. 20, 'He hath put forth his hand against such as be at peace with him; he hath broken his covenant.' In those federal transactions and oaths that pass between man and man, God takes himself to be specially interested, and will see that the breach of them be severely punished. The next step is, not only between equals, but when a covenant hath been made with servants and poor underlings, and would not set them free at the year of jubilee, see how severely God threatens them, Jer. xxxiv. 16-18, for the breach of it; nay a covenant made with enemies, Ezek. xvii. 18, 19. Nay, carry it one gradation higher, though the covenant were extorted by fraud, as the covenant made with the Gibeonites, Josh. ix. 19, 20. They were part of the Canaanites, and God severely enjoined the Israelites that they should cut off all those nations; yet when they craftily got them into covenant, when this people were wronged by Saul, the Lord takes notice of it, 2 Sam. xxi. 1-3. See how God judgeth for them; there were three years' famine and pestilence, which was not appeased until Saul's sons were hanged before the sun. Now the Lord hath ever been such a severe avenger of an oath between man and man, between his people and their servants, between his people and their enemies, and when extorted from them, certainly in such a solemn covenant as he hath made between us and himself, and that in things absolutely necessary, in things enjoined before the covenant was made, it is not safe to break with God. Ananias, when he vowed a thing to the Lord, though he was free before, God strikes him dead. It is not free with us, whether we will obey, yea or nay, what is enjoined upon us; therefore when we will break with God, what shall we expect but that he should avenge the quarrel of his covenant?

SERMON CXV.

I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.—VER. 106.

DOCTR. 4. I now come to the fourth point, that our oath of obedience to God should be often revived and renewed upon us.

David recognises and takes notice of the oath wherein he was bound to God, and here he renews it again, 'I will perform it.' It should be so:—

1. Because we are apt to forget, and not have such a lively sense of a thing long since done, so that we either break the oath, or perform our duty very negligently. Our old baptismal covenant we are apt to forget it, especially by being under the bond of it in innocency, and dedicated to God by the act of another, viz., our parents. The apostle instanceth in those that were baptized in grown years, 2 Peter i. 9;

he intimates they were apt to 'forget they were purged from their old sins.' I suppose it relates to baptism in that clause, forgotten his baptismal vow and obligation of renouncing his sin, and giving himself to the service of the Lord; and therefore there should be a purpose to revive it upon our heart, and the obligation should ever and anon be made new and fresh to quicken us to our duty.

2. This forgetfulness it will cost us dear, it will be an occasion of many and great troubles. Jacob had forgotten his vows of building an altar at Bethel; God quickens him to his duty by sharp affliction: Gen. xxxv. 1, 'Arise, go up to Bethel,' &c. God was fain to quicken him with a scourge. Samson, when his vow was broken, how many dangers is he thrown into? taken, and bound, and made a sport of by the Philistines. God will rub up the memories of his servants by some sharp and severe dispensations of his providence, when they are not sensible of their vow and faith plighted to God. Never forget your obligation to God: Dent. iv. 23, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God.'

Quest. But when should we renew our covenant, or our oath of allegiance to God?

1. Partly when we stand in need of some special favour from God, or when we draw nigh to him in some special duty; as Jacob, when God manifested himself to him, and he had communion with him at Bethel, then he vowed a vow, Gen. xxviii. 21. So Num. xxi. 2, Israel vowed a vow to the Lord when they were in some distress; and Ps. lxxvi. 14, 'I will pay the vows of my distress, which I made when I was in trouble.'

2. Again, after some special mercy, when under some love pang of spiritual rejoicing, and we have a deep sense of God's love to us, or a new pledge of his love to us either in spiritual or temporal benefits, and our soul melted out towards God in acts of spiritual rejoicing: Ps. cxvi. 8, 9, 'For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.' And when God breaks the force and power of enemies, when he makes the wrath of man turn to his praise, then Ps. lxxvi. 11, 'Vow and pay unto the Lord your God.' Those pagan mariners they made their vows to God when the Lord delivered them from the storm, Jonah i. 16.

3. When all things go to ruin, when the state of religion is collapsed, either in a nation or in our hearts, after some notable breaches of covenant by a people, or by a person, and we have warped from God, seem to have wrested ourselves out of his arms, then to bind ourselves to him again, and to renew our vows; for upon this occasion doth Josiah enter into covenant with God, and 'cause the people to stand to the oath,' 2 Chron. xxxiv.

4. When we are to draw nigh to God in the use of the seals of the new covenant, when a man is to revive his own right in the covenant of grace; so when we are to draw nigh to God in the Lord's Supper, which is the New Testament in Christ's blood, which is the seal of the covenant, then we should solemnly bind ourselves to the duty of it, and swear to the Lord anew.

Use. To press you with all earnestness to enter into covenant with

God, and then to keep it and make it good; to be sensible of the vow of God upon you, and to keep firm in the bond of the holy oath.

First, To enter into solemn obligation to God, a purpose of holy and close walking with God. I shall press you hereunto:—

1. God's laws are holy, just, and good, therefore certainly we should not be backward to swear to him; because we cannot bring ourselves seriously to give up ourselves to the Lord, they are righteous judgments. Suppose you could be free, yet subjection to God were to be chosen before liberty; therefore, when Christ invites us to take his yoke upon ourselves, he doth not so much urge his authority, 'All things are given to me of my Father,' therefore come to me; but he urgeth the sweetness of obedience, and the pleasure we may find in coming to him: Mat. xi. 29, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' If a man were free to choose whether he would be for God or no, yet the perfection or well-being of the reasonable nature being so much concerned in obedience to God, you should choose those laws before liberty. What doth the Lord require of you? To be holy, just, temperate, often praying, and praising his name; and are these things hard? A man is not a man if he do not yield to these things, Titus ii. 12. All our duties are comprised in those three adverbs, 'soberly, righteously, godly.' By being sober, a man delights himself; and by being just and righteous, a man delights others: without this, the world would be but like a den of thieves; and by being godly, he doth delight God. If we had only leave to love God and serve him, much more when we have a command to serve him, to be often in communion with him, it is the happiest life in the world. There is a great deal of pleasure, sweetness, and rational contentment doth accompany the exercise of these three graces, sobriety, righteousness, godliness.

2. We are already obliged by God's command, so that whether you resolve or no, you are bound. There are some things that are left free in our own power before the vow passeth upon us; as, Acts v. 4, 'Was it not in thy power?' Ay! but there are other things that are not in our power. God's right over the creature is valid, whether he consent to it or no; as the natural relation doth infer and enforce duty without consent. This is the difference between voluntary and natural relations. Look, as a father is a father, whether the child own him or no in that quality and relation, and without his consent; a father as a father hath a right to command the child. But there are duties that depend upon our consent, as in the choice of a husband or master. So here is a natural relation between God and us, he our creator, we his creatures, he our superior, and we his inferiors, by reason of his authority and eternal right; and God may urge this, 'I am the Lord,' though he do not urge that, 'I am the Lord thy God.' Sometimes, 'I am the Lord,' Lev. xviii. 5, his own sovereignty; sometimes, 'The Lord thy God,' ver. 2; which argues our choice and consent to choose him for our God; therefore thou art not free.

3. Actual consent and resolution on our part is required, that the sense of our duty may be more explicit upon our heart: 2 Chron. xxx. 8, 'Yield yourselves to the Lord.' In the original, Give the Lord the hand; that is, strike hands with him, enter into covenant with him, say, Lord, I will be for thee, and thou for me; choose him for your

portion, and give up yourselves to be the Lord's people: Rom. xii. 1, 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' He alludes to the eucharistical sacrifices. All our offerings must not be sin-offerings, but thank-offerings; so present yourselves. Under the law, a man he brought his thank-offering, and laid his hand upon it, 'Lord, I am thine.' It was implied in your baptism, and it is but reason that you should own your baptismal vow when you come to years of discretion. A bargain that is made for an heir during his nonage, it is confirmed by him when he comes to age. You were dedicated to God's service when you were young, and knew not what you did; now when you come to choose your own way, and at years of discretion, you should stand to what was done in your name to God; therefore there must be a serious and solemn consent of your heart.

4. It is for your profit to choose the strictest engagements; not only to approve the ways of God, but purpose; not only purpose, but put it into a promise or declared resolution; and not only resolve, but bind this resolution by an oath. Why? For you have more reason to expect God's assistance this way than any other, because this is the appointed means practised by all the people of God when they expected the grace of the covenant. Surely God's blessing is best expected in his own way, and the greatest engagement to God the more apt to hold us to our duty than a looser engagement.

5. Consider the necessity as well as the profit.

[1.] Laziness is the cause of our backwardness and hanging off from God. We are loath to come to God, are off and on, hang between heaven and hell; we have many loose and wavering thoughts, until we come to a firm purpose and determination; but that engageth the heart—Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engageth his heart to draw nigh to me?'—when you lay a command upon yourselves. We are weak and wavering in our purposes and wishes, but it puts an end to this when we come once to a full and firm purpose: Acts xi. 23, 'He exhorted them all, that, with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord.' Austin, in his *Confessions*, tells us how he would dally with God, and how long he struck¹ in the new birth, until he was resolved, until he bound himself firmly to shake off all his carnal courses, and mind the business of religion.

[2.] Because of our fickleness, and the strength of temptations that will draw us off from God. He that is not resolved cannot be constant: James i. 8, 'The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Christians! when an unconstant and rebelling heart meets with temptation without, all our wishes and cold purposes will come to nothing, but we shall give out at the first assault, and be unstable in all our ways; but when we are firmly and habitually resolved, then Satan is discouraged. While we are thinking and deliberating what we shall do, the devil hath some hope of us, we lie open to temptation; but when he seeth the bent of the heart is fixed and settled, and we have firmly bound ourselves to God, his hopes are gone. He that is in a wavering condition is easily overcome when temptation comes, but a fixed man is safe. Papers, feathers, and things that lie loose

¹ Qu. 'stuck'?—ED.

upon the ground, are tossed up and down by every blast and puff of wind, but those things that are fastened to the ground, though the wind blows never so strongly, they remain. Many set out towards the ways of salvation, but are discouraged, and turn back again to a course of sin; but when you solemnly give up yourselves to God, then you will not have so many temptations as before. Look, as Naomi was ever dissuading Ruth that she should not be a companion with her in her sorrows, but go back to her own country; but when she saw she was resolved, and steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her, Ruth i. 18. Or let me take another instance, Acts xxi. 14. The disciples were persuading Paul that he should not go to Jerusalem, though they did even break his heart, they could not break his purpose; but when they saw that he was so set that he went bound in the spirit, then they said, 'The will of the Lord be done.' Thus will tempters be discouraged from importuning and setting upon us to draw us off from God, when once our bent is fixed. By resolution we are quickened to more seriousness and diligence, for when once we come under the bond of the holy oath, the awe of an oath will still be upon us, and quicken us to more diligence and seriousness, to make a business of religion, whereas otherwise we make but a recreation and sport of it, and but a business by the by: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after.' When we have laid firm bonds upon ourselves, this makes us awe-ful, serious, and resolute in a course of obedience.

Thus it directeth us to resolve. For the manner of entering:—

1. It must be a resolution of heart rather than of the tongue: Jer. xxx. 21, 'Who is this that engageth his heart to seek the Lord?' Acts xi. 23, 'He exhorted them, that, with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord.' Resolutions are not determined by the tenor of our language so much as by the bent of the heart; therefore empty promises signify nothing, unless they be the result of our very souls, and not only of a natural conscience. Deut. v. 29, the people did not dissemble certainly when the Lord appeared to them by the sound of a trumpet and those mighty earthquakes; but saith the Lord, 'Oh, that there were such a heart in them to fear me always!' That there were a heart, and such a heart; that is, that this were not merely the result of an awakened conscience, but the resolution of a renewed heart. So Ps. lxxviii. 37, 'Their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' Surely they did not dissemble in their distress, but their heart was not right with him; that is, it was not a sanctified heart, it was only the dictate of an awakened conscience for the present.

2. When you thus engage yourselves to God, let it not be a weak, broken, but full resolution; cold wishes are easily overcome by the love of the world and a half purpose: Acts xxvi. 28, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Carnal men, although they are not converted, yet they have a kind of half turn, almost, but not altogether. Upon a lively sermon, or in sickness, they have their purposes and wishes; but it is not a full strong bent of heart, and love must be a serious bent: 1 Chron. xxii. 19, 'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.'

3. It must not be a wish, but a serious resolution, such as is advised, all difficulties well weighed. In a fit and pang of devotion men will resolve for God, but it will never hold: Josh. xxiv. 19, 'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins;' and therefore you must reckon what it is to serve this holy God; you must sit down and count the charges, what it is likely to cost you, that this dedication of yourselves to God may be grounded upon serious consideration. Do you know what lust of the flesh you must renounce, what interest of yours you must lay at his feet?

4. It must be a thorough, absolute, and perfect resolution, whatever it cost, as he that sold all for the pearl of price, Mat. xiii. 46. A marriage even made may be broken off; some will take up religion by way of essay, to try how they like it, as men go to sea for pleasure, but will not launch so far into the deep but that they may be sure easily to get to shore again; but a man for a voyage resolves upon all weathers. So, whatever disappointment, here is my business, thus will I do; and 'though he should kill me, yet will I trust in him,' Job xiii. 15.

5. It must be a resolution for the present, not for the future; for all resolutions for the future are false: Ps. xxvii. 8, 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face;' like a quick echo, 'My heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' And we must resolve so to engage presently, for what we do for hereafter it is but a cheat we put upon ourselves, merely to elude the workings of heart, to avoid the present impulse.

6. It must be a resolution according to the covenant of grace, in a sense of our insufficiency and dependence upon Christ, not in a confidence of our own strength. Peter went forth in a confidence of his own resolution, and how soon did he miscarry! Therefore we must resolve in the strength of God: Ps. cxix. 8, 'I will keep thy precepts; O forsake me not utterly.' If God forsake, all will come to nothing. Thus we should solemnly dedicate ourselves to his use and service.

Secondly, Having entered into such a solemn engagement to be the Lord's, keep this covenant and oath made with God. For motives:—

1. From the nature of such a solemn engagement; it hath more in it than a single promise. There is in every solemn dedication or vowing of ourselves to God an attestation or calling upon God to take witness, and there is an imprecation. An attestation, a calling God to witness of our serious intentions to perform, and will you call God to be witness to a lie? And an imprecation, a calling upon God to punish us if we do the contrary; therefore, being entered into the bond of such a holy oath, how should we tremble to break it! For he that renews his oath of allegiance to God, he doth as it were dare God to do his worst, for you thereby wish some heavy plague to fall upon your heads if you do not fulfil the duty of your oath; that is, he that eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ unworthily, he is guilty of damnation, guilty of the Lord's blood, because these solemn rites do not only confirm the promises, but confirm the threatening; and there is implied not only an invocation of blessing, but an imprecation upon ourselves; that is, if you do not fulfil the duty of the covenant, you offer yourselves as it were to God's curse.

2. Consider the tenderness of God's people in case of any oath or solemn promise, though it concerned their duty to man. Josh. ix. 19, 20, it is spoken of the league with the Gibeonites, 'We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.' They looked upon it as horrible impiety to break an oath. Now much more doth this hold in our engagements to God. Shall we not look upon it as a horrid impiety to break a solemn oath so solemnly renewed, and our faith so solemnly plighted? Every sin of ours is made the more heinous because of this oath.

3. Remember the great quarrel that God hath against the Christian world and all the professors of his name is about his covenant and oath taken. What is the reason God doth visit Christendom with famines, pestilences, inundations, and wars? Because they do not stand to the oath of God that is upon them. Every professor of the name of Christ, he is supposed to be in covenant with God: Heb. x. 29, 'Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing?' All visible professors of Christianity are under a covenant with God, to take God for their God, and to live as his people; now because of their looseness and profaneness, they do not stand to their engagement, therefore so many plagues are upon them: Lev. xxvi. 25, 'I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant;' that is, because they did not perform the duties sworn to him.

SERMON CXVI.

I am afflicted very much : quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.—VER. 107.

HERE we have—(1.) A representation of his case and condition, *I am afflicted*; his condition was calamitous, and here is the degree of it, *very much*. (2.) His prayer, *quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word*; wherein we have the nature of his request, *quicken me, O Lord*; then the argument, *according unto thy word*.

For the first, 'I am afflicted;' it may be understood of outward pressures, or soul troubles. From thence note—

Doct. God's people are liable to sad and sore afflictions here in the world.

He doth not so fondly and delicately bring up his children but that he exerciseth them with sharp afflictions. David, a man dear to God, much in communion with him, ever and anon you hear him complaining of trouble. It is the church's name, Isa. liv. 11, 'O thou afflicted, and tossed with tempest, and not comforted.' God's people are sometimes afflicted in the outward, sometimes in the inward man. In the outward man, either by enemies, the more because they are godly: 2 Tim. iii. 12, 'All they that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.' They must not dream of worldly ease, and

think to go to heaven upon a bed of roses, but sometimes their way is strewed with thorns, and they have fiery trials: 1 Peter iv. 12, 'Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you;' no more than you would to see a shower of rain fall, or a cloudy day succeed a fair: we would laugh at one that should be troubled to see a shower fall. So sometimes by sickness under God's immediate hand. In the 3d epistle of John, the apostle saith of Gaius, 'I wish that thou mayest prosper, and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.' It seems he had a healthful soul in a very sickly crazy body. And Paul's thorn in the flesh notes some racking pain, stone or gout, which he alludes to thrusting up a stake in the body of slaves. The inward man, that hath its affliction too, anguish, sorrow of heart, sometimes by reason of God's desertion. Christ Jesus drunk of this cup: Mat. xxvii. 46, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' And the cup goes round; his people pledge him in this bitter cup, and often complain of a withdrawing God, that they cannot find God as they were wont formerly. Many times perplexing lusts and prevalency of sore distempers: 'O wretched man,' &c., Rom. vii. 24, so Paul groans; and sometimes from temptations and assaults from Satan: Luke xxii. 31, 32, 'Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' Christ did not pray to exempt him from it, but to preserve him in it.

If you ask why God's children are thus afflicted, I answer—It is not heaven we now enjoy.

1. We are not in our eternal rest, therefore here we must be exercised, tried, afflicted. The world is a middle place between heaven and hell, therefore hath somewhat of both; their principles and actions are mixed, so their condition is mixed, intermixed with sorrows and joys, until they come there where they shall rest from all their labours. So it must be.

2. God doth it to purge out sin: Isa. xxvii. 9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.' Gold is cast into the fire. Why? To have its dross consumed. Corn is beaten with the flail. Why? To be severed from its chaff, husks, and straw; and iron is filed to get off its rust; so this is the fruit of all—the taking away sin. Afflictions are a necessary cure for sin: John xv. 2, 'Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' Look, as in a vine there are certain superfluous luxuriant leaves and branches that grow up with the fruit, and hindereth the increase of it, which the vine-dresser pares off, not to destroy the vine, but to cultivate and manure it, so it is with no ill intent; so corruption grows up with our graces, and hindereth us that we cannot bear fruit, when we are in a flourishing condition; therefore these need to be purged away.

3. God doth it to humble us. This was that which God aimed at in all his afflictive dispensations towards the people of Israel, Deut. viii. 2. God's eminent servants need affliction to humble them. David had many things to puff him up, his royal dignity, the gift of prophecy, familiarity with God, great opulency, many victories, pride of life, &c.; and he needed many afflictions to keep him humble, Ps. cxxxii. 1. Paul, he was apt to be lifted up with abundance of

revelations, therefore God humbled him with ‘a thorn in the flesh,’ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

Use 1. If we be out of affliction, let us provide for a time of exercise. David, a saint, is afflicted. God’s bosom-friends may feel his hand sore upon them. David, a king, is afflicted; those in the highest station have their incident cares and troubles. David, an Old Testament believer, saith, ‘I am afflicted.’ I observe this, because God then dispensed himself to his people in and by temporal promises, and yet even then they had great mixtures of trouble, to show that which they had in the world was not all they had to expect from God. The promises now in the New Testament, now life and immortality is brought to light, they run to us in another strain, not of temporal, but spiritual things; therefore we must expect our portion of sorrow before we go to heaven. Be not of such a woman-like nature, and so delicately brought up, as never to see evil days; for aught I see, we are entering upon our trial. The strain of our ministry is mainly consolatory usually, but there comes a time of expense and laying out, when such comforts are to be laid up in our heart, therefore let us be provided.

Use 2. If we be for the present under affliction, let us bear it with patience, observing how God’s ends are accomplished. It is smart and grievous now, Heb. xii. 11, but it will be salutary and healthful; it will yield to you righteousness, and that righteousness will yield you peace—give the peaceable fruit of righteousness. If God will take away the fuel of our sin, empty us of our pride, self-conceit, weaken the security of the flesh, let us be content, only let us take heed that the time of mortifying sin be not the time of discovering sin, and that we do not trespass the more. To be sinning and suffering is the case of the damned. Take heed you do not sin in your suffering; especially take heed of those sins that are proper to affliction. Fainting: ‘If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is but small.’ Distrust of God’s providence: ‘I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul.’ Despair of God’s promises: ‘I said I am cut off,’ &c. Then you lose the benefit of God’s family discipline when you yield to these sins. But see how it drives you out of the way of hell, for affliction is a gentle remembrance of hell; for look, as those whose garments were singed, as when they threw the three children into the furnace, their own garments were singed by the force of the flame, they knew what it was to be thrown into the pit; so the Lord in effect doth tell you what will be in hell; this is a gentle remembrance, stand farther off, that ye may not be condemned with the world, 1 Cor. xi. 32. And then, how it quickens you to look after heavenly things; for when the outward man decays, then look to things not seen, 2 Cor. iv. 17; when you are fitted more and more for your change, when you grow more humble, mortified, as stones are hewn and squared for the building.

