

forgiving them. As not when he falleth, so not when he stumbleth, not at lesser evils that befall them. Many will say they do not wish their destruction, but a little evil they could be glad of; which sheweth how rare true piety is. God will give him like advantage against thee; as the leprosy of Naaman doth cleave to Gehazi. David, when he heard of the death of Saul, rent his clothes and wept and fasted, 2 Sam. i. 11, 12. Therefore, to feed our eyes with the misery and torment of others, is no holy affection. Job disclaimed it: Job xxxi. 29, 'If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him, neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.' Revenge is sweet to carnal nature, but such a disposition as that cannot or should not find room in a gracious heart. To evidence his integrity, Job produceth this vindication. Though they that hate us be our worst enemies, and should have spirits steeped in bitterness and wormwood against us, yet ought we not to rejoice at the misery of an enemy. Yea, to mourn at their fall becometh us more, if we would act as Christians; and to fear because of it is an act of piety. Therefore this old leaven of malice and revenge must be purged out, this being inwardly delighted, when we hear of the fall of those that hate us. When thine enemy falleth, consider, Either I myself am like him, or worse, or better than he. If better, who made thee to differ? If worse, thou hast cause to wonder thou art spared, and to fear before the Lord. Let us therefore observe the judgments of God executed according to his word. *Iactantius telleth us, Quod non metuitur, contemnitur, quod contemnitur utique non colitur.* If the wrath of God be not feared, it is contemned; and if God be contemned, he cannot be worshipped.

## SERMON CXXXII.

*I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.—*  
VER. 121.

HERE is—

1. David's plea.
2. His prayer.

First, His plea, 'I have done judgment and justice.' *Defensio est, non arrogantia*, saith Ambrose; he doth not speak this boasting or trusting in his own righteousness, but by way of apology and just defence: it is no pleading of merit, as if God were his debtor; but an asserting of his innocency against slanderers. There is *justitia personæ*, the righteousness of the person; and *justitia causæ*, the righteousness of the cause wherein any one is engaged. We may propound the justice of our cause to God as the judge of the earth, and appeal to him how innocently we suffer, when we are not able to plead the righteousness of our persons as to a strict and legal qualification: Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.' Well, then, David pleadeth the equity and justice of his cause, and his right behaviour therein. They

cannot condemn him of any unrighteousness and injustice, and yet endeavour to oppress him; therefore he pleads, Lord, thou knowest where the right lieth, so far as concerneth their slanders, I appeal to thee for my integrity and sincerity; thou knowest that I have given up myself to do just and right things; though they are thus forward to mischief, I have done them no wrong; 'hear me, O God of my righteousness,' Ps. iv. 1. They that look to be protected by God must look that they have a good cause, and handle that cause well, otherwise we make him the patron of sin. When we suffer as evil-doers, it is the devil's cross, not Christ's, that we take up.

But let us see how David expresseth his innocency, 'I have done judgment and justice.' These two words are often joined together in scripture. When God is spoken of, it is said of him, Ps. xxxiii. 5, 'He loveth righteousness and judgment;' and in the 2 Sam. viii. 15, it is said that 'David executed judgment and justice over all Israel.' Muis distinguisheth them thus, *Judicium adversus sceleratos, justitia erga bonos*—judgment in punishing the wicked, justice in rewarding the good. Besides that David speaketh not here as a king, but as a poor oppressed man, the words will hardly admit of that notion. Some think they are only put to increase the sense: I have done judgment justly, exactly. I suppose the one referreth to the law or rule itself, according to which every one is to do right—that is, judgment, a clear knowledge of what ought to be done; the other referreth to the action that followeth thereupon. So that judgment is a doing of what we know, and acting according to received light: Ezek. xviii. 5, 'Do that which is lawful and right;' it is in the margin, Do judgment and justice. Now when this is attributed to public persons, judgment signifieth due order in trying and finding out the state of a cause; and justice the giving out sentence on that trial and judgment, or causing justice to be executed for righting the wronged and punishing the wrong-doer. When to private men, the one implies the direction of conscience, the other the rectitude of our actions. By judgment we discern between right and wrong, and by justice doing things justly according to the rule. Thus it is said, Ps. evi. 3, 'Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doth righteousness at all times.' There is another notion of these two words, which I had almost forgotten:—(1.) Judgment seemeth to be opposite to rigour and extremity, and seemeth to import equitable carriage, mixed with mercy and moderation in exacting our own from others. Certainly, so judgment is sometimes taken, Jer. x. 24, 'O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.' (2.) Justice is just and faithful, dealing in and about those things which we owe to others, or are employed about, or are intrusted with by others.

*Doct.* It is a comely property in God's children, and very comfortable to them, to do judgment and justice.

1. It is an excellent property—

[1.] Because by it we are made like God. Righteousness is part of God's image, and herein we do most resemble his perfection: Ps. cxlv. 5, 'The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.' There is a perfect holiness in his nature, and a condecency in all his actions. Therefore it is God-like in us when our natures are

sanctified, and all our actions are righteous and holy. It is said, Eph. iv. 24, 'That the new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness,' according to the pattern of God, much like to him: they that are most so, are most like him. Natural conscience doth homage to the image of God: Mark vi. 20, 'And Herod feared John, knowing he was a just man.'

[2.] It is acceptable and pleasing to God. The just man is an object of God's complacency: Prov. xv. 9, 'The Lord loveth him that followeth after righteousness.' God loveth all his creatures with a general love, but with a special love those that bear his image. He doth not love men because they are rich and mighty, fair and beautiful, valiant and strong, but as holy and just. It is said, Prov. xxi. 3, 'To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.' God hath required both, and we should make conscience of both; but yet the one is better than the other, though the one be a duty of the first table, the other of the second, because moral and substantial duties are better than ceremonial, internal before external, and duties evident by natural light before things of positive institution. It appeareth in this, that God doth accept of moral duties without ceremonial observances, 'For in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him,' Acts x. 35. But ceremonial observances without moral duties are of no account in God's sight: he still rejecteth their offerings when they neglect justice; not thousands of rams and rivers of oil, but to show mercy, and to do justly, Micah vi. 7, 8, this is good. Again, he dispenseth with the ceremonials and the externals of religion when they come in competition with moral duties, even of the second table; as David's eating the shew-bread when he was hungry, Mat. xii. 5. Well, then, how right and punctual soever we be in other things, unless we show mercy and do justice, we are not accepted with God, though zealous for and against ceremonies of the stricter party in religion. It is true we cannot say they are better than faith and love, and the fear of God, and hope in his grace, for these are the substantial duties of the first table. And compare substantials with substantials, *de ordine modus*, first-table duties are more weighty. But compare internals of the second with externals of the first, moral duties of the second with the ceremonies of the first, natural and evident with the merely positive and instituted; these latter<sup>1</sup> are more weighty. Give to God what is God's, and to men what is men's.

[3.] Because it fitteth for communion with God. When you are just and righteous, you may call for and look for such blessings as you stand in need of; for the righteous have an easy access to him, and are sure of audience: Ps. xvii. 15, 'But as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.' I cannot behold the face of Saul, he will not see my face; but this comforts me, that I can behold thy face. Lord, thou wilt look upon me, and be gracious to me, and hear my prayers. Otherwise God will not hear the unjust, as he saith he would not accept of their peace-offerings, till 'judgment ran down as a river, and righteousness as a mighty stream, Amos v. 23, 24, and rejects the Jewish fasts, Isa. lviii., because they did not loose the oppressed, &c. On the other side, he hath assured the protection of his providence to

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'the former'?—Ed.

him that is just: Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16, 'He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppression, and shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high, his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks; bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure.' God will minister to him sure comforts and sure supplies. They that walk in a continual course of righteousness and just dealing of all sorts shall be as safe as if in a fort impregnable, not to be taken by any force, and sufficiently furnished with store of provisions to hold out any siege; a high craggy place is such. Bread and water are tokens of God's full and final deliverance: Isa. li. 1, 'Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness.' None must look to be thus qualified but the righteous.

[4.] It is so suitable to the new nature as fruits to such a tree. What is works meet for repentance? Acts xxvi. 20, 'That they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance;' and 'bring forth fruits meet for repentance,' Mat. iii. 8. They are the kindly products of faith in Christ and repentance towards God. It is as unsuitable to those that are gracious to be unjust, as that the egg of a crow should drop from a hen, or venomous berries should grow upon a choice vine. That grace that is put into our hearts, which maketh us submissive and dutiful to God, doth also make us kind and harmless to men. These things are required of us as the fruits of true faith and repentance: Isa. i. 16, 17, 'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.' This is particularly insisted upon as the proper fruit of their change. So Dan. iv. 27, 'Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor.' Repentance is a breaking off the former course of sin. The king, an open oppressor, Daniel preacheth righteousness and mercy to him. They that continue their former unjust courses never yet truly repented: Zech. viii. 16, 17, 'These are the things that ye shall do. Speak ye every man truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates, and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord.' He would have their repentance thus expressed.

[5.] Because it is so lovely and venerable in the eyes of the world. A Christian, if he had no other engagement upon him, yet, for the honour of God and the credit of religion, he should do those things that are lovely and comely in themselves, and so esteemed by the world, for he is to glorify God, 1 Peter ii. 12, and adorn religion, Titus ii. 10, to represent his profession with advantage to the consciences of men. God is dishonoured by nothing so much as injustice, which is so odious and hateful to men; and wicked men are hardened, the hopeful discouraged, atheism prevaileth: Neh. v. 9, 'Also I said, It is not good that ye do; ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?' On the contrary, when we give every one their due, we bring honour to God and credit to reli-

gion; you can the better hold up the profession of it against contradiction, hold up head before God and man. Now justice is so lovely, partly as it is a stricture of the image of God, as before, in which respect it is said, Prov. xii. 26, 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.' Men are convinced that he is a more perfect man, fitter to be trusted, as being one that will deal faithfully. And partly because the welfare of human society is promoted by such things: Titus iii. 8, 'These things are good and profitable for men.'

[6.] And indeed that is my last reason; it conduceth so much to the good of human society. A Christian is a member of a double community—of the church and of the world; the one in order to eternal life, the other in order to the present life; as a man, and as a Christian. Without justice what would the world be but a den of thieves? *Remove justitiam*, &c., saith St Augustine. The world cannot subsist without justice: 'The king's throne is established by righteousness,' Prov. xvi. 10. The nation gets honour and reputation by it abroad: Prov. xiii. 34, 'Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.' Never did the people of the Jews, nor any other nation whose history is come to our ears, flourish so much as when they were careful and exact in maintaining righteousness. And as to persons, all commerce between man and man is kept up by justice. And if this be a truth, that God, and not the devil, doth govern the world, and distribute rewards and the blessings of this life, surely then justice, which is a compliance with God's will, is the way to be exalted, and to live well in the world, and not lying, cozening, and dissembling.

2. It is very comfortable to us to be just. The comfort of righteousness is often spoken of in scripture: Prov. xxix. 6, 'In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare; but the righteous doth sing and rejoice;' whatever befalling him, good or evil, much or little, in life or death. Good or evil; if good, he hath comfort in his portion, because what he hath he hath by the fair leave and allowance of God's providence: Prov. xiii. 25, 'The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul;' he hath enough, because he hath what God seeth fit for him; he hath enough to supply his wants, enough to satisfy his desires; sometimes it is much, sometimes it is little. It is much sometimes, for they are under the blessing of the promise: Dent. xvi. 20, 'That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' Justice shalt thou follow; if you will take care for that, God will take care to bless you. If it be little, that little is better than more gotten by fraud and injustice: Prov. xvi. 8, 'Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right;' Prov. xv. 16, 17, 'Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure, and trouble therewith;' though it be but a dinner of herbs: Ps. xxxvii. 16, 'A little that a righteous man hath is better than the treasures of many wicked.' The comfort, if they will stand to the scriptures, lieth not in abundance, but in God's blessing. There is more satisfaction in their small provisions than in the greatest plenty. Suppose their condition be evil, whatsoever evil a just man suffers, he shall get some good by it, living or dying, and so still hath ground of comfort: if scorned or neglected, he hath the comfort of his innocent dealing to bear him out.

As Samuel, when he and his house was laid aside, 1 Sam. xii. 2, 3, he appeals to them, 'Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or from whose hands have I received a bribe to blind mine eyes therewith, and I will restore it?' If you are opposed and maligned, you may plead against your enemies as Moses did, Num. xvi. 15, 'Respect not their offerings; I have not taken an ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.' You may plead thus when you are sure you have not wronged them. If you are oppressed, as David in the text, you may appeal to the God of your righteousness. In life, in death, they have the comfort of their righteousness; in life, Deut. xvi. 20, as before. In death; Prov. xiv. 32, 'The righteous man hath hope in his death;' Isa. xxxviii. 3, 'Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, that I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' When he is going the way of all the earth, this will be a comfort to him, that he hath done no wrong, but served God faithfully, and lived with men without guile and deceit. Oh, for comforts for a dying hour! Now this comfort ariseth partly from a good conscience, and partly from the many promises of God that are made to righteousness.

[1.] From peace of conscience. We are told, Prov. xv. 15, 'That a good conscience is a continual feast.' Ahasuerus made a magnificent feast, that lasted a hundred and eighty days; but this is a continual feast, a dish we are never weary of. Now, who have this feast? The crooked, the subtle, the deceitful? No; but those that walk with a simple and plain-hearted honesty: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.' They have comfort in all conditions: Acts xxiv. 16, 'Herein do I exercise myself always, to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.' Others are like trees of the forest, every wind shaketh them; but they are the garden of God: Cant. iv. 16, 'Awake, O north wind; blow, O south wind, upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.' Out of what corner soever the wind bloweth, it bloweth good to them.

[2.] Partly from the many promises of God, both as to the world to come and this present life. For the world to come, the question is put, Ps. xv. 1, and it were well we would often put it to our hearts, 'Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?' It is answered, 'He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth with his heart, that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour;' a man that maketh conscience of all his words and actions. So the apostle telleth us, in the new heavens and new earth there dwelleth righteousness, 2 Peter iii. 13. Then, for this world there are many promises: take a taste; this bringeth profit, and is only profitable: Prov. x. 2, 'Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivereth from death.' Men think to do anything with wealth, and that naked honesty may be a-cold; they have food and physie, friends and honour; alas! how soon can God blow upon an estate and make it useless to us—make a man vomit

up again his ill-gotten morsels! Job xx. 15, 'He hath swallowed down riches, and shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly.' As a man that hath eaten too much, though God permit him to get, he doth not permit him to hold what he hath gotten unjustly. There is a flaw in the title will one time or other cast them out of possession. Well, then, riches profit not. But what is profitable? 1 Tim. iv. 8, 'Godliness is profitable to all things.' And this part of godliness, righteousness, that will prolong life, and bring a blessing upon the soul of the righteous: Prov. x. 3, 'The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but he casteth away the substance of the wicked.' Another promise; it bringeth preservation in times of difficulty and danger; he that hath carried it righteously, they know not how to lay hold upon him, and work him any mischief: Prov. xi. 3, 'The integrity of the upright shall guide him, but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.' So again, Prov. xiii. 6, 'Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way, but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.' It is God keepeth us, but the qualification of the person kept is to be observed, it is he that is just and honest. We think it is the way to danger, because the eye of the flesh is more perspicuous than the eye of the spirit or mind; and we are more apt to see what is, and who is against us, than what and who is for us: Ps. xxv. 21, 'Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on thee.' That which, in the judgment of the flesh, is the means of our ruin, is indeed the means of our preservation. So Isa. xxxiii. 15, 'He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly,' &c. Again, for recovery out of trouble: Prov. xxiv. 15, 16, 'Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting-place; for the just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked shall fall into mischief.' They may be 'persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.' There are strange changes of providence; we are up and down, but shall rise again; with the wicked it is not so. Again, for stability: Prov. x. 4, 5, 'As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more; but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.' Wicked men, being great in power, rend and tear all things, and bring down all things before them; but they have no foundation: the one is fleeting as the wind, the other is settled as the earth. So Prov. xii. 3, 'A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.' Wicked men get up, seem high for the time, but they have no root, therefore soon wither: they have no root, as that ambassador, when he saw the treasure of St Mark, said, This hath no root. All their policies, secret friendships, shall never be able to keep them up. Ahab was told that God would root out him and all his family; he thought to avoid this threatening; gets many wives and concubines, by whom he hath seventy children, hoping that one of them would remain to succeed him; he committed their tutelage and education to the choicest of his nobility, men of Samaria, a strong town; but you see all this came to nought, 2 Kings x. So Prov. x. 36, 'The righteous shall never be moved, but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.' Every man that is in good estate would fain make it as firm and lasting as he can; these settle politics, contract friendships, use all means to

make their acquisitions firm and secure, but pass by the main care, which is to settle things upon a righteous foundation, and therefore they shall not flourish. So for posterity: Prov. xi. 21, 'The seed of the righteous shall be delivered.' So Prov. xii. 7, 'The wicked are overthrown and are not, but the house of the righteous shall stand;' Prov. xx. 7, 'The just man walketh in his integrity; his children are blessed after him.' All our care is for posterity, man multiplied, continued; in short, all manner of blessings: Prov. xxi. 21, 'He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.' He findeth life: Prov. xi. 19, 'As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death;' Prov. xii. 28, 'In the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death.' Righteousness; he shall have righteous dealing from others. Honour; he shall have a good name in the world, and be preferred when God thinks fit.

*Use.* To press us to do judgment and justice—

1. As to our private dealing with others; carry yourselves faithfully, and make conscience of justice and equity.

[1.] Propound to do nothing but what is agreeable to righteousness and honesty: Prov. xii. 5, 'The thoughts of the righteous are right, but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.' Our evil purpose spoils all. A good man erreth sometimes through ignorance, incogitancy, or violence of temptation, overtaken or overborne; but he doth not propose to do evil, that is the property of the wicked.

[2.] Be always exercising righteousness, as God giveth opportunity and occasion: 1 John iii. 7, 'He that doth righteousness is righteous;' Ps. cvi. 3, 'Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doth righteousness at all times.' Justice must be observed in lesser things as well as in great, for where heaven and hell are concerned nothing is little, Luke xvi. 10. He that is faithful in that which is least, *in minimo*, ὁ πιστὸς ἐν ἐλαχίστῳ—he that is faithful in a little thing will not be unfaithful in anything. Many will be righteous in some thing, but in some others dispense with themselves.

[3.] Do not depart from your rule and resolution of just dealing upon any temptation whatsoever. Men resolve to be just, but when the temptation cometh, their resolution is shaken. Oh! remember the greatest gain will not countervail your loss: Mat. xvi. 26, 'What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' It will prove a poor bargain in the end; and there is no profit in what is gained unjustly; it is a certain loss, and so it will prove in the issue: Hab. ii. 9, 10, 'Woe unto him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil: thou hast consulted shame to thy house, and hast sinned against thine own soul.' You think to avoid all emergent evils; there needs no more to pull down the power and greatness of the oppressor than his studying to make it great; nothing destroyeth it so much.

[4.] Take special heed to thyself that thou be not unrighteous when opportunity is offered, when put in places of power and trust. Many are innocent because they have no opportunity to be otherwise. It is said, John xii. 6, 'He was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what



was put therein.' When corrupt affections and suitable temptations and objects meet, then it is dangerous to the soul.

[5.] 'Take heed of covetousness: 1 Tim. vi. 10, 'The love of money is the root of all evil.' It will make a breach on thy duty when it is indulged; therefore take away the lusts, and temptations will have less power over thee.

For motives—

(1.) Righteousness is a christian's breastplate: Eph. vi. 14, 'And having on the breastplate of righteousness,' to defend the heart and vital parts. It keepeth the heart whole; if the breast be covered with a firm resolution to shun whatsoever is evil and unjust, temptations will not pierce us. Unless you arm yourself with this resolution, you will lose comfort, and lose grace.

(2.) Consider how soon God breaketh in with a judgment when once men transgress righteousness: 1 Thes. iv. 6, 'Let no man go beyond his brother, nor defraud his brother; for God is the avenger of all such.' God, that is the patron of human society, will not suffer unrighteousness and injustice to go unpunished.

2. In your public engagements, see that you have a good cause and a good conscience, and in due time God will plead your cause. (1.) See that you have a good cause; you must not intitle God to your petty quarrels and revenges: 1 Peter ii. 19, 20, 'For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully; for what glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God;' 1 Peter iii. 16, 17, 'Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ: for it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing.' That epistle was penned in a suffering time. When you are exposed to hardships, be sure you are in God's way. (2.) As the cause is good, so must your carriage be. Do not step out of God's way for the greatest good. So many, if they may drive on their designs, they care not what they do, as if a good end would warrant them. Christ need not get up on the devil's shoulders. God is now bound to avenge this, for 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.' In this evil day the righteous shall be saved. God saved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and delivered just Lot, 2 Peter ii.

Secondly, We have David's prayer, 'Leave me not to mine oppressors.' He beggeth help against the oppression of the enemy. I might observe—

1. That it is no new thing to see innocent men troubled, oppressed, persecuted. He that could say, I have done judgment and justice, yet had his oppressors. As long as Satan wants not instruments, the people of God shall not want troubles; and the two seeds will never be reconciled. Therefore we should not censure the oppressed, and those that are fallen under the displeasure of men; and the oppressed themselves should not wonder at it—wicked men do but after their kind.

2. That to be left of God under the oppression of wicked men is a grievous calamity, and earnestly to be deprecated.

[1.] When are we said outwardly and visibly to be left by God under the oppression of wicked men?

(1.) When he taketh off the restraints of his providence, and the hedge of his protection is broken down, and lets loose the enemy upon us, and we are left in the power of their hands: Dan. i. 2, 'The Lord gave the king of Judah into his hands.'

(2.) When he doth not comfort us in such a condition, particularly when God's assistance is not vouchsafed. Sometimes he doth so: 2 Cor. i. 4, 'Who comforts us in all our tribulations.' At other times all is dark: Ps. lxxiv. 9, 'We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet, neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.'

(3.) When he doth not direct us, and show us our duty: Ps. cxliii. 10, 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God, thy Spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.' It was a time when his enemies prevailed over him. Now, if God hide counsel from us, we grope at noonday.

(4.) When he doth not support us. Sometimes this, Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul; and Ps. xciv. 18, 'When I said my foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up;' Ps. lxxiii. 23, 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me up by my right hand.' David prayeth, Put me not into their power, do not let loose the reins; thou hast hindered them hitherto. It is thy mercy that all this while I have not been given up as a prey to their teeth; they want not malice and a will to take vengeance to the uttermost.

[2.] It is a grievous calamity.

(1.) It is a hard thing to be left to the will and lusts of men. David was in a strait; he chose rather to fall into the Lord's hands than into the hands of men: 2 Sam. xxiv. 14, 'I am in a great strait; let me now fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great, and not into the hand of man.' Men are revengeful, proud, insolent: wicked men will soon exceed their commission: Zech. i. 15, 'And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction;' Deut. xxxii. 27, 'Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this.' God speaketh after the manner of men.

(2.) It is a great mark of our Father's displeasure when he withdraweth, hideth counsel from us, leaveth us without support and comfort: Mat. ix. 15, 'And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.'

[3.] It is earnestly to be deprecated, not only as a grievous calamity, but as hoping for relief: 'I will not leave you *ὀρφανούς*,' John xiv. 18, 'comfortless;' and Mat. xxviii. 20, 'Lo, I am with you to the end of the world.'

*Use.* Go, then, and represent your condition to God with humiliation, owning his anger, but with faith waiting for his help. Tell him what a prey you have been to Satan; desire him, if he withdraw his presence one way, he will manifest it in another, in comforting, counselling his own people; tell him your weakness, the enemies' malice, and implore his aid and assistance.

### SERMON CXXXIII.

*Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.—*

VER. 122.

IN this verse we may observe a petition—(1.) Metaphorically expressed; (2.) Literally explained.

In the former branch we have—(1.) The notion by which the help he expecteth from God is expressed: it is that of a surety, *be surety for thy servant*. (2.) The end and fruit of that help, or the terms on which he expecteth it, *for good*.

In the literal explanation we have—(1.) The matter of the petition, *let them not oppress me*. (2.) An argument insinuated from the quality and disposition of his enemies, *the proud*.

First, From the metaphorical notion, 'Be surety for thy servant,' we may observe this doctrine—

*Doct.* In deep distress we have leave and encouragement to desire God to interpose for his people's relief.

1. I shall open the notion of a surety.

2. Show why we have leave and encouragement to desire God to interpose.

First, For the notion of a surety. Symmachus, ἀναδέξαι μὲ εἰς ἀγάθον, receive me into thy protection for good. Septuagint, ἐκδέξαι τε δοῦλόν σου, *suscipe servum tuum*. It is a phrase taken from men when they are sureties for a debtor, to take him out of the hands of a cruel creditor who is ready to cast him into prison. And thus the prophet speaketh to God when he was in extreme danger, and could think of no help but God's.

1. It implieth the danger imminent; when a sergeant hath attached a man, and he is ready to go to prison, and there is no means for him to escape, unless somebody be his surety to answer all the challenges and demands of the law. In this sense Hezekiah used it: Isa. xxxviii. 14, 'I am oppressed; undertake for me.' He spake it when he was summoned to the grave, to pay the debt we all owe to nature: I am like a poor debtor called to pay my debt speedily; therefore, Lord, be my pledge, deliver me out of this danger. So doth David here, when the proud were cruelly set upon his destruction. We are driven to God alone, and beat to the throne of grace by our miseries; yea, God lets the affairs of his people run on to loss and ruin, till we be in the condition of a debtor going to prison; he reserveth himself for such occasions till brought nigh to utter ruin, and all other inferior reliefs

fail. And we must be content it should be so ; for there is no use of a surety till we are attached. Imminent danger giveth notice that the Lord is coming.

2. That this distress and misery cometh as a debt respecting God's laws and the higher court, where all things are decreed and sentenced before they are executed in the world, so it is a debt that must be paid, and distress is God's arrest. God is compared to a creditor, Luke vii. 41 ; therefore the miseries of God's people are expressed by chains, stocks, prisons, fetters, words that relate to a judicial proceeding. To chains: Lam. iii. 7, 'He hath made my chain heavy.' To stocks: Job xiii. 27, 'Thou putttest my feet into the stocks.' To a prison: Ps. cxlii. 7, 'Bring my soul out of prison.' To fetters: Job xxxvi. 8, 'And if they be bound in fetters, and holden in cords of afflictions.' To a debt that must be paid, so is sin considered with respect to its punishment, Mat. vi. 12; Luke xi. 4, 'Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.' God puts the bond in suit, the instruments are but as sergeants and officers to demand of us satisfaction for breach of covenant with God. They think not so, neither doth their evil heart mean so ; but so it is in God's purpose. When you are in trouble God hath committed you to prison, and there is no coming out without submission and humiliation, urging the satisfaction of Christ. You are sent thither by God's authority, and there is no getting out without his leave.

3. That the party is insolvent and undone unless some course be taken to satisfy the creditor ; he cannot help himself by his own wisdom and strength out of the danger. The debtor in the Gospel had nought to pay, Mat. xviii. 25. Why else should we look after a surety : Job xvii. 3, 'Put me in a surety with thee : who is he that will strike hands with me ?' Man is not able to stand alone under the weight of his afflictions ; it is a burden too heavy for us to bear. We have no might, 2 Chron. xx. 12. God's people are often brought into such a case. When the principal is not *solvens*, the surety answereth. We are weak, but he is strong ; we are not able to subsist. They exceed us in carnal advantages ; if force be to be resisted by force, they will easily overcome us, unless another that is stronger than we undertake for us.