Let us come to the degree, ‘I am afflicted very much; the Septuagint renders it, ἐταπεινώθην ὥς σφόδρα, ‘I am afflicted very sore.’

Doct. The afflictions of God’s people may not only be many, but very sore and heavy.

So David here, and Ps. lxxi. 20, ‘Thou hast showed me great and sore troubles.’ Why many?

1. Many and strong lusts are to be subdued, and we need great afflictions to subdue many and great corruptions. Some stains are not easily washed out, but need much rubbing. When pride is deeply rooted in the heart, God brings down even to the grave, that a man goes up and down like a walking ghost, and like a skeleton or dry bones. There is such an one described, Job xxxiii. 17 with 22; and why? To bring down pride in his heart? The physic must be according to the distemper; if the distemper be more rooted, the physic must be more strong: Ps. cvii. 11, 12, 'Because they rebelled against the word of the Lord, and contemned the counsel of the Most High, therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.' When people begin to grow high and stomachful, contemptuous against God and his ordinances, then God brings them into sore distresses, to break their pride and stoutness of heart.

2. That God may have the more experience and trial of his people. In daily and little afflictions there is no trial of their courage, faith, patience, and submission, and all other graces. The trial of faith is in extremity. Graces are exercised to the life, when we are even at the point of death: 2 Cor. i. 9, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead.' So patience, it is not tried but by sharp affliction; therefore the apostle saith, 'Let patience have its perfect work,' James i. 4. So Christian courage and resolution, that is tried in deep affliction, when we are 'slain all the day long,' Heb. xi. 35, 36; Rom. viii. 37, 'In all these things we are more than conquerors.' The strength of a man's back is not tried by a small weight, but by a heavy burden, how much he can bear; so the sharper the affliction, the greater the trial.

3. That they may have the more experience of God, for the sharper the affliction the sweeter their comfort, and the more glorious their deliverance: Ps. lxxi. 20, 'Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles, thou shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.' God's power in raising them up is more seen: 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who delivered me from so great a death.'

Use 1. If we be under sore troubles—

1. Let us not faint; remember it is no more than we have deserved. God will not afflict a man above his deserts; he cannot complain of wrong, Ezra ix. 13. It is never more, it may be less; when our afflictions are great, our deserts are far greater: Isa. xl. 1, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God.' Why? 'For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.' God saith double; he relents presently.

2. Consider the degree of affliction; it is not measured out by ourselves, but measured out by a wise God; though afflicted very much and very sore, the measure it is ordered by God, as well as the kind of it. If it were measured out by ourselves, it would be too light, it would be too gentle; the patient must not be trusted in searching his own wounds; and if it were left to our enemies, they would know no bounds: Zech. i. 15, 'I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.' But it is left to the wise, just, and gracious God and Father; he tempers the cup in his own hand; and therefore

when the affliction is grown sore and strong, it comes not only from a wise God, but a tender Father, that best knows what is good for us. Job xxxiv. 23, that is a notable place, 'For he will not lay upon man more than right, that he should enter into judgment with God;' that is, the party afflicted hath no just complaint against God, can take no exception against God's proceedings, for he perfectly understands our need, and understands our strength. God perfectly understands our need: 1 Peter i. 6, 'If need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' And understands our strength: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'Faithful is he, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.' Many parents do not correct their children in measure, being ignorant of their nature and disposition. Many physicians mistake their patients' constitution, therefore the physic may work too strongly and too violently for them; but God understands our need and our strength, and so suits all his remedies accordingly.

Use 2. To reprove those fond complaints that are extorted from us in deep and pressing afflictions; as if—

1. Sometimes, there was never any so afflicted as I am. God's people have been sore troubled: Lam. i. 12, 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me.' Yes, others have been afflicted in the same kind and degree, if not worse: 1 Peter v. 9, 'All these things are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.' You think it is such as the like hath never been known or heard of, for every man's own pain seemeth most grievous: Lam. iii. 1, 'I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.' Other prophets foretold them, I see them executed. The best of God's people have their measures of hardships; you are not singular, do not stand alone. This is one of Satan's deceits. Satan will suggest this to a child of God, that he may question his Father's affection, lose the comfort of his adoption, and put yourselves out of the number of God's children. Your lot is not harder than the rest of God's children; all that are in the world have the same trials, troubles, pressing evils upon their hearts now and then.

2. Another you find complaining, taxing God of unfaithfulness, as if he would break trust, and lay upon you more than you are able to bear, and you deceive yourselves; for if you cannot bear your present burden, you would bear none, you do not improve Christ's strength: Phil. iv. 13, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' Christ doth not help us in such a degree, or one trouble, and no more, but in all.

3. Another we find complain, I am cut off; God will be merciful and gracious no more, Ps. lxxvii. 8, 9, &c.; he hath forsaken me and forgotten me. God's children have been brought thus low, yet have been raised, as the church: Ps. cxviii. 18, 'Lord, thou hast chastened me sore, yet hast not given me over unto death.' Within a little while he will show this was but our infirmity; this would stop these idle complaints by which we give vent to our daily impatience.

We have seen David's case, but what doth he do? He goes to God about comfort and relief, 'I am afflicted very sore: O Lord, quicken me, according to thy word.' There observe—

1. That he prays, and makes his addresses to God.

2. For what he prays.

Doct. First, That he prays. Observe, affliction should put us upon prayer and serious address to God. Thus God's people are wont to do: Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.' They that have neglected God at other times, will be dealing with him then, and this God expects: Hosea v. 15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early.' It will be the first thing they will do, the greatest thing they will take care of; as that which we most care for, most is thought of in the morning. Nay, it is that which God enjoins: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the time of trouble.' Some might hang off when God's rod is upon their backs, or be discouraged by the bitter sense of a trouble; therefore God doth not only give us leave, but commands us to call upon him. This is the special season when this duty is performed with life and vigour: 'Is any man afflicted? let him pray,' James v. 13. Let him thus give vent to his trouble, it doth mightily ease the heart. An oven stopped up is the hotter within; the more we keep down grief, and do not unburden ourselves, the more it presseth upon the heart. Wind imprisoned in the bowels of the earth makes a terrible shaking there till it gets vent; so till our sorrow gets a vent it rends and tears the heart. The throne of grace was appointed for such a time, Heb. iv. 16; when need comes, then it is a time to improve our interest, to put promises in suit; when God seems to be an enemy to us, when, to appearance, he executes the curse of the old covenant, oh! then we should work through all discouragements, then we should hold God to his second grant and charter, and come to his throne of grace, and keep him there.

For the reasons:—

1. God is the party with whom we have to do; whencesoever the trouble doth arise, there is his hand and his counsel in it; therefore it is best dealing with him about it, in all afflictions, public or private: Amos iii. 6, 'Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?' Let men but awaken their reason and conscience, who is it that is at the upper end of causes, that casts our lot upon such troublesome and distracted times? So in private afflictions, David owned God's hand; Shimei had mocked him, but he looks higher; the Lord hath bid him curse. So Job; he doth not say the Chaldean and Sabeans hath taken away, but the Lord hath taken, Job i. 21. Afflictions have a higher cause than men ordinarily look at; they do not come out of the dust, but come from God. See what inference Eliphaz draws from this principle, Job v. 8, 'I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause;' that is, I would go and deal with him about it; it was Eliphaz's advice to Job, and it is seasonable to us all.

2. It is God only that can help us and relieve us, either by giving support under the trouble, or removing it from us; so saith David, Ps. lvii. 2, 'I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me.' A believer looks for all things from God; when all things go well with him, God is his best friend; when all things go ill with him, God is his only friend; he runs to none so often as to

God. Now upon these principles we go to God ; but for what end ? Let us see what we go to God for.

[1.] That we may know his mind in all his providences. The affliction hath some errand and message to us, something to deliver us from God ; now we need to ask of God to know his mind : Micah vi. 9, ‘Hear the rod, and who hath appointed it.’ We should not only be sensible of the smart, but look to the cause ; therefore, if we would know the cause, let us go and expostulate with God about it ; as Joab, when Absalom set his corn-field on fire ; he sent for him once and twice, but he comes not, until he sets his corn-field on fire, and then he comes and expostulates with him, ‘Who hath done this ?’ 2 Sam. xiv. 30, 31. So when we make bold, and will not come to God, nor take notice of his messages, God comes and lets out his wrath upon our comforts and conveniences ; now let us deal with God about it ; wherefore is all this ?

[2.] That we may have strength to bear it. Alas ! we can bear or do little of ourselves, for that doing refers to bearing : Phil iv. 13, ‘I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me ;’ that is, I can suffer want, need, hunger, thirst, nakedness, and run through all conditions, ‘through Christ that strengtheneth me.’ Now you must ask it of God : James i. 5, ‘If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God.’ It is wisdom to bear affliction, if he would wisely carry himself under the rod ; that he may not discover his folly, he must ask this strength and grace of God.

[3.] Wisdom to improve our chastisements, that we may have the benefit and fruit of them : Isa. xlviii. 17, ‘I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit ;’ that is, to profit by afflictions, to reap the fruit of them. So Job xxxiii. 16, ‘He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.’ God, by a powerful work upon the heart, impresseth their duty upon them, that they may see wherefore it is that he hath afflicted them.

[4.] We go to God for deliverance and freedom from the trouble : Ps. xxxiv. 19, ‘Many are the troubles of the righteous, but out of them all the Lord will deliver them.’ It is God’s prerogative to set us free. We break prison when we attempt to escape merely by our own means ; therefore either we shall have no deliverance, or no kindly one. God hath delivered, doth deliver, and we trust will deliver. This must be sought out of God ; God helping together with your prayers, 2 Cor. i. 10, 11. Prayer must fetch it out from God, or it is no kindly deliverance. Well, then, in our affliction, we need to be often with God.

SERMON CXVII.

Quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word—VER. 107.

USE 1. To reprove the stupidity and carelessness of them that neglect God in their troubles : Dan. ix. 13, ‘All this evil is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God.’ A very senseless slight spirit, that when they are under the blows of God’s

heavy hand, they will not be much in calling upon God; this is contrary to God's injunction, who expects now with earnestness they will seek him. God reckons upon it; he could not hear from them before, but now they will pray hard, and will make up their former negligence. When God sends a tempest after you, as on Jonah, yet will you keep off from him? It is contrary to the practice of the saints; in their chastisements, troubles, and afflictions, they are much with God, opening their hearts to him. Nay, it is worse than hypocrites, for they will have their pangs of devotion at such a time, Job xxvii. 10, 11. In short, you lose the comfort of your affliction. Seasons of affliction are happy seasons if they prove praying seasons; when they bring you nearer to God, it is a sign God is not wholly gone, but hath left somewhat behind him, when the heart is drawn into him. This is the blessing of every condition, when it brings God nearer to you, and you are more acquainted with him than before.

Use 2. Then it takes off the discouragements of poor disconsolate ones, who mis-expound his providence when they think afflictions put us from God rather than call us to him. Oh no! it is not to drive you from him, but to draw you to him. Do not think God hath no mercy for thee, because he leaves thee to such pressures, wants, and crosses. This is the way to acquaint yourselves with God, yea, though you have been hitherto strangers to him; he hath invited you to call upon him in time of trouble, he is willing to have you upon any terms. A man will say, You come to me in your necessities; God delights to hear from you, and is glad any occasion will bring you into his presence; and therefore be much with God.

Secondly, I observe, when this affliction was sore and pressing, yet then he hath a heart to pray, 'I am afflicted very sore, O Lord, quicken me.'

Doct. We must not give over prayer, though our afflictions be never so great and heavy. Why? Because—

1. Nothing is too hard for God; he hath ways of his own to save and preserve his people when we are at a loss. This was the glory of Abraham's faith, that he accounted God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead, Heb. xi. 19. Difficult cases are fit for God to deal in, to show his divine power. When means have spent their allowance, then is it time to try what God can do: Ps. cxlii. 4, 5, 'I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living.' When all things fail, God faileth not.

2. We must still pray. Faith must express something above sense, or else living by faith and living by sense cannot be distinguished. In desperate cases then is the glory of faith seen: Job xiii. 15, 'Though he should kill me, yet I will trust in him.' In defiance of all discouragement, we should come and profess our dependence upon God.

Use. To condemn those that despond, and give over all treaty with God, as soon as any difficulty doth arise; whereas this should sharpen prayer, rather than discourage us. This is man's temper, when troubles are little and small, then to neglect God; when great, then to distrust God. A little headache will not send us to the physician,

nor the scratch of a pin to the chyrurgeon ; so if our troubles be little, they do not move us to seek after God, but we are secure and careless ; but when our troubles are smart, sore, and pressing, then we are discouraged, and give over all hopes ; so hard a matter is it to bring man to God, to keep an even frame, neither to slight the hand of God, nor to faint under it, as we have direction to avoid both extremes, Heb. xii. 5, to cherish a due sense of our troubles, with a regular confidence in God.

That he prays you have seen. Now what he prays for. He doth not say *deliver* me, but *quicken* me.

Doct. Strength and support under afflictions is a great blessing, to be sought from God, and acknowledged as a favour, as well as deliverance.

1. You shall see this is promised as a favour : Isa. xl. 31, ‘They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ;’ that is, shall not faint nor be weary, but mount up as it were with wings as eagles ; they shall have a new supply of grace, enabling them to bear and hold out till the deliverance cometh. They that wait upon the Lord do not always see the end of their troubles, but are quickened, comforted, and strengthened in them ; they shall renew their strength.

2. This is accepted by the saints with thanksgiving, and valued by them as a special answer of prayer ; they value it more than temporal deliverance itself many times ; as 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10, Paul prays for the removal of the thorn in the flesh thrice, when God only gives him this answer, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee ;’ saith Paul then, ‘I will rejoice in mine infirmities,’ so I might have strength and support in grievous weaknesses, reproaches, and afflictions, whatever they be. So Ps. cxxxviii. 3, ‘In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.’ That is noted as a special answer of prayer. How did he hear him ? With strength in my soul. Though he did not give him deliverance, he gave him support, so that was acknowledged as a very great mercy.

3. There are many cases wherein we cannot expect temporal deliverance, then we must only go for quickening and support ; when by a lingering disease we are drawing down to the chambers of death, and our outward strength is clean spent and gone, then have we support ; that is a great mercy : Ps. lxxiii. 26, when strength fail and heart fail, ‘God is the strength of my heart, and portion for ever ;’ that is, to have his heart quickened by God in the languishing of a mortal disease. So 2 Cor. iv. 16, ‘Though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.’ There are many troubles that cannot be avoided, and therefore we are then to be earnest with God for spiritual strength.

Use. Well, then, you see upon what occasion we should go for grace rather than for temporal deliverance. We should pray from the new nature ; not deliver me, but quicken me ; and if the Lord should suspend deliverance, why, that will be our strength in time of trouble : Ps. xxxvii. 39, ‘The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord ; he is their strength in the time of trouble.’

But more particularly, let us take notice of this request : ‘Quicken me,’ saith he.

Doct. Quickening grace must be asked of God.

1. What is quickening?

2. Why asked of God?

First, What is this quickening? Quickening in scripture is put for two things:—

1. For regeneration, or the first infusion of the life of grace; as Eph. ii. 5, ‘And you that were dead in trespasses and sins hath he quickened;’ that is, infused life, or making to live a new life.

2. It is put for the renewed excitations of God’s grace, God’s breathing upon his own work. God, that begins life in our souls, carries on this life, and actuates it. Now this kind of quickening is twofold spoken of in this psalm; there is quickening in duties, and quickening in afflictions. Quickening in duties, that is opposite to deadness of spirit; quickening in affliction, that is opposite to faintness.

[1.] Quickening in duties, that is opposite to that deadness of spirit which creeps upon us now and then, and is occasioned either by our negligence or by our carnal liberty, that deadness of spirit that doth hinder the activity of grace.

(1.) By our negligence and slothfulness in the spiritual life, when we do not stir up ourselves: Isa. lxiv. 7, ‘There is none that stirreth up himself to take hold on thee;’ when men grow careless and neglectful in their souls. An instrument, though never so well in tune, yet if hung up and laid by, soon grows out of order; so when our hearts are neglected, when they are not under a constant exercise of grace, a deadness creeps upon us. Wells are sweeter for the draining. Our graces they are more fresh and lively the more they are kept a-work, otherwise they lose their vitality. A key rusts that is seldom turned in the lock, and therefore negligence is a cause of this deadness: 2 Tim. i. 6, ‘Stir up the gift that is in thee.’ We must blow up the ashes. There needs blowing if we would keep in the fire; we grow dead and lukewarm, and cold in the spiritual life, for want of exercise.

(2.) This deadness is occasioned by carnal liberty: Ps. cxix. 37, ‘Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.’ When we have been too busy about the vanities of the world, or pleasures of the flesh, when we have given contentment to the flesh, and been intermeddling with worldly cares and delights, it brings a brawn and deadness upon the heart: Luke xxi. 34, ‘Take heed that your hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this world,’ &c. I say, by this the soul is dis-tempered, and rendered inapt for God. Christians! this is a disease very incident to the saints, this deadness that creeps upon them. We have not such lively stirrings, nor a like influence of grace; we have not those earnest and lively motions we were wont to have in prayer. Now God he quickeneth us. How? By exciting the operative graces, as faith, love, hope, and fear, when these are kept pregnant and lively, as we read of ‘lively hope,’ 1 Peter i. 3. There is living faith and lively faith, and living fear and lively fear of God, and living hope and lively hope. All graces God makes them lively and vivacious, that they may put forth their operations the more readily. Well, this is quickening in duties.

[2.] There is quickening in afflictions, and so it is opposed to fainting, that fainting which is occasioned by too deep a sense of present troubles, or by unbelief, or distrust of God and his promises, and the supplies of his grace. Oh! when troubles press upon us very sore, our hearts are like a bird, dead in the nest, overcome, so that we have no spirit, life, nor aptness for God's service: 'My soul droopeth for very heaviness;' we have lost our life and our courage for God.

Well, how doth God quicken us? By reviving our suffering graces, as our hope of eternal life and eternal glory, patience and faith, and so puts life into us again, that we may go on cheerfully in our service. By infusion of new comforts. He revives the spirit of his contrite ones; so the prophet saith, Isa. lvii. 15. He doth revive our spirits again when they are dead and sunk under our troubles. Oh! it is very necessary for this: Ps. lxxx. 18, 'Quicken us, and we will call upon thy name.' Discomfort and discouragement they weaken our hands; until the Lord cheers us again we have no life in prayer. By two things especially doth God quicken us in affliction—by reviving the sense of his love, and by reviving the hopes of glory. By reviving the sense of his love: Rom. v. 5, 'The love of God is shed abroad,' like a fragrant ointment that doth revive us, when we are even ready to give up the ghost; Ps. lxxxv. 6, 'Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?' I say, when he restores the sense of his love after great and pressing sorrow, then he is said to quicken. So when he doth renew upon us the hopes of glory: Rom. v. 2, 3, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' Well, you see what this quickening is.

Secondly, This quickening must be asked of God.

1. Because it is his prerogative to govern the heart of man, especially to quicken us. God will be owned as the fountain of all life: 1 Tim. vi. 13, 'I charge thee in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things.' It is God that quickeneth all things. All the life that is in the creature, all the life that is in new creatures, it comes from God; it is he that giveth us life at first, and he must keep in this life in the soul, and restore it. The meanest worm, all the life it hath, it hath from God. When John would prove the Godhead of Christ, he brings this argument, John i. 4, 'In him is life.' There is not a gnat but receives this benefit from Christ as God. He hath the life of all things, and this life is the light of men; much more the noble creature man hath this life from God; much more the new creature; greater operation of spiritual life, more depends upon his influence; and therefore, if we would be quickened, and carried out with any life and strength, we must go to God for it.

2. God as our judge, he must be treated with about it, for he smites us with deadness; therefore till he takes off his sentence, we cannot get rid of this distemper; it is one of God's spiritual plagues, which must be removed before we can hope for any liveliness, and any activity of grace again. Under the law, God punished sins more sensibly; as unhallowed addresses, he punished them with death. Under the gospel, he punisheth sins with deadness of heart. When they seem careless in the worshipping of God, they have a blow and breach, as he smote Uzzah and Nadab and Abihu dead in the place;

and now he smites with deadness, Rev. iii. 7. He 'hath the key of David, that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth;' without his permission we can never recover our former lively estate again, for there is a judicial sentence passed upon us.