4. That the surety taketh upon him the debt of the principal person, and is to be responsible for it. God hath taken our obligation upon himself, to pay our debts, to oppose himself against all our wrongs. He will take our cause as his own : Ps. ix. 4, 'For thou hast maintained my right and my cause ;' and in his own time and manner will show it to the world, and justify us against our enemies. Oh ! how should our hearts rejoice in this, that he will be the party responsible, make our cause his own, and be liable to the suit as a debtor is to the creditor ! 'He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye,' Zech. ii. 8 ; 'He that despiseth you, despiseth me ;' 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?' Acts ix. 4 ; and Isa. lxiii. 8, 'And he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie ; so he was their saviour.'

5. God is a sufficient surety. Here we may consider two things—the satisfaction of Christ, and the power of God's providence ; in re-

spect of both which he is a pledge and surety every way sufficient for our comfort, safety, and deliverance.

[1.] I would not leave out Christ's satisfaction, though it lie not so full in this text; for as God hath a hand in all our sufferings, and all our affairs are determined in a higher court, this satisfaction is necessary to answer the controversy and quarrel of God's justice against us. Thus Christ the second person is *ἐμφατικῶς*, our surety: Heb. vii. 22, 'Christ is the surety of a better testament.' There is a double sort of surety—by way of caution and satisfaction, as sureties in case of debt and sureties for good behaviour; the one for what is past, the other for what is to come. The example of the one we have in Paul for Onesimus, Philem. 18, 'If he hath wronged or owed thee ought, put it upon my account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, and I will repay it.' An example of the other we have in Judah for Benjamin: Gen. xliii. 9, 'I will be surety for him; at mine hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.' In both these respects Christ is a surety; he is our surety as a surety undertaketh for another to pay his debt; and he is our surety as he hath undertaken that his redeemed ones shall keep God's laws, be carried safe to heaven. Of his suretiship by way of caution we speak now. Though Theodoret understand that in the text, Undertake for me that I shall keep thy laws; but it is more proper to consider the speech as it referreth to the payment of our debt by virtue of this suretyship. Solomon hath assured us, Prov. xi. 15, that he that is surety for another shall smart for it, or be broken and bruised. The same word is used concerning Christ, Isa. liii. 10. He was our surety, and was bruised and broken, suffered what we should have suffered. We have a right to appear to God's justice, but<sup>1</sup> our surety having made a full satisfaction for us, God will not exact the debt twice—of the surety and the principal. When the ram was taken Isaac was let go: Job xxxiii. 24, 'Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom.' Well, then, as our punishment is a due debt to God's justice, the Lord Christ undertaketh or is become a surety for us; not only our advocate to plead our cause, but our surety to pay our debt; from a judge become a party, and bound to pay what we owe: Isa. liii. 4, 'Surely he hath borne our griefs.'

[2.] The power of God's providence. If God undertake for us, his bail is sufficient; none of our enemies can resist his almighty power, surely he is able to deal with our enemies: Isa. xxiii. 4, 'Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle?' They are matter to feed the fire, not to quench it. He rescueth us just as going to prison. If he put himself a pledge between us and our enemies, he will defeat all their oppositions and machinations against us, and stand between us and danger, as an able bail or surety doth between the creditor and poor debtor. Well, then, suretyship, as it noteth our necessity, so God's engagement, and his ability and faithfulness to do what he undertaketh. We must set God against the enemies: Isa. li. 13, 'And forgettest the Lord thy maker, who hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy; and where

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'to appeal to God's justice, that'?—Ed.

is the fury of the oppressor?' Dan. iii. 17, 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.' We have the Almighty to be our saviour and protector, why are you afraid of a man? God against man is great odds, if we had faith to see it: man is mortal, God is immortal; man is a poor weak creature, but God is almighty; what is he not able to do for us? Surely he will not leave his friends in the lurch; his power is such that he is able to keep us safe and sound.

Secondly, The reasons why we have leave and encouragement to desire God to interpose.

1. From God's covenant, where in the general there is a mutual engaging to be each other's. In our several capacities we engage to stand by God and own his cause, and God is engaged to stand by us. We make over ourselves, bodies, souls, interests, all to God. God, *quantus quantus est*, as great as he is, is all ours; therefore, if he be ours, we may pray him to appear for us, and own us in our distress and trouble. Our friend is a friend in distress. A gracious heart, by virtue of this mutual and interchangeable indenture, appears for God, and taketh his cause, though never so hated, as its own: 'The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me,' Ps. vi. 9. We are his witnesses, Isa. xliii. 10. Surely it is too high a word for the creature; but God taketh our cause as his, is surety for us; by virtue of the general tenor of the covenant he is our God, *jure venit in auxilium nostrum*, his covenant engageth him to undertake for us. More particularly God undertaketh to defend and maintain his people; as to be a rewarder, so to be a defender: Gen. xv. 1, 'I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' And Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'For the Lord is a sun and a shield.' This defence is sometimes expressed, with respect to the violence of assaults in the world, by the notion of a shield. So, with respect to the process of the law, by the notion of a surety; Isa. lii. 3, we have the term of a redeemer. So that we have leave to pray him to fulfil his covenant engagement.

2. God's affection is such that he will refuse no office that may be for his people's comfort. We are often dissuaded from suretyship, especially for strangers, by the wise man, with great vehemency and instance: Prov. vi. 1, 2, 'My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth;' Prov. xi. 15, 'He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it;' Prov. xvii. 18, 'A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend;' Prov. xx. 16, 'Take his garment that is surety for a stranger;' Prov. xxii. 26, 27, 'Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts: if thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take the bed from under thee?' and in other places. Our pity is stirred towards a man that is like to be undone and ruined; therefore there is such dissuading from suretyship. And hath not God a greater pity over the afflictions of his people? He pities the afflictions of them that suffer most justly, yea, far below their desert: Judges x. 16, 'His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel;' 2 Kings xiv. 26, 'For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter; for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel.' How much

more will he pity them that are unjustly oppressed of men ! Acts vii. 34, 'I have seen the afflictions of my people which is in Egypt, and have heard their groanings, and am come down to deliver them.' His bowels worketh ; God loveth his people better than they love themselves. *fide-jube, Domine, pro servo.*

3. Our relation to him : I am thy servant, and I know thou art a good master ; and he is our sovereign Lord, and therefore hath undertaken to provide for us : the master was to be the servant's *patronus*. God hath found us work, and he will find us defence. This the argument of the text, 'Be surety for thy servant.' We are employed in his work, engaged in his cause. If a rich man set a poor man at work, as to dig such a ditch, if he be afterwards troubled for it, the rich man is concerned to bear him out : Ps. cxvi. 16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant ; I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid.' Whilst we are engaged about our master's business, and in his work, he is engaged to protect us, and bear us out in it.

4. Our very running to him, and committing ourselves into his hands, is an engaging God : Ps. lxxxvi. 2, 'Preserve my soul, for I am holy, O thou my God ; save thy servant that trusteth in thee ;' Ps. x. 14, 'The poor committeth himself unto thee ; thou art the helper of the fatherless.' Employ God, and find him work ; he will not fail to do what he is intrusted with : Ps. lvii. 1, 'Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me, for my soul trusteth in thee ; yea, in the shadow of thy wing will I make my refuge, until these calamities be over-past.' God taketh it well that we should make bold with him in this kind, and tell him how we trust him, and expect relief from him. Nothing is so dishonourable to God, nor vexatious to us, as the disappointment of trust. An ingenuous man will not fail his friend that doth trust and rely upon him, much less will a faithful God fail those that look to him, and depend upon him for help.

*Use.* Advice to us what we should do in our deep distresses and troubles ; when able to do nothing for ourselves, God will be surety, that is, make our cause his own.

1. As your matters depend in a higher court, and with respect to your own guilt and sin, which hath cast you into these troubles, acknowledge your debt, but look upon Christ as your surety, who gave himself a ransom for us. The controversy between God and us must be taken up by submission on our parts, for God is an enemy that cannot be overcome, but must be reconciled. The way is not to persist in the contest, and stand it out, but beg terms of peace for Christ's sake : 2 Chron. vi. 38, 39, 'If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul, then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, their prayers and supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee ;' Job v. 8, 'I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause.'

2. As your danger lieth with men, acknowledge your impotency, but consider who is your surety, and will take your part against the instruments that have had a hand in your trouble.

[1.] God, who hath such a pity over his suffering servants, is ready ever to do them good : Ps. xxxv. 1, 'Plead my cause, O Lord, with

them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me.' He is in such full relation, and so fast bound to them, that they may not be weary and impatient and swallowed up of despair, he will interpose. God seeth our sufferings, heareth our groans, suffereth together with us, and is afflicted in all our afflictions. Believe it assuredly that he will take the matter into his own hand, and be the party responsible: Ps. cxl. 12, 'I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.' Woe be to them that would not have God for their party, joined in the cause of the afflicted. God hath given assurance of his protection not by words only, but by deeds: Prov. xxii. 23, 'The Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.' He hath passed his word, and he will do it: Prov. xxiii. 11, 'For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.' It is his title, Isa. li. 22, 'Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God, that pleadeth the cause of his people;' not by a verbal or local, but a real and active plea: Ezek. xxxviii. 22, 'And I will plead against him with pestilence, and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and the people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone.' And Isa. l. 8, 'He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together; who is mine adversary? let him come near to me;' that is, let him join issue with me, commence his suit in law. We should be confident upon God's undertaking: Jer. l. 34, 'Their redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name; he shall thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land.' It is a great ease in affliction to commit our cause unto God, and put our affairs into his hand.

[2.] God, who hath such power; we need not fear any opposite if God be our surety: Ps. xxvii. 1, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?' Ps. xli. 1, 2, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;' a resolution to adhere to God and his truth whatever cometh. If they be mighty, God is mightier; if they be crafty, God is wiser. It is a great crime to fear men so as not to trust in God; it is a great sin to fear men so as not to fear God. When we comply with them in things displeasing to God, this is to set men above God.

Secondly, We come to the limitation, end, or fruit of this suretyship, 'For good.' There are three expositions of this clause, as noting the end, the cause, the event. (1.) Undertake for me, *ut sim bonus et justus*; so Rabbi Arama on the place, Be surety for me that I may be good. Theodoret expounds it, Undertake that I shall make good my resolution of keeping thy law. He that enjoineth, undertaketh. Though we have precepts and promises, without God's undertaking we shall never be able to perform our duty. (2.) 'In good,' so some read it. God would not take his part in an evil cause. To commend a wrong cause to God's protection is to provoke him to hasten our punishment, to make us serve under our oppressors. But when we have a good cause and a good conscience, he will own us. We cannot expect he should maintain us and bear us out in the devil's



service, wherein we have entangled ourselves by our own sin. (3.) 'For good;' so it is often rendered: Ps. lxxxvi. 17, 'Show me a token for good;' Jer. xiv. 11, 'Pray not for this people for good.' So Neh. xiii. 31, 'Remember me, O my God, for good.' So here, 'Be surety for thy servant for good.'

*Doct.* We should only desire the interposing of God's providence so as may be for good to us.

I shall first give you the reasons, and then give you some rules concerning this good here mentioned.

*Reason 1.* Because then we pray according to God's undertaking: Ps. xxxiv. 10, 'But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing;' they may want food, want raiment, want many things, but they shall want no good thing: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'No good thing will he withhold.' He may keep us low and bare, withhold many temporal mercies from us, feed us from hand to mouth, and short commons may be sweet and wholesome, and deny to give us larger revenues and incomes. If they were good for us, we should have them. God withholds these things so as our need and good doth require: Jer. xxiv. 5, 'Whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.' Their captivity was for good.

*Reason 2.* Because then we pray according to the new nature; old nature would have ease, the new nature would have grace; the flesh would be pleased, but the spirit would be profited; and God hears not the voice of the flesh, but the spirit in prayer: Rom. viii. 27, 'He that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God.'

Let me give you some rules.

1. This good is not always the good of the flesh, not always the good of prosperity. Sometimes the good of prosperity may be good: Prov. xxiv. 25, 'But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.' A good blessing shall come upon them that plead God's cause against the wicked. There is the blessing of prosperity-good and adversity-good. All good is more or less, so as it cometh near or less near the chiefest good; therefore that is good that tendeth to make us spiritually better, more like to God, and capable of communion with him. Lam. iii. 27, 'It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.' That is good which conduceth to our everlasting good.

2. God knoweth what is better for us<sup>1</sup> than we do ourselves. We ask a knife wherewith to cut ourselves. It would be the greatest misery if God should always carve out our condition according to our own fancy; we would soon pray ourselves into a snare if our will were the rule of our prayers, and ask that which would be cruelty in God to grant. I will give you an instance in Lot, Gen. xix. 17, 18, 'Make haste, escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed: I cannot, saith he, escape to the mountain, behold now this city is near, it is but a little one, and my soul shall live.' Lot presenteth his own fancy to God's counsel and choice for him: this little place was in the plain; he was persuaded the shower of brimstone would overtake him before he got thither. Often it is thus with us; though God should command and we obey, we lift up our will above his, and doat upon our

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'what is good for us better'?—ED.

own fancies, and will prescribe to God, think it is better to live by sense than by faith. This mountain was the weaker border of the plain.<sup>1</sup> Now this was weakness in Lot surely. God, that had taken him out of Sodom by the hand of his angels, stricken the Sodomites with blindness, which was an instance of God's great power and goodness to him. Now compare the 17th and 18th verses with the 30th verse, 'And Lot went out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, he and his two daughters with him, for he feared to dwell in Zoar; and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.' Mark here, when God biddeth him go to the mountain, then he goeth to Zoar; when God gave him leave to tarry in Zoar, then he goes and dwells in the mountain: he was afraid in Zoar, when he saw the horrible desolation of all the country about it. Now see the ill success of his own choice, and how badly we provide for ourselves: a little time will show us our sin and folly: his abode in the mountain drew him to incest. Another instance: Hosea xiii. 11, 'I gave them a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.' God may let things succeed with us to our hurt: 'If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us;' 1 John v. 14. God is a God of wisdom, he knoweth certainly what will be good for us. He is a God of bowels, and loveth us dearly, and will certainly cast all things for the best; therefore God is to be judge both for time and kind of our deliverance, otherwise we may meet with wrath in every condition, whether we want or have our will; but if we refer it to him, we shall never want what is best for us. The shepherd must choose our pastures, whether lean or fat, bare or full grounds. The child is not to be governed by his fancy, but the father's discretion; nor the sick man by his own fancy, but the physician's skill: our will is not the chief reason of all things.

3. That which is not good may be good, and though for the present we see it not, yet we shall see it; though not good in its nature, it may be good in its fruit: Rom. viii. 28, 'We know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God;' a little faith and a little patience will discover it. As poisonous ingredients in a medicine, take them singly, and they are destructive; but as tempered with other things by the hands of a skilful physician, so they are wholesome and useful: Heb. xii. 11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous.' The rod is a sour thing for the present, but wait a little, this bitter root may yield sweet fruit: God can so overrule it in his providence. So Ps. cxix. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.' Ask a man under the cross, Is it good to feel the lashes of God's correcting hand? No; but when he hath been exercised, and found lust mortified, the world crucified, and gotten evidences of God's favour, then it is good that I have been afflicted.

4. This good is not to be determined by feeling, but by faith: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Yet God is good to Israel, and to such as are of a clean heart.' God is good to his people, however he seem to deal hardly with them: sense judgeth it ill, but faith saith it is good; it seeth a great deal of love in pain and smart. There is such a difference between faith and sense as there was between Elisha and his servant, 2 Kings vi. 15, 16; the servant saw the host of the enemies, but he did

<sup>1</sup> There seems to be a misprint in this sentence.—ED.

not see the fiery chariots and horsemen that were for his help; Elisha saw both. So believers see not only the bitterness that is in God's chastenings, but the sweet fruits in the issue. Faith can look at the pride and power of wicked men as a vain thing, when they are in the height of their power and greatness: Job v. 3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation;' that is, prophetically, not passionately; foretelling evil, not wishing it. When they were taking root, as themselves and other worldly men thought, I judged him unhappy, foretold his end and destruction. There is much of the spirit of prophecy in faith. When others applaud, make little gods of them, he looketh through all their beauty, riches and honour: Ps. xcii. 7, 'When the wicked spring as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.' Grass will wither and dry up of its own accord, especially when there is a worm at the root. Their very prosperity, as it ferments their lusts, and hardeneth their hearts, is a means to draw on their destruction: Ps. xxxix. 5, 'Man in his best estate is vanity.' Then, when they seem to have all things under their feet, who could harm them? so that none dare open the mouth, move the wing, or peep; yet God can easily blast and whip them with an unseen scourge.

5. Good is of several sorts, temporal, spiritual, eternal.

[1.] Temporal good. Cross accidents conduce to that: Gen. l. 20, 'Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good; to bring to pass as it is this day, and to save much people alive.' The Egyptians and themselves had wanted a preserver if Joseph had not been sold and sent into Egypt. If a man were to go to sea in a voyage upon which his heart was much set, but the ship is gone before he cometh, but after he heareth that all that were in the ship are drowned, then he would say, This disappointment was for good. As Crassus' rival in the Parthian war was intercepted and cut off by the craft of the barbarians, had no reason to stomach his being refused. Many of us have cause to say, *Periissem nisi periissem*—we had suffered more if we had suffered less. In the story of Joseph there is a notable scheme and draught of providence. He is cast into a pit, thence drawn forth and sold to the Ishmaelites, by them sold into Egypt, and sold again. What doth God mean to do with poor Joseph? He is tempted to adultery; refusing the temptation, he is falsely accused, kept for a long time in ward and duress. All this is against him; who would have thought that in the issue this should be turned to his good? that the prison had been the way to preferment, and that by the pit he should come to the palace of the king of Egypt, and exchange his parti-coloured coat for a royal robe? Thus in temporal things we get by our losses, and God chooseth better for us than we could have chosen for ourselves. Let God alone to his undertaking, and he will manage our affairs better than we looked for.

[2.] Good spiritual: Heb. xii. 10, 'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' What do we call profit? The good things of this world, and the great mammon which so many worship? No; some better thing, some spiritual and divine benefit, a participation of God's holiness. Then we profit when we grow in

grace and are more god-like, when we are more concerned as a soul than a body. It is a good exchange to part with outward comforts for inward holiness. If God take away our peace, and give us peace of conscience, we have no cause to complain. If our outward wants be recompensed with the abundance of inward grace, 1 Cor. iv. 10, and we have less of the world that we may have the more of God, and be kept poor that we may be rich in faith, James ii. 5, 6; if we have a healthy soul in a sickly body, as Gaius had, 3 John 2; if an aching head maketh way for a better heart,—doth not God deal graciously and lovingly with us?

[3.] Our eternal good. Heaven will make amends for all that we endure here. This mainly is intended in Rom. viii. 28, ‘All things shall work together for good to them that love God.’ And then in the 29th and 30th verses, he presently bringeth in the golden chain, ‘Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, he justified; and those whom he justified, them he also glorified.’ So 2 Cor. iv. 17, ‘This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;’ it shall either hasten or secure our glorious estate. A man may lose ground by a temptation, his external good may be weakened, his soul suffereth loss; but this warneth him of his weakness, and quickeneth him to stand upon his watch, and to look up more to Christ for strength against it. Or he may be cut off, and perish in the affliction; but then his glorious estate cometh in possession.

6. That may be good for the glory of God which doth not conduce to our personal benefit; and the glory of God is our great interest, John xi. 27, 28, ‘Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour, Father, glorify thy name.’ Then there came a voice from heaven, saying, ‘I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.’ There was the innocent inclination of his human nature, ‘Father, save me from this hour;’ and the overruling sense of his duty, or the obligation of his office, ‘But for this cause came I to this hour.’ We are often tossed and tumbled between inclinations of nature and conscience of duty; but in a gracious heart it prevaieth above the desire of our own comfort and satisfaction: the soul is cast for any course that God shall see fittest for his glory. Nature would be rid of trouble, but grace submitteth all interests to God’s honour; that should be dearer to us than anything else; were it not selfishness and want of zeal, that would be our greatest interest.

#### SERMON CXXXIV.

*Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.—*  
VER. 122.

USE. It informeth us what reason there is to pray and wait with submission to the will of God. God will answer us according to our trouble, not always according to our will. He is wiser than we, for

he knoweth that our own will would undo us. If things were in our own hands, we would never see an ill day, and in this mixed estate that would not be good for us. But all weathers are necessary to make the earth fruitful, rain as well as sunshine. We must not mistake the use and efficacy of prayer. We are not as sovereigns to govern the world at our pleasure, but as supplicants humbly to submit our desires to the supreme Being. Not to command as dictators, and obtrude any model upon God, but to solicit as servants: 'Do good in thy good pleasure to Zion,' Ps. li. 18. If we would have things done at our pleasure, we should be the judges, and God only would have the place of the executioner. Our wills would be the supreme and chief reason of all things. But this God cannot endure; therefore beg him to do good, but according to his own good pleasure.

1. Let us submit to God for the mercy itself, in what kind we shall have it, whether temporal, spiritual, or eternal. If God see ease good for us, we shall have it; if deliverance good for us, we shall have it, Ps. cxxxviii. 2; or give us strength in our souls, or hasten our glory. We should be as a die in the hand of providence, to be cast high or low, as God pleaseth: 1 Sam. iii. 18, 'It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.'

2. Let us submit for the time. Though Jesus loved Lazarus, yet he abode still two days in the same place when he heard he was sick, John xi. 6. It is not for want of love if he doth not help us presently, nor want of power. Christ may dearly love us, yet delay to help us, even in extremity, till a fit time come, wherein his glory may shine forth, and the mercy be more conspicuous. He doth not slight us, though he doth delay us; he will choose that time which maketh most for his own glory. Submit to God's dispensations, and in due time you shall see a reason of them.

3. Let us submit for the way and means. We know not what God is a-doing: John xiii. 6, 7, 'Then cometh he to Simon Peter, and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not, but thou shalt know hereafter.' No wonder we are much in the dark, if we consider, first, that the worker of these works is 'Wonderful in counsel and excellent in working,' Isa. xxviii. 29; infinitely beyond politicians, whose projects and purposes are often hidden from us; therefore much more his. Secondly, That the ways of his working are very strange and imperceptible, for he maketh things out of nothing: Rom. iv. 17, 'And calleth those things that be not as though they were;' one contrary out of another, as light out of darkness, 2 Cor. iv. 6, meat out of the eater, enemies catched in their own snare. Thirdly, That his end in working is not to satisfy our sense and curiosity: Isa. xlviii. 7, 'They are created now, and not from the beginning, even before the day when thou heardest them not, lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them;' Isa. xlii. 16, 'I will bring the blind by a way they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known.' He chooseth such a way as may leave enemies to harden their hearts; Micah iv. 12, 'But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel; for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.'

*Secondly*, I now come to the literal explanation; and there we have—

1. The evil deprecated, *oppress me*.

2. The persons likely to inflict it, *the proud*.

First, The evil deprecated, 'Let not the proud oppress me.' The Septuagint, *μὴ συκοφαντήσωσάν με ὑπερήφανοι*, let them not calumniate me. The Septuagint takes this word for oppression or violent injustice, and therein are followed by St Luke iii. 14, xix. 8.

*Doct.* Oppression is a very grievous evil, and often deprecated by the people of God.

1. I shall show you what oppression is. It is an abuse of power to unjust and uncharitable actions. That it is an abuse of power appeareth by the object of it, who are those that are usually oppressed; that is, either the poor and needy: Dent. xxiv. 14, 'Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of the strangers within thy gates.' The fatherless and the widow are mentioned: Jer. vii. 6, 'Ye shall not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.' The stranger: Zech. vii. 10, 'And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor;' and Exod. xxii. 21–23, 'Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child; if thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all to me, I will surely hear their cry.'

2. The subject or agent by whom it is practised—(1.) 'The proud;' the mighty, rich, great man; at least comparatively, in regard to the wronged party: Ecces. iv. 1, 'And on the side of their oppressors there was power, but the oppressed had no comforter;' Job xxxv. 9, 'By reason of the multitude of oppressors they make the oppressed cry, and by reason of the arm of the mighty.' (2.) The base and mean, when they get power into their hands, to oppress the rich, noble, and honourable: Isa. iii. 5, 'And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour; the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.' It is commonly more insolent and cruel and contemptuous and spiteful: Prov. xxviii. 3, 'A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain that leaveth no food.' When men do unjust and uncharitable actions, as when men bear it proudly or insolently towards them, throwing them out of their riches, denying them the liberty of their service because it is in the power of their hands, or taking advantage of their low condition to run over them, or making an advantage of their necessity and want of skill: Hosea xii. 7, 'He is a merchant, the balance of deceit is in his hand; he loveth to oppress;' or prejudice their testimony to the truth by our credit and esteem in the church, rendering them so weak or wicked, factious or foolish, as not to be regarded.

3. This is a grievous evil; it is so in itself, and may be specially aggravated as to cases.

[1] It is grievous in itself, as it is so odious to God, as being a perversion of the end of his providence. Those that excel in any quality are appointed for the protection and support of the weak and indigent. God gave them their wealth and parts and power and credit

and greatness, to the end they might comfort, counsel, defend, and do good to those that want these things. Now when they make no other use of their power than lions and bears do, to mischief others by it, they do evil because it is in the power of their hands, Micah ii. 1. Power, if men have not a great tenderness of conscience and fear of God, is an unwieldy wilful thing, degenerates into oppression: Isa. x. 14, 15, 'There was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were no wood.' Therefore he went on to oppress and tyrannise in the world, because none durst to oppose him. Power needs much balance to temper and allay it.

[2.] It is so offensive to his people, and burthensome to them: Eccles. vii. 7, 'Oppression maketh a wise man mad;' it shaketh and discomposeth those of the best temper, makes them pray and weep, and cry before the Lord: Eccles. iv. 1, 'So I returned and considered all the oppressions under the sun, and beheld the tears of such as are oppressed.' When you lay such heavy loads upon them that they are not able to bear it, but cry to God to right them.

[3.] The evil itself, oppression. It is not only theft, but murder. These expressions we have: Isa. iii. 13, 14, 'Ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye, that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor?' that is, cause them by your hard usage to pine away? So Micah iii. 1-3, 'And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel, is it not for you to know judgment, who hate the good, and love the evil, who pluck off their skin and their flesh from off their bones? who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldron?' It is in God's account human butchery and murder, beyond simple slaughter, as they make them die a lingering death.

[4.] It is especially aggravated if they be God's servants oppressed for religion: Ps. xii. 5, 'For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy; now will I arise, saith the Lord, I will set them in safety, from him that puffeth at him.' The proud persecutor doth little think of the godly, that any power he hath can do anything to help him; therefore mocketh at all his hopes: therefore, when God hath exercised the godly for a while, he will arise, &c. I say the sin is aggravated by the innocency, the holiness, the usefulness of the party oppressed, when fitted to glorify God, and do service to the public, and disabled to the prejudice of both.

[5.] It is the highest impiety to fetch power and advantage from any ordinance of God to commit it: John xix. 10, 11, 'Then said Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knewest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.' Courts of justice, that should be sanctuaries

and places of refuge to oppressed innocency, they make slaughter-houses and shops of cruelty. When pretexts of laws and justice are used to colour the oppression and persecution of innocent useful persons, this makes it more odious in the sight of God.

*Use 1.* Oh, pity the oppressed ! Job vi. 14, 'To him that is afflicted, pity should be showed from his friend ; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty.' The men of Keilah thought of delivering up David, because they feared not God, 1 Sam. xxiii. 11, 12. But men have no fear of God, but too much fear of men. When God is angry, God will suffer none to help : Ps. lxxxviii. 18, 'Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness ;' Job xii. 5, 'He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.' Sensuality will make us forget the afflictions of others : Amos vi. 4-6, 'They lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and calves out of the midst of the stall ; that chaunt to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David ; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but they are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph.' Scruples of conscience through difference in religion : John iv. 9, 'How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest water of me ?' Therefore we should pity others ; we have God's example : 2 Cor. vii. 6, 'God that comforteth those that are cast down.'

*Use 2.* Keep from oppression ; let us be far from this sin. Samuel professeth his innocency : 1 Sam. xii. 3, 4, 'Behold here I am, witness against me before the Lord and his anointed : whose ox have I taken ? or whose ass have I taken ? or whom have I defrauded ? whom have I oppressed ? or of whose hand have I received a bribe to blind mine eyes therewith ? And they said, Thou hast not defrauded nor oppressed us.'

#### Motives.

1. God will right the wrongs of the oppressed : Prov. xxii. 22, 23, 'Rob not the poor, because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate ; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them ;' Prov. xxiii. 11, 'For their redeemer is mighty, he shall plead their cause with thee.' It belongeth to him as supreme judge and mighty potentate : Eccles. v. 8, 'If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter, for he that is higher than the highest regardeth, and there be higher than they.' Who can break the power of the greatest ? The poor and indigent have none to own them, to resent the things done unto them, but God, who is the supreme Lord, will not fail to own them.

2. Consider the injustice of such dealing, as being contrary to that rule of reason, *Quod tibi non vis fieri, alteri ne feceris*. Every man should do as he would have others do to him. Put yourself in their case. Take this rule quite away, and there is nothing so false, bad, cruel, that you would not be drawn to think or say or do against your brother. Uncharitableness, and want of sympathy with us in our troubles, much more insulting over us in our miseries, we look on it with detestation ; and shall we oppress and afflict others when we have



power so to do? Those that profess themselves Christians should be far from this sin.

Means.

1. The fear of God should bear rule in our hearts: Job xxxi. 23, 'For destruction from God was a terror to me: and by reason of his highness I could not endure;' Lev. xxv. 17, 'Ye shall not, therefore, oppress one another, but thou shalt fear thy God; for I am the Lord your God.' We should be afraid to do them injury, as if a strong party, able to repay injuries, were ready to be avenged upon us for it.

2. Take heed of envy, covetousness, pride, revenge; these are ill-counsellors. Ahab envies Naboth's vineyard, and covets it, and that put him upon oppressing him. So Hosea xii. 7, 'He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand; he loveth to oppress.' So take heed of pride: Ps. x. 2, 'The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor.' So when persons are of a revengeful temper, it will put them upon oppression and persecution for every fancied or supposed affront offered to them: the enemy and avenger go together, Ps. viii. 2.

3. Think of changes, that pride may not be without a curb, nor affliction without a comfort. It is the proud oppress, who are drunk with their wealth and outward prosperity. The Lord's people are not troubled by humble souls, that are sensible of their mutableness and frailty, but by those who little think of these things, and how hard it fareth with them that fear God.

Secondly, Here are the persons to inflict it, 'The proud.'

*Doct.* The proud are they that especially persecute the godly.

Who are the proud?

1. Generally those that obstinately stand it out against God and the methods of his grace: Neh. ix. 16, 'But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not unto thy commandments;' and ver. 29, 'Yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not to thy commandments;' Jer. xiii. 17, 'My soul shall weep in secret for your pride.'

2. More especially those that are too well conceited of themselves, seen by their affecting to meddle with things too high for them: Ps. cxxxi. 1, 'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty, neither do I exercise myself in great matters, nor in things too high for me.' Murmur under crosses, quarrel with providences, finding fault with all God's sayings and doings, trust in themselves that they are righteous, Luke xviii. 14; scoff at others for their godliness: Ps. cxix. 51, the proud 'had me greatly in derision;' Ps. x. 2, 'The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor,' ready to brawl on all occasions; Prov. xxiii. 10, 'Only by pride cometh contention;' would have all to stoop to them, are stiff in their opinions, boasters, lessening the gifts of others, impatient of admonition.

3. The particular pride here mentioned, when men are high-minded, and trust in uncertain riches, drunk with their prosperity. So oppressing in their honour and greatness, as if they would trample all others under foot, and crush them at pleasure. These are merciless and pitiless, disdain the poor, whatsoever presence of God they have with them; we are filled with the scorning of them that are at ease.

## SERMON CXXXV.

*Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.*—VER. 123.

IN the former verse, David spake as one under oppression, here he setteth forth his longing and waiting for deliverance. In the words we have—

1. The act of faith, together with the object of it ; his eyes were to the salvation of God.

2. The defect and weakness of his faith, and God's delay, implied in the occasion of it, 'Mine eyes fail.'

3. The ground and support of his soul in this exercise, 'The word of thy righteousness.'

By salvation is meant temporal deliverance: his eyes were to his salvation ; that is, he did with faith and patience wait for it. But in waiting, his eyes failed ; that noteth some deficiency and weakness, but his support during all this was the word of God's righteousness ; that word wherein God promised salvation and deliverance to them that are oppressed. And he calleth it the word of his righteousness, because he is one that kept it justly and faithfully ; as if he had said, Surely God is righteous, and is no more liberal in promises than faithful in performing, therefore, though mine eyes even fail, yet I will keep looking and longing still for his salvation.

I begin with the ground of his faith, and the support of his soul, which is the word of promise.

*Doct.* That God's word, wherein he hath promised deliverance to his suffering servants, is a word of righteousness.

There are three things in the promise—*Veritas, fidelitas, justitia*, fidelity, faithfulness, and righteousness.

1. *Veritas*, sincerity or truth in making the promise, according to which God doth really intend and mean to bestow what he promiseth ; 'For God is not as man, that he should lie ; neither the son of man, that he should repent : hath he said, and shall he not do it ? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ?' To lie is to speak a falsehood with an intention to deceive ; this cannot be imagined of God. What need hath he to court a worm, or to mock and flatter us into a vain hope ? What interest can accrue to him thereby ? Yea, the purity of his nature will not permit it : Titus i. 2, 'According to the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.' He will as soon cease to be God as cease to be true, for his truth is his nature, he is truth itself. Man, that is mutable, and hath an interest to promote by dissembling, may put on a false appearance, and speak what he never meaneth ; but God cannot do so, for he is truth itself, essentially so in the abstract, can admit of no mixture, though creatures may. Light itself admitteth not of any darkness, but as it is in subjects, so it doth. But God is truth, and in him is no falsehood at all. Now, of all lies, a promissory lie is the worst ; it is greater than an assertory lie. An assertory lie is when we speak of a thing past or present otherwise than it is. A promissory lie is when we promise a thing for time to come, which we never intend to perform.

And this is the worse, because it doth not only pervert the end of speech, but defeateth another of that right which we seem to give him, in the thing promised; which is a further degree of injustice. Therefore we must take heed how, either directly or interpretatively, we ascribe such a lie to God. The apostle telleth us, 1 John v. 10, 'He that believeth not, maketh God a liar;' which is the highest dishonour you can cast upon him, which in manners and civility we would not offer to our equal, and which even a mean man would scorn to put up with at our hands. God hath made many promises, as that he will be with thee in six troubles, and in seven he will not forsake thee, Job. v. 19; that he will dispose of all things for the best to them that love him, Rom. viii. 28; that no good thing shall be wanting to them that fear him, Ps. xxxiv. 10. Doth not God mean as he saith? and dare we trust him no more? Your diffidence and drooping discouragements give him the lie, and you carry it so as if these were but words of course, without any intent to make them good.

2. *Fidelitas*. The next thing in the promise is faithfulness, and that referreth to the keeping of the promise. A man may be real in promising, he did not intend to deceive: but afterwards he changeth his mind: there may be verity in making the promise, but there is not fidelity in keeping the promise. But God is faithful; hath he said, and shall he not do it? All the promises are 'Yea and Amen' in Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. i. 20. God's word is not 'Yea and Nay,' but 'Yea and Amen;' it doth not say Yea to-day, and Nay to-morrow, but always Yea. So it is Amen, so it shall be; and this in Jesus Christ, on whose merit they are all founded, and who was the great instance of God's truth: for the great promise wherein God stood bound to the church was to send a Saviour to redeem the world; and if God hath made good this promise, surely this is a pledge that he will make good all the rest; for if he spared not his Son, he will not stick at other things.

3. There is *justitia*, righteousness; for this is righteousness, *jus suum cuique tribuere*, to give every one his right and his due. Now by promise, another man cometh to have a right in the thing promised; therefore justice requireth that you should give him the right that accrueeth to him by virtue of your promise. So God, *promittendo se fecit debitorem*, maketh himself a debtor by promise. It was his mercy and goodness to make the promise, but his justice bindeth him to make it good. This is often spoken of in scripture: 1 John i. 9, 'Faithful and just to forgive us our sins;' 2 Tim. iv. 8, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.' By his promise he is become a debtor to us; he cannot go against his own word; his justice will not suffer him to change. It is a debt of grace indeed, but a debt it is which it is justice for God to pay. Thus you see how it is a word of righteousness.

*Reason 1.* Because God hath in his promises pawned his truth with the creature, and so given us an holdfast upon him. *Chirographa tua injiciebat tibi Domine*. Promises, as in a contract, are more than simple declarations, and bare assertions of what good he will do to us. With man it is one thing to say, This I purpose to do; another, This

I promise to do. A promise addeth a new bond and obligation upon a man for fulfilling his word. An intimation or signification of God's will and purpose sheweth the event will follow; but a promise doth not only do that, but giveth us a right and claim to the things promised. Scripture prophecies will be fulfilled because of God's veracity; but scripture promises will be fulfilled, not because of his veracity, but his fidelity and justice. And the 'heirs of promise may have strong consolation by God's word and oath'—'two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie,' Heb. vi. 18. There is a greater obligation upon God to make it good.

*Reason 2.* Because none that ever depended upon God's word were disappointed; not one instance to the contrary: Ps. xviii. 30, 'The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all that trust in him.' Search the annals and records of time, and all experience hath found the word of God exactly true. If any build not upon it, it is because they are not acquainted with God, and the course of his proceedings: Ps. ix. 10, 'They that know thy name will trust in thee.' There is so little believing and trusting God upon his word, because they are men of no experience; otherwise they would find God punctual to his promise: 'Not one thing hath failed of all the good things the Lord your God spake concerning you,' Josh. xxiii. 14. He speaketh not only as his own observation, and the result of all his experiences, and that in a time when there was no room for dissembling: 'I go the way of all the earth,' but also 'you know in all your hearts, and all your souls;' and he repeateth it, 'Not one thing hath failed.' Unless you be impudent, you cannot deny it; try him, you have found support and relief hitherto.

*Reason 3.* Because God standeth much on the credit of his word. Heathens have acknowledged it to be the property of the gods, ἀληθεύειν καὶ εὐεργετεῖν; certainly the true God hath showed himself to the world in nothing so much as doing good and keeping promise: Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name,' above all that is famed or spoken or believed of God, this is most conspicuous, as being punctual in keeping covenant and fulfilling promises. God hath ever stood upon that, of being tender of the honour of his truth in the eye of the world: therefore we should build securely upon the word of his righteousness.

*Use 1.* To bless God that we are upon such sure terms. All people that know there is a God, wait for some good things from him; but they are left to uncertain guesses, it may be they may have them, it may be not: but we have it under hand and seal, and have God's warrant for our hope, and so deal with God upon sure terms. Well may we take up David's song, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word,' Ps. lvi. 10. It is twice repeated in that psalm: that is ground of rejoicing, that God will assure us aforehand what he will do for us. God might have dealt with man by way of dominion and command alone, without any signification of his goodness, and left us to blind guesses. Promises are the eruptions and overflows of God's love, he cannot stay till accomplishment, but will tell us aforehand what he is about to do for us, that we may know how to look for it.

*Use 2.* To exhort us to rest contented with God's word, and to take his promises as sure ground of hope. I shall show you how you should count it a word of righteousness; what is your duty; and that first you are to delight in the promise, though the performance be not yet, nor like to be for a good while: Heb. xi. 13, *πεισθέντες καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι*, being persuaded of them, they embraced them. Oh! how they hugged the promises at a distance, and said in their hearts, Oh, blessed promise! this will in time yield a Messiah: John viii. 56, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and saw it, and was glad.' You hold the blessing by the root, this will in time yield deliverance, Heb. vi. 18; not only yield comfort, but prove comfortable: Ps. cxix. 111, 'Thy testimonies I have taken for an heritage; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' For your duty—

2. You are to rest confident of the truth of what God hath promised, and be assured that the performance will in time be: *πεισθέντες*, Heb. xi. 13. Faith is not a fallible conjecture, but a sure and certain grace: Rom. viii. 28, 'We know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God.' So Ps. cxl. 12, 'I know that God will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.' There is a firm persuasion; I know I shall find this to be a truth. Men who are conscionable and faithful in keeping their word are believed; yet, being men, they may lie: Rom. iii. 4, 'Let God be true, and every man a liar.' Every man is, or may be a liar, because of the mutableness of his nature; from interest he will not lie, but he can lie. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. Surely God cannot deceive, or be deceived. He never yet was worse than his word.

3. You are to take the naked promise for the ground of your hope, however it seem to be contradicted in the course of God's providence; when it is neither performed, nor likely to be performed, it is his word you go by, whatsoever his dispensations be. Many times there are no apparent evidences of God's doing what he hath said, yea, strong probabilities to the contrary. It is said, Rom. iv. 18, 'That Abraham against hope believed in hope,' *παρ' ἐλπίδα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι*. Abraham had the promise of a son, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; but there was no appearance of this in nature, or natural hope of a child, both he and Sarah being old: yet he believed. It is an antanaclasis, an elegant figure, having the form of a contradiction he goeth upon God's naked word. Then faith standeth upon its own basis and legs, which is not probabilities, but his word of promise. Everything is strongest upon its own basis, which God and nature have appointed. For as the earth hangeth on nothing in the midst of the air, but there is its place, faith is seated most firmly on the word of God, who is able to perform what he saith.

4. This faith must conquer our fears and cares and troubles: Ps. cxii. 7, 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' He must fix the heart without wavering: Ps. lvi. 4, 'In God I will praise his word, in God have I put my trust: I will not fear what man can do unto me.' The force of faith is seen in calming our passions and sinful fears, which otherwise would weaken our reverence and respect to God.

5. Above all this, you are to glorify God publicly ; not only in the quiet of your hearts, but by your carriage before others : John iii. 33, 'Put to his seal that God is true.' It is not said, Believed or professed, but, Put to his seal. We seal the truth of God as his witnesses when we confirm others in the faith and belief of the promises by our joyfulness in all conditions, patience under crosses, diligence in holiness, hope and comfort in great straits. Num. xx. 12, God was angry with Moses and Aaron, because ye 'believe not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel.' We are not only to believe God ourselves, but to sanctify him in the eyes of others ; as when the Thessalonians had received the word in much assurance, in much affliction, and much joy in the Holy Ghost, the apostle telleth them they were examples to all that believed in Achaia and Macedonia, 1 Thes. i. 5. The worthiness and generousness of our faith should be a confutation of our base fears, but a confirmation of the gospel. But we are so far from confirming the weak, that we offend the strong ; and instead of being a confirmation to the gospel, we are a confutation of it.

Use 3. Reproof to us that we do no more build upon this word of righteousness.

1. Some count these vain words, and the comforts thence deduced fanatical illusions ; and hopes and joys, fantastical impressions : Ps. xxii. 7, 8, 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn ; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him : let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.' Nothing so ridiculous in the world's eye as trust or dependence or unseen comforts. Ungodly wits make the life of faith a sport and matter of laughter.

2. Some, though not so bad as the former, they may have more modesty, yet as little faith, since they are all for the present world, present delights, present temptations. With many, one thing in hand is more than the greatest promises of better things to come, 2 Tim. iv. 10 ; they have no patience. Afflictions are smart for the present : Heb. xii. 11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous.' Yea, they do not deal equally with God and man. If a man promise, they reckon much of that, *Qui pelat, accipiet*, &c. They can tarry upon man's security, but count God's nothing worth. They can trade with a factor beyond seas, and trust all their estates in a man's hand whom they have never seen ; and yet the word of the infallible God is of little regard and respect with them.

3. The best build too weakly on the promises, as appeareth by the prevalency of our cares and fears. If we did take God at his word, we would not be so soon mated with every difficulty : Heb. xiii. 5, 6, 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have ; for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper ; I will not fear what man can do unto me.' There would be more resolution in trials, more hardness against troubles. Besides maintenance, there is protection in the promise. If we had faith to believe this, it would effectually quiet our minds in all our necessities and straits and perplexities. Man can do much, bring them low, even to a morsel of bread. We need not much desire the best things of the world, nor

fear the worst; need not be covetous, nor fearful. Where faith is in any life and strength, it moderateth our desires and fears. It is an ill part of a believer to hang the head.

Secondly, From that clause, David's eyes were to God's salvation, that God's word being passed his people do and must wait for the accomplishment of it. The lifting up of the eyes implies three things—faith, hope, and patience; all which do make up the duty of waiting for help and relief from God.

1. The lifting up the eyes implies faith and confident persuasion that God is ready and willing to help us: 2 Chron. xx. 12, 'But our eyes are unto thee;' Ps. cxliii. 1, 2, 'Unto thee I lift mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.' The very lifting up of the bodily eye towards heaven is an expression of this inward trust: so David in effect saith, From thee, Lord, I expect relief, and the fulfilling of thy promises. So that there is faith in it, that faith which is the evidence of things not seen. How great soever the darkness of our calamities be, though the clouds of present troubles thicken about us, and hide the Lord's care and loving-kindness from us, yet faith must look through all to his power and constancy of truth and love. The eye of faith is a clear, piercing, eagle eye: Heb. xi. 27, 'Moses endured, as seeing him that was invisible.' A man is very short-sighted before: 2 Peter i. 9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off;' can only skill in the things of sense and reason, see a danger near him, as beasts or a bait while it is before him; a brute thinketh of no other; or else goeth by probabilities, as it seeth things by the light of reason in their causes. But faith seeth things afar off in the promises, Heb. xi. 13, at a greater distance than the eye of nature can reach to. Take it either for the eye of the body, or the mind, faith will draw comfort not only from what is invisible at present, but not to come for a long time; it is future as well as invisible; its supports lie in the other world, and are yet to come.

2. There is hope in it; for what a man hopeth for he will look for it, if he can see it a-coming: 'the earnest expectation of the creature,' ἀποκαρδοκία τῆς κτίσεως, Rom. viii. 19; the stretching forth of the head: Judges v. 28, 'They looked out at the window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long a-coming?' So by spiritual hope there is a lifting up of the eyes, or a looking out for what God hath promised, or an intent observing all together: 'Our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for a Saviour,' Phil. iii. 20. Faith keepeth the eye of the mind fixed upon the promise, and is ever looking out for deliverance: Ps. cxxi. 1, 2, 'I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help: my help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.' Thence they look and wait for succour; it must come out of heaven to them. They see it, they can spy a cloud a-coming; that which a man careth not for he doth not look for. David saith, 'I will pray and look up,' Ps. v. 3. Hope hath expectation of the thing or object hoped for.

3. There is patience in it, in persevering and keeping on our looking till mercy come, with faith and ardency in expecting God's help. Looking and waiting is to be conjoined, notwithstanding difficulties, till it procure deliverance: Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Our eyes wait on the Lord,

who will have mercy on us.' This lifting up of the eyes doth not imply a glance, or once looking to heaven; but that we keep looking till God doth help: Isa. viii. 17, 'I will wait on the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.' There is a constant depending, and patient attending upon God, notwithstanding the present tokens of his wrath and displeasure. As a man withdraweth himself from a party, and will not be seen of him, nor spoken to by him, but the resolute suitor tarrieth to meet and speak with him. So Micah vii. 7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.' Not give over upon every discouragement, as a merchant doth not discontinue trading for every loss at sea. Certainly it is not faith and hope, unless we can endure and bear out. Natural courage will bear out for a while, but not long. A little touch breaketh a bubble, and a slight natural expectation is soon discouraged; but to hope against hope, to pray when God forbids praying, to keep waiting when we have not only difficulties in the world, but seeming disappointments from heaven itself, when the promise and Christ seem to be parting from you, and refuse you; yet then to say, I will not let thee go until thou bless me, as Jacob said to the angel, Gen. xxxii. 25, 26, when God saith, Let me alone.

*Use.* Let us turn ourselves towards God for help, and have our eyes on him, and keep them there: Ps. cxli. 8, 'But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord; in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute.' Let us not give way to discouragements, though God delay us so long till all our carnal provisions are spent, no meal in the barrel, nor oil in the cruse, and we are brought to the last morsel of bread; though brought to complain for pity to them that will show none, but pour vinegar into our wounds; yea, till our spiritual provisions be spent. Faith will hold out no longer, hope can do us no service, patience lost and clear gone; we fall a-questioning God's love and care. I say, though we grow weary, let us strive against it, acquaint God with it, renew faith in the word of promise. There is a holy obstinacy in believing.

To get this eye of faith—

1. There is need of the Spirit's enlightening. Nature is short-sighted, 2 Peter i. 9. A man cannot look into the other world till his eyes be opened by the Spirit of God: Eph. i. 17, 18, 'The Father of glory give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' There needs spiritual eye-salve to get this piercing eye to look through the curtain of the clouds.

2. When your eye is opened, you must keep your eye clear from the suffusions of lust and worldly affections. A mortified heart is only a fit soil for faith to grow in. The world is a blinding thing, 2 Cor. iv. 4. While present things bear bulk in our eye, invisible things are little regarded by us. Dust cast into the eyes hindereth the sight, carnal affections send up the fumes and steams of lust to blind us.

3. The eye being clear, you must ever be looking up out of the world of temptations into the world of comforts and supports, from



earth to heaven: Heb. xi. 27, 'As seeing him that is invisible;' and the nothing things of the world, by omnifying and magnifying God. There are the great objects which darken the glory of the world, and all created things. And there we see more for us than can be against us, 2 Kings vi. 15. Pharaoh, a king of mighty power, was contemptible in Moses' eyes, because he saw a higher and a more glorious king; so glorious, that all the power and princes of the world are nothing to him.

4. The less sensible evidence there is of the object of faith, the greater and stronger is the faith, if we believe it upon God's word: John xx. 29, 'Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.' It extenuateth our faith, when the object must be visible to sense, or it worketh not on us. Faith hath more of the nature of faith when it is satisfied with God's word, whatever sense and reason say to the contrary: 1 Peter i. 8, 'Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now you see him not, you rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Whatever faith closeth with upon sure grounds, it is spiritually present to the soul, though few sensible helps. The less we see in the world, the more must we believe. To see things to come as present, and to see things that otherwise cannot be seen, cometh near to God's vision of all things. God saw all things before they were, all things that may be, shall be, *visione simplicis intelligentie*: Prov. viii. 31, 'Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth.' So doth faith eye all things in the all-sufficiency and promise of God, long before they come to pass, and affects the believer with them, John viii. 52.

Thirdly, From the weakness and imbecillity confessed, 'Mine eyes fail.' The doctrine is—

*Doct.* That sometimes God's people wait so long, that their eyes even fail in waiting; that is, their faith, hope, and patience is almost spent, and they are ready to give over looking.

For the phrase intimateth two things—a trial on God's part, and a weakness on ours. First, a trial by reason of God's dispensations. Two things make our waiting tedious—the sharpness of afflictions, and the length of them, long delays of help and great trouble, in the mean time. First, the depth of the calamity, or the sharpness of the trial may occasion this failing: Ps. xxxviii. 10, 'My heart panteth, my strength faileth me, for the light of mine eyes is also gone.' Secondly, the length of troubles, or the protraction of deliverance. As the bodily eye is tired with long looking, so doth the soul begin to be weary, when this expectation is drawn out at length: Ps. cxix. 82, 'Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?' The delay is tedious.

As to the matter of this failing, there are three things:—

[1.] That the sufferings of God's children may be sometimes long. God ordereth it so, that faith, hope, and patience may have its perfect work, Heb. vi. 12. There is an intervening time between the promise and the accomplishment. Intervening difficulties, James i. 3, 4; Rom. viii. 24, 'Hope that is seen is not hope;' it is but natural probability, natural courage. Those that have received a great measure of faith have a great measure of trials; their troubles are greater than

their graces may be the more exercised, that many stubborn humours may be broken, Jer. iv. 3. God useth to suffer his enemies to break up the fallow ground of his people: Ps. cxxxix. 2, 'The plowers plough upon my back, they make long their furrows.' We have proud and stiff hearts, therefore the plough of persecution goeth deep, that the seed of the word may thrive the more; till they have done their work, God doth not cut asunder the cords. The Lord of the soil expects a richer crop. The power of the Spirit is more seen: Col. i. 10, 11, 'Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.' Not only patience, but long-suffering, which is patience extended under continued troubles. Men may fret; it is not unwilling, extorted by force; but they are cheerful under the cross. The length of sufferings; some can endure a sharp brunt, but tire under a long affliction. Some go drooping and heavily under it; therefore joyfulness. For these and many other reasons doth God permit our sufferings to be long.

[2.] Why faith, hope, and patience are apt to fail.

(1.) Because these graces are weak in the best, and may fail under long and sharp trials: Ps. cxxxv. 3, 'For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity.' The strongest believer may faint in trouble, therefore God will not try them above their strength; but as he sometimes giveth more grace, so sometimes he abateth the temptations. Grace is not so perfect in any as to be above all weakening by assaults. Who would have thought that a meek Moses could be angry? Ps. cvi. 33. There are relics of sin unmortified, such as may be awakened in the best. Who would have thought that David should fall into uncleanness, an old experienced man, who had many wives of his own, when Joseph, a young man, a captive, resisted an offered occasion? But especially do these graces fail in their operation when the temptation is more spiritual; for these are mystical graces, to which nature giveth no help, when things dear to us in the flesh and in the Lord are made the matter of the temptation, and set an edge upon it, &c. Sins that disturb the order of the present world are not so rife with the saints as sins that concern our commerce with God.

(2.) Because temptations raise strange clouds and mists in the soul, that though they grant principles, yet they cannot reconcile providences with them. As Jer. xii. 1. 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, yet let me plead with thee.' It is not to be questioned, much less doubted of, that God is upright and just in his dealings; yet what mean those passages of his providence? Their thoughts are fearfully imbrangled, the minds of the godly are molested: 'Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?' So Hab. i. 13. 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity; wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously? and holdest thy tongue, when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?' God is pure and holy, they know; yet how can he bear with the enemy, in their treachery and violence against the church? So brutified are they, that they know not how to reconcile his dispensations with his nature and attributes; though they have faith enough to justify God, yet atheism enough to question his providence. When the heart is

over-charged with fears: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Yet God is good to Israel: my feet were almost gone, my steps well-nigh slipped.' They hold fast the conclusion, 'Yet God is good to Israel;' yet cannot maintain it against all objections.

(3.) Carnal affections are hasty and impetuous, and if God give not a present satisfaction, they question all his love and care of them: Ps. xxxi. 22: 'I said in my heart, I am cut off;' Isa. xlix. 14, 'Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken, and my God hath forgotten me;' Jonah ii. 4, 'And he said, I am cast out of thy sight.' So that, did not God confute his unbelief by some sudden experience, as in the first instance, or the word contain a suitable supply, as in the second, or the principle of grace in some measure withstand ('but I will look towards thy holy temple'), the soul would be swallowed up in the whirlpool of despair. Thus hasty and precipitant are we while we hearken to the voice of the flesh. We are apt to count all our troubles God's total desertion of us. Such a hasty principle have we within us, that will hurry us to desperate conclusions, as if it were in vain to wait upon God any longer.