Use. To press us to be often with God for quickening, that we may obtain this benefit. I have spoken of it at large upon another verse; if you would have this benefit, rouse up yourselves: Isa. lxiv. 7, 'There is none that stirreth up himself;' and 2 Tim. i. 6, 'Stir up the gift that is in thee.' A man hath a faculty to work upon his own heart, to commune and reason with himself; and we are bidden to 'strengthen the things that are ready to die,' Rev. iii. 2. When things are dying and fainting in the soul, we are to strengthen ourselves; therefore, if we would have God to quicken us, thus must we do, chide the heart for its deadness in duty; we can be lively enough in a way of sin; chide the heart for its deadness in affliction: Ps. xlii., 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? still trust in God.' And after you have done this, then look up, and expect this grace from God in and through Christ Jesus. It is said, John x. 10, 'I am come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.' Jesus Christ, he came not only that we might have life enough to keep body and soul together, but that we might not only be living but lively, full of life, strength, and cheerfulness in the service of God. He is come into the world for this end and purpose: expect it through Christ, who hath purchased it for us. And then plead with God about it, according to his promise, Ah! Lord, according to thy word; hast thou not said, I will quicken a dead heart? When thou art broken and tossed with affliction, remember it is the high and lofty one that hath said he will 'revive the heart of the contrite ones,' Isa. lvii. 15; and plead thus with God, Ah! Lord, dost not thou delight in a cheerful spirit? 'Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?' Ps. lxxxv. 6. And then humble yourselves for the cause of the distemper. What is the matter? how comes this deadness upon me? Isa. lxiii. 17, 'Why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?' Inquire what is the cause of this deadness that grows upon me, that you may humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.

The argument only is behind, *according to thy word*. David, when he begs for quickening, he is encouraged so to do by a promise. The question is, where this promise should be? Some think it was that general promise of the law, 'If thou do these things, thou shalt live in them,' Lev. xviii. 5; and that from thence David drew this particular conclusion, that God would give life to his people. But rather it was some other promise, some word of God he had to bear him out in this request. We see he hath made many promises to us of sanctifying our affliction: Isa. xxvii. 9, 'The fruit of all shall be the taking away of sin;' of bettering and improving us by it, Heb. ii. 11; of moderating our affliction; that he will 'stay his rough wind in the day of the east-wind,' Isa. xxvii. 8; that he will 'lay no more upon us than he will enable us to bear,' 1 Cor. x. 13. He hath promised he will moderate our affliction, so that we shall not be tempted above our strength. He hath promised he will deliver us from it, that 'the rod of the wicked shall not always rest on the back

of the righteous?' Ps. cxxv. 3; that he will be with us in it, and never fail us, Heb. xiii. 5. Now, I argue thus: if the people of God could stay their hearts upon God's word when they had but such obscure hints to work upon, that we do not know where the promise lies, ah! how should our hearts be stayed upon God when we have so many promises! When the scriptures are enlarged for the comfort and enlarging of our faith, surely we should say now as Paul, when he got a word, Acts xxvii. 25, 'I believe God;' I may expect God will do thus for me, when his word speaks it everywhere. Then you may expostulate with God: I have thy word for it, Lord; as she, when she showed him the jewel, ring, and staff, Whose are these? So we may cast in God his promises: Whose are these according to thy word? And mark, David, that was punctual with God, 'I have sworn, and I will perform it; and quicken me according to thy word.' Sincere hearts may plead promises with God: Isa. xxxviii. 3, 'Lord, remember I have walked before thee with an upright heart.' These may look up and wait upon God for deliverance.

SERMON CXVIII.

Accept, I beseech thee, the free-will-offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me thy judgments.—VER. 108.

In this verse two things are asked of God—God's acceptance; then, secondly, instruction.

First, He begs acceptance. Therein take notice—(1.) Of the matter, object, or thing that he would have to be accepted, *the free-will-offerings of my mouth*. (2.) The manner of asking this acceptance, *accept, I beseech thee, O Lord*. In the former, you may observe the general nature of the thing, and then the particular kind; they were free-will-offerings; and yet more express, they were free-will-offerings of his hands; not legal sacrifices, but spiritual services, free-will-offerings of his mouth, implying praises. Our praises of God are called 'the calves of our lips,' Hosea xiv. 2, rendered there by the Septuagint, 'the fruit of our lips,' and accordingly translated by the apostle, Heb. xiii. 15, 'The fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.' He was in deep affliction, wandering up and down the desert; he was disabled to offer up to God any other sacrifice, therefore he desires God would accept the free-will-offerings of his mouth; he had nothing else to bring him.

Secondly, He begs of God instruction in his way, *teach me thy judgments*. By *misphalim*, 'judgments,' are meant both God's statutes and God's providences. If you take them in the former sense, for God's statutes, so he begs grace to excite, direct, and assist him in a course of sincere obedience to God, practically to walk according to God's will. If you understand it in the latter sense, only for the accomplishment of what God had spoken in his word, for God's providence, for his corrective dispensation, 'Teach me,' he begs understanding and profiting by them.

I shall begin with his first request, which offereth four observations :—

1. That God's people have their spiritual offerings.
2. That these spiritual offerings must be free-will-offerings.
3. That these free-will-offerings are graciously accepted by God.
4. That this gracious acceptance must be earnestly sought and valued as a great blessing, 'I beseech thee accept,' &c.

Doct. 1. First, That God's people have their spiritual offerings. I shall give the sense of this point in five propositions.

1. That all God's people are made priests to God, for every offering supposeth a priest; so it is said, Rev. i. 6, that Christ Jesus 'hath made us kings and priests.' All Christians, they have a communion with Christ in all his offices; whatever Christ was, that certainly they are in some measure and degree. Now, Christ was king, priest, and prophet; and so is every Christian, in a spiritual sense, a king, priest, and prophet; for they have their anointing, their unction from the Holy One, and he communicates with them in his offices. So also do they resemble the priesthood under the law. In 1 Peter ii. 5, they are called 'a holy priesthood to offer sacrifices to God;' and 1 Peter ii. 9, they are called 'a royal priesthood.' They are a holy priesthood, like the sons of Aaron, who were separated from the people, to minister before the Lord; and they are a royal priesthood, in conformity to the priesthood of Melchisedec, who was 'king of Salem, and also priest of the most high God.' There is a mighty conformity between what is done by every Christian and the solemnities and rites used by the priests under the law. The priests of the law were separated from the rest of the people: so are all God's people from the rest of the world. The priests of the law were to be anointed with holy oil, Exod. xxviii. 41; so all Christians they receive 'an unction from the Holy One,' 1 John ii. 20. By the holy oil was figured the Holy Spirit, which was the unction of the Holy One, by which they are made fit and ready to perform those duties which are acceptable to God. After the priest was thus generally prepared by the anointing to their services, before they went to offer, they were to wash in the great laver which stood in the sanctuary door, Exod. xxix. 4; Lev. viii. 4, 5. So every Christian is to be washed in the great laver of regeneration, Titus iii. 5. And when they are regenerated, born again, purged and cleansed from their sins, then they are priests to offer sacrifices to God; for till this be done, none of their offerings are acceptable to him: for 'they that are in the flesh cannot please God,' Rom. viii. 8; and 'the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord,' Prov. xv. 8. Thus you see in all these correspondences, and in many more, Christians they are priests. What the priests of the law were to God, that is every Christian now to God, to offer spiritual sacrifices by Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. They have their offerings. The great work of the priest was to offer sacrifice, and this is our employment, to offer sacrifices to God. What sacrifices do we offer now in the time of the gospel? Not sin-offerings, but thank-offerings. A sin-offering can be offered but once: Heb. x. 14, 'By one offering Jesus Christ hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' And there needs no more of that kind; that was but to be once offered, Heb. vii. 27; and therefore there remains

nothing more to be done by us but the offering of thank-offerings, and this is to be done continually: Heb. xiii. 15, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.'

3. These offerings must be spiritual thank-offerings. Under the law the thank-offering was that of a beast, but now under the gospel we offer spiritual sacrifices; therefore the apostle saith, 1 Peter ii. 5, 'Ye are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.' The sacrifice must suit with the nature of the priesthood. The priesthood is spiritual, and not after the law of a carnal commandment, and not by an external consecration, but the inward anointing of the Holy Ghost. And herein we differ from the priests of the law, because the very nature and substance of our worship is more pleasing to God than the nature of theirs; for moral worship is better and more suited to the nature of God than ceremonial: 'God is a spirit, and will be worshipped in spirit,' John iv. 24. And therefore, when ceremonial worship was in force, they that rested in external ceremonies, and did not look to the spiritual intent and signification of them, were not accepted by God; though the ceremony was performed with never so much pomp, though they came with their flocks and herds, yet praying to God, and praising God with a willing mind, which was the soul of their offering, was that alone which was acceptable to God; therefore it is said, Ps. lxxix. 30, 31, 'I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving: this also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs;' that is, which is perfect and exact according to the institutions of the law, for there was to be no blemish in the sacrifice of the law; yet calling upon the name of God, and praising him, is better than the service performed with the exactest conformity to legal rites: Ps. l. 13-15, 'Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' The Lord draws them off from ceremonies to the spiritual service; it is more becoming the nature of God, and it is more reasonable service. The offering of a beast hath not so much of God's nature, nor of man's nature in it, only God would keep it up for a while; therefore now these are the great offerings.

4. The two great sacrifices required of us, prayer and praise; there are many others, but they are implied in these. To instance, under the gospel there is this thank-offering, presenting ourselves to the Lord, dedicating ourselves to the Lord's use and service: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service;' 2 Cor. viii. 5, 'They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' And then there is alms: Heb. xiii. 16, 'To do good and communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' And when the Philippians had made contribution to Paul's necessities, he saith it was 'a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour unto God,' Phil. iv. 18. Ay! but now both these are included in the other two, namely, as they are evidences of our thank-

fulness to God, and the sense of his love and favour which we have received by Christ. The great and usual offerings are 'the fruit of our lips,' 'the calves of our lips,' here called 'the free-will-offerings of our mouth,' prayer and praise. That prayer is a sacrifice, see Ps. cxli. 2, 'Let my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.' The daily offering was accompanied with incense, and he mentions the evening sacrifice, because then was a more perfect atonement for the day, therefore when the evening sacrifice came, it was to be understood they were perfectly reconciled to God. And then that praise is a sacrifice, see Ps. liv. 6, 'I will freely sacrifice unto thee; I will praise thy name, O Lord, for it is good.' And in that other place where the Lord rejects the flesh of bulls and blood of goats, praise is substituted, 'Will I eat the flesh of bulls and blood of goats?' No: Ps. l. 14, 'Offer to me thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.' So Ps. cxvi. 17, 18. So that prayers and praises are the oblations which we offer unto God under the gospel, either acknowledgments for former mercies, or petitions for future deliverances. These are the two duties which contain the substance of the ceremonies under the law, and are daily and constantly to be performed by us.

5. Whatever was figured in the old sacrifices, it must be spiritually performed in the duty of prayer and praise. In those legal rites, there was an evangelical equity, or something that was moral and spiritual for us still to observe.

As, first, in prayer, truth was the inward part of the sacrifice, for the mere external oblation was of no significancy with God. There were three things wherein it symbolizeth with prayer; in prayer there is required brokenness of heart, owning of Christ, renewing covenant with God.

[1.] One thing that was required in sacrifices was brokenness of heart; for when a man came to present his beast before the Lord, he was to consider this beast was to be slain and burnt with fire; and to consider, All this was my case; I might have been consumed with his wrath, and be burnt with fire; and so come with a compunctionate spirit, with brokenness of heart, to bemoan his case before the Lord; therefore it is said, Ps. li. 17, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' This is required in every one that comes to prayer, brokenness of heart; that is, a sensibleness of his want of those good things for which he comes, and his inability to supply himself with anything without God; nay, his ill-deservings, how justly he might be denied of God, and cursed by all manner of plagues; how he hath forfeited all manner of blessings; this must be at the bottom.

[2.] The sacrifices implied an eying of the Redeemer, by virtue of whose oblation and intercession we are accepted with God; for every one that came with his sacrifice was to lay his hand upon the head of the beast, to put his sins there, to show Christ bore the iniquity of us all; and in every prayer we make, there is this evangelical equity, by virtue of the old sacrifice remaining upon us, that we should eye the Redeemer, even Christ Jesus, our Lord, 'Who hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour,' Eph.

v. 2. He is the expiatory sacrifice, and therefore in all our supplicatory or gratulatory offerings to God we must still look to him. The word, *an offering*, relates to things destitute of life that were dedicated to God, as flour, oil, frankincense; that which was signified thereby was accomplished in Christ. And for the other word, *sacrifice*, gave himself as an offering and sacrifice; the beasts whose blood was shed, those things which had life in them, were called a real sacrifice offered to God to appease his justice. Thus Christ Jesus was given as a sacrifice, to obtain all manner of blessings for us. We should look upon God as an all-sufficient fountain of grace, and the author of every good gift, depending upon him for his goodness and bounty for Christ's sake.

[3.] In sacrifices there was implied a renewing of covenant; so the Lord saith, Ps. l. 5, 'Gather my saints together, that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.' As they did dedicate the beast offered to God, so was the worshipper to dedicate himself to God. Now we must renew this dedication of ourselves to the Lord's service; all this was morally in the sacrifices, and is to be done every day in our future prayers, with brokenness of heart, eying our Redeemer, casting our whole dependence upon him, and in a sense of his love dedicating and devoting ourselves to God.

Secondly, For the other duty, of thanksgiving and praise for mercies received. Every point and passage of his undeserved favour to be owned, and praise thereof to be given to God, and still to look on all done not for our sakes, but for the sake of Christ Jesus. You read under the law, Lev. iii. 3, when the thank-offering was brought to God, it was to be laid upon the top of the burnt-offering. First they were to bring the burnt-offering, and offer that to God, then to lay upon it the peace or thank-offering, to show that first we must be reconciled to God, and by virtue of that all mercies descend and come down upon us; and then upon this solemn occasion they were to give up themselves anew to the Lord. So the apostle presseth this, Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.' And this is one part of the offering of our lips, namely, when we come solemnly by virtue of every mercy received, and promise obedience anew and afresh to God. To apply this—(1.) Are you priests? (2.) Do you offer sacrifices of prayer and praise to God continually?

[1.] Are you priests unto God? Are you priests by separation? Hath God called you out from amongst men? Ps. iv. 3, 'The Lord hath set apart the man that is godly for himself.' Hath God called you off from sin to holiness, from self to Christ, from the creature to God? for these are the three things wherein conversion consists. From the creature to God, as our last end; from self to Christ, as the only means to come to God; and from sin to holiness, as the only way to get an interest in Christ. Are you called off from the common course of living, wherein most men are involved, that you may live and act for God? Are you priests by unction? Are you anointed by the Spirit as to gifts and graces, and qualified and made meet for this holy ministration unto God? Christ hath purchased gifts in some measure

for his people; for as we were maimed in Adam, not only as to graces but also as to gifts, so is our restitution by Christ, that the plaster may be as broad as the sore. We have necessary gifts given us by virtue of his ascension, whereby we may lay open our state and case to God. Indeed, all God's people have not a like measure of gifts, and carnal men may come behind in no gift, therefore have you the grace of prayer: Zech. xii. 10, 'I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication.' Have you a heart qualified by grace, made meet to converse with God? the tendency and disposition of your souls that carrieth you to God? grace that seeks a vent and utterance in prayer and holy converses with God? and are you priests by purgation? Every priest was to be washed in the great laver; are you washed and purged from sin, that you may serve God acceptably? Mal. iii. 3, first they must be purified, then offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. God will not take a gift out of a carnal man's hand; and therefore you should look to this, that you be purified and purged.

[2.] Do you offer spiritual sacrifices to God, of prayer and praise?

(1.) Prayer, a duty very kindly to the saints. It is natural to them; it is, as it were, the sphere of their activity, the Spirit discovers himself to men in prayer. As soon as they are converted to God they will fall a-praying, and be dealing with God often in this kind; therefore the children of God are described by this, as a duty wherein they are most exercised: Zeph. iii. 10, 'My suppliants;' and Ps. xxiv. 6, 'This is a generation of them that seek thee;' to show this is a vital act, a usual and constant expressing of the new nature that is put into them. Surely they that love God will be always seeking him, and a broken heart, sensible of its condition, can never want an errand to the throne of grace. You are to offer sacrifices as they did under the law. Now under the law there was a daily sacrifice, every morning they were to offer a lamb without spot, Num. xxviii. 3, to show that every morning they should come and sue out their pardon by Christ, and every evening to look to the Messiah, the lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world; that was the intent of the type. Now I reason thus: certainly we have as much need as they; we are sinners as well as that people which lived under that dispensation; therefore every morning we must look to the lamb of God. Nay, we have more reason, for they could not clearly discern the meaning of that type; but now all things are open, we can behold the lamb of God, therefore must be often with God, suing out our pardon in the name of Christ.

(2.) The sacrifice of praise. It is notable when the apostle had spoken of Christ as a sin-offering he mentions this as the main thing in the gospel: Heb. xiii. 15, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.' Praise, it ought continually, frequently, and upon all occasions to be offered to God, for this is a more noble duty than prayer. Self-love may put us upon prayer, but love to God puts us upon praise and thanksgiving; we pray because we need God, and we praise because we love him. In prayer we become beggars, that God would bestow something upon us; but in praise we come, according to poor creatures, to bestow something upon God, even to give him the glory due to his name, and tell him what he

hath done for our poor souls. This is the most noble among all the parts of Christian worship. We have more cause to give thanks than to pray, for we have many things more to praise God for than to pray to him for. There are many favours which go before all thought of desert, and many favours still bestowed upon us beyond what we can either ask or think.

Doct. 2. Secondly, These spiritual offerings must be free-will-offerings to God. This expression is often spoken of in the law, Lev. xxii. 18; Num. xxix. 39; 2 Chron. xxxi. 14; Amos iv. 5. What are these free-will-offerings? They are distinguished from God's stated worship, and distinguished from that service which fell under a vow. Besides the stated peace-offerings there were certain sacrifices performed upon certain occasions to testify God's general goodness, and upon receipts of some special mercy; and you will find these sacrifices to be expressly distinguished from such services as men bound themselves to by vow, Lev. vii. 16. What is there that answers now to these free-will-offerings? Certainly this is not spoken to this use, that a man should devise any part of worship of his own head, whatever pretence of zeal he hath; but they serve to teach us two things:—

1. They are to teach us how ready we should be to take all occasions of thankfulness and spiritual worship; for besides their vowed services and instituted services they had daily sacrifices and set feasts commanded by God; they had their free-will-offerings offered to God in thankfulness for some special blessing received or deliverance from danger.

2. It shows with what voluntariness and cheerfulness we should go about God's worship in the gospel, and what a free disposition of heart there should be, and edge upon our affections in all things that we offer to God. And in this latter sense I shall speak, that our offerings to God, prayer and praise, should be free-will-offerings, come from us not like water out of a still forced by the fire, but like water out of a fountain, with native freeness, readily and freely.

[1.] God loves a cheerful giver; constrained service is of no value and respect with him. Under the law, when sacrifice of beasts was in fashion, wherefore did God choose the purest and fattest of everything offered to him, but as a testimony of a willing mind? And still he looks to the affections rather than the action. God weighs the spirit, Prov. xvi. 2. When God comes to put them into the balance of the sanctuary, what doth he weigh? External circumstances of duty, or the pomp and appearance wherein men go? No; but he considers with what kind of heart it is done; and the love of sin, God takes notice of that, as well as the practice of sin. So in our duties, God takes notice of the love, the inclination of our souls, as well as the outward service; therefore our offerings must be free and voluntary.

[2.] God deserves it, he doth us good with all his heart, and all hisgivings come to us from his love. Why did he give Christ for us and to us? 'He loved us.' Why gave he him for us? 'God so loved the world,' John iii. 16. Why doth he give Christ to us? Eph. ii. 4, 5, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.' That which moved God to bestow his saving grace upon us

was his great love, and all the good we receive from him. Why, mercy pleaseth him: 'I will rejoice over them to do them good.' If he deliver us out of any danger, he hath 'loved us from the grave,' Isa. xxxviii. 7. Now love should season all our services to God.

[3.] Where a day of grace hath passed upon our hearts, so it will be; the soul will come off readily and freely to the duties God hath required of us: Ps. cx. 3, 'Thy people shall be a willing people in the day of thy power.' We are naturally backward, slow of heart to do anything that is good, hang off from God, will not be subject to him; but when the day of his power passeth upon us, then we are a willing people, we are more delighted in communion with God, less averse from him, the bent of our hearts is altered, and the stream of our affections is turned another way, and our converses with God are more delightful, and we are as earnest in serving God as before we were in serving sin.

Use. To press us to serve God with a perfect heart and with a willing mind, 1 Chron. xxix. 9. Thus when we give God any spiritual sacrifice, when we pray to or praise him, we should do it willingly, not customarily, or by constraint, or for by-ends, nor by the compulsion of a natural conscience; and when we feel, as we shall now and then, any tediousness and irksomeness in prayer, we should quicken ourselves by this motive: Christ Jesus, who was our sin-offering, he willingly offered up himself upon the service of our salvation. I might urge other arguments, as the nobleness of our service, the greatness of our reward, the many sweet experiences we shall gain in our converse with God; but this should be as the reason of reasons, and instead of all. Christ Jesus did not grudgingly go about the work of our salvation, but willingly offered himself: Ps. xl. 8, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.' When God would have no more legal sin-offerings, but the great sin-offering of the gospel was to be produced and brought forth in the view of the world, 'Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me.' Now our thank-offering should be carried on with the same willingness. Christ will be served now out of gratitude, and therefore his love should constrain us. Surely if we believe this great mystery of Christ, that he did willingly offer himself upon the service of our souls, and if we have any faith in him, 'faith will work by love,' Gal. v. 6. The soul may reason and discourse thus with itself, Do I believe Christ Jesus did thus willingly give himself for my soul? how can I be backward in God's service and hang off from him? Oh! let me live to Christ, 'who loved me, and gave himself for me,' Gal. ii. 20. What! shall I be more backward to do for God than Christ was to die for me, to go to the throne of grace than Christ Jesus was to go to the cross? Can I hang him off from such pleasing noble service, when Jesus Christ my Lord refused not the hard work of my redemption? If his will was in it, certainly so should be yours.

Doct. 3. The third point, that these free-will-offerings are accepted with God. 'They shall come with rams,' speaking of the conversion of the Gentiles in terms proper to the old legal dispensation, 'and they shall come with acceptance,' Isa. lx. 7; and Mal. iii. 4, 'Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord.' Upon what grounds, and what way our acceptance with God is brought

about? Our works in themselves cannot please God, they are accepted not as merits, but as testimonies of thankfulness.

1. Our persons are by Christ reconciled to God, and in worship he delights. This is the proper importance of laying the peace-offering upon the top of the burnt-offering, Lev. iii. 10.

2. Our infirmities are covered with his righteousness; for Christ is the propitiation, the mercy-seat that interposeth between the law and God's gracious audience. We come to the throne of grace when we come to God in and by him, Heb. iv. 16.

3. By his intercession our duties are commended to God; as Aaron was to stand before the Lord with his plate upon his forehead, wherein was writ, 'Holiness to the Lord.' Why? 'That he might bear the iniquity of the people, that they might be accepted of the Lord.' All our acceptance comes from Christ's intercession; and alas! our prayers and praises are unsavoury eruptions, belches of the flesh, as they come from us; a great deal of infirmity we mingle with them, we mingle brimstone with our incense and sweet spices, therefore provoke the Lord to abhor and despise us; but there is an angel stands by the altar that perfumes all our prayers and praises. How should this encourage us against the slights of the world and discouragements of our own hearts, and to look after the testimony of our acceptance with God!

Doct. 4. The fourth point, that this gracious acceptance must be sought and valued as a great blessing: Ps. xix. 14, 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord.' And it must be valued as a great blessing, if we consider either who the Lord is, or what we are, or what it is we go to him for. If we consider who the Lord is, God all-sufficient, that standeth in no need of what we can do, that cannot be profited by us; he is of so great a majesty, that his honour is rather lessened than greatened by anything we can do; the great author of all blessings, all our offerings come from himself first: 'Of thine own have we given thee.' And if we consider what we are, poor, impotent, sinful creatures, will God take an offering at our hands? And if we consider what we do, nothing but imperfection; there is more of us in it, of our fleshly part, in anything we do, yet that these things should be accepted with God.

SERMON CXIX.

My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.—VER. 109.

In this verse and the next, David asserts his integrity against two sorts of temptations and ways of assault—the violence and craft of his enemies. Their violence in this verse, *my soul is in my hand*; and their craft in the next verse, *they laid snares for me*. And yet still his heart is upright with God.

In this verse observe—(1.) David's condition, *my soul is continually in my hand*. (2.) His constancy and perseverance, notwithstanding that condition, *yet do I not forget thy law*.

First, Let me speak of the condition he was now in, in that expression, 'My soul is continually in my hand.' The soul in the hand is a phrase often used in scripture; it is said of Jephthah, Judges xii. 3, 'I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon.' So Job xiii. 14, 'Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand?' And when David went to encounter Goliath, 1 Sam. xix. 5, it is said, 'He put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine.' In exposing ourselves to any hazard and dangers in any great attempt, it is called the putting of our life in our hand. And the witch of Endor, when she ventured against a law to please Saul, and so had exposed her life, this form of speech is used concerning her, 1 Sam. xxviii. 21, 'I have put my life in my hand.' Briefly, then, by *soul* is meant life, and this is said to be in his hand; I go in danger of my life day by day; as if he should say, I have my soul ready divorced when God calls for it. It not only notes liableness to danger, but resolution and courage to encounter it. In a sense, we always carry our souls in our hands; our life hangs by a single thread, which is soon fretted asunder, and therefore we should every day be praying that it may not be taken from us, as the souls of wicked men are, Job xxvii. 8; Luke xii. 20, but yielded up, and resigned to God. But more especially is the expression verified when we walk in the midst of dangers and in a thousand deaths: 'My soul is in my hand;' that is, I am exposed to dangers that threaten my life every day.

Secondly, Here is his affection to God's word, notwithstanding this condition, 'Yet do I not forget thy law.' There is a twofold remembrance of things—notional and affective; and so there is a twofold forgetfulness:—

1. Notional. We forget the word, when the notion of things written therein has either wholly or in part vanished out of our minds.

2. Affectively. We are said to forget the word of God when, though we still retain the notion, yet we are not answerably affected, do not act according thereunto, and this is that which is understood here, 'I do not forget thy law.' Law is taken generally for any part of the word of God, and implies the word of promise, as well as the word of command. As for instance:—

[1.] If we interpret it of the promise, the sense will be this: I do not forget thy law; that is, I take no discouragements from my dangers to let fall my trust, as if there were no providence, no God to take care of those that walk closely with him. Heb. xii. 5, when they fainted, they are said to have forgotten the consolation which spake unto them as unto children.

[2.] If we interpret this word 'law' of the commandments and directions of the word, and so I do not forget it; that is either by way of omission, I do not slacken my diligence in thy service for all this; or by way of commission, I do not act contrary to conscience; and the effect of the whole verse is this: Though I walk in the midst of dangers and a thousand deaths continually, yet at such a time, when a man would think he should not stand upon nice points, even then he

should keep up a dear and tender respect to God's law. And he doth the rather express himself thus, I do not forget it, because great temptations blind and divert the mind from the thought of our duty. Our minds are so surprised with the dangers before us, that God's law is quite forgotten as a thing out of mind, and we act as if we had no such comfort and direction given us. The points are two :—

1. That such things may befall God's children that they may carry their lives in their hands from day to day.

2. When we carry our lives in our hands, no kind of danger should make us warp and turn aside from the direction of God's word.

Doct. 1. That such things may befall God's children that they may carry their lives in their hands from day to day.

That this is often the lot of God's people, we may prove: 1 Cor. xv. 31, 'I protest, by our rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.' How can that be, I die daily, since we die but once? The meaning is, I go still in danger of my life. Such times may come when we run hazards for Christ every day, so that in the morning we do not know what may fall out before night: 2 Cor. xi. 23, 'In deaths often;' that is, in danger of death. So 1 Peter iv. 19, 'Let those that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.' Let them commit their souls, that is, their lives; the soul is sometimes put for life, for life spiritual or life eternal, but there it is put for life natural; so let them commit their souls to God, that is, in times of danger and hazard. Let them go on in well-doing cheerfully, and though there be no visible means of safety and defence, let them commit their lives to God in well-doing; when they carry their lives in their own hands, let them be careful to put them into the hands of God. Let God do what he pleaseth, for he is a faithful Creator; that is, as once he created them out of nothing, so he is able to preserve them when there is nothing visible, nothing to trust to. Often this may be the case of God's people, that they carry their lives in their hands from day to day. That you may take the force of the expression, consider when the people of God are in the midst of their enemies, then they carry their lives in their hands: Mat. x. 16, 'Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves;' when they are among men no better affected to them than wolves to sheep, and when men have them in their power, and there is no outward restraint of laws and government; for whatever enmity they have or act against them, laws and government are a great restraint; as Gen. xxvii. 41, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I slay my brother Jacob.' Till Isaac was dead, there was a check upon him; but sometimes it is in the power of their hands to do them mischief: Micah ii. 1, 'They practise iniquity, because it is in the power of their hand.' When men are ill affected, no restraint upon them, no impediment in their way, yea, when they begin to persecute and rage against the servants of God, and we know not when our turn comes, then we are said to have our lives in our hand; as Rom. viii. 36, 'For thy sake are we killed all the day long;' that is, some of that body killed, now one picked up, then another; in these cases they are said to carry their lives in their hands, when they are in the power

of men that have no principle of tenderness to us, no restraint upon them, these begin to vex, molest, and trouble the Church.

For the reasons why God permits it so, that his people should carry their lives in their hands.

1. God doth it to check security, to which we are very subject. We are apt to forget changes; if we have but a little breathing from trouble, we promise ourselves perpetual exemption therefrom; as Ps. xxx. 6, 'My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved.' When we have got a carnal pillow under our heads to rest upon, it is hard to keep from sleep, and dreaming of temporal felicity to be perpetuated to us; then we forget by whom we live, and by whose goodness we subsist; yea, this may be when trials are very near: the disciples slept when their master was ready to be surprised and they scattered, Mat. xxvi. 40; when we are in the greatest dangers, and matters which most concern us are at hand. Now, to prevent this security, God draws away this pillow from under our heads, and suffers us to be waylaid with dangers and troubles everywhere, that we might carry our lives in our hands, for this makes us sensible of our present condition in the world, and that we subsist upon God's goodness and providence every moment.

2. To wean us from creature confidences and carnal dependences: 2 Cor. i. 9, 'We received the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.' Paul, that went up and down everywhere to hunt the devil out of his territories, and to alarm the carnal sleepy world, this Paul was very prone to trust in himself; a man that was whipped, imprisoned, stoned, opposed everywhere by unreasonable men, what had he to trust to but God's providence? And yet he needs to be brought to this, to take his life in his hands, that he might learn to trust in God that raiseth from the dead. The best are prone to trust in themselves, and to lean to a temporal, visible interest. We would fain have it by any means, therefore sometimes we take a sinful course to get it. Well, now, God, to cure his people of this distemper, breaks every prop and stay which they are apt to lean upon, breaks down the hedge, the fence is removed, and lays them open to dangers continually, so that from day to day they are forced to seek their preservation from him.

3. To check their worldliness. We are very apt to dote upon present things, and to dream of honours and great places in the world, and seek great things for ourselves, when we should be preparing for bitter sufferings. As the two sons of Zebedee employed their mother to speak to Christ; being near of kin to him, she comes in a cunning manner, under pretence to worship him, and propounds a general question to him; she does not at first propose the particular, but says in general, 'I have a certain thing to request of thee.' And what was her request? 'That one of my sons may sit on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.' Saith Christ, 'To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my father.' Mark, out of this story you learn how apt Christ's own disciples are to dote upon worldly honour and greatness. The sons of Zebedee, James and John, those two worthy disciples, employ their mother to Christ in such a

message ; they were dreaming of earthly kingdoms and worldly honour that should be shared between them, notwithstanding Christ taught them rather to prepare for crosses in this world. Do but reflect the light of this upon your own hearts. Do we think we are better than those apostles ? and that it is an easy thing to shut the love of the world, and the honour thereof, out of our hearts, since they were so enchanted with the witchery of it ? Therefore Christ tells them, Mat. xx. 22, ‘ Alas ! poor creatures, ye know not what ye ask : can you pledge me in my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ? ’ We know not what we do when we are hunting after high places in the world ; we are to pledge Christ in his bitter cup before our advancement come. Nay, to prove this is not only the worldling’s disease, but it is very incident to the choicest of God’s people ; for after Christ had suffered and rose again, the apostles were not dispossessed of this humour, but still did dream of worldly ease and honour, therefore they come to Christ with this question, Acts i. 6, ‘ Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ? ’ meaning, in the Jewish sense, break the Roman yoke, and give them power and dominion over the nations, hoping for a great share to themselves when this work was done. Thus you see human weakness and the love of worldly honour bewrays itself in Christ’s own disciples. One instance more, in Jer. xlv. 5, of Baruch, ‘ Seekest thou great things for thyself ? seek them not. ’ Baruch, he was Jeremiah’s scribe, had written his prophecy, and believed it, that dreadful roll, written it over, yet he was seeking some great thing for himself. The best are apt to think they shall shift well enough for themselves in the world ; therefore saith Jeremiah, For thou to have thoughts of honour and credit, and a peaceful and prosperous estate, when all is going to rack and ruin, never dream upon such a matter. Now judge whether there be not great cause that God should bring his people to such a condition that they should carry their life in their hands from day to day, that he might cure them of this distemper.

4. That they may value eternal life the more, which they would not do if they had a stable condition here in the world. After death there will be a life out of all danger, and a life that is not in our hands, but in the hands of God ; none can take that life from us which God keepeth in heaven. Now that they might look after this life, and value and prize it the more, they are exposed to hazards and dangers here. The apostle saith, 1 Cor. xv. 19, ‘ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. ’ When they find the present life encumbered with so many sorrows, and exposed to so many dangers, then they conclude surely there is a better and safer estate for the people of God elsewhere in heaven. God’s people cannot be of all men most miserable ; there is another life ; they have hopes in Christ, and for other things ; therefore they long for it, and look for it : Heb. xiii. 14, ‘ Here we have no abiding city, but we seek one to come. ’ All things are liable to uncertainties and apparent troubles, that we might look after that estate where the sheep of Christ shall be safely lodged in their eternal fold. Now God by their condition doth, as it were, say to them, as Micah ii. 10, ‘ Arise, this is not your rest. ’ Your stable comforts, your everlasting enjoyments are not here ; here all

our comforts are in our hands, ready to deliver them up from day to day.

5. God doth by his righteous providence cause it to be so, that his people carry their life in their hands, to try their affections to him and his word. When we sail with a full stream of prosperity, we may be of God's side and party upon foreign and accidental reasons. Now God will see if we love Christ for his own sake, and his ways as they are his ways when separated from any temporal interest, yea, when exposed to scorn, disgrace, and trouble. It is easy to be good when it costs us nothing, and the wind blows in our backs rather than in our faces, the state of affairs is for us rather than against us. Halcyon times and times of rest are times of breeding the church, but stormy times are times of trying the church: 1 Peter iv. 12, 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.' God will put us into his furnace, there will a fiery trial come, to see if we have the same affection to truth when it is safe to own it, and when it is dangerous to own it, when it is hated and maligned in the world. Few professors can abide God's trial: Zech. xiii. 9, 'I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried.' When two parts fall away, there is a third part refined and tried by trials. When the generality proves dross, or chaff, or stubble in the furnace, there is some good metal preserved, to shine brighter, for trial as their zeal is increased and their grace kept more lively, and their faith and dependence upon a continual exercise. God will try whether we can live upon invisible supports, and go on cheerfully in the performance of our duty in the midst of all difficulty, without these outward encouragements. They are proved that they may be improved.

6. God doth cause such things to befall his people, to show his power both in their preservation and in overruling all those cross providences for their good.

[1.] His power in their preservation; when they have no temporal interests to back them, God will show he can preserve his people: Ps. xevii. 1, 'The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.' It is well that the Lord reigns, else how could his people stand? The Lord reigns, and the multitude of isles they have a share in the joy and benefit. One benefit that we have by his reign is this, ver. 10, compared with ver. 1, he preserveth the souls of his saints; that is, their lives; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. There is an overruling, a secret and invisible providence, by which they are kept and hidden as in a pavilion, so they have often experience of wonderful preservation in the midst of all their troubles.

[2.] God shows his power for overruling all these accidents for the increase and benefit of his church and people. When the believers were scattered, and driven up and down, when exposed to hazards and inconveniences, it is said, Acts xi. 21, 'The hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.' God can make their loss turn to their increase. Christ often gets up upon the devil's shoulders, and is beholden more to his enemies than to

his friends in this sense, because that which would seem to stop his course, and to obscure his glory, doth advance it so much the more : Phil. i. 12, 'The things which happened unto me, have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.' The gospel was not extinguished by Paul's imprisonment, but propagated. I say, Paul's sufferings were as necessary as Paul's preaching, that the truth might gain, and that it might be known and heard of. God overrules all these actions for his glory, and for the benefit of his church.

Use 1. First, if we be not in this condition, let us look for it and prepare for it. Religion is a stranger in the world, and therefore it is often ill-treated ; we have a stable happiness elsewhere, and here we must expect changes. All the comforts and hopes of the scriptures is suited to such a condition ; a great part of the Bible would be needless, and would be but as bladders given to a man who stands upon dry land, and never means to go into the waters ; the comforts and provisions God hath made for us in the word would be useless, if such things did not befall us. Why hath God laid in so many supports, if we think never to be put to distress and troubles ? Oh ! then, think of these things beforehand, and make them familiar to you. 'The evil which I feared is come upon me,' saith Job. When the back is fitted, the burden will not be so dreadful. Think of these things beforehand, that you may provide and prepare for them. Now, that you may not be strange at such kind of providences, consider four things :—

1. The world will be the world still. There is a natural enmity between the two seeds, which will never be wholly laid aside, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, Gen. iii. 15 ; as natural an enmity as between the wolf and the lamb, the raven and the dove : 1 John iii. 12, 'Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his brother ; and wherefore slew he him ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.' Separation and estrangement in course of life is a provoking thing. Men that live in any sinful course are loath any should part company with them, that there might be none to make them ashamed ; therefore when they draw from their sins, and do not run with them into the same excess of riot, they think it strange ; your life is a reproof to them : John vii. 7, 'The world hateth me, because I testified of it that the works thereof are evil ;' and Heb. xi. 7, 'Noah condemned the world ; being moved with fear, prepared an ark.' Strictness is an object reviving guilt. Every wicked man loves another—*Velut factorem, adiutorem et excusatorem sui criminis*, as one that favours his actions, and helps to excuse his actions. One wicked man doth not put another to the blush. It is no shame to be black in the country of the negroes. But when there is a distinction, some walk with God humbly and closely, certainly your life is a reproach to others that do not so, therefore they will hate you.

2. This enmity hath ever been working : the prophets and holy men of God have had experience of it. Abel was slain by Cain, Gen. iv. 18 ; Isaac scoffed at by Ishmael, Gen. xxi. 11 ; which example the apostle allegeth, Gal. iv. 29, 'He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit.' So it was then, so it is now, and so it will ever be to the world's end. Ever it hath been

the lot of God's children to suffer hard things from the men of this world, though they are related to them in the nearest bonds of kindred and acquaintance. Jacob, because of the blessing and birthright, was pursued to death by Esau, and driven out of his father's house, Gen. xxvii.; Moses driven out of Egypt by his unkind brethren, Acts vii. 25-27; David hunted up and down like a partridge upon the mountains; Jezebel sought Elijah's life; Micaiah thrown into prison, and hardly used; Elisha pursued by Jehoram for his head. Instances are endless of this kind; ever there hath been an enmity, and ever will be.

3. Persecutions are more, greater, and longer in the New Testament than in the Old. Why? Partly because the Old Testament church was under tutors and governors, Gal. iv. 1, 2; neither for light of knowledge, nor ardour of zeal to be compared with the New Testament church, when 'the kingdom of heaven suffers violence,' Mat. xi. 11. Look, as Christ spared his disciples until they were fit for greater troubles, till fit for the new wine, Mat. ix. 17, so God spared that church. The church then had troubles, but for the most part they were not for religion, but for defection from God, for their sins. And partly, too, because the church of the Old Testament was not so dispersed, but confined within the narrow bounds of one province or country, not mixed with the profane idolatrous nations, nor exposed to their hatred, contradiction, and rage; but of Christians, the apostle tells us, this sect is everywhere spoken against. And partly because Satan then had quiet reign over the blind world for a long time; but now, when Christ comes to dispossess him, to turn out the strong man—the goods were in peace before, and now he hath but a short time—he hath great wrath, Rev. xii. 11. When Christ came to seize upon the world, it was quick and hot work, his force and violence was greater. Again temporal promises were more in the eye of the covenant, where all things were wrapped up in types and figures; when prosperity signified happiness, and long life signified eternity, there were not such exercises and trials then. But now, 'All those that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution,' 2 Tim. iii. 12. But since Christ hath set up his church, and brought light and immortality to the world, now troubles are greater.

4. Persecutions from pseudo-Christians will also be hot and violent: Rev. xiv. 13, 'Write from henceforth, saith the Spirit, Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.' Why, the dead that die in the Lord? they were always blessed from the beginning of the world; why such a solemn notice from heaven? Why *from henceforth*? The meaning is this: those that suffered under pagan persecutions, all Christians would call them blessed that died in the Lord. Ay! but now, when the persecutions began under the pseudo-Christians, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth still. Nay, the persecutions here are greater than the pagan, and of longer continuance. Why? Because they have a show of Christ's authority, as the beast in the Revelations had horns like a lamb; that beast which spake like a dragon, deceived the nations, enchanted the world with her witchery and sorcery, that beast had a pretence of the authority of Christ, Rev. xiii. 11. And the purity of Christians is greater, and so more enraging; and the great quarrel in the latter ages of the world is about a temporal

interest. The spirit of the world is the spirit of antichristianism, and all those that hang upon her are of the spirit of the world: 1 John iv. 5, 'They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.' Now, when these are contending for the world, this doth exceedingly inflame and heighten the rage against those that would endanger their worldly interest. You see there is cause to think that God will expose us also to our trials; therefore we should be forewarned and prepared for these things that they may not come upon us unawares.

Use 2. If God's people are put into such a condition that they carry their lives in their hands, then learn from hence, that if we have greater security for our lives and interests, we ought more to bless God and to improve the season. It is a great mercy that we have laws to secure our religion and our interests, that we have Christian and Protestant magistrates to execute those laws, that we may in safety worship God in the public assemblies, and we ought to bless God. But then, if this be our condition, there are three duties required of us:—

1. To acknowledge God in this mercy, for it is he that hath the hearts of magistrates in his own hands: Prov. xxi. 1, 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the river of waters, he turneth it whithersoever he will.' Their thoughts, their designs, inclinations and aversations are in God's hands. And as God hath power, so hath he promised this blessing, Isa. xlix. 23, that he will give 'kings to be nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers.' Well, there is a power and a promise. What follows then? Only that we praise God for so much of it as we have, and that we pray to God still for more, that we may, under our kings and governors, 'lead godly and quiet lives,' 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2; and therefore, if we have greater security for our lives and interests, God must be acknowledged.