(4.) Mutability in man. What a flush of faith and zeal have we at first, as stuffs have a great gloss at first wearing. We lose, as our first love, so our first faith: Gal. v. 7, 'Ye did run well; who did hinder you?' There is a great forwardness at first, which abateth afterwards; and men grow remiss, 'faint in your minds,' Heb. xii. 3, from one degree to another.

[3.] That this failing is but an infirmity of the saints; though their hope be weak and ready to faint, it is not quite dead.

(1.) It is an infirmity of the better sort, not like the atheism and malignity of the wicked. Some diseases show a good constitution, and seize on none but such. This distemper is not incident to carnal men: Isa. xxxviii. 14, 'Mine eyes fail with looking up.' It argueth a vehemency in our hope; they that do not mind things are never troubled with such a spiritual disease; for this failing cannot be but where there is vehemency of desire and expectation. Those that desire little of the salvation of God's people, feel none of this.

(2.) There is a difference between them and others; though they have their weaknesses, yet their faith doth not quite expire; there is a twig of righteousness still to trust to; they are weary of watching, but they do not give over waiting; and say, as he, 2 Kings vi. 33, 'What should I wait for the Lord any longer?' Fainting is one thing, and quite dead is another: they strive against the temptation: though no end of their difficulties appeareth, they attend still, keep looking, though the vigour of the eye be abated by long exercise. There is life in the saints, though not that liveliness they could wish; for they do not fall, and rise no more, and are quite thrown down with every blast of a temptation.

(3.) They confess their weakness to God, as David doth here, acquainteth God with it, and so shame themselves out of the temptation, and beg new strength. It is an excellent way of curing such distempers to lay them forth before God in prayer, for he helpeth the weak in their conflicts. When we debate dark cases with our own hearts, we entangle ourselves the more.

*Use 1.* It reproveth our tenderness when we cannot bear a little while: 'What! not watch with me one hour?' Mat. xxvi. 40. David kept waiting till his eyes failed. Some their whole voyage is storms;—Christ indents with us to take up our cross daily, Luke ix. 22;—who are their lifetime kept under this discipline; and can we bear no check from providence? We would have all done in an hour or in a year, can bear nothing when God calleth us to bear much and long; cannot endure to abate a little of our wonted contentment, when God will strip us of all.

*Use 2.* Let us provide for long sufferings. All colours will not hold as long as the cloth lasts. We need a great deal of grace, because we know not how long our great troubles may last. Sometimes sufferings are like to be long. First, When the cross maketh little improvement, carrieth little conviction with it. While the stubbornness of the child continueth, the blows are continued. God will withdraw till they acknowledge their offence, Hosea v. 15. When we eye instruments, and pour our rage upon them; or instruments are minded, and we hope to be delivered some other way, when we repent not. Secondly, When provocations are long: Dent. xxviii. 58, 59, 'If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law, that is written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance; and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.'

### SERMON CXXXVI.

*Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.*—VER. 124.

In this verse we have two requests—the one general, the other particular; wherein he would have the Lord exercise his mercy to him. Show thy mercy to me in teaching me thy law. The one respects the privilege part of religion, the other the duty part; the one concerns time past, or the pardon of sin already committed, 'Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy;' the other prevention of sin for the time to come, that I may perform my duty for the future, 'Teach me thy statutes.' Mercy is the ground of his request; teaching God's law the matter of it. He would have this gift bestowed on him freely.

First branch, 'Deal with thy servant,' &c. Where we have—

1. His relation to God, *thy servant*.
2. The terms upon which he would have God deal with him: Not according to my works, but *according to thy mercy*.

First, His relation is mentioned either—(1.) As a part of his plea, as if he had said, Lord, thou art merciful to all, for 'thy tender mercy is over all thy works,' Ps. cxlv. 9; much more to thy servants: now I am thy servant. God's servants have a special claim and interest in God; besides his general bounty, they expect his special mercy and

favour: Ps. cxvi. 16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid.' Clear that, that you are some of God's servants once, and then you may the better expect your master's bounty. Or, (2.) To show his need of mercy though God's servant. Such an emphasis it seemeth to have: Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant;' *non dicit cum hostibus tuis*. He doth not say, Enter not into judgment with thine enemy, but with thy servant. So here David, that was God's servant, a man of singular holiness, desireth that God would deal with him in mercy. From first to last, the saints have no other plea. Theodoret, on the text, observeth, *ὁ τοσαύτης ἀρετῆς ἐργάτης ἐλέους τυχεῖν*, &c.—so great a worker of righteousness beggeth to receive mercy, and looketh for all his salvation by mercy. And again, *οὐκ ἀπαιτεῖ μίσθον ἀλλὰ φιλοπρίαν αἰτεῖ*—he doth not challenge a reward, but asketh favour and kindness.

*Doct.* That God's best servants have no other and no better plea than that God would deal with them in mercy.

1. Because there is and can be no merit on the creature's part towards God, according to the rule of justice. Adam in innocency could *impetrare*, not *mereri*; it was his grace to covenant with the creature, when innocency and purity did adorn our nature; how much more since the fall, and the distance between God and us hath been so widened by sin! What merits must be *indebitum* and *utile*. It must be *indebitum*: when our righteousness was perfect, yet still due by virtue of our relation to God as creatures; and paying of debts deserveth no reward. The lawyers tell us, *Nemo consequitur premium, quod facit ex officio debitum*. We are bound, and do but our duty; but God is not bound to us. All that the creature hath and is, and can do, it oweth to God, and hath received it from him; and God is in such a degree of excellency above us that he cannot be obliged. Where there is so great a disparity of nature and being, there is no common right to make him obnoxious, to make it justice to any action of ours to reward us. Aristotle denied children could requite their parents, and merit from them, and that the obligation of merit is only between equals; certainly not between God and men. There was nothing which bound him necessarily to reward his creature but his free covenant. Again, that which merits must be *utile*, profitable to him from whom we challenge reward. If we be never so righteous, the benefit is ours, not God's. He is not beholden to us, useth us not out of indigence, but indulgence; not as if he needed anything, but we need his blessing: Luke xix. 10, 'When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants;' and Ps. xvi. 2, 'Our goodness extendeth not to thee.' God giveth all, receiveth nothing from us. The beam oweth all to the sun, the sun nothing to the beam.

2. Because since the fall there is no claiming but by the covenant of grace and mere mercy. A sinner cannot expect anything but upon terms of mercy. The covenant of works supposed us innocent and holy, and bound us so to continue, Gal. iii. 20; so that the law knoweth not how to do good to a sinner. Once a sinner, and for ever miserable; it leaveth no room for repentance. So that now there is no hope for the best, according to the rule of strict justice, but only

according to the law of mercy. In the new covenant there are these special differences from the law of works. That there is not only grace, but mercy and grace too. In the first covenant there was grace, but no mercy. Grace doth all things gratis, freely; but mercy pitieth the miserable: therefore, till sin and misery entered there could be no room for mercy. There was grace in that covenant, for it was of grace that God did enter into covenant with man at all, and of grace that he did accept man's perfect obedience, so as upon performance of it to make him sure of eternal life. But now in the new covenant God doth show mercy and grace too, and grace in the most rich and glorious manner. Mercy and grace too in this way of salvation, in that there is hope for a sinner, a plank cast out after shipwreck; and grace in the richest and most glorious manner; partly for the design and end that was driven at; it was the glory of grace: Eph. i. 6, 'To the praise of the glory of his grace;' and partly the ground of it was founded upon the infinite mercy of God and the infinite merit of Christ. The infinite mercy of God: Mercy is the infinite goodness of God, flowing out freely to the creature, without any moving cause or worth on the creature's part to expect it: Rom. ix. 16, 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that sheweth mercy.' And the infinite merit of Christ: Isa. lv. 3, 'I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David;' Isa. xlii. 6, 'And give thee for a covenant to the people;' and Isa. xlix. 8, 'I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant to the people.' David, that is Christ, the seed of David; all the mercies of the covenant are exhibited in and by him, in whom the covenant is made with us, and made good to us, 2 Cor. i. 20. And he is given for a foundation; that is, the foundation of a new and better covenant. And partly because of the terms wherein it is dispensed, which is not unsinning obedience, but a sincere owning of Christ, unto the ends for which God hath appointed him. So that in effect a thankful acceptance of a free discharge is all that we do for paying the debt, or to make way for our acceptance with God: Rom. iv. 16, 'Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed;' and Eph. ii. 8, 'Ye are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.' By the grace of faith we lay hold upon or apply to ourselves Christ and all his benefits; and that faith God giveth us by his mere grace, not exhibited by any work of others. The whole work of salvation, from its first step in regeneration to its last step in glorification, doth entirely flow from God's free grace, and not from any worth in us. So that this being the end, grounds, terms of the new covenant from first to last, mercy doth all on which our hope dependeth. We must claim by mercy.

3. As there is no merit in the best saints, so there is much demerit; and as there is nothing to induce God to be good to us, so there is much to hinder him, much that standeth in his way; yet God will do us good: Isa. lvii. 17, 18, 'I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also and restore comforts to him.' He taketh motives from himself to pity when he might take occasion to punish. There are many sins to be forgiven both before and after conversion. We are not only undeserving, but ill-deserving. It was much that God

would take us with all our faults, when he first drew us into acquaintance with himself, and intrust us with a stock of grace; but after he hath done that, we still are faulting and sinning: Rom. viii. 1, 'Yet now there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ;' notwithstanding the relics of corruption, and its breaking out.

4. From the temper of the saints, their humility. None have such a sight and sense of sin as they have, because their eyes are anointed with spiritual eyesalve. They have a clearer insight into the law: Jer. xxxi. 19, 'After I was instructed I smote upon my thigh.' They are enlightened by God's Spirit; the least mote is espied in a glass of clear water. None are so acquainted with their own hearts and ways as they who often commune with their own hearts, and use self-reflection. Others, that live carelessly, do not mind their offences; but they that set themselves do more consider their ways; none have a more tender sense of the heinousness of sin. She loved much, wept much, because much was forgiven her, Luke vii. Some are of a more delicate constitution; the back of a slave is not so sensible of stripes as they that have been more tenderly brought up. The beams of the sun shining into a house, we see the dust and motes in the sunbeams, which we saw not before. They profess as Jacob, I am not worthy of all the mercy and truth thou hast showed me. They groan as St Paul, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

*Use 1. Information.* We learn hence that we should not be discouraged, when our hearts are touched with a deep remorse and sense of our failings, and are desirous to break off our sins by repentance; that mercy which is freely vouchsafed in the covenant, which all God's servants have so often experienced, which the best make their only plea and ground of hope, will find out a remedy for us. If you have a heart to give up yourselves to God's service, and so to get an interest in the promises and blessings of the covenant, you may come and sue out this mercy, for God desireth to exalt his grace. God saith, 'Return to the Lord your God, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely,' Hosea xiv. It is the delight of grace to do good, notwithstanding unworthiness. The worst of sins do not hinder God's help, are not above his cure. There is hope for such as are convinced, and see no worth in themselves why God should do them any good. God needs not, will not be hired by the creatures to do it.

*Use 2.* How inexcusable those are that reject the offers of grace. If they have any liking to the blessings of the covenant, they have no ground to quarrel and differ with God about the price: Isa. lv. i, 'Ho every one that thirsteth, let him come to the waters and drink freely, without money and without price.' You have no cloak for your sin if you will not deal with God upon these terms. Nothing keepeth you from him but your own perverse will.

*Use 3.* What reason there is the best of God's servants should carry it thankfully all their days. From first to last the mercy of God is your only plea and claim. No flesh hath cause to glory in his presence, there being no meritorious cause in the covenant of grace, no moving and inducing cause, no co-ordinate working cause: 'Not for your sakes do I this,' Ezek. xxxvi. 32; and in 1 Cor. vii. 4, it is

said, 'Who maketh thee to differ?' We paid nothing for God's love, nothing for Christ, the Son of his love, nothing for his Spirit, the fruit of his love, nothing for sanctifying grace and faith, the effects of his Spirit dwelling and working in our hearts, nothing for pardon; we have all freely; nothing for daily bread, protection, maintenance; and shall pay nothing for glory, when we come to receive it: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of God unto eternal life.' It is all without our merit, and against merit. We should regard this especially when we are apt to say in our hearts, This is for our righteousness; as Haman thought none so fit for honour and preferment as himself, Esther vi. 6; Haman thought so in his heart. So proud-hearted, self-conceited sinners say in their hearts, God seeth more in them than in others. Alas! you are not only unworthy of Christ, the Spirit, grace, and glory, but the air you breathe in, and the ground you tread upon. What did the Lord see in you to judge you meet for such an estate? Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and all thy truth.' Did not you slight grace, neglect Christ, as well as others? and doth not sin break out, and make a forfeiture every day?

*Use 4.* That we should carry it humbly as well as thankfully. The best of God's children should most admire grace and glorify mercy, set the crown on mercy's head. Consider—

1. What was the first rise of all God's love, what set all a-stirring in God's bosom, John iii. 16. There was no cause beyond this. In other things we may rise higher, from his power and wisdom to his love. But why did he love us? There is no other cause to be given—he loved us because he loved us. It was love first moved the business in the ancient counsel of God's will. God's love is the measure of itself.

2. When he came to apply it, he found us in our blood. It was a great mercy that God would take us into his service with all our faults. We were his creatures, but quite marred, not as he made us. We are not what we were when first his; as we came out of his hands we were pure and holy, but since the fall quite spoiled: Jer. ii. 21, 'I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?' Strangely changed and altered! If a servant run from his master, and is become altogether blind, deformed, and diseased, will his master look after him, or care for him, or take him again? This was our case.

3. What is spoken already is common to others; you yourselves knew what you were, Titus iii. 3. Every man is soundly affected, more sensible of his own case, seeth particular reasons why God should refuse him; yet you are as brands plucked out of the burning, who did resist such powerful means, such fair advantages; you dallied with God. You know the case of others by guess, your own by feeling. You lay not only in the common polluted mass, but had your particular offences.

4. When taken in a fault, that God will pity our weakness and infirmities in his service: Mal. iii. 17, 'I will spare them as a man spareth his son that serveth him;' that is, he will continue his favour



and good-will to them that serve him. So surely they that have a conscience, and are privy to their manifold infirmities and failings, will admire this.

5. Though for the main we give up ourselves to live according to the will of God, yet consider, notwithstanding our sins, what constant humbling considerations there are to keep us sensible of our defects. (1.) All that you do is not worthy of God. Who can serve so great a majesty as the Lord is, according as he should be served? Josh. xiv. 29, 'You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy and a jealous God.' Alas! such is the poverty of human condition, that they can never perform service becoming his majesty. Have you a due sense of his purity and holiness? Nay, how jealous he is of the respects of his people! (2.) Not worthy of such a pure law, which requireth such perfect service at our hands: Ps. xix. 6-8, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul,' &c. What doth that speculation produce, that a short exposition of the law begetteth a large opinion of our own righteousness? (3.) Not worthy such great hopes: 1 Thes. ii. 12, 'That ye walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory.' Since we have such great wages we should do more work. Is this for heaven? Is this for eternity? (4.) Not such as will answer our obligations. We are indebted to all the persons of the Trinity; God himself for our portion, Christ our Redeemer, the Spirit for our guide and comforter. The Gentiles were greatly obliged to God for fruitful seasons. The Jews, though acquainted only with God's patience and forbearance, the ceremonial law was a testification of guilt, or a bond that showed the creature's debt; this bond was not cancelled. (5.) Not answerable to the new nature in God's children; they would be in a state of perfect conformity and subjection to God. A seed worketh through the clods; so they groan under the relics of corruption and sin, Rom. vii. 24, longing for the time when they shall be more like God, when they shall serve him without spot or blemish; therefore are unsatisfied with their present imperfections. These things considered, we should ever keep humble and thankful, praising God's grace: Isa. lxiii. 7, 'I will mention the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed upon us; and the great goodness towards the house of Israel which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and the multitude of his loving-kindnesses.'

*Use 5.* Directeth us how to pray. Cast yourselves at God's feet, pleading his mercy. We have heard the kings of Israel are merciful kings, 1 Kings xx. 31. You have heard so of the God of Israel; try what mercy will do for you. Say, as David here, 'Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy.' My prayers have no other foundation of hope but thy mercy; I am nothing, and would be nothing, but what I have from thee; I have no merits, but thou hast mercy; all that I have, and expect to have, floweth and must flow from this fountain. Take heed of challenging duty as a debt. No, Lord; thy mercy is all my plea; as all thy servants before have done: Lord, remember me in thy mercy; if any have other things to plead, let them plead; I am resolved to use no other plea: Ps. xlii. 5, 'But I have trusted in thy mercy.'

Second branch, *teach me thy statutes*. This may be considered apart by itself, or with respect to the context.

First, Apart, as an entire prayer in itself. So the doctrine is,—

*Doct.* It is God must teach us his statutes.

This will appear if we consider—

1. What it is to be taught of God. There is a difference between grammatical knowledge and spiritual illumination, or a literal instruction and a spiritual instruction; a greater difference than there is between teaching a child to spell and read the words, and a man to understand the sense. Literal instruction is when we learn the truths contained in the word by rote, and talk one after another of divine things. But spiritual illumination is when these things are revealed to us by the Spirit of God; as we read of the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, 1 Cor. ii. 4. Others have a form of knowledge, Rom. ii. 20. Some have only the report of Christ, have but a human credulity, or the recommendation of others, that reveal the doctrine of God to them. Others receive a revelation made to their souls; their eyes are opened by the Spirit, Isa. liii. 1. Once more, there is a difference between the Spirit's enlightening in a way of gifts and common grace, and his enlightening in a way of special and saving grace. Some that are enlightened by the Spirit fall away, Heb. vi. 4. Others are taught of God, so as to come to him by Christ, John vi. 45. This latter sort, that are savingly enlightened, have not only their minds opened, but their hearts inclined. So to be taught as to be drawn to faith and practice, this is proper to God, who is the sovereign dispenser of grace.

2. This will appear if we consider the heart of man, which is naturally full of darkness, and oppressed by the prejudices of customs and evil habits: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of God;' 2 Cor. iv. 4, 'The god of this world hath blinded their eyes.' This veil can only be removed by the Spirit of God. After grace received we know but in part, 1 Cor. xiii. 9, and much of the matter which beclouded the mind still remaineth with us; and when our lusts are awakened by temptations, our old blindness returneth upon us, and we strangely forget ourselves and our duty for the present. Therefore we have need to go to God to be taught: 2 Peter i. 9, 'He that wanteth these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.'

3. If we consider the matter to be taught, it is the mysterious doctrine that came out of the bosom of God. Every art hath its mystery, which strangers cannot judge of: 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'All scripture is given by inspiration.' This was a secret which had not been known without a revelation. God hath his mysteries which no man knoweth, but by the Spirit of God: Mat. xiii. 11, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given.' Those that have scriptures, yet have scales on their eyes, 1 Cor. ii. 14, they have not saving knowledge. How sharp-sighted soever graceless souls may be in things that concern the present world, yet they are blind in spiritual things, so as to be affected and engaged thereby seriously to turn to God. Yea, how accurately soever they can discourse in the theory, and preach of Christ and his ways, yet they have no transforming light. God's mysteries must be seen in his own light,

or they make no impression upon us: Ps. xxxvi. 9, 'In thy light we shall see light.' The scriptures containing the sum of the Lord's mind, none can of themselves attain to the meaning of them; it was not the device of man's brain. So none understand by their proper skill and invention. There are such knots as cannot be untied and loosed, but by imploring the help of the Spirit.

*Use 1.* To press us to be often with God for this teaching, and make it our great request to him. A gracious heart would fain learn the right way to heaven: Ps. xliii. 3, 'O send out thy light and thy truth.' Direction how to carry ourselves is a great blessing.

2. The blindness of our understandings should make us more earnest with God. We are apt to mistake our way, through the natural weakness of our understandings, especially when lusts and interests interpose: Jer. x. 23, 'Lord, the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' As man understandeth not events, so easily mistaketh present duties.

3. Our present estate. The world is a dark place, 2 Peter i. 19: compared with the light of glory, it is but like a light that shineth out of a room where a candle is, and a room where a candle is not seen, the glimmerings of the antichamber of eternity. Our own reason, the counsel and example of others, will easily misguide us. So the more we depend upon God, the more he will undertake to teach us, Prov. v. 6. Those that make their own bosoms their oracle, God is disengaged from being their guide: they need him not; but the snares they run into will soon show them how much they need him.

4. How unapt we are to see conclusions in the promises, and to apply general rules to particular cases and times; which most Christians cannot do, *ἐν διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν*, in their inferences: Rom. i. 21, 'Are vain in their imaginations, have their foolish hearts darkened.'

5. To bind all upon the heart, and to lie under the conscience of our duty, maketh the difficulty the greater; many imprison the truth in unrighteousness. Well, then, beg the constant direction and illumination of God's Holy Spirit; cast yourselves upon him in the sense of your weakness, and see if he will refuse you; say, I am blind and ignorant; Lord, guide me. It is dangerous to be left in any part of our duty to ourselves.

Secondly, If we consider the words with respect to the context. And first the remoter context, where David speaketh like a man under trouble and oppression, ver. 121, 122, 'Let not the proud oppress me,' &c. Lord, show me what to do in this time of my oppression.

*Doct.* Direction how to carry ourselves in trouble, till the deliverance cometh, is a great mercy, and should be earnestly sought of God.

*Reason 1.* From the parties oppressing. They that oppress watch for our halting, as Jeremiah complained, Jer. xx. 10. They accused the prophet unto the ruler, and so to work his ruin, if they could find him tripping in anything. Now when we are watched we need special direction, that God would teach us to walk warily and safely: Ps. xxvii. 11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies; or, those which observe me, they watch to get some advantage: therefore that they may have no advantage against us, we should not trust to our own single wisdom.

*Reason 2.* Because the danger of sin is a greater inconvenience than the danger of trouble. In times of trials and troubles we are in danger of soul-losing and sinning, as well as bodily danger; therefore we have need to beg wisdom of God to carry it well under trouble, because we are so apt to miscarry, unless God guide us continually in our dark condition, and take us by the hand, and help us over our stumbling-blocks. There are many sins incident to our condition.

1. Uncomely passion and unadvised speeches; therefore David prayeth in his trouble, Ps. cxli. 3, 'Set a watch before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.' In our oppression, we are under a temptation to hurt our own cause by unadvised and passionate speeches. When we have too great a sense of the temptation, something or other breaketh out to God's dishonour.

2. Some indirect course to come out of trouble, Ps. exxv. 3. Men that make haste out of trouble carve for themselves, break prison before they are brought out. Necessity is an ill counsellor, and will soon tempt us to some evil way for our own ease, some sinful compliance or confederacy. The devil tempted Christ when he was an hungry, Mat. iv. 3, hoping to work upon his necessity.

3. Private revenge, or meeting injury with injuries. We are apt to retaliate: 2 Sam. xvi. 9, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.' Revenge is soon up. No man is troubled if a shower of rain falleth upon us; but if any cast a bucket or bason of water upon us, we are in a rage presently. We can better bear any trouble from God than injuries from men: 'Oppression maketh a wise man mad.' A revengeful spirit is contrary to our heavenly calling.

4. Waxing weary of our duty, and quite tired and discouraged in God's service: Heb. xii. 3, 'Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners, lest you be weary and faint in your minds.' Weariness and fainting belong properly to the body, and they differ gradually. Weariness is a lesser, and fainting a higher degree of deficiency; as when a man laboureth, hungers, or travelleth, it abateth his strength, and abateth the active powers, or toileth the spirits, the principle of motion. And from the body it is translated to the mind, to a less or higher degree of defection; and it is thus, when troubles are many and long continued, we begin to grow faint, and wax weary of the faith and service of Christ, and sink under the burden. It is the devil's design to make us weary, and tire us out in the service of God.

5. Another evil is despairing and distrustful thoughts of God. David, after all his experiences of God, though he had conducted him up and down: 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' He had a particular promise and assurance of the kingdom, and had seen much of God's care over him; yet, after all this, David doubteth of the word of God: Ps. xxxi. 22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest me.' As if he should say, God hath no care of me, nor thoughts of me; and at that instant deliverance was coming.

6. Questioning our interest in God by reason of the cross. Our Lord hath taught us to say, 'My God, my God,' in the bitterest agonies when he was upon the cross; but few learn this lesson: Judges vi.

23, 'If God be with us, why hath all this evil befallen us?' Sometimes we question the love of God because we have no affliction, and anon because we have nothing but affliction; as if God were not the God of the valleys as well as of the mountains. Well, then, seeing all these distempers are incident to an afflicted estate, we should the more carefully watch against them.

*Reason 3.* Because our enemies make a great advantage of our failings, and harden themselves in their prejudices if we carry not a holy good cause in a holy religious way, and will take the least occasion given from a questionable practice to slander the truth: Neh. v. 9, 'Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?' If you should trip in anything, you shall soon hear of it, to the reproach of religion. A holy and wise carriage in afflictions is very honourable to the gospel, otherwise your testimony is rejected and blasted.

*Use.* Well, then, desire the Lord to guide thee in all thy troubles; yea, if God doth guide you, let this satisfy you before the deliverance cometh about. It is a mercy if you have direction, though you have not deliverance; for a godly man should not so much regard the ease of the flesh as the performance of his duty to God. If you carry your cross regularly with faith and patience, God may have more honour and you more profit by your affliction than your deliverance. Yea, to be instructed in the word, and be taught your duty, is in itself a greater mercy than a deliverance: Ps. xciv. 12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law.' It is a blessed thing, yea, it is a deliverance itself; for it delivereth you from the spiritual evil of the rod, which is the curse. Suffering doth not come as a curse when instruction goeth along with it; yea, it is the means of our great deliverance from the present evil world, 1 Cor. xi. 32, as it is a pledge of our future deliverance in due time; for God is not unmindful of us, and will not leave us without the conduct of his Spirit.

Secondly, To handle the words with respect to the nearer context in ver. 123, 'Mine eyes fail for thy salvation.' This teaching is begged after he had complained of the delay of the promises, and so implicitly he complaineth not of the falsity of the word, or the non-performance of the promise, but of the weakness of his own faith.

*Doct.* When the Lord suspends the promised deliverance, the godly suspect not the truth of his word, but the darkness of their own unbelieving hearts.