2. Be so much the more in active obedience: Acts ix. 31, 'Then had the churches rest.' And what then? 'And they walked in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.' When you have a good day, you should improve it well; when we may walk up and down in the security of laws, and serve God freely, oh! let us serve him much; we are not called to renounce our interests, therefore let us mortify our lusts. Fires are not kindled about us to consume our bodies, therefore let the fire of God burn up our lusts. If the saints are to quit their well-being, certainly it should not be grievous to us to part with our ill-being, with our sins for God's service. Look, as *Salvian de Gub.* lib. iii., saith, when our kings are Christians, and religion is not troubled by them, now God calls us to be more pure and holy in our conversations; now we do not shift for our lives, let us avoid occasions of evil; now we are not cast into prisons, let us confine ourselves to our closets, that we may serve God more cheerfully there.

3. Bear the lesser troubles with more patience, when this is not our condition, that our lives are carried in our hands from day to day. It was never so well with the people of God, that if not in kingdoms, yet in families, in parishes, in lesser societies there will be some conflict; now these we should bear with more patience, because the children of God are exposed to that condition that they have carried their lives in

their hands from day to day : Heb. xii. 3, 'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.' You are not called unto a 'resistance to blood.' As Julian the apostate said to one, If he was so offended with their taunts, what would he be with the darts of the Persians? If we cannot suffer a reproach, and an angry word for Christ; if we murmur when we are a little slighted and forgotten by men, and left out of the tale of the world, oh! what would we do if we were called to suffer greater things? Jer. xii. 5, 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horsemen?' that is, if thou canst not endure the scorn, reproach, and opposition of a few private wicked men that stand upon even ground with thee, how canst thou contend with horses, when there are other manner of oppositions?

Use 3. If this should now befall you, as it hath befallen God's choicest servants, and very likely so to do for those reasons I gave, then shrink not, but resolve to endure any extremity rather than take any sinful course for your ease; nay, be not dejected if it should happen: Acts xxi. 13, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.' There was one that had his life in his hand indeed, that had the courage to lay it down. To quicken you hereto, let me give a few considerations:—

1. God hath given you greater things than possibly you can lose for his sake; though we should lose life and all, yet he hath given us his Christ. Saith Ambrose, We are indebted for a person of the Godhead: and shall we stick at our personal interests and concernments? Shall we not die for his honour who died for our salvation? die temporally for him who maketh us to live eternally? and give that body as a sacrifice to the honour of Christ, which otherwise by the law of nature will become meat for the worms? therefore every Christian should carry his life in his hand, Phil. i. 20, either by martyrdom or ministerial labours.

2. No evil is like to that evil which will befall us in forsaking God: Mat. x. 28, 'Fear not them which can but kill the body,' &c. Shall we, rather than run hazards with the sheep of Christ, be contented to howl with wolves in everlasting darkness, when we for a little temporal danger refuse to run hazard with Christ's sheep, shall be cast into hell-fire for evermore? If we are so tender of suffering, what will it be to suffer hell-fire?

3. All that we can lose is abundantly made up in the other world. Heb. xi. 35, it is said, they 'would not accept deliverance, having obtained a better resurrection.' There is a resurrection from death to life, when we come out upon ill terms, by accepting the enemy's deliverance. Ay! but there is a better resurrection when we come out upon God's terms, a resurrection to life and glory hereafter. Violence doth but open the prison door, and let out the soul that long hath desired to be with Christ; and therefore we should endure, as expecting this better resurrection.

4. Consider upon what slight terms men will put their lives in their hands for other things, and shall we not run hazards for Christ? Many venture their lives for a humour, a little vainglory, to show a

greatness of spirit ; or they venture their lives upon revenges, upon a punctilio of honour. Some will venture their lives in the wars for one shilling a day, and shall we not carry our lives in our hands for Christ? Scipio boasted of his soldiers, that they loved him so as to venture their lives for him, to leap into the sea, and cast themselves down a steep rock : There are none of these but if I spake the word, shall go upon a tower, and throw himself down into the sea if I bid him. So Fulgentius' story of those that would obey their chief, whom they called *Vetus*, the old man of the mountain, if he bid them fall down a steep rock, to show their obedience ; and shall not we venture our lives for Christ?

Doct. 2. That when our souls are continually in our hands, no kind of danger should make us warp and turn aside from the direction of God's word. Why?

1. A Christian should be above all temporal accidents ; above carnal grief, carnal joy, worldly hope, worldly fear ; he should be dead to the world, or else he is not thoroughly acquainted with the virtue of Christ's cross, Gal. vi. 14.

2. God can so restrain the malice of wicked men, that though we carry our lives in our hands, we shall be safe enough for all that : Prov. xvi. 7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' Mark, the Lord can secure you against men, when a man pleaseth the Lord ; but when a man pleaseth men, they cannot secure you against the Lord, they cannot save you harmless from the wrath of God, or answer for you to the Almighty, nor give you safety from the terrors of conscience. But on the other side, many a man by pleasing God finds more safety and comfort in opposing the lusts and the humours of men than in complying with them. God's providence is wonderfully at work for his children when they are reduced to these extremities ; either he can allay their fury, turn in convictions upon their consciences of the righteousness of those whom they molest and trouble, as when Saul hunted for David, 1 Sam. xxiv. 17, 'Thou art more righteous than I.' God puts conviction upon him. Nay, sometimes such a fear and reverence that they dare not : Mark vi. 20, 'Herod feared John because he was a strict man.' Or some check or bridle, some contrary interest that God can set up, that their hands are withered when they are stretched out against them, as was Jeroboam's hand ; and therefore a Christian, though his life be in his hand, he should not warp. Why? For God can mightily provide for him as to his temporal safety : 1 Peter iii. 13, 'Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?' It is an indefinite proposition, sometimes it will be true. Let a man follow that which is good, who dares harm him? There is an awe, and he is kept safe, though not always.

3. We renounced all at our first coming to Christ. Estate, credit, liberty, life, it was all laid at Christ's feet, if our hearts were really upright with him. A man must lay down self, whatever it be, else he cannot be Christ's disciple, Mat. xvi. 24 ; Luke xiv. 26. This was done in vow, in a time of peace ; therefore it must be actually done and made good in a time of trouble. Your interests are God's, and are only given back to God again ; your estate, life, liberty, and credit, all

given up. Why? That you may have something of value to esteem as nothing for Christ.

4. Our sufferings shall be abundantly recompensed and made up in the world to come: Rom. viii. 18, 'I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.' For a man to stand comparing his interest or sufferings here in this world with the glory revealed, is as foolish a thing as if a man should set a thousand pound weight with a feather. So 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'Our light affliction,' &c. We are often saying, If we lose this and that, what will become of us? what shall we have? Mat. xix. 27-29, 'We have left all.' A great all they had left for Christ; it may be a net, a fisher-boat, a cottage; yet he speaks magnificently of it, and 'what shall we have?' Have! You shall have enough; 'in the regeneration you shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

5. You should not warp, though you carry your lives in your hands, because constancy is necessary. How necessary? For our credit and good name as we are men: 'Do I use lightness?' saith the apostle, 2 Cor. i. 17. Men lose their authority and esteem, they are not accounted grave, serious, and weighty, when they shift and change, and appear with a various face to the world; and certainly it is for our comfort, for our right to everlasting blessedness is most sensibly clear by constancy in God's cause: Phil. i. 28, 'And in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.' Oh! what would a man give for to clear this, that he is an heir of God? This is an evident token; and it is necessary for the credit of the truth which we profess. When we shift, turn, and wind, we bring a dishonour upon it; but, saith the apostle, Phil. i. 14, 'They waxed confident by my bonds;' this puts heart and courage. And it is for the honour of God: 1 Peter ii. 14, 'On your part he is glorified;' and John xxi. 19, 'Signifying by what death he should glorify God.' Since constancy is so necessary, either we should not take up principles, or suffer for them if called thereunto.

Use 1. Caution to the people of God. Take heed you do not forget the word, when you carry your lives in your hand. Many of God's people may do so sometimes, as when we deny the truth: Mat. xxvi. 72, 'Peter denied before them all, saying, I know not the man.' Or when we take any sinful course for temporal safety, as when David feigned himself mad before Achish, 1 Sam. xxi. 13. Or when our spirits are filled with passion against the instruments of our trouble, and with uncomely heats, as Peter drew a sword in a rash zeal, and had no thanks for it, but a rebuke from Christ. Or when we suffer in a heartless and comfortless manner, as God's children sometimes are in dejections of spirit. David took notice of his drooping and disconsolateness, Ps. xlii. 5; when he flitted up and down in the wilderness, pursued with Saul's army, he had his droopings and discomforts. In these cases we forget the word of God.

Use 2. To press you to courage and constancy in a time of danger; to endure all extremities, rather than do anything against the word of God. Here I shall inquire:—

1. What is this Christian courage? There is military valour and

Christian valour. The one consists in doing, the other in suffering, great things. Peter, at Christ's death, had more of the military valour and fierceness than of the passive valour, for he that could venture on a band of men was foiled by a damsel's question. The one dependeth on hastiness of temper, greatness of blood and spirits; the other upon faith and submission to God's will: Acts vii. 55, 'He being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.' It is spoken when the people gnashed on him with their teeth, then full of the Holy Ghost. There is the habit of fortitude, and the act of it when led on. There is a great deal of difference between the courage of wicked men, and the faith and fortitude of good Christians. We see rude men are undaunted in the face of danger, but the fortitude of Christians consisteth in lifting up their eyes and hearts to heaven; others not, for as soon as they think of God, their courage faileth; the more brave, the more they shut out the thought of divine things, all sense of God and immortality: 1 Cor. xv. 32, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.' It is a brutish fury, inflamed by wine, stirred up by trumpets and drums, not stirred up by the consolations of God, or remembrance of his covenant; then they are dejected, Rev. vi. 15-17.

2. To remove such objections as may hinder your courage and constancy.

[1.] It is a sore temptation to keep our service, but we must stand to God's providence, to honour him by service or suffering, as he shall think good. We are to honour God in his own way, we are not to stretch conscience in the least degree to continue it. God hath no need of thy sin; when God hath a mind to lay you aside, submit.

[2.] The smallness of the difference is another objection. If it were to turn Turk, or heathen, or papist, men will say, they would not do so and so. God standeth upon every peek of his word, every dust of truth is precious.

[3.] Another objection is this, we shall be interpreted to hinder the public peace.

I answer—'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men,' Rom. xii. 18. But be sure not to betray the cause of God, nor lose the interest of Christ; that is not possible which is not lawful in a moral sense.

[4.] Another objection is, that we shall be accounted peevish, rash, stubborn.

I answer—We must be led to credit. There is a difference between men stubborn and obstinate and zealous. Many may sacrifice a stout body to a stubborn mind, but be courageous and constant in the service of God.

3. What is necessary to this well-tempered courage, that we may suffer not out of humour, but out of conscience towards God? Not because formerly engaged by profession, or out of a desire of a name and esteem among religious persons, but out of obedience to God, who commandeth us to choose afflictions, rather than sin. To this resolution there is necessary—

[1.] A heart weaned from the world, Mat. vi. 24, otherwise a man will act very uncertainly, and his zeal for God be very uneven.

[2.] A heart entirely devoted to God. Every one that cometh to Christ must be thus resolved, Luke xiv. 26.

[3.] A heart purged from sin, or else our zeal is not uniform, besides that our lusts will weaken our courage. A carnal person, suffering in a good cause, is of no account with God. The priests were to search the burnt-offering if sound, or had any defect or blemish upon them. He that keepeth the commandments is best able to suffer for them: Mat. v. 10, 'Blessed are they that suffer for righteousness' sake.' A martyr must have all the precedent graces.

[4.] A heart that lieth under a deep sense of eternity, and things to come: 1 John v. 4, 'This is the victory we have over the world, even our faith.' Not any looking backward, but forward.

SERMON CXX.¹

The wicked have laid a snare for me; yet I erred not from thy precepts.—VER. 110.

HERE is the second assault made upon David's integrity, the secret snares laid for him. The enemies of God's people do not always go to work in the way of open persecution, and directly for righteousness' sake; but then they lay snares; what they cannot do by open force, they seek to do by fraud. Many that have stood out with courage against the shock of violence, have been taken in a snare; as the prophet that resisted the king was enticed by the blandishments of the old prophet, 1 Kings xiii. Persecution is a more gross way, and liable to exception, and therefore they must go secretly to work. Sometimes this life is a continued temptation, and a Christian that walketh in the world walketh in the midst of snares set for him, by his enemies bodily and spiritual. The devil is the great snare-layer, and wicked men learn it of him: 'The wicked have laid a snare for me,' &c. In the words observe—

1. David's temptation, *a snare laid* for him.

2. The persons who managed the temptation, *the wicked*.

3. The success and issue, *yet I erred not from thy precepts*.

Doct. The godly have often snares laid for them, not only by Satan, but by wicked men.

Now snares are to entice, or endanger, or of a mixed nature.

1. Snares to entice them from their duty. Thus the blandishments of the whorish woman are called a snare: Prov. vii. 23, 'As the bird hasteth unto the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.' Of this nature are crafty insinuations, baits of preferment, profit, pleasure, or any carnal advantage, to pervert our judgments, and draw us off from our duty.

2. Snares to endanger their safety, clogged with some spiteful condition to entrap others, or when there is a plot laid to endanger others, as Jeremiah complaineth, Jer. xviii. 22, 'They have digged a pit to take me, they have hid snares for my feet;' secretly conspired

¹ On the Fifth of November.

and practised his destruction. And David, Ps. cxl. 5, 'The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside, and set gins for my feet. Selah.' Hunters and fowlers did never go more cunningly to work to catch the prey, than those proud men had laid their design to bring his life under their power. And in Ps. xxxv. 7, 'For without cause they have hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul;' and Ps. lvii. 6, 'They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit for me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah.' Now of this sort are St Bartholomew's matins, and the plot and contrivance to out the Protestants in France, when they were invited to a wedding, that they might destroy them; and of this nature was the Gunpowder Treason; there was a snare laid. When Orestes had plotted Clytemnestra's death, Euripides expresseth it, *καλῶς ἂρ' ἄρκυν ἐς μέσσην πορεύεται*—she fitly cometh into the snare.

3. Of a mixed nature, both to entice by endangering, and endanger by enticing.

[1.] As when they put them upon such conditions as may tempt them to folly and sin. Some think the text verified in David, at that time when he said, 1 Sam. xxvi. 19, 'They have driven me out from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go serve other gods;' meaning, they excited Saul to pursue him and persecute him, and forced him to flee into an idolatrous country, and so a snare laid to endanger his steadfastness in the true faith. It is a great temptation. *Necessitas cogit ad turpia*—necessity is but an evil counsellor; and this joined with the other temptation of bad company: Ps. cxx. 5, 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar.'

[2.] When they enact a law or statute, whereby to force them to sin or trouble; as they had a plot against Daniel, either to make him neglect his God, or render him obnoxious to authority, Dan. vi. 7, 8. When they burden them with such laws and statutes as the godly cannot obey without sin, or refuse without danger; they have their ends either to draw them to sin or suffer.

Now snares are laid by the wicked:—

1. Because usually they excel in policy, craftiness, and worldly wit, are superior to God's children therein; their whole hearts run that way, and their principle is entire and unbroken; and therefore our Lord Christ telleth us, Luke xvi. 8, 'For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' They applaud themselves in their artifices, idolise their wit; Hab. i. 16, 'Sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their drag;' therefore use it to the saints' destruction.

2. Because they are acted by Satan, who will ever be doing against the church, though to little purpose. Luke xxii. 3, the devil entered into Judas when he plotted against Christ. They learn their wiles from Satan, and conceive mischief by copulation with the great incubus of hell.

3. Their own hatred and malice against the people of God. Malice is a laying snares. Anger vents itself in a storm of words, or in

some sudden violent action ; but hatred lurketh in the soul, and puts them that harbour it upon plots and contrivances of revenge. The historian observeth of Tiberius, *In malitiam statim invecus est*, &c. When Absalom hated Amnon, because he forced his sister, he plotteth how to take away his life, 2 Sam. xiii. 22.

Now, whence cometh this malice against the children of God ? Either by envy at their interests, or hatred at their holiness.

1. Envy at their interests, their esteem and respect in the world, when they come to be of any regard among men. Esther v. 9, Haman plotteth against Mordecai, because he sat in the king's gate : Ps. cxii. 9, 10, 'His horn shall be exalted with honour ; the wicked shall see it, and be grieved, and gnash with their teeth.' When the gospel was like to get credit, Acts xvii. 5, the envious Jews raised an uproar. Pride is loath to stoop ; to see opposites in glory and power whets their malice, and they contrive how to root them out. Every man would have himself and his own faction admired and magnified. The Pharisees conspired to take Christ : John xii. 19, 'All the world is gone after him.' When religion prevaileth, and groweth in credit and fashion, it is deeply resented by naughty men.

2. Hatred at their holiness. Men cannot endure to be outstripped in religion, and therefore hate what they will not imitate. Hatred is quick-sighted in revenge, full of plots and contrivances, and tickleth the soul with a delight in them ; but especially religious hatred, when a man hateth another for his godliness, when religion, instead of a party, becomes a judge, that which should restrain our passions feeds them ; no hatred so great as that against the power of godliness. Cain, when he saw Abel so punctual in God's service, he plotteth to draw him into the field, 1 John iii. 12, and beginneth a discourse with him about providence and judgment to come, and rewards and punishments, and while Abel maintained God's part, Cain fell upon him and slew him.

To apply this. As these snares tend to our temporal destruction, so there is a double use to be made of them.

1. To trust God with our safety in the midst of so many snares. What shall we do ? Whatever remedy we have against violence, no man by his own foresight can find out all the snares that are laid for him ; therefore commit your safety spiritual and temporal to the Lord ; go to him and say, Ps. cxli. 9, 'Keep me from the snare they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity.' Constant dependence upon God is necessary, for there can be no snare hidden from him who watcheth over us and our safety by night and by day. There is a double argument why we should trust God with our safety ; because of his wisdom, and because of his watchful providence. Because of his wisdom. Alas ! we are foolish and simple, and often betray ourselves into an evil condition ; but God is wise for them that are foolish : Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth : the Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his day is coming.' There is a wise God acting for a foolish people. I tell you, the wisdom of God for us is much greater than the wisdom of God in us. Where enemies deal proudly, God is above them ; where they deal craftily, God is beyond them. The

wisdom of God for us is greater than the wisdom of any against us. And also because of his watchful providence; he hath a waking love and care of us night and day: Ps. cxxi. 4, 'Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.' He will be so far from sleeping, that he will not so much as slumber. When we know nothing, his providence finds out the secret contrivances that are against us. I tell you, God is our father; he will maintain us and take care for us, when we live by faith, and not by shifts, in a good plain downright course of honesty: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God all-sufficient: walk before me, and be thou perfect;' that is, they should go on doing their duty, and refer the care of their safety to God. Oh! then, cast yourselves upon the Lord; he will either direct your way to eschew these snares, or pluck your feet out of them if you be taken therein: Ps. xxv. 15, 'Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord; he shall pluck my feet out of the snare.' Look to him for direction and counsel.

2. Bless God for your safety and preservation; it is a mercy to have a being, in the midst of so many dangers and snares as waylay us everywhere; especially should we bless God when we have escaped some notable trap and pit that was digged for us: Ps. cxxiv. 7, 'Our soul is escaped like a bird out of the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.' This is a passage we may use to God this day. There are two grounds usually of thanksgiving for this deliverance:—

[1.] That their devices came to nought: Job xv. 35, 'They conceive mischief and bring forth vanity.' It discovereth the wisdom, power, goodness, and watchfulness of God, that this dark and hellish machination, that they thought so wisely laid that all devils in hell could not discover it, yet the God of heaven brought it to light: Prov. xxi. 30, 'There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.'

Those three words set out the quintessence of parts. *Wisdom* noteth a quick apprehension; *understanding* a wise foresight grounded upon experience; *counsel* a designation of some rare artifice: Isa. viii. 9, 10, 'Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us.'

[2.] The mischief returned back upon themselves: Ps. vii. 15, 'He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. Higgaion. Selah.' Their instruments; it is a high note that we may observe it. An iron heated red-hot burneth their fingers that hold it; they are taken in their own pit, poisoned in their own cup, holden in cords of their own vanity, so that in the issue it appeareth they laid a snare for themselves rather than for us.

Use 2. As they are enticements to sin; so we may make many uses of it.

1. You ought to ask God's counsel, for you walk in the midst of snares, that he would guide you and lead you: Ps. xxvii. 11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord; lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.' Those that watch for our halting are many, their craft is great; therefore go to the wise God for counsel; ask of him what your way and course shall be, for he seeth that which you see not.

2. Get spiritual wisdom and understanding. An ignorant, credulous heart is soon seduced, but a man of understanding, that seeth his danger, is not easily drawn and allured into it: Prov. i. 17, 'In vain is the snare laid in the sight of any bird.' The vain, credulous, simple young man is soon enticed by the lewd woman, in the 7th of the Proverbs.