They think this failing is because they are no more enlightened; they are dull in conceiving, and misty and cloudy in their apprehensions, and therefore would have a clearer understanding of the promise and a more quick-sighted faith; or have failed in the performance of the condition required, therefore desire that God would teach them and show them their errors, and cause them to profit in sanctification. Thus should we do in like cases when there is a seeming contradiction between the word and the works of God, betwixt his promises and his providence about us. His voice is sweet, like Jacob's, but his hands rough, like Esau's. Do not suspect the promise, but your understanding; go into the sanctuary, Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17. God will help you to

reconcile things; otherwise the difficulty will be too hard for you. The saints that have suspected or distrusted God have found themselves in an error, Isa. xlix. 14, 15 and Ps. lxxvii. 8-10. (1.) You must not interpret God's promise by his providence, but his providence by his promise; and the promise is the light side, and providence the dark side of the cloud: Isa. xlv. 15, 'Thou hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour;' Ps. lxxvii. 19, 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.' We cannot trace him; a man cannot find out the reason of everything that God doth. (2.) You must distinguish between a part of God's work and the end of it. We cannot understand God's providence till he hath done his work. In the last act of the comedy all the errors are reconciled. Tarry till then: Zech. xiv. 7, 'At evening it shall be light.' We view providence by pieces, and we know not what God is a-doing, rending and tearing all in pieces. But view God's work in its whole frame and contexture, and it will appear beautiful. (3.) We must distinguish between what is best for us and what we judge is best for us: Deut. viii. 15, 16, 'Who led thee through the great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not; that he might humble thee, and prove thee, to do thee good at the latter end.' Other diet is more wholesome for our souls than our sick appetite craveth. It is best with us many times when we are weakest: 2 Cor. xii. 10, 'When I am weak, then am I strong;' worst, when strongest: 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, 'When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his own destruction.' Many times the buffetings of Satan are better for us than a condition free from temptations; so is poverty and emptiness better than fulness. (4.) We must distinguish between what things are in themselves, and what in their reduction, use, and tendency. All things are for a believer in their use, though they may be against him in their nature, 1 Cor. iii. 18-20, and Rom. viii. 28. 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' All their crosses, yea, sometimes their sins and snares, God will overrule them for good, and the work of grace sometimes goeth back that it may go forward. Many such cases there are which look like a contradiction, which we shall not know what to make of them, unless we bring it to Christ, an interpreter, one of a thousand. But take heed in these confusions and tossings of thy soul how thou reflectest on God; a little experience will confute thy prejudices.

Thirdly, With respect to the nearest context, the former clause of this verse. After an appeal to the covenant of grace, or a petition for mercy, he asketh direction to keep the law.

*Doct.* They that would have mercy by the covenant must be earnest to be taught God's statutes.

Mercy and teaching are David's two great requests throughout this and other psalms.

*Reason 1.* The moral obligation of the law still lieth on God's servants, that are taken into the covenant of grace. There is an eternal obligation upon the creature to love and serve the creator, which cannot be dissolved. We are not redeemed from the service of

the law by Christ, but the curse of the law: Luke i. 74, 75, 'Being delivered from the hands of our enemies, that we might serve God in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.' The end of our redemption was not to destroy our service according to the law, but to fit and enable us to perform it according to the image of God restored in us, Eph. iv. 24. The new man is created to restore in some measure those abilities we lost in Adam. God never yet gave man a liberty to be free from the obligation of the moral law. He would not pardon any sin against it without satisfaction made by Christ, and believed and pleaded by sinful man. Christ merited, and God restored the spirit of sanctification, that men might keep it. He will not spare his own children, when they transgress against it by heinous and scandalous sins, as to temporal punishments: Prov. xi. 31, 'The righteous man shall be recompensed upon earth; much more the wicked and the sinner;' Ps. xxx. 31, David and Eli both smarted for their sins. No man hath interest in Christ unless he return to the obedience of this law: 1 Cor. ix. 21, 'To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law;' Rom. viii. 1, 2, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit: for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' No interest in mercy else: Gal. vi. 16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them.' We cannot have full communion with God till we perfectly obey it: Eph. v. 27, 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but it should be holy and without blemish.'

*Reason 2.* The great privilege of the covenant of grace is to be taught God's statutes, or to have a real impress of them upon the heart and mind, which is the way of divine teaching: Heb. viii. 10, 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel in those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.' He will cure us of our wickedness, weakness, and carelessness, and enable us to keep his law; it is God's undertaking to do so, and that out of free grace and favour, for he is not indebted to us; it is to give us knowledge of them, and power to keep them. Much of the law natural cannot be severed from it, and that is the reason why the heathens have the law written upon their hearts, Rom. ii. 15; but the writing is very imperfect, both as to knowledge and power to keep it. God will imprint them more perfectly; this is the true notion of the law. By the mind is meant understanding, by the heart the rational appetite. In the mind is the directive counsel; in the will the imperial and commanding power. There is the prime mover of all human actions; he giveth an apprehensive and perceptive power, whereby we apprehend things more clearly, and effectually desire and affect spiritual delights.

*Use 1.* To refute the claim of them that would plead mercy, but would still go on in their own ways, blessing themselves in their sins. Till our hearts and minds are suited to God's law by a permanent

tincture of holiness, we are not fit subjects to ask mercy and the promises of the covenant.

*Use 2.* If we would have this effect, we must go to God, who alone can work upon the immortal soul, to reform, mould, or alter it. A new man or angel cannot do it; they may by sense and fancy teach him many things; but to make these lively impressions must be the work of the Spirit.

## SERMON CXXXVII.

*I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.*—VER. 125.

IN this verse he repeateth his plea and request also. In the former verse he mentioneth the relation of a servant, and prayeth, ‘Teach me thy statutes.’ And here again—(1.) Asserteth his relation to God, ‘I am thy servant.’ (2.) Reneweth his request, ‘Give me understanding,’ (3.) The fruit and effect of the grant, ‘That I may know thy testimonies;’ or, ‘Then I shall know.’

First, This repetition hath its use. This repeating his relation to God sheweth that where the conscience of our dedication to God, and our endeavours to serve him, is clear and sincere, we should not easily quit our claim. Deal with thy servant in mercy; yea, Lord, I am thy servant: I have my failings; but, Lord, it is in my heart to serve thee; I can and will avow it as long as I live. Our defects and disallowed failings do not deprive us of the title of being God’s servants; we may take comfort in it, and assert our interest in the promises as long as we delight to do his will. And though unbelief opposeth our claim, we must remove it in the face of all objections. Christ puts Peter to a threefold assertion of his love to him, John xxi. It is supposed we do not lie, in these redoubled professions of our respect and service to God.

Secondly, This renewing his request sheweth his earnestness to increase in spiritual understanding. Savoury and powerful knowledge of divine things is in itself so excellent a benefit, and our necessity of it is so great, that we cannot enough pray for it. Only observe, that in the former verse, the notion was *statutes*, here *testimonies*. Statutes are that part of God’s word which we should obey; testimonies that part which we should believe, viz., the promises. But this may be too critical, the words being taken in this psalm in a greater latitude.

*Doct.* That it is a good plea, when we want any mercy, spiritual or temporal, to be able to plead that we are God’s servants.

1. That there are a sort of people, that in a peculiar manner are God’s servants.

2. These may plead it when they want any mercy, spiritual or temporal.

First, That some are in a peculiar manner God’s servants. The saints of God are so called; it was Moses’ honour: ‘They sung the song of Moses, the servant of the Lord.’ So Josh. i. 1, ‘Now after the



death of Moses, the servant of the Lord.' So Paul asserts it of himself: Acts xxvii. 23, 'The God, whose I am, and whom I serve.' Here is a true description of a Christian man; he is God's, and serveth God; he is God's by special appropriation and communion with God. He serveth God, that is, walketh answerable to his relation, and is ever about God's work. Elsewhere he describeth himself by his service: Rom. i. 9, 'My God, whom I serve in my spirit;' 1 Tim. i. 3, 'God, whom I serve with a pure conscience.' But to know who in a peculiar manner are God's servants, we must distinguish—

1. God is served actively and passively—by necessity of nature, or voluntary choice. Passively, by necessity of nature, all creatures, even the inanimate, are his servants: Ps. cxix. 91, 'They continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy servants.' But actively, to serve him out of duty and choice; so do only men and angels, who were made immediately for his service; the brute and inanimate creatures only ultimately and terminatively. They have a principle in their nature to incline them to it, are not only overruled so to do by the conduct of general providence. The water that driveth a mill serveth my purpose, but otherwise than the miller or overseer of the work. Fire and water is my servant, much more he.

2. We must distinguish between those who are God's servants *de jure*, of right, and those who are so *de facto*, in deed—servants of right, and actually his servants. *De jure* all men are God's servants; God made them for himself, Prov. xvi. 4, and Christ bought them for himself: Rom. xiv. 9, 'For to this end Christ both died and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.' He is *δεσπότης*, a Lord and master, where he is not *κύριος*, a covenant redeemer and Saviour: 2 Peter ii. 1, 'They deny the Lord that bought them,' *ἀγοράσαντα*, a master that bought them for service, and may challenge a right and interest in them, having shed his blood for mankind. But *de facto* those are God's servants who yield themselves up to God's dominion, to serve and please him in all things with cheerfulness and consent. The covenant is represented under divers notions; as a covenant of friendship: James ii. 23, 'Abraham was called the friend of God;' as a conjugal covenant: Hosea ii. 19, 20, 'I will betroth thee to me;' as a covenant between king and subjects: Isa. xxxiii. 22; as a covenant between master and servants, Isa. lvi. 6, that take hold of his covenant, and join themselves to the Lord to be his servants. The two former notions imply the sociableness and intimacy we have with God in the covenant; the two latter our inferiority and subjection. Both must be minded, that as on the one side we be not slavish and under bondage, so, on the other, we may not behave ourselves too fellow-like with God. We are such servants as are also friends, yea, as sons; yea, his spouse. The end of joining ourselves to the Lord is not to be partners with him, but servants to him.

3. Some are servants by visible profession and baptismal engagement; others really and indeed, by conversion to God, or an actual giving up of themselves to his use and service. By baptism we are professed servants and subjects to the God of heaven, bound to be so; for it is the seal of that covenant of service I spake of before, and so

bindeth our service in it. We renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and dedicate ourselves to the Lord. Justin Martyr saith, They did ἀναθεματίζειν ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θεῷ; and Ezek. xvi. 8, ‘And entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine;’ 1 Peter iii. 21, ‘The like figure whereunto even baptism doth now save us, not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.’ By profession, all baptized persons are God’s servants; but in reality all converted persons are so, that are turned from idols to serve the living God, 1 Thes. i. 9. Without this, Christ will not be contented with an outside acquaintance and the flattery of empty titles, but will the more challenge us by virtue of our profession: Mal. i. 6, ‘If I be a father, where is mine honour? if I be a master, where is my fear?’ *Cui res subjecta nomini negatur, is nomine illuditur.* It was no honour to Christ, but a mere mockery, to be called King of the Jews, whilst they buffeted Christ and spat upon him. If God be a master, he will have the honour, fear, and obedience that belongeth to a master, that we should be afraid to offend him.

4. There are some that are servants by general relation, to distinguish persons, and some by way of special attendance. A servant in general relation is every Christian; servants by special attendance are either angels, and they are called his ministers, Ps. ciii. 21, as being in near and special attendance about their master’s person, courtiers of heaven, most in grace and favour with God. A man may have one to do his business, that yet hath not one to attend his person. Among men, the magistrate is the minister of God for good, Rom. xiii. 4. Ministers are servants in special attendance, therefore Paul so often calleth himself the servant of Jesus Christ: Rom. i. 9, ‘Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son;’ ministers of God, not of the people, but for the people, because of their near service about and under God. David was both a holy man, and a king, and a prophet. David as a king might use this petition: it highly concerneth one in public rank and office to say to God, I am thy servant; yea, as private believers. I observe it not only to distinguish persons, but to distinguish the work of the same person. Christians have, besides their general calling, a particular calling wherein to serve God. God hath given us all talents to trade withal: Mat. xxv. 14, ‘Who called his servants, and delivered unto them his goods;’ Luke xxiii. 13, ‘Occupy till I come.’ *Dona talenta.* Every one of us, as instruments of providence, are to serve God in our generations, Acts xiii. 36, and so not only to mind the work of our general calling, but that particular work which he hath given us to do in our way and place. The general and particular calling do not cross, but help one another. In your particular calling, as instruments of God’s providence, you provide for your support during your service, and the relief of others: so that, as God’s servants, you are not to be idle, but to have a lawful employment and calling, that you may not cast yourselves upon temptations of using sinful shifts for your support and living. It is also a remedy against the evils that flow from idleness and too much ease, and that he may promote the good of church, family, and kingdom. And then the general calling helpeth the particular, by limiting it, and

our endeavours therein, that so we may have time to save our souls ; and directing us, that we do all things holily and justly, as become the servants of the Lord.

Secondly, These may plead it when they want any mercy spiritual or temporal.

1. It is not a plea contrary to grace. Indeed, no such plea can be allowed in the new covenant ; partly because it is the mere mercy of God to advance us to this honour, to make us his servants, and the fruit of his goodness, rather than our choice : Rom. ix. 16, 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth ; but of God that showeth mercy.' Willing and running and working and serving are necessary afterwards, 1 Cor. ix. 24, as our way and qualification. Again, our service is mixed with many weaknesses. Mercy there needeth to interpret our best actions, Gal. vi. 16. Peace and mercy, when we have done most exactly ; yea, the very plea of servant excludeth all thought of merit ; for a servant *ipso jure ministerium domino debet* : Luke xvii. 9, 'Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded ? I trow not.'

2. It is not contrary to humility. It is not, We are thy children, we are thy saints ; but, We are thy servants. It is the meanest of relations ; it speaketh duty rather than perfection, and pleads not property of the house, but propriety and interest in God. The best of us are but servants to the high God, and therefore should not carry it proudly either to our master or to our fellow-servants. It is a humble claim.

3. It speaketh comfort ; for God will provide for his family, and will give maintenance, protection, direction, help, and finally wages, where he requireth and expecteth service : for the present, necessities by the way ; for the future, a blessed reward. For the present, we may depend on him as servants on their lord : Ps. cxxiii. 2, 'Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hands of their masters, and the eyes of maidens to the hand of their mistress,' &c. Servants had their dole and portion from their masters—the males from the master, the females from the mistress ; therefore is the expression of looking here used. (1.) God will give direction. In the text, David, upon the account of being God's servant, beggeth to know his will, as all good servants study what will please their masters ; and will God appoint us work, and not tell us what it is ? Ps. cxliii. 10. 'Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God : thy spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness.' God doth not only show us what is good in his word, but teacheth us also by his Spirit, and directs us in every turn and motion of our lives ; and we ask it of him as he is our God and Lord. (2.) Help and assistance. God is no Pharaoh, to require brick and give no straw ; his grace is ready to help the endeavouring soul : Gal. ii. 12, 13, 'Work out your salvation ; for God worketh in you both to will and to do.' He exciteth the first motions, and still carrieth them on to perfection. (3.) Protection while he hath a mind to use us ; ver. 122. of this psalm, 'Be surety for thy servant for good : let not the proud oppress me.' Under the law, if a servant was hurt, the master was to take an account, and satisfaction to be made to him for his servant, Dent. xxi. 32 ; so God taketh an account

of the wrongs of his servants, and will demand satisfaction. (4.) Maintenance, 1 Tim. v. 8. Every man hath a care devolved upon him, to take care of his family, and provide for them, as instruments of God's providence; and will not God provide for his own? And then for time to come; God's servants have good wages: Heb. xi. 6. 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' We need not seek another paymaster; there is a sure reward. Prov. xi. 18, 'But to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward;' and a great reward, Ps. xix. 11, 'And in the keeping of them is a great reward;' and a full reward, 2 John 8, 'But that we receive a full reward.' No desire remaineth unsatisfied.

*Use.* To persuade us to become the servants of the Lord.

1. I will plead with you upon the account of right.

[1.] You ought to be so *jure creationis*; you were created by him. As a man expecteth fruit from the vine which he hath planted, so may God expect from the creature which he hath made; yea, you were made for this end. If God had made us for another purpose, our living to that end and purpose had been regular. But this was his end, that he might be served by us. Let us lay these things together; consider what an absolute power God hath by creation; no lord hath such a right over his slave or servant as God over us. The slave or servant is either taken in battle, or bought and hired with our money; but God made us out of nothing: he that made a thing at his own pleasure hath a greater right than another can have by purchase, yea, greater right than a master over his beast. A master hath a greater right over his beast than over his servant: the dominion over the beast is more natural to us than over a servant; the servant and master have the same common nature. When he gave us dominion over the beasts of the field, the one is founded in God's original grant, the other is but a civil right founded in temporal accidents. Something is due even to a slave, as our own flesh. Yet a man cannot absolutely do with his beast as he will; the law of God interposeth: a good man is merciful to his beast. God will not allow a cruel disposition, nor give us the absolute disposal over the creatures which we made not; nay, more than a potter over the vessels which he hath framed, or a workman over his work; he only giveth external shape or figure by art, out of matter already prepared. But God giveth the whole being out of nothing; nothing but what is his. A potter hath power over his work to dispose of it as he pleaseth; here the law interposeth not. Surely, if a potter hath power to dispose of his vessels, God hath an absolute power to smite or heal, lift up or cast down, save or condemn; none can say, 'What doest thou?' He doth not fashion us out of matter prepared, but out of mere nothing. But this was his end, that we should love and fear and serve and glorify him. Our business was not to eat and drink, and please ourselves and others, and live a merry life. All things act to the end for which they were created, the sun to shine by day and enlighten the world, the moon and stars by night; and they answer their end. Their ultimate end is to serve God, their next end is to serve man. All things in the world are either subjected to our dominion or created for our use. The heavens, though not under our dominion, as beasts, yet are for our use; the lower heaven

to give us breath, the middle heaven to give us light and heat, the highest heaven for our dwelling-place. The sun runneth and hasteneth to give us light. The sun shineth for us, the wind bloweth, and the water floweth for our use. The earth and air are for our use, the earth to tread on, the air to breathe in. And shall not we serve him that made the whole course to serve us? All the creatures are at work for us day and night, for a poor worm of six foot long! Yea, the creator is at work for us: 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' We complain if the creatures do not serve us, and shall not we serve God who gave us those servants?

[2.] A right of preservation. He is Lord alone, because he preserveth all things: Neh. ix. 6, 'Thou, even thou, O Lord, alone; thou hast made heaven, and the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the sea and all that is therein; and thou preservest them all.' At whose table are we fed? at whose cost and expense are we maintained? upon whom do we depend every moment for being and operation? Acts xvii. 28, 'In him we live and move, and have our being;' Heb. i. 3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;' he doth every moment continue what he gave at first. Things were not made that they should act and subsist of themselves, as the house abideth when the inhabitant is dead and gone. A daily influence is necessary. As the beams depend on the sun, so do we every moment upon God; every day we are bound to serve him. If God should turn us off for preservation to ourselves, how soon should we return to our original nothing! God is disengaged if we serve him not. If, out of indulgence, he continues our beings, what vile ingratitude is it not to serve him! Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not not know, my people doth not consider.' Would you maintain a servant to do his own work? Since we live upon God, we should live to him.

[3.] A right by redemption: 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, 'And ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which is God's.' If a man had bought another out of slavery, all his time and strength and service belonged to the buyer. Christ hath bought us from the worst slavery with the greatest price, and shall we rob him of his purchase? This was his end; he did not redeem us to ourselves, but to God; not to live as we list, to exempt us from his dominion; that is impossible. Saul promised to make him free in Israel that would destroy Goliath, 1 Sam. xvi. 25. But to be free from God's dominion cannot be; that was not Christ's end in redeeming us, but that we might be put into a capacity to serve God. Well, then, when God hath such a right in us, we ought to obey him.

2. Consider what an honour it is to be God's servants. *Servire Deo regnare est.* The meanest offices about a prince are honourable. No such honourable employment as God's service, both in respect of the person whom we serve, the great God, and the service itself; it is a service of righteousness and holiness, Luke i. 74. This is no drudgery; our natures are ennobled; the liberty and perfection of human nature is preserved by this service. And then for the quality of our reward, there is no such wages, no such reward in any service: John xii. 26,

‘And where I am, there shall my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.’ Here is true honour, fitted for great spirits that will not stoop to trifles; and indeed God’s servant is the only great spirit. The most eminent servants in the court of kings have but a splendid and more gaudy slavery in comparison of God.

3. What a happiness, as well as honour, both in respect of our present communion with him, and future fruition of him! The Queen of Sheba said of Solomon’s servants, 1 Kings x. 8, ‘Happy are the men, and happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.’ Happy those indeed that serve God: they are friend-servants: John xv. 15, ‘Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth; but I call you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.’ In regard of intimate communion, they are treated as sons, though they be servants. Now it is very comfortable to be taken into God’s bosom, and to have access to him upon all occasions. Besides the reward and wages in the life to come, God’s servants have great rails. Our earnest is better than the world’s wages.

4. Consider what a hard master we were under before: Rom. vi. 17, ‘But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin.’ You have obeyed many masters: Titus iii. 3, ‘Ye were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures.’ You that were at the beck of every brutish lust, and were carried to and fro with so many contrary passions and affections, that have left so many wounds in your consciences, alarmed by terrors every day, when you denied yourselves nothing, thought nothing too much or too dear to spend or part with in a sinful course.

5. If once we come to choose his service, we shall find a difference between the Lord and other masters: 2 Chron. xii. 8, ‘Nevertheless they shall be his servants, that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.’ The sorrow of the one, the sweetness of the other; the misery of the one, the blessedness of the other; the bondage of the one, the liberty of the other: they that forsake or refuse God’s service shall soon find worse masters. God hath ways enough to punish our straggling from duty and slighting his service; either by putting us under hard taskmasters, some that shall turn the edge of authority against us, push with the horns of a lamb, a barbarous enemy, making us to be mutual oppressors of each other; or by giving us over to Satan’s power, or our own hearts’ lusts.

6. Christ’s service is not hard nor heavy: Mat. xi. 30, ‘My yoke is easy and my burthen light,’ notwithstanding all your prejudices against it. These men live as they list; they think this a sweet liberty to be guided by their own wisdom, and live according to their own wills, according to their own ends, and that it is better than to be curbed, Ps. ii. 3. But after a little while they have other thoughts, they will find the bitterness of such a course. On the contrary, the more we try the service of God, the sweeter we shall find it to be: 1 John v. 3, ‘And his commandments are not grievous: and Prov. iii. 17, ‘Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.’ Our work

is wages, and our very work carrieth a reward in the bosom of it. So sweet and comfortable it is. Now for directions.

[1.] If we would be God's servants, we must sincerely, wholly, and absolutely give up ourselves to do his will; and never more to look upon ourselves as our own masters, to do what we please, but wholly to study what will please God. Isa. lvi. 6, they 'joined themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and be his servants;' Rom. vi. 16, 'Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?' There is a solemn dedication made, we take up his service seriously, not upon example barely, or tradition, or fear, or constraint, or some base respects or sinister ends, or some sudden pang or motion; but after serious and due deliberation, out of judgment rightly informed, and affection thereon grounded, do engage themselves to perform humble service to God, without limiting or power of revocation, give up themselves wholly to follow his directions.

[2.] God's servants have work to do; none of them must be idle: Mat. xx. 6, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?' Luke i. 74, 75, 'That we may serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days;' Phil. ii. 12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;' Acts xxiv. 16, 'Herein do I exercise myself, to keep a good conscience, void of offence.' We must not put hands in bosom, having so much work to do. Many presume of being God's servants; but it is only in the notion; they do nothing for him.

[3.] This service must not be done grudgingly, but heartily: Isa. lvi. 6, 'And the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and be his servants;' Deut. x. 12, 'To love the Lord thy God, and serve him.' God will not be served but out of love, not by necessity and constraint. We must yield *obedientiam servi*, but not *servilem*: we are delivered from a slavish spirit: Rom. viii. 15, 'We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.' God's service must be gone about with ready affection and good-will. The respect which we show to God is called service in regard of our strict obligation to it, but obedience in regard of our readiness of mind to perform it. Secondly, Not slightly, but with reverence and zeal: Mal. i. 6, 'If I be a master, where is my fear?' Ps. ii. 11, 'Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling;' Phil. ii. 12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;' and Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' God will not be put off with anything by the by, it is a lessening of his majesty: 'I am a great king.' Thirdly, It must be done constantly, not by fits. He that is God's servant never ceaseth from his work; their feasting, walking, sitting, sleeping, waking, hungry, thirsty, hearing, or praying, it is all for God. He that doth any of these things merely for himself, to gratify the flesh, doth not act as God's servant: Acts xxvi. 16, 'Serve God instantly day and night.' Fourthly, Orderly. All things in God's service must be regarded according to their weight: Rom. xiv. 18, 'For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men;' that is the main things, not in contests about ceremonies: if others carry

these matters beyond their weight, let not us; it is not a pin to choose what party a man is of, if he doth not mind righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost: as if a servant should provide sauce for his master, and neglect to provide meat.

[4.] Our great end and scope must be to please God. They are true servants that make it their business to please their master: Isa. lvi. 6, 'They choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;' John viii. 29, 'The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always the things that please him;' 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'I exhort you all by the Lord Jesus Christ, that as you have received of us how to walk and please God, so ye would abound more and more;' and 1 John iii. 22, 'And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do the things which please him.' So Heb. xi. 5, 'Enoch had this testimony, that he pleased God.' The property of a servant is not to please himself. They that set themselves to please God observe his will in all things. There is a great pleasing in the world, but few make it their business to please God. All inferiors please their superiors on whom they depend; and shall not we please God, who is infinitely greater than man, and on whom we depend every moment for all that we enjoy?

*Use.* Are we God's servants? We all say so; but we speak out of conviction of conscience rather than out of inclination of heart; not what *de facto* is, but what *de jure* should be; and it is well that we come so far as to own God's right. *Professio ipsa, saith Hilary, habet conscientiae necessitatem, non habet confessionis veritatem.*

1. If it be so, then God is our chiefest good and highest lord, whom we study to please and gratify. It is certain that is our master which hath the greatest part in us, and power and influence over us: Mat. vi. 24, 'No man can serve two masters: ye cannot serve God and mammon;' Rom. xvi. 18, 'They serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly;' Phil. iii. 19, 'Whose god is their belly.' It was a speech of Luther, *Venter in omni religione est potentissimum idolum.* It doth all with men. Where the belly is served, Christ is neglected. So far as his service will comply with the interest of the belly, or a quiet, pleasurable life, so far they can be zealous: their religion must feed them and maintain them, or else they care not for it—John vi. 26, they followed Christ for the loaves—mind religion for outward advantages. When our interest and Christ's service go contrary ways, we can dispense with our duty to God for the sake of this. It is clear, to be servants is to want a power and right to dispose of ourselves, our actions, and employments. While any other thing hath an interest in us to dispose of us, we are not God's servants; but that thing that hath such a power with us is our master.

2. A servant is chiefly known by obedience: Rom. vi. 16, 'To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey;' Luke xii. 47, 48, 'And that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will,' &c. Men may talk high for God, know much; but whom do we ordinarily obey? When the flesh bids us go, we go; come, we come. If pride bids us display the pomp of wit in our duties, or to hang out the ensigns of our vanity, we yield straight. If lust bid us pamper the flesh; we pre-



sently obey ; if coveteousness bid take the wedge of gold, we do it. But when a man knoweth anything to be the mind of God, and prepareth his heart to do it, he is one of God's servants.

3. A servant of God is one that the sight of God's will is reason enough to him : 1 Thes. v. 18, 'This is the will of God.' The will of God must be the prime and prevalent motive with a Christian ; they are servants, not to do their own will, but his whose servants they are ; they do nothing but what their master commandeth, and what he commandeth they see reason to obey.

Second branch, 'Give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.' This is subjoined to the former plea.—(1.) Because David would not be a servant in name and title only, but in deed and in truth ; and therefore would fain know his duty. (2.) To show the difference between God's servants and the servants of other lords who command us : Prov. xiv. 25, 'The king's favour is towards a wise servant ;' they see them wise, find them wise, and then love them : but God must begin with us ; his favour maketh us wise.

*Doct.* God's best servants think they can never enough beg divine illumination.

David doth often enforce this request.