3. Keep the highway of duty, and walk by a sure rule, and then you are safe. David saith here, 'I erred not from thy precepts.' In a time of snares, often consult with your rule. It is Satan's aim to put us out of our way; as when the fisherman would get the fishes into the net, he seeketh to rouse them out of their place. Take a man out of God's way, and he becometh a ready prey to Satan. In doubtful cases there is no man chooseth the worst, but first he breaketh some known rule and clear moral precept. Therefore be punctual, and keep close to God's directions in clear and known cases, and you are safe.

4. There needs a mortified heart to worldly interests; our temporal interest is to be shaken off. A man of carnal affections seeketh out the snare: Job xviii. 8, 'He is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare.' If we will find the sin and disposition of heart, God will find the occasion; and a man that hath a commodity to put off (faith and a good conscience), will soon find a chapman to truck with him. Judas was thinking of betraying Christ, and the high priests were plotting how to do it just at the same time. Worldliness layeth us open to the snare: 1 Tim. vi. 9, '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.' But he that is dead to worldly interests remaineth firm, whatever bait be proposed.

Secondly, We come to the persons that managed the temptation, the wicked: 'The wicked have laid a snare for me.'

Doct. It is the property of a wicked heart to plot and lay snares for the mischief and ruin of others, especially God's people. David saith here, 'The wicked have laid snares for me.'

1. It is a deliberate, voluntary sin; and the more will and advisedness in any sin, the greater it is. Laying of snares is not a thing done in passion, but in cool blood; there is art and cunning in it, and the heart dwelleth long upon it. The will sets the wit a-work, to weave the net and frame the device. *Involuntarium minuit de ratione peccati*—when a thing is involuntary it lesseneth sin; a man may be overtaken with a fault, Gal. vi. 1. But when he studieth it, it is much the worse. God's children are surprised through unwariness, and made to stumble in a fit of temptation; but when men's wits are bended to project and plot sin, it is not an infirmity but an iniquity: Prov. vi. 14, 'Frowardness is in his heart; he deviseth mischief continually, he soweth discord.' It is the description of a naughty heart; so the prophet, Micah ii. 1, 'Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds: when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hands.' Their wickedness is premeditated, then woe to them.

2. It is a sign that evil is connatural to them, when they are plotting,

as poison is to a spider ; they are always working it, never out of their way by night and by day, their hearts run upon it : Prov. iv. 16, ' Whenever they are abroad, they sleep not unless they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall.' Then when others cannot rest, they examine themselves. Ps. iv. 4, ' Commune with your hearts upon your beds.' When our reins should instruct us, and suggest wholesome thoughts to us, Ps. xvi. 7 ; or when we should direct our prayer to God in the morning, Ps. v. 3, then they employ their thoughts and musings on evil. The apostle maketh it to be their disposition that are given up by God to a reprobate sense, to be ' inventors of evil things,' Rom. i. 30.

3. They that plot evil, they are of the devil's trade, whose work it is to hurt and mischief those who are broken loose from him ; it is his business to lay snares : 2 Tim. ii. 26, ' And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.' When Judas plotteth against Christ, the devil entereth into him. So Acts xiii. 10, it is said to Elymas the sorcerer, ' O thou full of all subtlety and mischief, the child of the devil.' They are like the devil in their hatred of God and the truth, and the persecution of the church, and like him for subtlety and politic contrivance. Bloody designs and inventions are the venom and poison of the old serpent sunk into men's hearts ; there are both cruelty and lying : John viii. 44, ' Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do : he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him : when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own ; for he is a liar, and the father of it.'

4. It is a sin contrary to the love of God and man, against double light and double obligations, from both the tables : grace and nature condemneth it. It is against God, for if we did love him, we would love his image ; the saints that are so near and dear to him, they are ' his jewels,' Mal. iii. 17 ; they cost him dear ; he gave an infinite price for them, the blood of Christ : they are the apple of his eye ; to strike at them is to strike at God himself. And it is against man ; if reasons of grace do not restrain such, yet reasons of nature should. To plot mischief against one that is of the same nature with us, natural light will teach us we should do as we would be done by. Oh ! what a cruel creature is man to man, when God lets him alone to the sway of his own heart and natural fierceness !

5. It is contrary to the gentleness and simplicity of the Christian religion. Christian religion is a simple and harmless thing : Phil. ii. 15, ' That ye be holy and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation ;' 2 Cor. 1. 12, ' This is our rejoicing, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.' It is a sign men have drunk in a false religion when their spirits are efferated, and grow monsters in wickedness. Men addicted to false worship are subtle and cruel ; subtle, for where there is real worth there is no dissimulation ; they carry things open and fair ; they have a God and conscience to bear them out, and this is worth all the world ; and if things do not suit to their minds, they can tarry God's leisure, without base and creeping acts, and underhand designs and machinations ;

but a false religion, that hath not a God to depend upon, breedeth fears, and fear and pusillanimity puts men upon plots and bloody designs, as Herod, when afraid, seeketh craftily to murder Christ, Mat. ii. And as a false religion is crafty, so it is mischievous and cruel: Jude 11, 'These walked in the way of Cain;' for a false religion cannot subsist without the plots of blood and tyranny and cruelty. When Judaism began to fall, the Jews bound themselves under an oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. False worships put men upon a blind zeal, that breaketh out in tragical effects. *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.* So much of truth, so much of meekness, openness, and plainness, as the other is of spite and malice.

Use. Oh! then, let the children of God abhor this hateful disposition; take heed of those kind of sins that have subtlety and malice in them; these are the devil's sins, the cursed old serpent, that hath been a murderer from the beginning; take heed of plotting mischief, and secretly designing the ruin of others. I would have you Christians, that are of the true religion, carry it meekly towards others; beware of deliberate sins. It is possible in some great temptation the children of God may fall into these kind of sins, as David plotted Uriah's death; but that sin was laid to his charge more than all the sins that ever he committed. These sins are accompanied with some notable affliction and judgment, as on David's sad house; they leave an indelible stain and blemish, and cost us dear: 1 Kings xv. 5, 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all his days, save in the matter of Uriah.'

How many failings have we left upon record? His distrust: 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' His dissimulation, with his rash vow to destroy Nabal; his injustice in the matter of Ziba and Mephibosheth; indulgence to Absalom, numbering the people, wherein he showed his carnal confidence. All these are passed over in silence, as his infirmities, save only in the matter of Uriah. And they will cost dear; there is always some eminent trouble and affliction that accompany such sins. When David had sinned in the matter of Uriah, what troubles were there in his house; his daughter ravished, Amnon slain in his drunkenness, Absalom driveth him from his palace royal, and then, poor man, his subjects deserted him, he forced to go weeping up and down, and shift for his life; all Israel came to Absalom, his wives defiled by his own son. Thus you see what is the fruit of deliberate sins.

These sins cost us a great deal of bitter sorrow, sighs, and tears, to recover our peace and God's love and favour. Again, how bitterly did David remember his sin, and beg that God would 'restore to him the joy of his salvation!' Ps. li. Therefore take heed of deliberate sins, when we have time enough to have serious and sufficient consideration of the evil, and yet do it; when a man knoweth a thing to be evil, and yet resolveth to go forward with it. Sin is not done suddenly, in heat of blood, but at leisure; not limited to a minute, or an hour, or any short space of time; and yet to do it, this grieves the Spirit, and will cost us dear.

SERMON CXXI.

Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever : for they are the rejoicing of my heart.—VER. 111.

In this notable psalm there are many independent sentences expressing David's affection to the word of God. In this verse you have—(1.) David's choice, 'Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever.' (2.) The evidence of that choice, 'For they are the rejoicing of my heart.' I call it the evidence, for so it is a proper demonstration that he took God's precepts for his heritage; this is the mark and sign of it, 'They are the rejoicing of my heart.' It did his heart good to think of his heritage, and what an ample portion he had in his God.

First, Let me speak of his choice, whence this observation. It is the property of believers to take God's testimonies for their heritage. In the management of which truth, I shall show—

1. What are God's testimonies.
2. What it is to take them for an heritage.
3. The reason why it is their property to do so.

1. What are God's testimonies. Any declaration of his will, in doctrine, precepts, threatenings, promises. The whole word, it is the testimony which God hath proposed for the satisfaction of the world. It is God's deposition or testimony, to satisfy men what is his mind and will concerning their salvation. God's testimony is the public record, that may be appealed unto in all cases of doubt, Ps. xix. 8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart,' &c.; 'The testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.' By *the statutes of the Lord*, is meant in general the whole counsel of God delivered in the word. But then more specially and chiefly they imply the evangelical or gospel part of the word, the promises of the covenant of grace, Isa. viii. 20, 'To the law and to the testimonies.' *Testimony* in this sense is contradistinguished to the *law* or God's precepts, what is required of us; thus 'the ark of his testimony' is called by that name. Mark this notion of calling the word God's testimony; it shows us what regard we should have to the precepts and promises of God; you need regard them, it is God's testimony *to* you and then *against* you. Christ would have his word preached 'as a testimony against them,' Mat. xxiv.,—a testimony *to* them that they might know God's mind, and then, if it were not received, a testimony *against* them at the last day; when God comes to judgment, the sinner will be without an excuse, but will not be without a testimony; every sermon will rise up against him in judgment; it will be a testimony for their conviction.

And as we should regard his precepts, so it shows in what regard his promises are, which are chiefly his testimony; therefore it is said, John iii. 33, 'He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.' You give God the glory of his truth by venturing your souls upon his testimony, whereas otherwise you 'make him a liar,' a blasphemy which is most contrary to the glory of his being: 1 John v. 10, 'He that believeth not makes God a liar.' Look upon

the promises as God's testimonies, you may urge it to your own heart and to God. We may urge it to our own heart when we are full of doubts and troubles; here we have God's testimony to show for it, 'Why do ye doubt, O ye of little faith?' Here is God's testimony. Nay, it is a testimony under an oath, that the heirs of promise might want no satisfaction, Heb. vi. 18. If we had but God's bare word it should beget faith, for God stands much upon his truth; but we have his oath, his hand and seal. Why! after such a solemn assurance shall I make God a liar, as being in doubtful suspense? And they are a testimony which you may produce to God himself: Lord, thou hast said, and here is a promise wherein thou hast caused me to hope; I expect nothing but what thou wilt perform. Look, as Tamar showed the tokens to Judah when he was about to condemn her, showed him the ring and the staff as a testimony, and said, Whose are these? Gen. xxxviii. 25, you put God in mind of his promise; here is the testimony he hath called you to these hopes whereby you should wait upon him. How shall we take it here? for the precepts of God, or the promises, or both? Surely the precepts of the word are the heritage, or the gospel and treasure of the church, a treasure not to be valued; and every single believer is to take up his share, and count them his treasure and his heritage. No man can take the promissory part of the word for his heritage, but he is to take the mandatory part also; as in every bond and indenture the conditions must be kept on both sides. So if you should take it for the whole covenant of God, wherein God is bound to us and we to God, there were no incongruity. Yet the notion of an heritage is most proper to the promises, and these are the rejoicing of our soul, the foundation of our solid comfort and hope. The promises are a witness in our hearts how he stands affected to us, of which we are most apt to doubt through our unbelief. Natural light will convince us of the justice and equity of his precepts; therefore by the special use of the word the promises of God are called his heritage. Again, the promises are put for the things promised, and testimonies for the things contained and revealed in them; for the promises properly are not our heritage, but they are the evidences, the charters which we have to show for our heritage. The blessings of the covenant are properly our heritage, and the promises are the assurance and conveyances by which this heritage is made over to us. As we say a man's estate lies in bonds and leases, meaning he hath these things to show as his right to such an estate; so the promises, that is the blessings contained, or the testimony revealed there, they are the things a believer takes for his portion. Thus I have showed what is meant by the testimonies of God.

2. What is it to take them for our heritage? There are two words, *heritage*, and *I have taken* them. The word *heritage* first notes the substance of our portion, or what we count our solid and principal estate; secondly, it notes our right and propriety in it; thirdly, the kind of tenure by which we hold it; fourthly, many times actual possession. Now saith David, I have taken; that implies actual choice on our part. We are not born heirs to this estate, but we take it, we choose it for our portion. And mark, he doth not say they are, but I have taken them for my heritage. Every believer cannot say, These are

mine, they are my heritage, for every one hath not assurance; but yet every one should say, 'I have taken them,' there I look for my happiness; for every believer is alike affected, though not alike assured. David doth not here so expressly mention his interest, though that is implied, as his choice. Briefly, to take God's testimony for our heritage implies four things:—

[1.] To count them our choicest portions. Let others do what they will, this is my share, my lot, my portion, saith David; that which I esteem to be my happiness; this is as lands, goods, treasures to me, dearer and nearer than all temporal things whatsoever. Look, as a believer in the duty part of religion takes the precepts for his counsellor, so David saith, Ps. cxix. 24, 'Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors,' or the men of my counsel. Answerably in the happy part, they are my heritage and the rejoicing of my soul; it is my wealth, my treasure, my chief estate. Every man is known by the choice of his portion; now David was not taken up with any worldly thing, so as to make that his heritage, or account it his solid happiness, wherein his soul could find complacency and contentment.

[2.] It signifies to make it our work to get and keep up an interest in God's testimonies; this is to take them for our heritage. Esteem is manifested by prosecution. That which is our chiefest work, that shows us what we take to be our heritage. What! is it to grow great in the world, to shine in pomp, to flow in pleasure, or to get and maintain an interest in the covenant? What do we seek first? Is it 'the kingdom of God and his righteousness'? Mat. vi. 33. The main care is to make sure an interest in the covenant, to get a right and propriety in it.

[3.] To hold all by this tenure: heritage is a child's tenure. We do not come to this right by our own purchase, but as heirs of Christ; not by our own merits, but by adoption, God making us children and 'joint-heirs with Christ,' Rom. viii. 17; 'and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.' Adam's tenure was that of a servant; the blessings that he expected from God, by virtue of the covenant of works, he looked upon them as wages of obedience; but now we take the promises as an heritage, as a right devolved upon us as heirs of Christ, because believers are called the seed of Christ, and upon the account of that are possessed of the privileges of the covenant: Isa. liii. 10, 'He shall see his seed, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.' This is a heritage purchased for us before we were born, before we had done either good or evil; and we have the right and title of sons, John i. 12; he hath given us this privilege to be the sons of God. Whatever we receive, we receive it from God as a child's portion.

[4.] Heritage signifies actual use and possession, and living upon them; and so I have taken thy testimonies for my heritage; that is, I mean to live upon them, and fetch all my comforts thence. A believer's interest is not an imaginary thing. We do enjoy somewhat by virtue of the promises. It is true our full fruition is suspended till hereafter, but we begin here. The testimonies of the Lord they are of present use in the present life; therefore we are said to be 'Heirs according to the hope of eternal life,' Titus iii. 7. God doth not take

us to heaven presently upon our spiritual nativity or new birth. It pleaseth God to exercise us for a while in our nonage, under tutors and governors, and to make us differ little from servants; but for the present we have maintenance, we live by faith, Gal. ii. 20. We live upon our heritage, and fetch thence not only peace and righteousness and grace, but meat, drink, and clothing, protection, and defence. So that to take God's testimonies for our heritage is to live upon them as far as the present state will permit, to fetch out all our supplies from the covenant; otherwise we should make the promises to be but a conceit and imagination, if they did not afford present support. A believer doth not live upon outward supplies only, but upon the covenant; not upon meat and drink, food and raiment, but he fetcheth all from the covenant, by the exercise of faith, and so these things are sanctified to him. So that to take them as our heritage is to make them the grounds of our future hopes, and the storehouse from whence we receive our present supply. And this is that which is called living by faith, fetching all our supports and supplies out of the promises: Gal. ii. 20, 'All that I live in the flesh' (so in the original), 'I live by the faith of the Son of God.'

3. For the reasons, why it is the property of believers to take the testimony of God for their heritage; before I come to that, first, I must show what kind of heritage it is; secondly, How believers only, and no others, can take them from their heritage.

[1.] What kind of heritage it is. It is a heritage which exceeds all others in three particulars—it is full, it is sure, it is lasting; therefore we must pitch upon it for our solid happiness.

(1.) It is a full heritage, and nothing can be added to the completeness of our portion; for in the promises here is God, heaven, earth, providences, ordinances, all made ours, and all inward comforts and graces they are a part of our portion; and what can a soul desire more? Here is God made over to us; the great blessing of the covenant is, I am thy God. Other men say (and they will think it a great matter when they can say), 'This kingdom is mine, this lordship is mine, this house, these fields are mine; but a believer can say, this God, this Christ, this Holy Spirit is mine. Alas! riches and honour and worldly greatness are poor things to a God made ours in covenant. Nay, mark the emphasis; God is not only ours, but ours as an heritage: Ps. xvi. 5, 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance.' They may claim a title to God, and enjoy the possession of God as freely as a man would do his own inheritance. I say, they have as sure a right to God, and all that he is and can do, as a man can have to the patrimony whereunto he is born. And as the Lord is theirs, so heaven and earth are both theirs. Heaven is theirs: let a believer be never so despicable in the world, yet he is an heir-apparent to the kingdom of heaven, James ii. 15. Though, it may be, you are poor persons, nothing to live upon; poor apprentices, nothing to set up withal, yet 'God hath chosen the poor of this world to be heirs of a kingdom.' Poor believers are but princes in disguise, princes in a foreign country, and under a veil; they have a large patrimony; it lies indeed in an unknown land to the world, it is in *terra incognita* to them; but believers know what an ample portion God hath laid up for them, heirs of a kingdom. If that be not enough,

take that other expression, Rom. viii. 17, 'Heirs, co-heirs with Christ.' Christ as mediator, and we as members of his body, possess the same God, one father, one husband, one estate; we dwell together, live together; where he is we are. Besides God and heaven there is the world too. Here is the difficulty, how a Christian, that hath not a foot of land, yet should be heir of all the world. All things are theirs, saith the apostle, 1 Cor. iii. 21. And it is said of Abraham, who was 'the father of the faithful,' and whose blessing comes upon us, that through the righteousness of faith he became 'heir of the world.' He was re-established in the right which Adam had before the fall, that wherever God should cast his portion, he should look upon it as made over to him by grace, as a sanctified portion belonging to the covenant; and in this sense he was heir of the whole world. All creatures are sanctified to a believer, and the comfortable enjoyment of them fall to our lot and share; and therefore, 1 Tim. iv. 5, it is said, 'commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving, to them that believe and know the truth.' Mark, believers only have a covenant right to meat, drink, land, money, and the things that are possessed in the world, to make use of the good creatures God hath bestowed upon them. Others are not usurpers; I dare not say so. All men have a providential right; it is 'their portion God hath given them in this world;' but they have not a covenant right. Whatever of the world falls to their share comes to them in a regular way of providence, that shall be sanctified, and truly without this covenant right, if we had all earthly possessions, it would be a mere nothing, and no blessing. Once more, providence is theirs, even those things which are against us, afflictions, death; not only life, but death, 1 Cor. iii. 22, as part of their portion. Ordinances are theirs, all the gifts of the church, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, all for their benefit. And graces are theirs; the righteousness of Christ and the graces of the Spirit, they are all a part of their portion, made over to them by virtue of God's testimony. As to the righteousness of Christ, it is said of Noah, Heb. 11, 7, that he 'became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith.' The great legacy which Christ hath left is his righteousness. As Elijah when he went to heaven left Elisha his cloak or mantle, so when Christ went to heaven, he left the garment of his righteousness behind him as a legacy to the church, in confidence whereof we appear before God. Look, as fathers leave lands to their children, and such as they have, so Christ hath left us what he had. In the outward estate we are despicable. Silver and gold he hath not left us, that is no solid portion; but he hath left us his righteousness and obedience, as a ground of our acceptance with God. No monarch in the world can leave us such a portion; it cost Christ very dear to purchase it for us. Then the graces of the Spirit; we have grace enough to maintain our expenses to heaven, and carry us on till we come to the full enjoyment of our portion. Thus God in covenant, heaven, earth, whatever is great and magnificent, the ordinances of the church, the graces of the Spirit, all these belong to our heritage; it is a full portion.