*Reason 1.* Our blindness in the matters of God is a great part of our spiritual misery : Eph. v. 8, 'Ye were sometimes in darkness.' There is a veil lying upon our hearts, not easily removed and taken away. All the mischief introduced by the fall is not cured at once, but by degrees ; as spiritual strength increaseth we grow up into it ; so spiritual light. The maim of the understanding, as well as the will, is not wholly cured till we come to heaven, for here we know but in part ; till God give us understanding, we are utterly blind ; the best of God's servants have cause to acknowledge it in themselves, the remnants of ignorance and incredulity. The apostle biddeth them to add to faith virtue, to virtue knowledge ; that is, skill to manage the work of our heavenly calling.

*Reason 2.* None are so sensible of this blindness as they. It is some proficiency in knowledge to understand our ignorance : Prov. xxx. 2, 3, 'Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.' I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.' The most knowing see they need more enlightening. The best of our knowledge is to know our imperfections, 1 Cor. viii. 2. He that thinketh he knoweth anything, knoweth nothing as he ought to know.

*Reason 3.* There is room for increase ; for in the best we never know so much of God's ways but we may know more : Hosea vi. 3, 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord ;' Prov. iv. 18, 'But the path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' True sanctified knowledge is always growing. If we sit down with measures received, it is a sign we do not know things as we should know them. Christ grew in knowledge, not in grace, for the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily. Practical knowledge is never at a stand ; though a man may see round the compass and light of saving truth, yet he may know them more spiritually and more feelingly.

*Reason 4.* The profit of divine revelation as to these three things :—

1. A clear discerning of the things of God, not a confused notion ; as the blind man in the Gospel saw men as trees walking. So 2 Cor. iv. 6, ‘ For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ ; ’ and 1 John v. 20, ‘ And hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true.’ Every degree of knowledge is God’s gift. What other men see confusedly, we see more distinctly in this light.

2. Firm assent. Then ‘ shall I know thy testimonies ; ’ know them from others that have not divine authority. It is the spirit of wisdom and revelation that openeth our eyes to see the truth and worth of heavenly things contained in the promise : Eph. i. 17, 18, ‘ The father of glory may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understandings being enlightened, that ye may know the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints in light ; ’ and Mat. xvi. 17, ‘ Flesh and blood hath not revealed these things unto thee.’ Human credulity we may have upon the report of others, the evidence of the truths themselves ; but this firm assent is the fruit of divine illumination.

3. Hearty practice. Let thy testimonies not only strike my ear, but affect my heart, command my hand, let me know them so as to do them, for otherwise our knowledge is little worth. God doth so direct, that he doth also enable us to approve our obedience to him sincerely and faithfully. There is a knowledge that puffeth us up, 1 Cor. viii. 1, which yet is a gift, and floweth from the common influence of the Spirit : Jer. xxii. 16, ‘ Was not this to know me ? saith the Lord.’ But there is a greater efficacy in practical knowledge, such as warmeth the heart with love to the truths known, John iv. 10, ‘ If thou knewest the gift,’ &c. Such a light as proceedeth from the gracious influence of the Spirit.

*Use 1.* Let us be often dealing with God in prayer, that our judgments may be enlightened with the understanding of the word, and our affections renewed and strengthened unto the true obedience of it ; beg for that lively light of the Spirit.

1. We need it. In how many things do we err in the things which we know ! how weak are we both as to sound judgment and practice ! The apostle saith, ‘ We know but in part,’ 1 Cor. xiii. 9 ; ‘ We are but of yesterday, and we know nothing,’ Job viii. 9. Therefore we have need to go to the Ancient of days, that he may teach us knowledge, and kindle our lamps anew at the fountain of light. Alas ! we take it in by drops, or by degrees, as a tender and sore eye must be used to the light. We have but little time to get knowledge in, and do not improve that little time we have.

2. We have leave to ask it : James i. 5, ‘ If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God ; ’ and why do we not, seeing we have a liberty to ask it ?

3. God hath promised to bestow it ; he will give his Spirit to them that ask it, Luke xi. 13. And to beget faith in us : ‘ If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ? ’

Here is a notable argument; he reasoneth and promiseth. And Prov. ii. 3, we must cry for knowledge. Well, then, let us be earnest, that we may not miss that which is to be had for asking; beg for a heart to know, Jer. xxiv. 7, 'I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord.'

*Use 2.* It informeth us that there is somewhat more than the word necessary to give us knowledge. God must not only reveal the object, but prepare the subject. David having a law, beggeth understanding that he might know God's testimonies. The literal sense and meaning of the words may be understood by common gifts and ordinary industry, unless men be exceedingly blinded and hardened by their own prejudices. But to have a spiritual understanding of them, so as to profit and increase in sanctification, that is from the Lord. These things may be drawn into a system, wherein there will be nothing that exceedeth the understanding of a man. But to understand it so as to be affected with and changed by it, that is from the Spirit: 1 John v. 20, 'And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true;' and Eph. v. 8, 'Ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.' He is the purchaser and author of that light.

*Use 3.* Is reproof to those that presume on their own wit to understand divine mysteries. Many think they have eyes in their head, and can see into matter as far as other men, and conceive and judge of a thing as soon and as well as others can do; and so will not acknowledge their dulness and blindness in heavenly things, take it ill to be told of it: John ix. 4, 'Are we blind also?' In a rage scoff at those that talk of the enlightening of the Spirit, and being taught of God. Alas! you must be blind and be fools before you be wise, 1 Cor iii. 18, in your own conviction and feeling.

## SERMON CXXXVIII.

*It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law.—*  
VER. 126.

IN the words we have—(1.) A prayerful suggestion, *it is time for thee, Lord, to work.* (2.) The reason of it, *for they have made void thy law.*

In the first branch take notice of—

1. The person to whom the address is made, *for thee, Lord.*
2. The suggestion itself, what and when; what they would have the Lord to do, *to work*; and when, even now, *it is time to work.*

To open these, I begin with—

1. The person to whom the address is made, the Lord. Some read the words, *It is time to work for thee, O Lord*, because they have made void thy law. It is time indeed to work for God, when so many work against him, in an evil generation; lest the law should perish and fall to the ground, some should keep up the authority of it, and they that fear God are to encourage one another, Mal. iii. 16. The Chaldee paraphrase reads it, 'It is time to do the will of the Lord.' But the

Hebrew original carries it as we do, it is time for Jehovah to do. The Septuagint, *καὶρὸς τοῦ ποιῆσαι τῷ κυρίῳ*. The vulgar Latin, *Tempus faciendi, Domine*.

2. Here is the suggestion itself—(1.) What they would have God to do. It is expressed by a general word, *work*; as also Jer. xiv. 7, ‘Do, for thy name’s sake.’ What should he do? *Tempus mittendi Filium Dei*, saith Augustine; to set about the work of redemption, to send the Son of God. But that is a work rather to exercise and show forth his justice, power, and truth, both in punishing his enemies and delivering his people, to work his own proper work of justice, as becometh the judge of all the world to do; namely, to punish the wicked, and help his servants out of their hands. (2.) When it is time. Then it seemeth to be a time when man’s wickedness is grown to the height: Gen. xv. 16, ‘In the fourth generation they shall come again, for the sins of the Amorites are not yet full.’ Good men are put to the uttermost of their patience, and God’s glory abused beyond measure, Isa. lii. 5. Lord, it is time to work; they are as bad as bad may be; thy people have quite spent all their faith and patience; when thine ordinances and word are despised and affronted, and thy people trodden under foot, it is time for thee to work.

Secondly, Let us explain the reason, ‘For they have made void thy law.’ The law is made void two ways, *formaliter et interpretative*.

1. Formally, when any deny the authority of God, as Pharaoh: Exod. v. 5, ‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?’ Or those rebels, Ps. xii. 4, ‘Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?’ Or we make void the law when we deny it to be given of God, as Marcion and his followers, that the law was given by an evil god. Many now question the scriptures themselves, or deny the obligation of the moral law to believers, as the antinomians and libertines, as the apostle telleth us, Rom. iii. 31, that we ‘do not make void the law by faith; yea, we establish the law.’ It was the greatest ratification to it that could be. Or, finally, those that take upon them to enact things contrary to the law of God, or besides the law, as necessary to salvation, and enforce their own traditions beyond and before the law of God. These make void the law, as Christ telleth the pharisees that they ‘made the commandments of God of no effect by their traditions,’ Mat. xv. 6. Especially when they obtrude these things upon the consciences of others under the highest penalties.

2. Interpretatively, when men by consequence take away the honour and authority that is due to the law, by their wickedness and rebellion against God. Though in words they acknowledge the authority of God and the obligation of his law, yet they have no respect to it in their carriage and practice, doing whatever pleaseth themselves, stand in no awe of God and his word, reject it as a thing of nought. Obedience to the law is a ratifying and confirming the law by our consent: Deut. xxvii. 26, ‘Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.’ Our words do not confirm the law so much as our works. So, on the contrary, they repeal or make void the law that observe it not in their practice. *Finis operis* is made *finis operantis*, as if they intended to abolish, whilst they make no reckoning of the law. Where observe, that this is a notion to make sin odious to us;

it is not only *ἀνομία*, a transgression of the law, 1 John iii. 4; but a despising the law, 2 Sam. xii. 9; a judging or censuring the law, James iv. 11; yea, a repealing and disannulling the law, which is the notion of the text.

*Doct.* That when a flood of wickedness is broken out, we may put God in mind of doing his work of punishing the wicked and delivering his people.

I shall give you the sum of this doctrine in these four considerations.

1. That God doth for a while hold his hand, and bear with the wickedness of his enemies.

2. Though he doth for a while bear with them, yet he hath his times to punish and proceed to execution.

3. This time is usually when the impiety and insolency of wicked men is come to a height.

4. When it is come to a height, we may and must mind God of doing his work, or arising to judgment.

The first consideration is implied in the doctrine and the text; the other three are express.

First, It is implied that God doth for a while hold his hand, and not seem to mind his work. Though the least sin deserveth the greatest plagues, even when it is first committed, yet such is God's patience and long-suffering, that he will not at first punish even the sins of his enemies, but will let them ripen and come to a height before he smite. This he doth—

1. To show his bounty and goodness to all his creatures. He will not easily destroy the workmanship of his hands, even the provoking wicked; but giveth them time to repent and change their course; Rev. ii. 21, 'I gave her space to repent of her fornications, and she repented not.' The worst have leave to repent, means to repent, time to repent; and if they have not the grace to repent, they may blame themselves: Rom. ix. 22, 'He endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction,' *ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ*. The reprobate taste of God's common goodness as they are members of the world, are forborne for a long time, till they be sear and rotten through, fit for the burning. Nay, let me observe this: God, that is very quick with his people, is very patient towards them that perish. God is quick with his own people; he will visit their iniquities with scourges, and will not suffer sin to lie upon them; and therefore they are chastened every morning. Yet this God is very patient to them that know no better, profess no better, have had no experience of his ways; and though they finally perish, it is long first, till their sins do even extort vengeance out of his hands.

2. To chastise, exercise, and prove his own people, he beareth with the wickedness of their enemies.

[1.] To chastise them for their sins, that they may be brought low, and their souls be humbled to the dust. Certainly this God expects before he will appear for us: 1 Peter v. 6, 'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.' And because his people are backward to this work, he permitteth such instruments as will not spare, but lay on to the purpose: Isa. x. 5, 6, 'O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him

against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.' When God is angry with his people, he can easily find a rod for them; yea, not only a rod, but a staff, which is a more heavy instrument of correction: he can find instruments sufficiently exasperated, and full of malice, severe executioners; and he lets them alone till they have done his work, though they manage his controversy with cruel minds, and evil and destructive intentions. Sometimes God punisheth his people with divisions among themselves; and though they are very troublesome one to another, yet a sheep cannot worry a sheep, as a wolf will; they do it to the purpose, in a most cruel and spiteful manner. Now, though he will reckon with wicked men for their violence, for transgressing their bounds, and going beyond his revealed will and approbation, Zech. i. 15, yet not till his work be done upon Mount Zion and Jerusalem: Isa. x. 12, 'When the Lord hath done his work upon Mount Zion and Jerusalem, I will punish the stout heart of the king of Assyria.' He will not cast the rod into the fire till we have felt the smart of it, and be thoroughly humbled under his mighty hand.

[2.] To exercise his people, that they may not contract rust, and languish and grow idle in heaven's way. Alas! when we live at ease, and have nobody to trouble us, God is little owned, loved, and acknowledged, the throne of grace lieth neglected and unfrequented; and therefore he permitteth enemies to keep us in breath: Ps. lix. 11, 'Slay them not, lest my people forget.' Things in conceit do not leave such an impression upon us as things in feeling. Scipio would have Carthage stand, to whet and exercise the Roman valour. We need vigilant enemies as a guard upon us, that we may be kept awful, serious, mindful of God, constantly in the exercise of faith and dependence. Wicked men have their ministry and service, to be as goads in our sides and scourges on our backs, to whip us to our duty, and make us mend our pace heavenward: Ps. xciv. 12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law;' chastened by the molestations of the wicked, for all along he complaineth of the delay of vengeance on the persecutors; and in the next verse he saith, 'Until the pit be digged for the wicked;' as condemned men are suffered to live till their gallows and grave be made ready: if they trouble us in the meanwhile, it is to reduce us to a sense and practice of our duty: and that we may not securely go on in a course of vanity and sin. Till that be done, the pit is not ready for the wicked and ungodly oppressors; they dig their own pit by their sin and oppression.

[3.] To prove his people as well as to exercise them. To prove their faith and their patience; their faith, to see whether they can live by faith, and not by sense and present appearance; whether we are persuaded that there is a just and righteous God, that is the supreme governor of the world, notwithstanding all the oppositions and confusions they groan under: Hab. ii. 3, 4, 'Because it will surely come, and will not tarry. Behold, his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith;' that is, the Lord's

purpose in delaying to perform the vision is to try and discover who are the lofty and unsound, and who can subsist and hold out by faith on God's being, and providence, and promises, and world to come, and so wait upon God in hard times without fainting. If God should smite as soon as his enemies provoke him, faith would be of no use, and the whole world would be governed by sense. To believe the justice and mercy of God, though for the time we do not see any manifestation of it, that is the trial of faith. We know there is one that sits above and seeth all. Though the world be in an uproar, and they that work wickedness are set up, and God's servants persecuted, yet we know that God will reckon with them in due time. And secondly, to prove their patience, in bearing the present difficulties, and tarrying the Lord's leisure: Rev. xiii. 10, 'Here is the patience and faith of the saints;' that is, a sensible proof of it, when a powerful enemy carrieth all before him: there would be little use of such a grace but for such times. This is submission to God, when we are resolved to tarry for his season, though we know it not, and will wait as long as God will have us wait, when all human probabilities are taken away, and we have nothing but God's providence to live upon.

Second consideration. Though he bear long, yet he hath his times to punish and arise to judgment.

1. With respect to himself and his own glory: Ps. ix. 16, 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth.' Little of God would be taken notice of in the world unless he did now and then give out sensible demonstrations of his power and justice, and mindfulness of human affairs. What strange conceits would men else have of God! as if no God, no providence, no distinction between good and evil; but as if God were indifferent to either, and did favour good and bad alike: and therefore it is in vain to trouble ourselves about the worship and service of God, no reward nor punishment. These are the uses the wicked make of God's forbearance, either to deny God and providence: Ps. lv. 19, 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' If they have shifted from vessel to vessel, they corrupt and settle upon the lees, Zeph. i. 12; they say God will not do good, neither will he do evil, nor interpose; but suffereth enemies to trample upon his people and glorious name. Or else pervert the interpretation of providence: Ps. l. 21, 'Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself;' as if he did favour their ways. They misinterpret providence, and make the sun go according to their dial, or else ascribe the act of providence to themselves; Deut. xxxii. 27, 'Lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this.' When long permitted to prosper, they think they have mastered heaven, that there is no power superior to theirs, and they can carry all before them at their pleasure. Therefore God must vindicate himself by his works, and give out some demonstrations to sense that there is a distinction between good and evil; that God is differently affected to either, that he hateth the evil and loveth the good, and accordingly there is a reward and punishment: Ps. lviii. 11, 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous.' God is fain to teach them by briers and thorns, or else the stupid world would not take

notice of it, but think the world is governed by chance, not administered by an almighty, all-wise, and most just providence. They knew not what to think of providence when they saw the godly oppressed and the wicked high in power.

2. With respect to his people. Surely God will not always chide ; for God considers the weakness of man : Ps. ciii. 14, ' He remembers we are but dust.' The hearts of his people would fail and faint, and they would be tempted to some forbidden course to ease themselves, Isa. lix. 16. He knows our spirits would fail ; God would not have us utterly to be discouraged. We are liable to temptations : Ps. cxxv. 3, ' The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity.' Therefore he hath his breathing times, and times of intermission from trouble. The spirits of a poor creature would soon be drunk up if there were not some well days ; therefore he will show himself to his people.

3. With respect to the wicked, who would grow excessive and outrageous in sin : Rom. ii. 5, ' But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath ;' Eccles. viii. 11, ' Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil ;' grow bold, resolute, and settled in an evil way ; go on without remorse, because they go on without trouble, and so grow to be monsters in sin. It is only faith that can see afar off, but infidelity and atheism mind not what is to come, and look only to what is present. Well, then, lest wicked men should thus continue themselves in sin, God hath his time to reckon with them ; his justice is not asleep all this while, but God keeps a petty sessions in this world before the general assizes. Now concerning this time, let me tell you four things :—

[1.] There is a time appointed. There is an end of all things, not only an expected end, but also an appointed end : Hab. ii. 3, ' The vision is for an appointed time ;' things are not left to their own hazard and chance to work out their own end ; but ordered and appointed by the wise God : Dan. xi. 27, ' Yet the end shall be at the time appointed ;' ver. 35, ' To try them, and purge them, and to make them white, even to the time of the end ; because it is yet for a time appointed.' There is a course of providence set by God which shall at length come to its end and period.

[2.] This is the best time : 1 Peter v. 6, ' That he may exalt you in due time.' There is a due time, as well as a set time. There is nothing in the whole administration of God preposterous, unseasonable, or disorderly. Wait but a little, and you shall see the reason of all this course of dispensations ; for God doth all things in number, weight, and measure. If it had come sooner or later, it would not have come so seasonably : Eccles. iii. 11, ' He hath made everything beautiful in its time.' When God's work is done, and all things are put together, you will see a marvellous beauty in it. It is just with the work of providence as with the work of creation, every day's work was ' good ;' but when God saw all his works together, in their frame and correspondence, all was ' very good,' Gen. i. 31. We would



think that God should come sooner to our deliverance : God is not slack, but we are too hasty ; if he should come sooner, it would be the worse for us. We would have thought God should have owned Joseph in the pit. No ; God stays till he be cast into prison ; and in prison Joseph would fain come out as soon as Pharaoh's butler was come out, but he forgot him. God would not have it so ; he must tarry there till God's time was come, and then had not only deliverance out of prison, but preferment. So many times we would be contented with half a deliverance, and would have it now, but God will give it us in the best season.

[3.] It is but a short time. Say sense what it will, it is but *μικρὸν ὄσον ὄσον*, 'a little little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry,' Heb. x. 37. It is not so long as enemies would make it, for they would root out the memorial of God's children ; not so long as sin would make it, or as fancy would conceive it. Suffering hours pass tediously ; we count quarters and minutes when we are in pain or anxious expectation ; we think an hour a week, a week a month, a month a year, and every year seven. Yea, not so long as reason would make it as to probabilities and the course of second causes. When things are fortified and backed with a strong interest, to reason it will be a long time. It is not so long as sense would make it ; though we count the years, the winter is over, and the spring is come, and yet we are not saved, and can say, It is thus long ; yet this is not long in comparison of eternity, 2 Cor. iv. 17. It is not long to faith, for to the eye of faith things future and afar off are present, Heb. xi. 1. Not long to love, Gen. xxix. 20 : seven years are as a few days ; they that believe an eternity, and have any love to God, will say it is short. But a short walk is a long journey to the sick and weak ; the impatience of our flesh makes it seem long.

[4.] When the time is come, God will make speedy work : Isa. lx. 2, 'The Lord will hasten it in his time ;' Luke xviii. 7, 'Shall not God avenge his own elect?' Rev. xviii. 7, 'Her plagues shall come in one day ;' Isa. lxvi. 8, 'A nation born in a day.' All these places show (and it is a comfort to us) that no difficulty shall hinder when the season calls for it. He that produced heaven and earth at once, what cannot he do ? We are dismayed when we consider an evil party fortified with combined interests, strength of opposite factions, force of laws and worldly powers ; but God can make a nation be born in one day. It will be quick work when God once begins.

Third consideration. This time is usually when the impiety and insolency of wicked men is come to a height. Indeed there are other notes ; as when his people's hearts are prepared to receive and improve deliverance, when God's glory calleth for it. But this is the season mentioned in the text ; therefore I shall show you—

1. That this is a season.
2. Inquire when iniquity is come to a height.
3. Why then God doth usually interpose.

1. That this is a season : Gen. xv. 16, 'The sins of the Amorites are not yet full.' God sheweth his patience to that wicked people, till the measure of their sins were filled up. So wrath came upon the persecuting Jews when they had filled up the measure of their fathers,

Mat. xxiii. 32. While the enemy's cup is a-filling, God delayeth, and we must wait. So Dan. viii. 23, 'When the transgressors are come to the full.' Once more, Joel iii. 13, 'Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe; come, get ye down, for the press is full, the fats overflow, for their wickedness is great.' The Lord compares sinners to a field of ripe corn ready to be cut, full fats and wine-presses to be trod out. When sin is ripe, the execution of vengeance will not be long forborne.

2. When doth iniquity come to a height? I answer—Their iniquities may be considered as to the two branches of it—their rebellion and disobedience to God, and their injuries and vexation of the saints.

[1.] Their disobedience and contempt of God.

(1.) When this is general. All orders and ranks of persons have corrupted their way, as the Sodomites compassed the house, Gen. xix. 4; both young and old, all the people from every quarter. Usually in making a judgment upon the state of a people, you will find it thus: If any part be right, it keeps off the judgment from the rest; if a zealous magistracy, though a corrupt people, or an unsavoury ministry, and a praying, mourning people, God holds his hand, and will not proceed to judgment. They are 'the salt of the earth,' Mat. v. 13; and Isa. vi. 13, 'The holy seed shall be the substance thereof.' But when all join in one, in a neglect of God, and common enmity to his ways; then, I say, the judge of the earth will do his work, then wrath breaketh out.

(2.) When it groweth impudent and outrageous, as if they would obliterate and extinguish the law of God, or take away all force and authority from it by their perverse actions and pernicious examples. They do not obliquely, and under the show of divers pretences, break God's laws, but openly set themselves against him, and break a commandment without any shame: Isa. iii. 9, 'They declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not;' yea, 'they glory in their shame,' Phil. iii. 19; as if they would out-face heaven and religion at once, and all honesty and ingenuity by their debaucheries. Bold-faced sin doth not go long unpunished.

(3.) Desperate incorrigibleness. All remedies are unprofitable, and hope of amendment taken away, Jer. vi. 3; Ezek. xxiv. 13, 'When God would have purged them, they would not be purged.' He trieth them with several conditions, he hath a love for them as they are his creatures; judgments and mercies they had, yet they are no change-lings, but go on as wicked as ever. God trieth key after key, one providence after another, yet not a whit the better or wiser; but are like men that have slept: still abuse his patience, and defeat all the methods of his grace, show the same corruption they did before.

(4.) When they run into unnatural sins, and the corruption of human society is endangered: Lev. xviii. 27, 28, 'For all these abominations have the men of the land done,' &c.; when men are so wicked and filthy that a man needs to be a criminal to be acceptable to them; they think it strange that others run not into the same excess of riot, 1 Peter iv. 4; certainly then God needeth to strike in, that virtue may be upheld in some kind of reputation.

[2.] Their violence and vexation of the saints. It was Bede's obser-

vation, *Odium in religionis professores*, &c.—that hatred of the professors of religion was that undid his country. God is angry when his people are wronged; the world is kept up for their sakes. Were it not for the elect to be gathered, time would be no more; for their sakes kingdoms and churches are preserved; they are the staff and stay, the chariots and horsemen of Israel. God is tender of them as the apple of his eye; therefore, when they are wronged, and men are not only evil themselves, but haters of those that are good, and do not only break God's laws themselves, but would force others to do so, God will hold no longer. As their violence increaseth, so doth their ruin hasten, Rev. xii. 12. When they abuse their power to such an end, though God may bear with them for a time till they have done their work, yet he will reckon with them: Zech. i. 15, 'I am sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease; for I was a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.' God will not forget his relation to his sinning people, and will not suffer them to be abused out of measure. When they would destroy and root out whom God would only correct and purge, it is a sign of their approaching ruin. Now these things should be considered by us to a good end; not to feed an evil humour, or to increase our hatred and exasperation against a party, whom, it may be, we hate too much already with a carnal hatred; but to a good purpose. Partly that we may not be too confident of carnal ease too soon. God will, it may be, have the enemies' cup yet fuller, and that they shall appear more in their own colours. And so our trials may be greater. We know not the bounds of the Lord's patience. We, that are apt to extenuate our own sins, are apt to aggravate the sins of others, look upon them in the glass of fashion, and cry too soon, It is time. But of this by and by. And partly that we may see the greatness of our transgressions, by which we have provoked the Lord to give us up into the hands of such men as blaspheme his name every day, Isa. lii. 5. Our sins were full in our kind, in the abuse of God's truth and worship; and though not such moral wickedness, yet a great deal of spiritual wickedness. And God is more quick and severe upon us, and will not bear that in a professing people that he beareth in others: 'Judgment begins at the house of God,' 1 Peter iv. 17. The cup of trembling goes round, and his own people drink first, and our staggering is not yet over; in time they shall pledge us. God beareth with Balaam, though he tempted him again and again, when he would not bear with the young prophet whom the lion slew. He bore with the Philistines a long time ere they were plagued. We feel the smart of the rod sooner, Zech. xii. Yet it is apparent our kind of sins were grown to a ripeness, our self-seeking, factions, turbulency, unquietness under government, abuse of Christian liberty, uncharitable divisions among ourselves, vexing one another, vain opinions, slighting God's ministers and ordinances. And partly that we may be humbled for their sins. It should be a grief to us to see men break God's laws, to see men out-dare heaven. David fasted for his enemies, Ps. xxxv. 14–16; and Ps. cxix. 136, 'Rivers of tears run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law;' because God is so much dishonoured, human nature so much corrupted. If more of this spirit were stirring, it were the better for us. And partly that we

may fear ourselves. We are bound up in the same community, and when God judgeth them, how shall we escape? The Jews have a proverb, that two dry sticks may set a green one on fire. The meaning is, the godly man may fall in the common calamity: wheat is plucked up with the tares. God saith in Deut. vii. 22, that they should not destroy all the Canaanites, 'lest the beasts of the field should increase upon them.' The safety of his people are involved in the safety of their sinning and persecuting enemies. A hedge of thorns may serve for a fence to a garden of roses, and all the relief we have is, The Lord can make a distinction: 2 Peter ii. 9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.'

3. Why doth God take this time? (1.) For his own glory. His justice is more discovered when men have filled up their measure: Ps. li. 4, 'That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.' It justifieth God's proceedings, and maketh us the more inexcusable. So also his power; it is God's time to send help and remedy, when all things are gone to utter confusion; when things are at the most desperate pass, Ps. exxiv. 3-5, in our low estate, then is God seen. (2.) Hereby God's work upon Mount Zion is promoted. His people are humbled when their adversaries are chief, and rage against them: Ps. exxiii. 4, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorn of those that are at ease, and with contempt of the proud.' When things come to extremity their prayers are quickened: Ps. cxxx. 1, 'Out of the depths I cried unto thee, O Lord.' They are fitted to prize mercy, Ps. cii. 13, 14. They that thought it no great matter to have a standing temple, delight in the dust of a ruinous heap. Then shepherds' tents look lovely, we set a higher rate on despised ordinances. In short, they are waiting and praying, and humbling their souls before God.

Fourth consideration. When a flood of wickedness is thus broken out, we may mind God of the deliverance of his people. But what needs that? Doth not God know his seasons, and will not he exactly observe them? In the answer I shall show you why and how.

1. Why? (1.) Because God loveth to be awakened by the prayers of his people; and when he hath a mind to work, he sets the spirit of prayer a-work: Jer. xxix. 11, 12, 'I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.' So thus and thus will I do: Ezek. xxxvi. 37, 'Yet for this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel.' We are to give a lift by our prayers; it is a time of finding, Ps. xxxii. 6. (2.) He hath put an office upon us. God acts the part of a judge, we as solicitors and remembrancers: Isa. lxii. 6, 7, 'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace night nor day. Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' We are to put God in mind, so that we but do our duty.

2. How? The principle and manner must be right.

[1.] The principle; be sure it be not the impatience of the flesh, or

love to our own ease, or a mere tediousness and irksomeness of the cross. Be sure it be not passion and a principle of revenge, but a desire of promoting his honour and vindicating his glory. David doth not say how troublesome they were to himself, but, They make void thy law; as if he had said, Lord, if my own interest were only concerned, I would not open my mouth, nor ever call upon thee to revenge my private quarrels; but it is my zeal for thy honour and ordinances; not that I have received injury, but thy worship is corrupted. Work, else what will become of thy name and poor people? Offences done against God should grieve us more than our own injuries, and we should rather regard the general interest of religion than any personal offence done to us. There is often a carnal spirit breathing in our prayers, and our zeal is fleshly; the people of God beat it back: Ps. cxv. 1, 'Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory;' and Ps. lxxiv. 10, 'O Lord, how long shall the adversary reproach, and the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?' The godly can endure their own troubles better than they can bear the open dishonouring and blaspheming of God. This is the true sense, but because the heart is deceitful—(1.) Be sure your cause be good, your adversaries evil, that ye may say, Ps. lxxiv. 22, 'Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause.' It is not for your sins, but your righteousness; the hatred is not against the body. Indeed they pretend some little faults. It is as if a leper should hate a man because he hath some pimples in his face. Something they would lay to their charge. (2.) That we use all means with God and men to reclaim them, praying for them: Mat. vi. 44, 'Pray for them that despitefully use you.' Mourning for their sins: Jer. xxiii. 19, 'My soul shall weep in secret for your pride.' Heaping coals of fire upon their heads by all acts of kindness, condescending to them as far as possibly we can, Rom. xii. 18. These arts become his kingdom, that is not to be planted by force, but consent, them that would have the zeal of God, not of a party. (3.) Be sure your principle be zeal for God's glory, not a desire to establish your own interest, and to see revenge on a party that differeth from you: Luke ix. 54, 55, 'You know not what spirit you are of.' Religious affections overset us, and fleshly zeal puts on a holy spiritual guise and mask, and we think it is for the honour of Christ. (4.) Not against particular persons, but the opposite faction to godliness. In general, destroy all the enemies of Christ, &c.

[2.] For the manner how. We must seek to God, first, with submission, not prescribing to God, nor making a snare to ourselves. We, that have short and revengeful spirits, cannot judge aright of God's patience, which is infinite, out of fleshliness and affection to our own ease. And so our times, John vii. 6. Your time is always ready; if none of these be, yet we are limited creatures, and great is the wisdom of God and his power admirable; it doth not belong to us to guide the affairs of the world, Ps. lxxviii. 41. We must not prescribe opportunity to him, fixing times. Besides that, it argueth a spirit too much addicted to, and eyeing of, temporal happiness. It doth much unsettle us and harden others. The devil maketh advantage of our disappointment. Therefore not only when it seemeth seasonable to us we may seek to him for deliverance. Once more, there are other things

concur besides the enemies' ripeness for judgment,—preparing his people's hearts, fitting those instruments for his work ; therefore all is left to God's will, and let him take his time.

*Use of all is—*

1. To teach us how to behave ourselves in these times with patience, and yet with hope and waiting. It is the time of Jacob's trouble, but there will be a time of deliverance, Jer. xxx. 7. With patience ; God will have a time to chastise his people. We must bear it patiently ; it will make crosses sit easy ; they may be greater and longer than our joys : Ps. xc. 15, 'Make us glad, according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.'

2. With hope let us expect it. Certainly it will not exceed the time limited by God. That time is not long : Isa. xiii. 22, 'Her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged ;' Ezek. xii. 21–28, 'And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth ? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord, I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel ; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. For I am the Lord : I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass ; it shall be no more prolonged.' Faith should see it as present, approaching ; and then let us wait his leisure, minding God in prayer.

### SERMON CXXXIX.

*Therefore I love thy commandments above gold ; yea, above fine gold.—VER. 127.*

IN the words we have—

1. A note of inference, *therefore*.
2. The duty inferred, *I love thy commandments*.
3. The degree of that love, *above gold* ; amplified by the repetition, with some advantage, in the expression, *yea, above fine gold*.

Gold, by a synecdoche, is put for all worldly things, the comforts and profits of this life, as in many other places ; as Ps. xix. 10, 'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold ; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.' The two bastard goods with which the world is enchanted are pleasure and profit. Old people are all for profit, young people are all for pleasure. Now both these, truly so called, are found in the word of God. So in Prov. viii. 10, 11, 'Receive my instruction, and not silver ; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies ; and all the things that are to be desired are not to be compared to it.' So Prov. viii. 19, 'My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold ; and my revenues than choice silver.' So Prov. iii. 14, 'For the merchandise thereof is better than gold ; and the gain thereof than fine gold.' So Prov. xvi. 16, 'How much better is it to get wisdom than gold ? and to get

understanding rather to be chosen than silver?' This comparison is used so often for two reasons:—

1. Because it is more prized in the world. All things that have a goodness in them have a certain bait suitable to the several appetites of men; but in most men's opinions gold seemeth chiefly to be desired, partly for its beauty, but chiefly for its use, it being the great instrument of commerce that doth all things in the world. The corruption of man's heart addeth a greater price to it, and therefore is the thirst of it so unsatisfied. Now the word, and that wisdom and godliness which it teacheth, is far above gold and fine gold,

2. Because it is the usual temptation to draw off men from the love and study and obedience of the word. Babylon's abominations are offered to the world in a golden cup: Rev. xvii. 4, 'And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.' Preferments are the baits of that black religion. True Christianity consists in sound graces; pseudo-Christianity in pomp and state and worldly advantages; and the apostle telleth us, 1 Tim. vi. 10, 'That the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith.' Therefore doth the Spirit of God so often compare spiritual things to gold; and here David preferreth his love to the word before the worldling's love to gold, yea, fine gold. For mark, it is not, More than I love gold, but, More than any man. Some have an ardent desire of it, however it be mortified in God's children.

First, For the note of inference, together with the duty inferred, 'Therefore I love thy commandments.' Some refer it to God's taking his time to work, as the judge of the world in punishing the wicked for their disobedience and contempt of his law; as if he had said, Lord, though thou dost connive, and hold thy hands for a time, yet I know thou wilt undertake the defence of the righteous, and not let the wickedness of the wicked go unpunished; it will cost them dear in the issue, 'therefore I love thy commandments,' &c. This sense I cannot exclude. If I thought fit to prosecute it, it would yield this doctrine, that a little faith would help us to continue our affection to the word of God, notwithstanding the wickedness of those that oppose it. For in truth here this wickedness doth soon come to an end: Ps. lxxiii. 18, 'Surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castedst them down into destruction.' But I rather refer it to the latter clause, 'They have made void thy law; therefore I love thy commandments.'

*Doct.* The more others despise the ways and laws of God, the more should a gracious heart love and esteem them.

So doth David profess that his love to God's ways was so far from ceasing that he found it increased rather.

*Reason 1.* Because the ways of God are still the same they were before. If there be any difference, they only need to be more owned by us with greater zeal and cheerfulness because they are despised and forsaken by others. God is the same still, heaven the same, and the scriptures the same, whether we have company to walk with us in heaven's way, yea or no; and therefore, why should not a Christian be the same he was before? Their contempt and hatred of God's ways

doth not make void our obligation to God and the bonds of our duty to him. If God had only required us to be good when we may be so with safety and ease, and would dispense with us at other times when religion is in disgrace, then indeed a Christian might change his course, and run with the cry as others do. But God had required in the worst times we should take God's part, and stand for him in the worst places, and keep his name even there where Satan's throne is, Rev. ii. 13, and be saints, though in Nero's household, Phil. iv. 22, under the nose of a raging persecutor. And as God is the same, so his ways are the same. Their contempt and hatred of holiness doth not hinder the loveliness of it to a spiritual eye. There is a beauty in God's despised ways: Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' He saw more excellency in the tents of Jacob than in the courts of Pharaoh. When the outward glory of his ways is darkened, and they are put under reproach and trouble, yet their inward beauty still remaineth, and may be seen by a spiritual, though not by a carnal eye; by those that will not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment, John vii. 24. The external glory, which is the favour of the world, outward prosperity and countenance, is foreign and accidental; but this is essential, and ever remaineth. And as holiness is the same, so the scriptures are the same; they do not speak one thing to-day and another to-morrow, and leave us at a latitude to put ourselves into all changes and postures: 2 Cor. i. 19, 'For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, was not yea and nay,' saith the apostle, 'but in him was yea.' The scripture doth not allow saying and unsaying, and building again the things which we have destroyed: Gal. ii. 18, 'For if I build again the things which I have destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.' Truth is the same in all ages; not like an almanack, to be changed every year, or calculated peculiarly for one meridian. Nor is it always the same. Indeed, in some lesser things, that serve only for the conveniency of religion, we may upon weighty grounds change practice, and do that which is good where best may not be had. So heaven is the same still; it not only serveth us as an antidote in prosperity, but as a cordial in adversity, and is at all times to be regarded. Well, then, since God, and holiness, and scripture, and heaven are always the same, why should not we? If there be change, it should be in the degree of our love, that it be greater than it was before, to repair God in point of honour, and to testify against the defection of others, that we are not of their stamp, who do not see by their eyes, nor walk by their principles, nor allow of their warpings.

*Reason 2.* God expects more from gracious hearts, because of their relation to him and acquaintance with him; and therefore, if others despise the laws of God, they should esteem them the more: John vi. 66, 67, 'From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will you also go away?' It goeth nearer to Christ's heart that those should forsake him that are trained up in his bosom, that the devil should steal away souls under his own arm. Whatever defection others make, yet that those who have tasted of his mercy, drunk of his cup, feasted with his loaves, have had experience of his grace, will ye also? He stood not



upon the multitude's going so much as his disciples'. Therefore they should rouse up themselves in evil times.

*Reason 3.* The good and the bad do exercise and keep one another in breath and vigour. When there are but two factions that stand in opposition to one another, one apparently for God, the other apparently for Satan, it addeth zeal and indignation to both sides, and they mutually inflame one another, and are as Jeremiah's two baskets of figs, the good figs very good, and the evil figs very evil, Jer. xxiv. 3. When others are so very bad, it should not quench zeal but inflame it; we should be not only good, but very good. Corruption, the more it is opposed, the more it stormeth and groweth outrageous, as a river swelleth by opposing dams and banks against it, they rage upon restraints now the floods break loose. So on the other side, should grace be more earnestly and zealously exercised the more it is opposed, as the casting on of water sets the lime on fire. To be sure, their malice will put us to a great deal of trouble, and trouble is a time to exercise grace. To be much in prayer, and faith, and patience, and mortifying corruptions, and watchfulness, and wary walking, that we may neither take infection ourselves, nor give occasion to others to stumble at the ways of God: Col. iv. 3, 'Walk in wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the time.' When they lived among unconverted heathens they should carry it wisely towards them, that they might not be occasions of stumbling or hardening. So by proportion those who profess the ways of God should carry it wisely towards such as they live amongst, who declare their non-regeneration by a profane life, and live like heathens, that they give no occasion to such adversaries of truth and holiness to speak reproachfully; but they should observe the apostle's rules, 1 Peter ii. 12, 15. Christians should be good in bad times, that the times may not be worse for them, nor they the worse for the times. They should labour to live down the vices and errors of the age wherein they live, and labour to save themselves from this untoward generation, and should cut off occasions from them that watch for occasions against them, and, like fishes, keep their freshness in salt water. Ham will scoff to surprise a Noah in a fault; when their foot slippeth, they will magnify themselves against them. Experience of the madness and fury whereby others are carried on in the ways of sin should more confirm others in the ways of God that are opposed by them. Surely such men would not hate what is evil, and so earnestly persecute what is good. *Non nisi grave bonum a Nerone damnari.* A good man would not choose by their liking and loathing. If any argument may be taken from them, it is to like the things the better because they slight them, and to love them because they persecute them. For it is to be presumed they will hate what is good, and love what is evil; and though no certain argument can be concluded thence, yet their love is but an ill token; for Christ telleth us, 'The world will love its own,' John xv. 19. All things love what is suitable to themselves.

*Reason 4.* Unless our love be increased when men oppose and despise the laws of God, it will not hold out against so great a trial. Sin is very infectious at all times, and when it is common it is less odious. But the force of example is great; we think we may do as

others do : a cold neutral love, or loose and general owning of the ways of Christ, will not bear us out. I confess this is a very great temptation that prevaileth with many : Mat. xxiv. 12, ‘ When iniquity aboundeth, the love of many will wax cold.’ Loose professors are soon shaken off, and dead fish swim with the stream. Yea, some of notable eminency in the church may miscarry, but yet always they are such as had their worldly affections unbroken and unmortified : 1 Tim. vi. 11, 12, ‘ Some through the love of money, have erred from the faith ; but thou, O man of God, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, and patience, love, meekness, fight the good fight of faith.’ There needs great diligence and fervency to increase in solid grace, or else we shall not dare to own God and his ways ; yea, I confess the soundest may be sorely shaken, and therefore need warning and confirmation. The godly have seeds of the same evils which draw away others. Evil example is very forcible, especially when it is general. In a time of public infection it is hard to preserve health. And then usually sin is disguised and carried on under plausible pretexts, and evil men blinded by their interests may easily warp, *Ingeniosa res est esse Christianum*, as Hierom of an Arian time. It is a matter of skill to discern God’s interest, and by consequence our duty. The prophet complaineth, ‘ I am a man of polluted lips, and I dwell among a people of polluted lips,’ Isa. vi. 5. We contract some contagion and taint from those among whom we live ; grow careless of sabbaths by general profanation ; take more liberty for the flesh when others wallow in all filthiness, and are given up to all manner of vanity. Therefore, as the force of example is great, the force of zeal should be greater, that we may stand for God, though we stand alone. As Elijah did : 1 Kings xix. 14, ‘ And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts ; because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets by the sword ; and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away.’ We must keep up our savour in a corrupt age, as Noah did : Gen. vi. 9, ‘ Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God.’ Lot lived more upright in Sodom, where he was besieged with temptations that made him constantly to stand upon his watch, than he did in the cave, when he neglected and grew secure. As fire burns hottest in the coldest weather, so a Christian’s zeal, by a holy antiperistasis, should flame most in a corrupted, debauched age.

*Reason 5.* Because it is very acceptable to God, and a note of sincerity to hold out against trials, yea, to increase in zeal when others desert him. Many will flock to Christ, and resort to him in his prosperity. When religion is befriended, painted butterflies and gaudy carnalists will prove summer friends to him ; but when winter frosts and blustering storms come, they are gone ; like those that go to sea, not for a voyage to ride out all weathers, but for recreation : Christ maketh little of their friendship. But now, Luke xxii. 28, 29, ‘ Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations ; and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.’ When David was crowned king in Hebron, then those that followed him in the wilderness were not forgotten, but preferred by him. To

serve God in a crowd, and with store of company, is not so praiseworthy. Every one will be in the fashion, and there is a revolution of fashions in religion; but to own him in a time of defection, when others look strange upon him; then to keep our zeal and strictness is commendable. *Temporibus malis ausus esse bonus.*

*Use 1.* Information. That the general corrupt custom and example of those with whom we live is not a sufficient excuse for our sinning. It is so in the minds of many, but it is not so indeed. It is indeed a temptation, and a strong incitement; but temptations to the contrary do not excuse from duty. This will appear to you if you consider—

1. The state of a Christian; he is not of this world: John xv. 19, ‘If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.’ He was separated for God’s use in baptism, and must make good his baptismal vow, live as one that is separated from the world and their course of life, that he may act for God: Ps. iv. 3, ‘Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself;’ therefore it is no excuse for him to say, I do but as others do; he is to reckon his hours by the sun, not the town-clock; to take God’s direction, not the voice of the multitude, as one of their stamp, and at liberty to comply with their fashions.

2. The course of God’s dispensations, which is to exercise and try his children before he crowneth them. None go to heaven without their trials.

3. The duty of God’s children, intimated in the cautions and descriptions and injunctions of the word: Exod. xxiii. 2, ‘Not to follow a multitude to do evil; nor to walk according to the course of this world;’ Eph. ii. 2, ‘The lust of men,’ 1 Peter iv. 2; nor the corruptions of the times: Rom. xii. 2, ‘Be not conformed to this world,’ &c. Many such hints everywhere, that show it a crime, &c.

4. The opposition of the wicked should make us more courageous; for then it is put to a plain contest, who shall have the better, Christ or Satan? Therefore we should discover that he that is in us is stronger than he that is in the world, 1 John iv. 4. Wicked men have their end and purposes if they can overcome the disciples of Christ, and discourage them from owning their profession. We are to be more than conquerors, Rom. viii. 37.

*Use 2.* We ought to be so far from being involved in the conspiracy of others against God, that our zeal should increase by others declining, and we should love religion when it is commonly despised. That is our commendation, *esse bonum facile est*, &c. Till we are *in termino*, we have our difficulties, till we are gathered to angels, *ἔξω βέλους*, out of gunshot. Our business is not to give way to evils, but to resist them with the greater courage. Indeed it is hard for a man to keep himself free from the infection of the times he lives in. We all complain of the badness of the times; but let us not make them the worse for us. If we would be good in bad times, we need—

1. Much holiness and heavenly-mindedness, that we may be burning and shining lights, conducting men to Christ, as the star that shone at Christ’s birth: Phil. ii. 15, ‘That ye be blameless and harmless,

the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.' Noah, by preparing an ark, condemned the world, Heb. xi. 7. This is the way to appear for God in the lustre of real grace, when we are taken off from other means.

2. Much faith or foresight of things to come : Heb. xi. 7, 'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark.' To see the ruin of the wicked when prosperous, this kept David in his integrity : Ps. lxxiii. 17, 'I went into the sanctuary, then understood I their end.' When he was once able to look through their honours and greatness and riches by the light of the sanctuary, he overcame the temptation which did so greatly press and shake him. So here in the text, 'It is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law ; therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold.' There is a worm in the root ; they are under God's curse : Job v. 3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation ;' which predicteth their ruin, though little appearance of their fall.

3. There needs much zeal and strong love to God. When profaneness is in fashion, let us give check to it in our place, either as magistrates by appearing against evil-doers, as Nehemiah contended for God : Neh. xiii. 11, 'Then I contended with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken ?' and ver. 17, 'Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath-day ?' Not like Gallio, that cared for none of these things. As ministers, more active against sin : Isa. lviii. 1, 'Cry aloud, spare not ; lift up thy voice as a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.' As governors of families, careful of ourselves and families : Josh. xxiv. 15, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' As private Christians, give out more of the lustre of grace : Mat. v. 16, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven ;' 1 Peter ii. 12, 'Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.' Not only stop the mouth of iniquity, but bring about the conversion of wicked men. Thus should every one of us in our place glorify God, and strive to make the times better : Rom. xii. 11, 'Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' That is a good time : serving the Lord can make a change, if we would ply this means. Thus did David serve his generation : Acts xiii. 36, 'For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep.' When you die, people will be able to say, We miss such a man ; he was zealous against sabbath-breakers, and drunkards, and swearers ; one that owned the people of God, a friend to religion.

4. Caution, that we be not carried away with the deluge of corruption : Gal. ii. 13, 'The other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.' Example hath a kind of compulsion in it ; the best men can hardly stand out against it. It secretly insinuateth itself, weakeneth

our love to God, abateth our care; therefore we cannot be enough watchful, that we be not secretly tainted, as a man in the sun tans unawares. As in times of common contagion, every man is careful of his diet and company, so should we watch to keep our garments clean and unspotted of the world.

5. Sincerity, not dissembling; as Josh. xiv. 8, 'I wholly followed the Lord my God;' not loving the ways of God on foreign respects, but their own internal reasons; otherwise a man soon miscarryeth, for these motives will be changed, and those very inducements that moved him to take up religion will move him also to cast it off. None but the solid Christian will hold out, whilst light chaff is carried about with every wind, and the carnal-minded cuts the coat of his profession to the fashion of the times. A false heart cannot long hold out: Prov. x. 9, 'He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known;' that is, to his shame; cannot long dissemble his nature.

6. A fixed resolution, that we may not be easy, and merely do as others do. It is the resolved man that encounters temptations, and maketh them fly back, as arrows shot against a brazen wall. Though others fall, I will serve the Lord, whatever others do: Josh. xxiv. 15, 'And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' If he meet with reproaches and scorns: 2 Sam. vi. 22, 'And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight.' If enticed by evil company: Ps. cxix. 115, 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.' If threatened: Acts iv. 19, 'But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.' Thus they stood by a self-denying resolution; whereas the unresolved man, James i. 8, 'is unstable in all his ways;' is turned like a weathercock with every wind, fitteth his religion to every interest. God biddeth us thus unmovably to fix ourselves: Jer. xv. 19, 'Thus saith the Lord, Let them return unto thee, but return not thou to them.' A man that would live quietly must either bring himself to the times, or expect the times should come over to him. A resolved man stayeth God's leisure, doth not serve his conscience to fit the times, but waiteth till God fit the times to his conscience.

7. A true sight of the worth of spiritual things above carnal. This in the text, 'More than gold, yea, fine gold.' Till a man cometh to this, his conscience will not be guided by his religion, but his interest, and give up all for the world's sake: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and loved the present world;' Phil. iii. 19, 20, 'Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' Loath to suffer, turn themselves into all shapes. God doth not command them, but themselves.

Secondly, The degree of his affection; whence this doctrine—

*Doct.* We ought not only to love the word, but to love it above all worldly things whatsoever.

1. Let me explain the grounds of our love to the word.

2. Speak of the degree of it.

1. Let me explain the grounds of our love to the word. We love the word, as it is the charter of our hopes and the rule of our duty. We have both respects in this psalm. As the charter of our hopes, ver. 111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken for an heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' As a rule of our duty, ver. 14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches;' and ver. 140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' So that—

[1.] To love and esteem the word as the charter of our hopes is to love and esteem spiritual privileges, such as the favour of God, pardon of sins, peace of conscience, taking away the stony heart, and eternal life. To have a deep sense and value for such things is the fruit of faith. It is true that some loose velleities and general inclinations men, as men, have to their own happiness; but being but weakly persuaded of these things, they are but slightly affected with them and the promises that reveal them. Men that have no faith, but altogether live by sense, know nothing more excellent than gold or riches, which do all in the world. If God would let them alone here, to have their portion in Paris, they would part with their share in paradise, such dunghill-souls have they. Let God keep spiritual things for whom he will, so they may live at ease in the world, they never mind communion with God, or enjoyment of God; but gracious hearts love the word, as offering and revealing these things.

[2.] To love the word as a rule of duty is in effect to love holiness, loving things as suitable to our necessities, and as suitable to our dispositions. 'I love thy commandments,' saith David in the text, as urging and directing us to our duty. This is also proper to gracious souls, to them all outward things are but toys and trifles for our senses to play withal. The least grain of grace seemeth better to them than a mountain of gold. They have a spiritual discerning, and love things according to the nature and worth of them. The things themselves are not to be compared together, so should not our affections to them.

2. The degree of it, more than all riches, 'Therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold.' Take riches as riches, in that notion as the word implies happiness, abundance, contentment. The word of God containeth the true riches, both in the promises and precepts of it.

[1.] In the promises, to us are given, τὰ τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἐπαγγελματα, 'exceeding great and precious promises,' 2 Peter i. 4. There the great controversy is decided about the true happiness and salvation, God or the creature; there you have the 'unsearchable riches of Christ;' Eph. ii. 7, 'That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.' The riches of the glory of the saints' inheritance: Eph. i. 18, 'That ye may know what is the hope of your calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' These

are things that make us truly rich: Rev. iii. 18, 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.' He is not rich that floweth in wealth and plenty, but he that hath Christ, and an interest in his benefits. They are possessors of all things, though they have nothing: 2 Cor. vi. 10, 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things.' A little serves the turn; they have the good things purchased by Christ, happiness enough if he can make them happy.

[2.] So in the precepts, they are means to work grace, the least dram of which is more worth than all things in the world. He is rich enough that is rich in faith: James ii. 5, 'Hearken, my beloved brethren; hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of a kingdom,' in paradise, 'which he hath promised to them that love him?' It is more precious than the trial of gold: 1 Peter i. 7, 'That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' The smallest measure of saving faith, or love to God, or fear of God, or repentance, is of more worth than what is most precious. The word of God does more enrich a man; and true benefit is to be preferred before counterfeit.

Reasons for the degree of our love.

1. From the worth of the word, the reward, and those benefits that are gotten by studying and obeying it; they exceed worldly things, as will appear, because the one suits with our bodily necessities, the other with our spiritual. Our bodily necessities are supplied by gold, our spiritual necessities by grace. Gold will not comfort a distressed conscience, no more than nosegay flowers a condemned man. *Quod si dolentem, &c.*, saith Horace: Prov. xi. 4, 'Riches avail not in the day of wrath.' The one renders us acceptable to men, the other to God. The world knoweth all things after the flesh; they measure men by splendour and pomp of living; but it is grace that God approveth most, and accepteth most. Grace is of great price in the sight of God: 1 Peter iii. 4, 'But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.' The one much embaseth our nature; it is something more vile than us, therefore that affection is debased. But grace always ennobleth our nature, and is something above us. A greater affection is due to things above us than to things beneath us. The one is useful to us *in via*, the other *in patria*. Surely that which is of eternal use and comfort to us is better than that which is only of a temporal use. In our passage to heaven, we need gold and silver for the supply of our bodily necessities, and the support of outward life, so far as we have to do in the world; but with respect to the world to come, gold doth nothing; there we leave our wealth behind us, but our works follow us. Our treasure we quit when we die, but our grace we carry with us. Once more; the price by which things may be purchased sheweth the worth of them. Wisdom is of so great a price, that all the treasures of the world cannot purchase it: Job xxviii. 15-20, 'It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof; it cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with

the precious onyx, or the sapphire; the gold and the crystal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold: no mention shall be made of coral or of pearls; for the price of wisdom is above rubies: the topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold.' What cannot money do in the world? yet it can do nothing as to the procuring of grace. The apostle telleth us this is a dear-bought blessing: 1 Peter i. 18, 19, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversations, received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot.' To despise the favour of God, the image of God, is to despise the price that was paid for these things, to have lessening thoughts of the blood of Christ. To conclude; those we count lesser<sup>1</sup> gifts which we bestow upon friends than upon enemies. A man would give meat and drink unto enemies when they hunger and thirst; but other gifts of a greater value to friends and relations. God giveth his Christ, his Spirit, his grace to his friends, children, servants; but corn and wine and oil, these he giveth promiscuously, yea, to his enemies a larger portion. Surely, then, these are better than gold. Our love should be according to the value of things.