(2.) It is a sure portion, both on God's part and ours. On God's part, there we have his word, and that is better than all the assurance

in the world: 'He hath magnified that above all his name,' Ps. cxxxviii. 2. If we had but God's single word, that is enough, for God is very tender of his word, more than of heaven and earth; and all things he hath made: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away.' Then we have it confirmed with an oath, Heb. vi. 6, 7. God thought our heritage could never stand upon terms sure enough, therefore he condescended to give us an oath over and above his word. An oath is given in a doubtful matter. But now because unbelief possibly might not be satisfied with God's bare word, he hath interposed by an oath, and pawned all his holiness and glory, laid them at pledge with the heirs of promise, 'that they might have strong consolation,' for that is the effect of God's oath, when the Lord swears, 'As I live, saith the Lord;' as if he should say, 'Take my life in pawn, count me not an excellent, glorious, holy God, if I do not accomplish this for you: I will make good this promise. There is no inheritance in the world so sure as this, made over to the heirs of promise. And then on our part, there it is made sure. God will maintain our right to this inheritance. We should embezzle our inheritance, lose it every hour, if it were wholly committed to us; but mark, 'Thou art the portion of mine inheritance, thou shalt maintain my lot. O Lord,' Ps. xvi. 5. A heritage is either wasted by the prodigality of the owner, or else wrested from us by the violence and cunning of others. Now, for the prodigal disposition of the owner: indeed we should spend our patrimony apace, soon embezzle our portion, if we had the sole keeping of it, for we are prodigals. But mark, under the law, Exod. xxv. 23, an Israelite, though he might alienate his inheritance for a while, till the year of jubilee came, yet God forbids him to sell it away for ever. So we blot our evidences often, we cannot read our title; there is an interruption of comfort, a kind of sequestration from the privileges of the covenant for a while; but Jesus Christ is our guardian to look after them that take the promises for their heritages. And then it cannot be wrested from us by the violence of others. All heritages in the world are liable to violences. Princes have been driven from their kingdoms, and men from their heritages; but this is a heritage God will maintain; he hath engaged his own power: John x. 28, 'No man is able to pluck them out of my hand.' It shall not be wrested from us by any pleas in law. The devil would soon pick a flaw in our title, there are so many temptations and accusations; but now God will maintain our right and possession of the privileges of the covenant. He is deeply engaged to maintain their right whose hearts depend upon him: they may take away life, but not the favour of God.

(3.) It is a most lasting and durable inheritance, as being eternal: 'I have taken thy testimonies for my heritage *for ever*.' You know all estates are valuable according as they last. A lease for years is better than to be tenant at will, an inheritance is better than a lease. Our inheritance lasts for ever and ever. All other heritages determine with life, but then ours begins—this heritage of God's testimonies. A worldly portion may crumble away and waste to nothing before we die, but these testimonies will give us a good estate when all things else fail. A believer, when he is stripped of all, and reduced to bare

promises, is a happy man ; and when he is reduced to exigencies, then is the time to put the bonds in suit. God by promise hath made himself a debtor : ‘ As having nothing, yet possessing all things,’ 2 Cor. vi. 10. They have all things in the promise, though nothing in sense. If we have but one gracious promise left to subsist upon, we cannot be poor ; it is better riches than all the world, for then our right to God and eternal life still remaineth. If an estate here should last till death, yet then certainly men try the weakness of their portion. When other men find the worthlessness and baseness of their portion, you find the sweetness, fulness, and comfort of yours. Carnal men have but an estate for life at best : Luke xvi. 25, ‘ Son, in thy lifetime thou receivedst thy good things ;’ when they come to die they can look for no more ; then they find the gnawing worm of conscience prove matter of vexation and torment ; but then your heritage comes to the full : Ps. lxxiii. 26, ‘ My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.’ Not only when all outward comforts fail, all creatures in the world have spent their allowance, but when the flesh begins to fail, when we consume and faint away, and hasten to the grave : Lord, then thou failest not, thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. We have an interest in the eternal God, and we shall live eternally to enjoy him. God lives for ever, and we live for ever, that we may enjoy God.

[2.] Now I come to give the reasons why it is the property of believers to choose this for their portion, and why no others can do it. It is the property of believers to do so upon two grounds :—

(1.) Because of the wisdom that is in faith. Faith is a spiritual prudence. You shall see faith is opposed not only to ignorance, but to folly, because it teacheth us to make a wise choice. Reason makes us wise to choose a good portion in this world : ‘ The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light,’ Luke xvi. 9. But faith is for the inward and spiritual life. Worldly men are wise in worldly employments, to make a wise choice, and accomplish such things they affect, turn and wind in the world ; there they excel the children of God ; but faith makes us wise for eternity, and therefore it chooseth the better portion. Faith is a spiritual light, and seeth a worth in other things. It is a notable saying, Prov. xxiii. 4, ‘ Labour not to be rich : cease from thine own wisdom.’ How came these two things to be coupled ? If we had no better wisdom than our own, we should spend our time, strength, and care to labour to be rich. Human wisdom doth only incline and enable us to the affairs of the present life, but God infuseth a supernatural light into the saints ; they have counsel from the Lord : Ps. xvi. 7, ‘ I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel : my reins also instruct me in the right seasons.’ As if he had said, Ah ! Lord, if I am left to myself, and the workings of my own natural spirit, I should be as vain and foolish as others are ; but thou hast given me counsel.

(2.) The next reason is, because of the nobleness and height of spirit that is in faith. Faith will not be satisfied with any slight fancies ; it must have better things than the world yieldeth. The great privilege of the covenant and work of grace is to give us a new heart ; that is, another manner of spirit than we had before. Our

natural spirit is the spirit of the world, a cheap, vile, low spirit, that will be satisfied with every base thing. Every man seeketh something for his portion, for no man hath sufficiency in himself, but seeketh it without. Natural men go no further than the world, riches, honour, pleasure; they seek it some in one thing, some in another. There is none more unsatisfied than a worldly man, for his heart cannot find rest, and yet none are sooner satisfied. A worldly man is not dainty, but taketh up what is next at hand. You think there is no such excellent-spirited men as they that have high designs in the world, and can achieve greatness and honour. But a poor Christian is of a more excellent spirit; these things will not give him contentment, nothing on this side God. Faith yieldeth a man a choice spirit, it maketh us take the testimonies of the Lord for our heritage. A renewed soul it hath its aspirings; it gets up to God, and will not be satisfied with worldly delights; but 'thou art my portion, saith my soul,' Lam. iii. 24. Others hunt after other things beneath God, heaven, the graces of the Spirit, the righteousness of Christ. Therefore thus it must needs be the property of God's children, because they have another understanding and another heart. And then none but the children of God can have these privileges. Why? Because though they are very magnificent and glorious, yet they are invisible, and for the most part future and to come; they make no fair show in the flesh; this is hidden manna, meat and drink the world knows not of. Carnal men look upon an estate that lies in the covenant to be but a notion and mere conceit, and they cannot believe they shall be provided for if God bears the purse for them; they cannot live immediately upon God, they must have something visible, outward, and glorious: and partly this inheritance is to come, therefore they cannot have this property: Heb. vi. 12, 'Be ye followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' The testimonies of the Lord are an inheritance we cannot come at presently, there needs a great deal of faith and patience in waiting upon God: as a hired servant must have money from quarter to quarter, and cannot with the child expect when the inheritance will befall him. A carnal heart dares not trust God, cannot tarry his leisure; wicked men 'have their reward,' Mat. vi. 2; they must have present wages, glory, honour, and profit here; they discharge God of other things, because it is a thing which costs them much waiting. A humble dependence upon God conflicts with many difficulties and hardships. Carnal men see no beauty in it, and because it is to come, it turns their stomachs.

SERMON CXXII.

Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.—VER. 111.

USE 1. It informs us what is the reason why a believer, that hath nothing in hand, nothing to live upon, yet is not only patient, but comfortable and joyful, as the men of the world when their corn, wine, and

oil increase. Whence are these men maintained, supplied, and kept at such a rate of cheerfulness? Their inheritance lies in the promise. As Christ said, 'I have meat and drink the world knows not of;' so they have land and estate the world knows not of; they have all in God. You account him a richer man that hath much land, and a thousand pounds in bonds, than he that hath only a hundred pounds in ready money; so a child of God that hath one promise is richer than all the world: he hath bonds, and his debtor cannot fail him. Let me tell you, a man may not only live by faith, but he may grow rich by faith. You read of living by faith, Gal. ii. 20; this is that which supports and keeps up a believer in heart and life. This will not only keep body and soul together, but help us to grow rich.

Use 2. For examination. You have heard much what it is to have an heritage in the testimonies of the Lord. Oh! but who is the man? Try yourselves. Let me propound a few plain questions.

1. Were you ever chased out of yourselves in the sense of the insufficiency of your worldly portion, and the curse due to you? Are you driven out of yourselves? Heb. vi. 18, there is a comfortable place: 'God, willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation.' Oh! who are these heirs of promise? If we could find out that, we are sure there is enough in God; there they are named who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. There is none ever took the testimony of the Lord for their portion, but they came first to take hold of it as men in danger, ready to sink and perish and be undone. Our first redress is to take sanctuary in the covenant, to flee to Christ, represented there as a city of refuge, that we may be safe. It is an allusion to a man which fled from the avenger of blood. When taken out of the city of refuge, under the law he was to die without remedy. So a poor soul that first takes hold of the covenant runs for sanctuary there first, before he comes to take possession of the comforts of it.

2. What do you take to be your main and your great work? Do you make it your main care to keep up your interest in the promises? the great business you drive on, you would sit down in as your work and employment? What do you wait upon as your great project and design in the world? Mary chose the better part, Luke x. 42; do you make this your choice, your work and business you drive on, that you may be possessed of the whole land of promise, and enjoy eternal life, and clear up your right and title to heaven? 1 Tim. vi. 19, 'Laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.'

3. Are you very chary of your interest? Oh! you would not hazard it upon such easy terms. This is that all your happiness depends upon. What! shall I break with God for such a trifle? Are you afraid to lose your inheritance by sin, as a man his treasure by theft? Are you careful and wary in this kind, that you may not hazard your interest? 1 Kings xxi. 3, said Naboth, 'God forbid that I should sell mine inheritance.' Mark, there was a king would traffic with him, and that inheritance was but a poor vineyard of the

earth, but it was that which was descended from his father: now God forbid I should sell it. Thus will be the disposition of God's children. Oh! here lies my all, my happiness, my daily supplies from God. God forbid that upon every trifle and carnal satisfaction I should break with God. It was a great profaneness in Esau, Heb. xii. 16, 'who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.' It is an argument that God is little valued, or the covenant and testimony of the Lord, when you can part with them for a mess of pottage, when the consolations of God are so cheap, and you can part with them for a little temporal satisfaction, and sell your part in Christ at a very easy rate.

4. What respect do you bear to the promises of God? Do you often meditate upon them? Have you recourse to them in straits? Do you keep them up as the choicest things upon your heart, upon which all your comfort depends, as a man would keep the key safe which opens to all his treasure? Do you carry the promises as a bundle of myrrh in your bosom? Because this is the key that gives you admission to the blessings promised. A man will keep his bonds chary, and will be often looking over them and considering them. So are you meditating upon the promises? Are they the rejoicing and delight of your souls? Do you keep them near and dear to you? When alone, do your hearts run upon them? For a man may know his heritage by his musing and imagination. When Nebuchadnezzar was alone, 'Is not this great Babel which I have built for the honour of my majesty?' He was thinking of his large territories. So if you have taken the testimonies of the Lord for your heritage, your heart will be running upon them. Oh! what a happiness is it for God to be my God, and my interest cleared up in eternal life, and the great things of the covenant! Many times the flesh interposeth: Ps. cxliv. 15, 'Happy is that people that is in such a case.' You will be admiring carnal excellency sometimes, but then you will check your souls: 'Yea, rather, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.'

5. If the testimonies of the Lord be your heritage, then you will live upon them, and make them the storehouse from whence you fetch all your supplies, as righteousness, peace, comfort, and spiritual strength; nay, all your outward maintenance. This will be comfort in straits, strength in duty, provision for your families. There are two sorts of the children of God, either those that are in prosperity, or those that are in want, and both live on the covenant. A child of God that hath a plentiful affluence of outward comforts, yet he doth live upon God, 1 Tim. iv. 5, to them that believe, for everything is sanctified by the word and prayer. Though God hath supplied them with mercy, yet they have their right; all comforts and blessings owe their rise from the promise. I take them immediately out of God's hand, from a God in covenant with me; and so I use the blessing and praise God. Otherwise, if you look only to present supplies, you live by sense, not by faith. Every one is to say, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' to fetch out his supplies from God every day, rich men as well as others, when you see you have a right and liberty by Christ. So God's leave and God's blessing go along with all; by this means rich men live upon the covenant. Ay! but chiefly in want; the word

quickened and strengthened him when he was in distress and in want of all things. Do you find the word afford maintenance in distress and want of all things? The covenant is a storehouse that never fails. When all else fails, God is alive still, and the promises are the same; when the field yields no meat, when there are no calves in the stall, &c., yet then you can live upon your covenant interest, and comfort yourselves in the Lord your God, Hab. iii. 18. Though the course of nature may fail, yet the covenant of God doth not fail, for that is beyond the course of nature, or beyond the common providence of God. When you can see that all the accidents which fall out in the world can never take your portion from you, you have enough to live upon; when you see more in the promises than the creature can take away from you, and can see all made up in God. As the children of Israel in the wilderness had no house, but, Lord, 'thou art our dwelling-place,' Ps. xc. 1. Faith gets a living from promises when nothing comes to hand in sense and outward feeling; and nothing can be taken from us but what the covenant can restore again, and to fetch quickening and support from heaven.

Use 3. For exhortation, to press you to take God's promises for an heritage; the poorest, that are born to nothing, may put in for a share. Take those motives:—

1. Consider every man hath an heritage, he hath a chief good: Ps. iv. 6, 'Many say, Who will show us any good?' There is something that man takes to be his happiness. The soul in itself is a chaos of desires; like a sponge that sucks and thirsts, it hath not sufficiency in itself; it was made for something without ourselves. Now man, being such a needy creature, is always looking abroad for a happiness, for a portion to maintain and keep him up in comfort and life. Every man must have a portion. Men are not men without looking after something to maintain them as a portion. Now there is no portion like this, like the testimony of the Lord; there is none so full as this, God's covenant notion is all-sufficiency; here is all things to be found in God. When God came to indent with Abraham, 'I am God all-sufficient.' He that hath the testimony of the Lord for his portion, hath God's all-sufficiency engaged to give him everything he stands in need of.

2. This is a portion will go along with you wherever you go. If you go into exile, a foreign land, into prison, into the grave, your heritage will follow you there. Your estate, though it lay in jewels, cannot be carried safe with you; but this portion you may carry with you, they cannot plunder and deprive you of it. There is a notable expression: Prov. xiv. 14, 'A good man shall be satisfied from himself.' A very strange expression: it is the highest sacrilege and usurpation that can be to be sufficient to ourselves; it is an encroachment upon God. Man, when he first fell from God, self was the next pretender. To seek that in ourselves which is only found in God, how is it meant a good man shall be satisfied from himself? What! shall the Lord be laid aside? shall he be sufficient to his own happiness? No; it is not meant in opposition to God, but in opposition to external things that lie without him. He is satisfied from himself; that is, from the comfort God lets into his own heart. A godly man is in-

dependent, his comfort doth not hang upon the creature ; if you take away the creature, you do not take away his portion. As the philosopher could say, when all were bewailing the loss and spoil of the enemy, I carry all mine with me ; so a Christian carries all his treasure about him. There is the same expression, Heb. x. 34, ‘ Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.’ A Christian hath a substance that is out of the reach of spoiling, since inward comfort is far better than riches, and all this lumber that is without.

3. All other things will never give you satisfaction. A worldly heritage may give us a bellyful, but cannot give us a heartful : Ps. xvii. 14, ‘ Their bellies are filled with hid treasure.’ They which are rich and great in the world have more dishes at their tables, but those have a more delicious feast in their souls that have chosen God for their portion. All other heritages do but yield more matter for sin, more fuel for wickedness, to be spent upon lust, pride, luxury, appetite ; that is all the difference. The heart of man is not satisfied with these things ; and yet if the heart could be satisfied, conscience could not, for that is a sore place ; still our sore will run upon us. Thus you see there is no heritage like this, that lieth out of the reach of the world, and that will fill up the whole heart, and yield satisfaction. You know all other things cannot help us in many worldly cases. In sickness spiritual comfort doth only relish of sweetness. A man doth never relish the comfort of the covenant as when he is under sickness, and deprived of other things. For all other heritages, we know the best of them at first, but this is a heritage that grows upon us ; here we have the pledge and earnest of our inheritance : an earnest is a small thing to bind the bargain in lieu of a greater sum.

4. This heritage sanctifies all our heritages. Oh ! it is a sad thing to enjoy a heritage with a curse and the wrath of God. ‘ First seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added ;’ then they are cast in over and above, as paper and packthread into the bargain, and are cast in in a sanctified way. A man may grow worse for every other portion, all the world will not bring one dram of grace ; but this improves the world, and betters us.

5. Again, this is a good sign of adoption, when we have the spirit of God’s children, both in God’s gift and our choice. When men take the promises for their portion, it is a sign they have a good spirit. There is no mark put upon them that have an excellent disposition and dexterity to grow great in the world ; but to be labouring and striving after an interest in the testimony of the Lord, it is a sign we have a child’s spirit.

6. Again, this is a peculiar portion, and always goes along with the favour of God. Other things a man may have with the hatred of God ; God giveth gifts to all his creatures. Isaac had the inheritance, but the children of the concubines had gifts. So every creature may have common gifts, a common portion, abundance of supplies in outward things, but no right in the promises of God ; and all this may be without the love of God.

7. Again, they that refuse this heritage the Lord will cause his vengeance to seize upon them. It is not arbitrary whether you will

take the testimony of the Lord for your heritage or no. God cannot endure to be despised. When Nabal despised David's kindness, 'I will cut off every one that pisseth against the wall.' So when the Lord hath made such an offer of himself and his Christ in covenant, and love hath gone to the uttermost to save, and we turn back, then 'snares, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest, this shall be the portion of their cup,' Ps. xi. 6. It would make a man's heart tremble to think of the heirs-apparent of the land of darkness, that is, wicked men: God will give them their portion with hypocrites in 'everlasting burnings.' Therefore take heed of refusing this portion; you can look for nothing but terrible things from God, for his love is despised. Well, then, go in God's name, and take hold of the covenant.

Again, this may be of use to press believers to live answerable to such an heritage. Am I an heir of heaven, and so uncomfortable and dejected? Can I have an interest in the promises and be no more affected? This returning upon our hearts, Rom. viii. 31. When the apostle had spoken that we should be co-heirs with Christ, and laid forth the privileges of the covenant, he concludes, 'What shall we say to these things?' So, Christians, go home, return upon your heart, and say, Have I an interest in him, and live at such a low rate both for comfort and grace? Do I walk in such a low and unsuitable manner? Do I look upon this as the only sure heritage for my soul. Urge your heart with such questions as these.

Doct. 2. The taking of God's testimonies for our heritage breeds joy and rejoicing in the heart.

Now this joy ariseth partly from the portion itself, partly from the disposition of the saints, and partly from the dispensation of God.

1. From the portion itself. It is a portion that deserves to be rejoiced in, it is so full, and God cannot be possessed without great joy. A man cannot think of a little pelf and worldly riches that is his own without some comfort; and can a man think of these great things without comfort? Consider both what we have in hand and hope, and still it is matter of joy. In hand, there is reconciliation with God. Oh, to have God in amity with us! Rom. v. 1. If one have but a great man to his friend, it comforts him that he hath such a prop and stay. Oh, but now to have God reconciled! And then to have the care of providence, to have God engaged as a father—God caring for us—to be under a promise that he will never fail us till he hath brought us to heaven. And then to have heaven kept for us, those glorious things: 'We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' Joy is pitched upon our hopes in many places, something in possession, and something in reversion; this must needs breed a joy in our soul: Heb. iii. 6, 'The rejoicing of hope;' and Rom. xii. 12, 'Rejoice in hope.' A Christian hath cause to rejoice for what he hath in hand. God is at peace with him, he can go to him as a friend, as a God in covenant with him; he is bound to provide for him as a father; and then, at the end of all, a glorious happiness that is to be enjoyed.

2. It ariseth from the disposition of the hearts of God's people; partly from their esteem, their faith, their assurance; they take it for their heritage, they esteem it as their portion, they believe it, and reflect upon their own interest; and all this causeth joy. It comes from

their esteem; that which I esteem I will delight in: Mat. vi. 21, 'Where the treasure is, there will the heart be.' Affection follows esteem, and above all the affection of delight. A man may desire a thing that is nothing worth; when he comes to enjoy it, then he slights it. We are not acquainted with the imperfection of all worldly things until we come to enjoy them; but delight, that is an argument of esteem, the choicest affection. And then it comes from faith. Many hear of such great promises, but they hear like men in a dream. But now a believer, that hath a piercing sight, that seeth the reality and truth of them, his heart leaps within him. Heb. xi. 13, it is said, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' When a man is persuaded of the truth, the reality, and goodness of the promise, oh! his heart leaps. They hugged the promises. Here is a promise that will yield glory, heaven, and happiness, and all that I stand in need of. Spiritual sight makes way for spiritual persuasion, and spiritual persuasion for holy rejoicing; that is the order: 'In whom believing, we were filled with joy.' Faith is the immediate ground; and that is the reason why carnal men do not feel such lively joy, they do not believe it. Then it comes, too, from assurance and reflection upon their own interest, when they can challenge it as theirs, when it is made over to them. The rejoicing of faith is not only good in common, but propriety is a ground of rejoicing, and delight is nothing but a complacency in our portion: 1 Sam. xxx. 6, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'

3. It comes from the dispensation of God; for when we esteem the promises and delight in them, then the Lord fills the heart with sweetness: Rom. xv. 13, 'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.' The Lord rewards delight with delight. Thou shalt 'call the Sabbath thy delight' in one place, then, presently 'Thou shalt delight thyself'—there is the promise. There is a delight and rejoicing that is our duty, and a delight and rejoicing that is God's dispensation. God loves to reward grace with grace. Look, as in a way of judgment he punisheth sin with sin, as when security is punished with sottish obstinacy and hardness of heart; so it is a sweet mercy when grace is rewarded with grace, when our delight in the promises is rewarded with a sweetness and taste of the promises.

Use 1. The portion of God's children and religion is no dark gloomy thing. The people of God have hidden joys. As the sun shines many times when it rains, so, though they be under affliction, yet they have the shine of God's face, the comfort of God's promises. Let me show the excellency of the spiritual heritage above the carnal. A carnal heritage, alas! that is a poor thing; there is no strong consolation in it. The comforts of wicked men are poor, weak comforts, they cannot comfort us in any affliction, poor things soon overcome; but to God's people their heritage affords strong consolation, in overcoming worldly lusts, in spoiling the relish of other pleasures, overcoming worldly care and worldly sorrow, in bearing us out in all afflictions; nay, the strength of it is seen in overcoming the terrors of the Lord, death, hell, judgment to come, the fears and doubts of our own conscience. It will not only swallow up the sense of poverty, dis-

grace, and affliction, but will bear us out in life and death; they have a joy that will make them to do and to suffer the will of the Lord. When once they have tasted the comforts of God's presence, other things will go down easy. I might press you to look after this rejoicing of heart. It makes much for the glory of God, for the honour of our portion, that we do not repent us of our choice, that we bear up cheerfully. And it is of abundant profit: the joy of the Lord is a Christian's strength; it bears him out in doing for God. To this purpose you should beware of sin; that is a clouding, darkening thing. Men or angels cannot keep their hearts comfortable that sin against God. Sin takes away all joy, peace, and the whole strength of men; and an angel cannot make the conscience of a sinner rejoice: therefore the children of God must take heed that they do not allow sin. In Acts ix. 31, 'They walked in the fear of God and comfort of the Holy Ghost.' Usually these two go together, and the oil of grace makes way for the oil of gladness; and usually obedience concurs to the establishing of our joy. Above all, look after communion with God, for he is the fountain of joy; and the more communion we have with him, the more we rejoice. The more communion in prayer: 1 Sam. i. 6, when Hannah prayed, 'she was no more sad.' Prayer hath a pacifying virtue in it. And then in the use of the seals, for these are assuring ordinances. Now the more we revive the grounds of assurance, the stronger the consolation; that appears Heb. vi. 18, Acts viii. 39. The eunuch when he was baptized 'went away rejoicing.' When a man hath an inheritance made over to him, passed in court, all things done, the title not to be made void, then he goes and rejoiceth. So when the promises have been confirmed by a solemn ratification, it makes joy. Then meditation and thanksgiving keep this joy alive; thanksgiving gives vent, and meditation that maintains it.

SERMON CXXIII.

I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always to the end.—
VER. 112.

DAVID did not only feast his soul with comforts, but also minded duty and service. In the former verse he had professed his comfort and joy, resulting from an interest in the promise; now he expresses the bent of his heart to God's statutes. Ephraim is represented as an heifer that is taught, that would tread out the corn, but not break the clods. It is a fault in Christians when they only delight to hear of privileges, but entertain coldly enforcements of duty and obedience. David was of another temper; first he said, 'I have taken thy testimonies for an heritage,' and then, 'I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes always to the end.'

In which words you have all the requisites of God's service.

1. The principle of obedience, *I have inclined my heart.*
2. The matter of obedience, *thy statutes.*

3. The manner of doing—(1.) Accurately to *perform*; (2.) The universality and uniformity, *always*; (3.) Constantly, *to the end*.

First, That which the Psalmist bringeth in evidence for himself is the frame of his heart; he beginneth there, not with eyes or hands or feet, but my heart. Secondly, This heart is spoken of as inclined, poised, and set, to show his proneness and readiness to serve God; not compelled but inclined. The heart of man is set between two objects; corruption inclineth it one way and grace another; the law of sin on the one side and the law of grace on the other; when the scales are cast on grace's side, then the heart is inclined to God's statutes. Now he saith, 'I have inclined.' It is the work of God's Spirit to incline and bend our hearts, as David expresseth himself, ver. 36. But it is not unusual in scripture to ascribe to us what God worketh in us, because of our subservient endeavours to grace as we pursue the work of God. *Certum est nos facere quod facimus, sed Deus facit ut faciamus*, saith Augustine. It is our duty to incline our hearts to God's law, which naturally hang sinward, but it is God's work. God beginneth by his preventing grace, and the soul obeyeth the impression left upon it: 'Turn me and I shall be turned,' Jer. xxxi. 18. Yea, he still followeth us with his subsequent and co-operating grace; we do but act under him: I inclined my heart after thou hadst filled it with thy Spirit; when I felt the motions of thy grace, my consent followed; preventing grace made me willing, and subsequent grace that I should not will in vain. Now, what was his heart inclined to? To 'perform thy statutes;' not to understand them only, or to talk of them, but inclined to perform them, to go through with the work; that is the notion of performing: Rom. vii. 18, 'How to perform.' We render *κατεργάζεσθαι* by it; to be complete in God's will, to do his utmost therein; this not by fits and starts, but always, a continual care and conscience to walk in God's law, not suffering ourselves for any respect to be turned out of the way. Many have good motions by starts, temporise a little; their goodness is like the morning dew; it is thus not for a time, but to the end. A holy inclination while the fit lasteth is no such great matter; this was to the last. Some stop in the middle of the journey, or faint before they come to the goal, but David held out to the last. Or this is brought as an evidence of his sincerity (the sum is a bent of heart carrying him out to perform whatsoever God doth command all the days of his life). I shall speak of what is most material, and observe this point—

Doct. They that would sincerely and thoroughly obey God must have a heart inclined to his statutes.

Here I shall show—

1. What is this heart inclined.
2. The necessity of it.

First, What is this heart inclined. God expects the heart in all the service that we do him: Prov. xxiii. 26, 'My son, give me thy heart;' not the ear or the eyes or the tongue, but the heart. The most considerable thing in man is his heart; it is *terminus actionum ad intra*, and *fons actionum ad extra*—it is the bound of those actions that look inward. The senses report to the fancy, that to the mind, and the mind counsels the heart: Prov. ii. 10, 'If wisdom enter upon

thy heart.' It is also the well-spring of those actions that look outward to the life, Prov. iv. 23; Mat. xv. 19. You have both these in one place: 'Let thy heart keep my precepts, let thine heart receive my words,' Prov. iv. 4. In taking in we end with the heart; the statutes of God they are never well lodged till they are laid up in the heart. In giving out duty and service, we begin with the heart; we must go so deep, or else all that we do is of no worth. The heart is the spring of motion, that sets all the wheels a-working: Ps. xlv. 1, 'My heart inditeth a good matter, my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer,' ready to praise God and serve him. When the prophet would cure the brackishness of the water, he cast salt into the spring. Our heart is blind: 1 Chron. xxii. 19, 'Now set your heart to seek the Lord.' There is a setting and fixing the heart which is the fruit of grace and ground of obedience.

1. It is the fruit of grace. By nature the heart is averse from God, desireth not to serve or enjoy him. See what the scripture saith of man's heart: Prov. x. 20, 'The heart of the wicked is nothing worth,' a sty and nest of unclean birds; Gen. vi. 5, 'Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart are only evil continually.' The scripture doth much set out the heart of man; it is foolish, vain, deceitful, Jer. xvii. 9, vain, earthly, unclean, proud. There is a strange bead-roll: Mark vii. 21-23, 'Out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.' It was in, or else it would never come out. If a man should vomit nothing but knives, daggers, pistols, and other instruments of destruction, of what a monstrous complexion would you judge that man to be! Oh, no such monster in the world as man's heart! If let alone to its own bent, it would grow worse every day, as putrid flesh grows more noisome every day. But now God by his grace giveth 'a new heart,' that hath other dispositions and inclinations, a heart that loveth God, and delights in God, tends to God. A new heart is the great blessing of the covenant, Ezek. xxxvi. 26; a new heart is a new placing of our desires and delights, for by these the heart is known.

2. It is the ground of obedience; for the heart is the main wheel of the soul, that moveth other things: a bowl is made round before it runneth round: Dent. v. 2, 'Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me!' There must be somewhat to bear up our resolutions. But more particularly, what is this bent and inclination of heart?

And first negatively.

1. It is not a simple approbation of the ways of God. Many go so far as to approve what is good, to condemn themselves for not doing it, to praise others that are holy, can be content that those that are under their power should take to the ways of God, as dissolute parents would have their children soberly brought up, *video meliora proboque*: Acts v. 13, 'The people magnified them,' yet durst not join themselves with the disciples of Christ. Saul said unto David, 1 Sam. xxiv. 17, 'Thou art more righteous than I,' yet David was fain to go to his hold; as the woman, in Luke xi. 27, 28, cried out, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck;' but

Christ said, 'Rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.'

2. It is not a bare desire or wish. Many that live ill could wish to live well. Balaam had his wishes, but went on in his course, Num. xxiii. 10. Some flashes they have; a spark is not enough to set the heart on fire in holy things; in carnal things it is enough. Many such languid motions carnal men have, yea, many cold prayers, that God would make them better, but 'the soul of the sluggish desireth and hath nothing, for his hands refuse to labour;' they do not set themselves in good earnest to get that grace they wish for. Would I were at such a place! but never stir a foot. Would I had written such a task! and never put pen to paper.

3. It is not a hypocritical will; or, as one called it, a copulative will. We would, but with such or such a condition. I would, if it did not cost me so dear; if I were not to mortify lusts, to deny friends, interests, relations. They would come to the supper, Mat. xxii., but one had married a wife, another had a yoke of oxen to prove, another had found merchandise; this is no full and perfect will. No doubt but the chapman would have the wares, but he will not come to the price; a Christian should say, I will whatever it cost me, I will whatever come of it: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing I have desired of the Lord, and this I will seek after.'

Secondly, Positively. Then is the heart inclined:—

1. When the judgment determineth for God, and comes to a full decree about obedience to him. Acts xi. 23, Paul exhorted them, 'That with full purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord;' that is the fruit of conversion; not a little liking or hovering or faint resolution, but a full purpose, an absolute positive decree in the will, to own God and his ways whatever it cost us, a full consent to the duty of the covenant.

2. When the will is poised and swayed with love and delight, and the heart is made suitable to obedience: 'Thy law is in my heart, and I delight to do thy will, O God,' Ps. xl. 8. Many times the law of God is written in the mind; many have good apprehensions, but the will is not swayed, bent this way. *Amor meus est pondus meum, eo feror quocunque feror*; when there is a natural inclination.

3. When this bent of the will is seconded with constant endeavours to attain what we resolve upon, and there is a continual striving to make good the articles of our perfect resignation or first surrender of ourselves to God: Phil. iii. 12, 'I follow after that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ.' God taketh hold of us by his grace, and we carry on this grace in the way of diligent pursuit or constant obedience. It is not one endeavour or two, but such as hath its constant force; hath not its pangs of devotion, but *τὸ θέλει παράκειται*, 'to will is present with me,' Rom. vii. 18. It is a daily habitual constant will; not a volatile devotion, that cometh upon us now and then, but such a will as is present as constant as evil is, Rom. vii. 21: *κακὸν παράκειται*. Wherever you go, or whatever you are about, you carry a sinning nature about with you; it is urging the heart to vanity, folly, and lust. So this will is present, urging the heart to good, and stirring up to holy motions.

Secondly, Let me now show you the necessity of this inclined heart, that we may yield to God cheerful, uniform, and constant obedience.

1. That we may yield to God cheerful obedience in all our services. God looketh for a ready mind. God, that accepts the will for the deed, never accepts the deed without the will. The dregs of things come out with squeezing and wringing; duty is best done when, like live honey, it droppeth of its own accord; cheerful and hearty service only pleaseth the Lord. Now, that is cheerful service which cometh not from the influence of by-ends and foreign motives, or the compulsion of a natural conscience or legal fears, but from the native inclination and bent of the heart: 1 John v. 3, 'This is love, to keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.' The work is not grievous, but pleasant, because suitable to the principles that are in us; it is not done against the hair: Cain offered sacrifice, but with a grudging mind. It is somewhere said, 'They offered to the Lord whose hearts made them willing.' When the heart is in it, it is not constrained, forced service, but natural and genuine; not like water out of a still, but like water out of a fountain.

2. For uniform obedience, to serve God in the whole tenor of our lives, that needs a heart inclined, that may be as a constant spring of holiness. A man may force himself now and then to actions displeasing to himself, but his constant course is according to his natural bent and inclination. Haman could refrain himself from murder, but his heart still boiled with rancour and malice. When men look only to the refraining of outward actions, or the restraining the outward man, it will never hold; the bent of the heart will discover itself, and so they will be off and on with God. The compulsion of conscience will sometimes urge them to God, but the inclination of the heart will draw them to evil; therefore God wisheth that his people had 'a heart to serve him,' Deut. v. 29.

3. Constant obedience; that can never be till the heart be inclined. Judas was a disciple for a while, but 'Satan entered into' his heart, Luke xxii. 3. Ananias joined himself to the people of God, but 'Satan filled his heart.' Simon Magus was baptized, but 'his heart was not right with God,' Acts viii. 22. Here is the great defect. But now, when God gets possession of the heart, there he dwelleth, Eph. iii. 17. there he abideth, as in his strong citadel, and from thence commandeth all the faculties of the soul and the members of the body.

Use 1. To press you to get this bent of heart, otherwise all your labour in religion will be in vain, every difficulty will put you out of the way, and make you think of a revolt from God; till this the work of grace is not begun. God's first gift is a new heart: Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 'A new heart also will I give unto you, and a new spirit will I put within you.' Without this you can never hold out, but you will be uncertain and mutable in the profession of godliness; whatever restraints are upon you for a time, sin will be breaking out ever and anon with violence; and at length men will 'return with the dog to the vomit, and with the sow to her wallowing in the mire,' 2 Peter ii. 20. Oh! then, go to God for it: Jer. xvii. 10, say, 'Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.' Carry forth the work of God so far as you receive it; follow after

to 'apprehend that for which we are apprehended of Christ,' Phil. iii. 12.

Use 2. Have we such a heart, a heart inclined to do the will of God?

1. Though there be such a bent and inclination, there will be failings, yea, reluctances and oppositions: Rom. vii. 18, 'To will is present with me, yet how to perform that which is good I find not.' There is a ready will asserted, and a weak discharge complained of. Observe, it is a will, not a wish; a weak discharge; not that nothing is done, but not all that good that is required, nor in that purity; the work doth not perfectly answer the will, nor the motions of the spirit by which it is excited; and mark, this weakness is not rested in, but complained of; and not only complained of, but resisted: 'I find not,' that implieth he sought it; for the word 'finding' implieth a diligent search; he laid about him on every side, he did not expect it should come by chance or a lazy inquiry.

2. If wrought:—

[1.] How was it wrought in you? Did God turn thee, and thou wast turned? Were you ever brought to self-resignation? By what steps was this work carried on? Thy heart was naturally wedded to thy lusts and to carnal vanity; did ever God make you see the odiousness of sin, the vanity of the creature, the insufficiency of self? Evil men seek contentment in the world as long as conscience will let them hold out in that way. You cannot cleave to God till you are rent off from the world and self. Was there ever such a separation? such a rending work? Conversion, or the altering the bent of the heart, lieth in three things—in turning from the creature to God, from self to Christ, from sin to holiness. How to God? By making us a willing people, to yield up ourselves to his service. How drawn from self to Christ? To seek all this good in him. How from sin to holiness? By seeing the beauty of God's ways. Paul found it a sensible work before he was brought to this self-resignation: Acts ix. 6, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' How did God draw you or drive you to this?

[2.] How is this bent of heart kept up towards God? Nature is apt to recoil, and the heart to return to its own bent and bias again. David beggeth, ver. 36, 'Incline my heart to thy testimonies.' It is a hard matter to keep up a bent of heart towards God; it will cost us much watching, striving, praying, to keep it fixed. The frame of man's heart is changeable and various, doth not always continue at the same pass; and lust will waken, and be pressing and importunate; deadness will creep upon us. The great business of the spiritual life is to keep the bent of the heart steady: neglected grace will suffer decay, and worldly vanities and listlessness and deadness to holy things will inroach upon the soul, and a gracious heart is much discomposed. As a needle that bendeth towards the pole may be jogged and put aside, though it cannot rest there, but turneth thither again, so the bent of the soul towards God may be much disordered, and we may lose much of our free spirit and ready mind, and grow uncomfortable and uncheerful in God's service, and it may cost us much sorrow and deep humiliation to get in frame again. A cold profession is easily

maintained, but to keep up a spiritual inclination is the work of labour and cost.

[3.] How doth it work in you? This bent of heart is seen in two things:—

(1.) In pulling back the heart from those sins to which corrupt nature doth incline us. Nature carrieth us to carnal things. There is something within that puts you on, and something without to draw you forward. Nature thrusteth, occasion inviteth, but grace interposeth and checketh the motion: Gal. v. 17, 'The spirit lusteth against the flesh;' it is against the bent and inclination of the new nature; there is a back bias. Joseph had a temptation; we read of occasion inviting, but not of nature inclining; but presently his heart recoiled. The heart of man is seldom without these counterbuffs. It is an advantage to have the new nature as ready to check as the old nature to urge and solicit: 1 John iii. 9, 'He cannot sin, for his seed remaineth in him.'

(2.) In putting on the heart upon duties that are against the hair and bent of corruption. Such acts of obedience as are most troublesome and burdensome to the flesh, as are laborious, costly, dangerous. Laborious, as private worship, wrestling with God in prayer, holding the heart to meditation and self-examination; sluggish nature is apt to shrink, but 'love constraineth,' 2 Cor. v. 14. Spiritual worship, and such as is altogether without secular encouragement, that is tedious; to work truth into the heart, to commune with God, to ransack conscience, it is troublesome, but thy striving will overcome it. So there is costly and chargeable work, as alms, contributions to public good; there must be a striving to bring the heart to it. Then for actions dangerous, as public contests for God's glory, or keeping a good conscience, though with cost to ourselves. Our great work is to keep the will afoot, nature is slow to what is good. A coachman in his journey is always quickening his horses, and stirring them up; so must we quicken a sluggish will, do what we can, though we cannot do all that we should; the will must hold up still. A prisoner escaped would go as far as he can, but his bolts will not suffer to make long journeys, but yet he thinketh he can never get far enough; so this will is a disposition that puts us upon striving to do our utmost for God.

Secondly, The matter resolved on, to 'perform thy statutes always unto the end.' Uniform obedience, always, or all his days. As long as life lasteth we must be always ready to observe all God's commands, which notes the continuity of our obedience, sincerity, and perpetuity of it. We are to engage our hearts by a serious resolution to serve him, and that not by fits and starts, but always; not for a time, but to the end. Resolve to cleave to him, to hold him fast that he may not go, to keep our hold fast that we may not go. Take notice of the first decays, and let us keep our hold fast, and bewail often the inconstancy of our hearts, that we are so inconstant in that which is good. Every hour our hearts are changed in a duty. What a Proteus would man be, if his thoughts were visible, in the best duty that ever he performed! Rom. vii. 18, 'Evil is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.' Our devotion comes by pangs and fits,

now humble, anon proud ; now meek, anon passionate ; not the same men in a duty and act of a duty, unstable as water. Compare it with God's constancy, his unchangeable nature, his love to us, that we may be ashamed of our levity. From everlasting to everlasting, God is where he was, the same ; the same to those that believe in him. Secondly, This 'to the end.' God's grace holdeth out to the end ; so should our obedience : 'He that hath begun a good work will perfect it,' &c. Consider how unreasonable it is to desire God to be ours unto the end, if we are not his: Ps. xlviii. 14, 'He is our God for ever and ever ; he will be our guide till death.' He doth not lay down the conduct of his providence. So Ps. lxxiii. 24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' We can give nothing to God, our obedience is but a profession of homage. If God be always in our eye, we shall be always in his. We receive life, breath, and motion from him every moment ; he sustaineth us, every day and hour yieldeth new mercy. God watcheth over us when we are asleep, yet how much of our time passeth away when we do not perform one act of love to God ! The devil is awake when we sleep, to do us a mischief, but the God of Israel never slumbereth nor sleepeth. How can we offend him ? Let us then take up this serious resolution, to perform God's statutes always to the end.

SERMON CXXIV.

I hate vain thoughts : but thy law do I love.—VER. 113.

THERE are in men two great influencing affections—love and hatred ; one serves for choice and pursuit, the other for flight and aversation. The great work of grace is to fix these upon their proper objects. If we could but set our love and hatred right, we should do well enough in the spiritual life. Man fallen is but the anagram of man in innocency ; we have the same affections, but they are misplaced ; we love where we should hate, and hate where we should love ; our affections are like a member out of joint, out of its proper place, as if the arms should hang backward. If men knew how to bestow their love and hatred, they would be other manner of persons than now they are. In the text we are taught what to do in both by David's example. See how he bestowed his love and hatred : 'I hate vain thoughts : but thy law do I love.' Love was made for God, and for all that is of God's side, his law, his ordinances, his image, &c. ; but hatred was made for sin. All sin must be hated, of what kind and degree soever it be. Every drop of water is water, and every spark of fire is fire ; so the least degree of sin is sin. Thoughts are but a partial act, a tendency towards an action, and yet thoughts are sin. Of all the operations of the soul, the world thinketh a man should be least troubled about his thoughts ; of all actual breaches of the law these are most secret ; therefore we think thoughts are free, and subject to no tribunal. Most of the religion that is in the world is but man's observance, and therefore we let thoughts go without dislike or remorse, because they do not betray us to shame or punishment.