2. Because if the word be not preferred before earthly things, it is not received with any profit and good effect. Christ saith, 'He that loveth anything more than me, is not worthy of me,' Mat. x. 37. He that studieth to please his friends rather than Christ, or to gratify his interest more than his conscience, within a very little while his Christianity will be worth nothing. It is not a simple love, but a greater love that we show to worldly things: Mat. xiii. 44-46, 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.' Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.' We must part with all, rather than miss of his grace, all that is pleasant and profitable, renounce all other things. When Christ propounds his terms, he would have us surrender all to his will and pleasure: Luke ix. 23, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' He must not avoid the cross by sinful shifts: we are ready to do so every day. These are the necessary terms, else we are not fit for the master's use: 2 Tim. ii. 21, 'If any man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.'

3. Unless we love the word above riches, we cannot possess riches without a snare; then it will be not only hard, but impossible, to enter into the kingdom of heaven: Mark x. 23-27, 'And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to

<sup>1</sup> Qu. "greater"?—ED.



go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking about him, said, With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.' Riches will so prevail over us, and wholly sway us, if they be our chief good and portion, and we have not a higher end to check our love to them. If a man would have all things cleave<sup>1</sup> to him, he must be sure the world doth not sit nearest his heart; for if they do, such a man, as he is unfit for heaven, so he is unfit for the world too. If they be your good things, Luke xvi. 25, 'Son, remember thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things;' you will get and keep and use them otherwise than the word doth allow.

4. From the fruit of grace; where it is planted in the heart and prevaieth, the desire of wealth is mortified, worldly lust denied: Titus ii. 12, 'Teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts;' and desires of grace enlarged and increased: 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.' And when it prevaieth further, and to a higher degree, they come to Moses' frame, to count the worst of Christ better than the best of the world: Heb. xi. 26, 'Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.' Not only the graces of Christ, or the benefits of Christ, but the reproaches of Christ. So much is the world lessened, and the desires of grace increased. The heaviest part of Christ's cross is sweeter than the worldly plenty, where sin accompanieth it.

*Use 1.* To press us to get this esteem and love of the word above all earthly things: by what names soever they are called, whether gold or fine gold. Consider—

1. The word of God containeth the true riches, in comparison of which all other things are but a shadow.

2. Except God's word be clearly esteemed above earthly things, it is highly contemned. You would think yourselves highly slighted if once it should be put to the question whether you or an ass or a swine be better. The case is as clear whether it be better to have a child's toy or land of inheritance. You think it a disparagement of their reason. It is so to compare spiritual things with carnal: Prov. xvi. 16, 'How much better is it to get wisdom than gold, and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!'

3. The word of God observed and obeyed bringeth all earthly things along with it; gold and fine gold, so far as they are necessary and good for us: Mat. vi. 63, 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;' and 1 Tim. iv. 8, 'Godliness is profitable unto all things; having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' It hath all kind of promises, it doth not come empty-handed; it bringeth in a portion in this life, and blessing in these outward things.

4. How constant the word is, and in one tenor: 2 Cor. i. 20, 'All the promises of God in him are Yea, and in him Amen; unto the glory of God by us.' But worldly things are uncertain: 2 Sam. xix. 43, 'And the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye.' Compare this with the next words, 2 Sam. xx. 1, 'Sheba blew a

<sup>1</sup> Qu. "clean"?—Ed.

trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse.' The people cry Hosanna to Christ, and presently after, Crucify him. Peter once made a glorious confession of Christ, and afterwards a gross denial. Paul was received as an angel by the Galatians: Gal. iv. 14, 'My temptation which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus;' but afterwards accounted an enemy; ver. 16, 'Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?' Nebuchadnezzar flourishing in a palace of gold, Dan. iv. 30, 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the glory of my majesty?' But a voice came to him from heaven, ver. 31, 'O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, The kingdom is departed from thee.'

Use 2. Have we such an esteem and affection to the word of God? Then—

1. We will do that which in other cases a greater love would incline us to do; otherwise it is but a compliment; we will diligently exercise ourselves in the word of God. Labour is the fruit of love: 'Remembering your labour of love,' 1 Thes. i. 3. He that doth not take more pains in the pursuit of heavenly things than of carnal, doth not love the one above the other; for love is industrious: John vi. 27, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.' What a deal of pains do men take for a little pelf, to heap up treasure, and fill their houses with the good things of this world, and spend all their time and wit, their care and strength, on outward things! The stream runneth stronger for the world when there is no proportionable care taken for the benefits which the word offereth. God maketh offer of grace and glory. Men are as those that travel by water, and see buildings ashore, and praise them as they pass by, but never enter into them, never look after them more. If you are ready and earnest in the pursuit of the one, careless and cold in the other; you think no time enough for the one, but grudge all time for the other: it is a sign the one hath a greater share in our hearts than the other. We are to seek worldly things in some measure, because God hath appointed every one some work to do; but when there is such a manifest disproportion between our seeking the one and the other, it sheweth which way our souls bend; if a nice difference, that hardly distinguisheth it, give suspicion, more especially when such a manifest disproportion.

2. We will part with the one for the other's sake, if carnal things can withdraw us from the pursuit of heavenly things: Heb. xii. 16, 'As Esau, who for one morsel of bread sold his birthright;' and heavenly things cannot make us to part with carnal things. Many make void the law to seek riches and wealth: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world;' break God's commands for a small hire, and do so constantly, frequently, easily; it is a sign they do but compliment, and speak from their judgments, not from their hearts, when they say they love God better than the world, or fine gold, the chiefest excellency of it. Would a man dispense with his obedience to the word, and be thus affected? What is deliberately, habitually preferred, that hath the greater love. We can neglect our

duty to God, trample upon God, Christ, heaven, scripture, conscience, duty, in the way to make speed after worldly things.

3. Wherein do we place the happiness of us and ours? To carnal men nothing is so dear as their present prosperity. Do you value yourselves to be more happy when you have a little grace and sense of God's love than if you had all the world: Ps. iv. 6, 7, 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.' And for your children, do you rejoice to see them great or good? Many are delighted to see their children thrive in the world, do well in the world, but careless whether they have grace, yea or no. If you take the world still as a great part of your felicity, it is a sign you have low thoughts and respects for the word of God.

### SERMON CXL.

*Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right ;  
and I hate every false way.*—VER. 128.

IN this verse a child of God is set forth by two marks:—

1. His approbation and esteem of the law of God in all the parts and points thereof, *I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right.*

2. His hatred of all sin as contrary thereunto, *and I hate every false way* : the one as the effect of the other.

First, In the first branch, take notice of—(1.) The illative particle, *therefore*. (2.) His respect to the word, *I esteem thy precepts to be right*. In the Septuagint it is *πρὸς πᾶσας τὰς ἐντολάς σου κατ' ὀρθότητα*, I was directed or set right unto all thy laws. But it maketh no difference in effect from our translation; for they that esteem the law will embrace and practise it. (3.) The extent and universality of this respect: there is a double universal particle, *all thy precepts concerning all things*; the general drift of them, and every particular matter and circumstance that falleth under this law, it is all right; I approve of whatsoever thou commandest, without any reservation and exception; all, even all, have I approved.

1. Something might be observed from the illative particle: it is inferred from their making void of God's law.

*Doct.* In times of defection, when others slight, condemn, and forsake the ways of God, we should approve and esteem them the more.

The reasons are—

1. To make amends for the contempt of others: 2 Peter iv. 14, 'On their parts he is evil spoken of; on your part glorified.' Let not God want his glory; if he be dishonoured by their sins, he should be the more honoured by your obedience. It concerneth us to look that God be no loser. As the sea, what it loseth in one place, it gaineth in another; or as a river, what it loseth in breadth, and is pent within narrow channels, it gets in depth; so you should give him the more

respect the more it is denied him by others; the sincere professors of the name of God should be the more earnest.

2. To show that we do not choose the ways of God upon foreign reasons, as public countenance and consent. Many men owe their religion not to grace, but to the favour of the times; it is in fashion; they may profess it at a cheap rate, because none contradict it. Indeed it sheweth they are extremely bad, that are bad when they may be good without any loss to themselves; but it doth not show they are good, that are only good in good times. Dead fish swim with the stream. They do not build upon the rock, but set up a shed leaning to another man's house, which costs them nothing; carried with a multitude, are not able to go alone in a good way; if they be religious, it is for others' sakes. Then is integrity discovered when persons dare be good in bad times, as Noah was said to be an upright man, because he was perfect in his generation: Gen. vi. 9, 'When all flesh had corrupted their way.' And so it is said, Job vii. 9, 'The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger;' that is, when there are discouragements and oppressions, as a resolved traveller holdeth on his journey, whether he meeteth with fair way or foul, good weather or bad.

3. There is an antiperistasis in grace as well as nature. Every quality, when it is pent up, is the stronger. Stars shine brightest in the darkest night. Fountain-water is hottest in winter, when the heat is pent up. In bad times good men are best; wicked men's badness exerciseth and increaseth good men's graces. The more odious sin appeareth in them, the more grace is strengthened in the saints; their looseness maketh you strict; their vanity and carelessness maketh you serious; their intemperance maketh you sober; their worldliness and sensuality maketh you spiritual; as they are instances of the cursed vigour of nature, you are instances of the sacred power of grace, Phil. ii. 15, shining as lights in the world 'in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation;' to be eminently holy among a company of profane, godless, atheistical spirits, showing forth the lovely beauty of holiness.

4. To show the difference between the people of God and others; and this is a fruit of God's eternal choice. God hath made a difference in the purposes of his grace, and they discover the difference in the course of their conversations: John xvii. 25, 'The world hath not known thee, but these have known thee, that thou hast sent me, and hast chosen them out of the world.' The opposite ignorance and obstinacy of the world sheweth their acknowledgment of Christ was of more value and acceptance. When the world neither knew nor believed on him, but rather opposed and persecuted him, they owned Christ, and so walked in a countermotion to the times.

5. To defeat the enemies' purpose, which is to hinder the success of the gospel, and destroy all affection and respect to the word and ways of God, and that the service of God should fall to the ground; as we hold a staff the faster, when one would wrest it out of our hands: Titus i. 9, 'Holding fast the faithful word.' The pastor of the church should be good at holding and drawing, as the word signifieth; so people's zeal should be the more kindled in the worst times. God hath a number that do fear him; Christ is never a king without subjects,

nor a head without a church; he ruleth in the midst of his enemies, Ps. cx. 1; therefore he hath some to rule over. Where Satan's throne is, there he hath some to confess his name. Elijah thought himself left alone, yet then God had reserved to himself seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal.

*Use.* It is very seasonable for us in these times to mind this; therefore—

1. That we may increase in practical godliness. Now wickedness is broken loose and the law is made void, this should not damp our zeal, but quicken it. You should walk with God, as Noah and David did, in the worst of times: yea, the badness of the age you live in should make you the more wise, more circumspect, more humble, more heavenly; as fire burneth hottest in the coldest weather. Study to serve God in thy generation. A man that is not good in the age he liveth in, would never be good. A lily will thrive in a wilderness, and a brier is but a brier though it grow in paradise. Their fury in sin should warn you of your duty to God. Shall a lust prevail more with them to damn themselves, than the love of God and the hope of salvation with you? shall they act more regularly to their ends? What zeal and earnestness have they in their course, and how open and bold-faced in sin! We read that Pambo wept when he saw a woman dressing herself curiously to please her wanton lover, to see her take so much pains to undo her soul, and that he had not been so careful to please God, and provide things honest in the sight of God, as she to please herself.

2. They are set up as warnings to us, as a beacon on fire warneth all the country to be in arms. You see what it is to give way to the beginnings of sin, not to be under the blessed conduct of God's Spirit. Some are notoriously wicked, judicially given up to be more visibly under the dominion of sin, that others may take warning how they come into that woful slavery: Phil. iii. 19, 20, 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies to the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, who glory in their shame, who mind earthly things; but our conversation is in heaven.'

3. It should make us fly to God for grace when the whole world lieth in wickedness: Isa. vi. 5, 'I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.' It is hard to converse with defiled ones and not be defiled, to keep ourselves unspotted from the world: Ps. cvi. 35, 'They were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.' The contagion of sin overspreads presently, as a man by touching that which was unclean became unclean. We easily catch a sickness from others, but we cannot convey our health to them.

*Use 2.* Teacheth us to keep up our profession even in lesser truths: 'I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things.' When men would wrangle us out of our duty, we are to be πιστοὶ ἐν ὀλίγῳ, faithful in a little. Great matters depend on little things. We are tried, ἐν τῇ παρούσῃ ἀληθείᾳ, 2 Peter i. 12, by the 'present truths,' whether we will own the ways of God: Rev. xiv. 13, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord,' or for the Lord, 'from henceforth, yea, saith the

Spirit, that they may rest from their labour.' Why 'from henceforth?' Why! before the sufferings of Christians were from heathens and professed enemies, and they were acknowledged blessed as dying for the Lord. But now, when antichrist and false Christians came up, they did pretend to be for Christ, and friends to him, and this might be a discouragement to them in their suffering; but saith the Holy Ghost, 'From henceforth blessed are they which die for the Lord,' when pseudo-Christians begin to come up, and persecute the heavenly Christians. It is as blessed a thing to suffer under pseudo-Christians and antichristianism as it was to suffer under heathens and pagans, professed enemies to Christianity. I speak of this, because the orthodoxy of the world is usually an age too short. In things publicly received, it is easy to be right. Christ is forced to gain upon the world by inches. A man may acknowledge the Trinity, the satisfaction of Christ, among Papists; but it is exceeding praiseworthy to own Christ when others scorn and reject him. The world will allow us to esteem the ways of God in some lesser things, that are out of controversy and are not maligned; but this esteem must have that extent as becometh the people of God, to have a hearty esteem of all the precepts of God, and all things contained therein.

Secondly, Let me come to his respect to the ways of God; and from his respect, with the extent, I shall observe this doctrine:—

*Doct.* That it becometh the people of God to have a practical heart-engaging esteem of all the precepts of God, and all things contained therein.

Let me show you what is this esteem the children of God have for his precepts.

1. There is something implied and presupposed.
2. Wherein it doth formally consist.
3. The qualifications of a right and saving esteem of the ways of God.

1. There is something implied and presupposed before we can come to esteem the precepts of God. As—

[1.] Knowledge and a right discerning. This is necessary, partly that a man may be able to make a distinction between good and evil, otherwise he cannot esteem the good and eschew the evil, for 'without knowledge the heart is not good,' Prov. xix. 2. If we should stumble blindfold upon a good way, we are not the more accepted with God, nor advantaged in our spiritual course. The clearer our light, the warmer our love. The more clear and certain apprehension we have of spiritual things, our faith is more steadfast, love more vehement, joy more sound, hope more constant, patience more sublime, our pursuit of true happiness more earnest. And partly because a man can not esteem that which he knoweth not. The will being *cæca potentia*, blind in itself, followeth the direction and guidance of the understanding. The ignorance of the nature and necessity of holiness is the cause of the neglect of it: John iv. 10, 'If thou knewest the gift,' &c. Many condemn good for evil, take evil for good, boldly rush into sin, reject the ways of God for want of knowledge. But then it is spiritual illumination that begets estimation, 1 Cor. ii. 14. The truth and worth of spiritual things must be seen by a spiritual eye. When the

Spirit enlighteneth a man, he beginneth to see that which he knew not before, to see things in another manner.

[2.] Advertency, or application of the mind to the object or things esteemed; that he seriously consider the matter, and what it is best to do; it is not a sudden, rash undertaking. The scripture speaketh of 'applying our hearts to wisdom,' Ps. xc. 12; and Prov. ii. 2, 'Apply thy heart to understanding;' Prov. xxiii. 12, 'Apply thine heart to instruction, and thine ears to the ways of knowledge.' Make it your business seriously to consider things that differ. But then—

2. Wherein lies this esteem, or wherein doth it formally consist? Esteem is an approbation of the will, or a hearty love. There is the approbation of the understanding, and the approbation of the will. The approbation of the understanding is a naked sense, or an acknowledgment of what is good: Rom. ii. 18, 'Thou knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent.' There is an excellency in holiness that winneth esteem, even there where it is not embraced. All convinced men see the evil of sin, and are half of the mind to quit it; they approve the law which they violate by a bare naked approbation. But then there is the approbation of the heart or will; there is love and liking in it, and this is called esteem. This is seen in two things—consent and choice: consent, to take this law for our rule; and choice, whatever temptation we have to the contrary. Men choose what they highly esteem. In short, it is such an approbation as doth engage affection, such an affection as doth engage practice. Esteem is the fruit of love.

[1.] There is a consenting to the law that it is good, Rom. vii. 16. There is a difference between assent and consent. A man may *assent* to the truth and goodness of the law that doth not *consent* to the goodness of it; as the devils assent to the truth of God's being, that do not consent to take him for their portion, James ii. 19. Therefore, besides the advertency of the understanding, there is the consent or approbation of the will. Paul speaketh good words of the law: Rom. vii. 12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good,' νόμος and ἐντολή—the law in general, and that commandment which wrought such tragical effects in his heart, that rifled all his confidence and hopes, and left him wounded with the sense of sin; it is holy in teaching duty to God, just in prescribing duties to our neighbour, good in respect to ourselves; a law becoming God to give and us to receive, suitable and profitable. Thus should we approve and like the law of God.

[2.] Choice, whatever temptation we have to the contrary; a preferring or prevailing love, a heart-engaging approbation, that doth prevailingly determine the soul to the ways of God. *Non differunt re consensus et electio*, saith Aquinas, *sed ratione tantum, ut consensus dicatur, secundum quod placet ad agendum; electio autem secundum quod praeferitur his quae non placent*—consent to the law and choice of the law are all one and the same act, distinguished by divers respects and considerations. It is called consent to the law, as it approveth of what the law adviseth; and it is called choice or esteem, as it preferreth the law and our obedience to it above other things. It is *actualis praelatio unius rei prae altera*, a preferring one thing above another.

Thirdly, I come to the properties or qualifications of this esteem.

1. It is not a simple, but comparative approbation. There is a twofold act of judgment—the first act and the second. The first act is that whereby I distinguish good from evil, and pronounce the one to be embraced, the other eschewed; approve the one, disapprove the other. But there is a comparative approbation; that is, that which the understanding judgeth best, all circumstances considered, better than all other things that can be represented. This is the proper notion of esteem: Heb. xi. 26, ‘Esteeming the reproach of Christ,’ &c. We approve of many things simply, and in the first act, which we disallow in the second, when we consider them as invested with some difficulty and unpleasantness, or overpoised with contrary desires, when we compare them with the pleasure and profit which we must forsake: it consents to walk in the ways of God, as Orpah will follow Naomi into the land of Israel, if she may do it without inconveniency, Ruth i. 14. The young man esteemed salvation worthy to be inquired after, Mark x. 20, but is loath to forego his earthly possessions to purchase that inheritance. When the judgment that we make of the thing simply considered in itself, and of the thing as considered with all circumstances, as it cometh in comparison with other things that must be endured or foregone.

2. There is a judgment of general estimation, and a judgment of particular application. By the one I bind duty upon others; by the other I engage my own heart, as the expression is, Jer. xxx. 21, ‘Who is he that engageth his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord;’ to engage his heart to take God for his portion. An instance we have in David: Ps. lxxiii. 28, ‘But it is good for me to draw near to God.’ I may approve many things as good, for which I have no appetite myself. Many will yield that it is good to serve God that cannot work, or do not engage their heart to it. Many approve piety in the general; it is good to be religious, to live a holy life; but when it cometh to our own case, when we are to abstain from this or that sin, we draw back. Many know what things are more excellent, but do not practise or embrace them; commend those that are religious, but do not imitate them. Acts v. 13, the people highly esteemed the Christians, but yet would not become Christians themselves: Ps. xlviii. 14, ‘This God is our God for ever and ever.’ Many a wicked man judgeth it best for him to continue his evil courses, and thinketh religion is good for other men, but it is not good for him; but God’s children are of another mind.

3. It is not a slight and superficial esteem, but such as is deep and solid: Mat. xiii. 20, ‘He heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.’ It is a blessed thing to hear of the pardon of sin, Heb. vi. 5, to taste of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come; as they that cheapen wines taste, though they do not go through with the bargain; some inclination of heart, half a mind to be thoroughly godly and religious: John v. 35, ‘They rejoiced in his light for a season.’ They were much taken with John for a while, and the novelty and excellency of his doctrine. But when is this esteem deep and solid? It may be known—(1.) By the root of it; (2.) The ground and formal object of it; (3.) The manner or way how we come by it.

[1.] The root of it When the root of this esteem is a vital prin-



ciple of grace : Mat. xiii. 21, 'He hath not root in himself.' The word is not ingrafted, James i. 21. The people had a good inclination : 'All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do,' Deut. v. 29. But, 'Oh ! that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always,' &c. They had a mind to do well ; but where faith, fear, and love are not planted, there may be some stirrings of conscience, but not a full purpose of heart. There is the approbation of an awakened and enlightened conscience, and the approbation of a renewed heart. A convinced man approveth, and a converted man approveth, but in a different manner. The one is but a flash, like fire in straw, the other hath a durable affection.

[2.] When the ground and formal object of it is not a temporal, natural, or carnal motive, but the moral goodness of the law ; because it is the pure and holy word and will of God, who is the lawgiver, whose authority is absolute. There may be carnal motives to incline us to esteem the word, as the novelty of John's doctrine : John v. 35, 'They rejoiced in his light for a season ;' delight to hear a plausible and rational discourse, as Ezekiel's hearers, Ezek. xxxiii. 32, 'And lo thou art to them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, that can play well upon an instrument ; for they hear thy words, but do them not.' Or carnal motives, as they Gen. xxxiv. 22, 23, 'Herein will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. Shall not their cattle and their substance be ours ? Only let us consent unto them,' &c. And so temporal interests. Religion hath a portion for which it is courted. The consent of many to the law is the same which Mahometans have to the Alkoran ; education in it, ancestors embracing of it, the countenance of the law, the custom of the country, &c.

[3.] The manner or way how we come by it, by much prayer and serious deliberation. Some by chance are surprised and affected with a good motion, suddenly good, but habitually bad ; they will in all haste become religious, but, alas ! this estimation or approbation of God's ways is entertained but for a time, but afterwards vanisheth and cometh to nothing. There must be a clear distinct knowledge of the excellency of God's ways : otherwise in a fit, or in a good mood, we choose that which is good ; but the interest in evil not being renounced in heart, it causeth an easy retreat into the former sinful course.

4. It must be such an esteem as hath a lively and effectual influence upon our hearts and ways. There is a liking that only produceth a velleity and wish, and doth not engage the soul to prosecute the things willed, or forsake the things nilled ; but there is such an effectual liking and esteem as will produce a constant, habitual willingness, that will have the authority of a principle, and hath a powerful command over the whole soul, to set it a-working to do the will of God, and will admit of no contradiction by contrary desires, but maketh us act with life, power, and earnestness. Cold and inconstant wishes produce no fruit in the heart. The general course of most men's lives is as if they had no liking to the law of God. It may be they may dislike and sacrifice some of their weaker lusts and smaller interests, which they can well spare, but corruption doth ordinarily

bear sway in their hearts and lives. In the text it is, 'I esteem all thy precepts, and hate every false way.' It is true, a man that approveth the law is not wholly freed from sin. There are sins of ordinary infirmity, that cleave to us while we are in the world, yea, taint our best actions: Isa. lxiv. 6, 'But we are all as an unclean thing, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.' And sometimes, though there be a principle of grace, a child of God may be overborne by the violence of a temptation, carried into presumptuous sins, which may make strange havoc in the soul. David prayeth, Ps. xix. 14, that God would keep him from presumptuous sins; but for the most part the children of God are influenced by their consent and esteem of the law of God. And the renewed part for the generality hath the upper hand, and prevaieth, and the flesh is weakened; as the house of David grew stronger and stronger, 2 Sam. iii. 1, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.

5. It must be a universal, not partial esteem: 'I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right;' Ps. cxix. 6, 'When I have respect to all thy commandments;' Luke i. 6, 'Zachary and Elizabeth walked in all the commandments and ordinances of God blameless;' Acts iii. 22, 'Him shall you hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you;' and he shall fulfil all my will. It is not enough to be right in commands in general, or the lump, but in this and that particular; not in some, but in all. We pretend to give up ourselves to the will of God in the general, but particulars we stick at. Men are convinced that holiness is necessary, that they must have some religion; therefore when they take up duty in the lump, and abstract notion or naked consent, it doth not exasperate opposite propensions: 'Ye cannot serve the Lord,' &c., saith Joshua, Josh. xxiv. 18, 19; but when they come to particulars, and see what it is to wait upon a holy and jealous God, they tire and grow weary: so that there must be a consent and purpose to obey, not some, but all and every one, without exception; not partial, like that of Herod to John: Mark vi. 20, 'He did many things.' The worst man in the world loveth some good and hateth some evil, but he doth not esteem all God's commandments in every point. Nay, the great enemy of our salvation, Satan, can be content to let us yield to God in many things, if he would be contented with half our duty: one sin reserved keepeth afoot his interest in our hearts, as a bird tied by the leg is fast enough. The devil will suffer men to do many things, but if he hath them fast by one lust, be it an inclination to sensuality, or love to the world, he is contented. The world likes many things in religion; they are good and profitable for men; but sticketh at others. To live godly in Christ Jesus will draw on persecution, 2 Tim. iii. 12. The flesh will dispense with us to do many things, for the more cleanly conveyance of others, if it can but get us to spare the bosom lust which the soul delighteth in. Every man, as he is enslaved by his own customs, opposeth one this law, another that; the proud man doth not approve of that law that doth forbid his pride, nor the sensual man that which toucheth his intemperance and unbridled appetite, nor the worldly man his covetousness, cannot endure that part of the law that would abridge him of his gain. Nothing more common than to cast off what liketh us not

in the law of God, and to wish there were no precept given in that kind. But our consent must be to all in general, and to this and that in particular. Many could be content with God's law, so far as it doth not cross their carnal interest, or hinder their corrupt desires; but we must esteem all the laws of God; they are all holy, just, and good, not one excepted; all conduce to perfect our nature, and make us happy creatures; they all conduce to the benefit of human nature; they are all enjoined by the authority of the same God: 'God spake all these words.' They are linked as rings in a chain; one preserveth another; they are all necessary for our eternal happiness; not one given in vain. So much thou continuest thine own misery, and art defective in the way that leadeth to true happiness, as thou art willing to indulge in any one sin. They are all written in the hearts of God's children, Heb. viii. 10, all suited to the new nature; and he hath given grace to keep all, 1 Peter i. 15, perfection of parts, not of degrees. The new creature is not maimed in the birth. A child hath not the bulk and strength of a man. Want of perfection of parts cannot be supplied by any after growth. Nay, all are necessary to our communion with God: Ps. lxxvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;' Mat. v. 19, 'Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments,' &c. If we dispense with ourselves in the least things, we are not fit for communion with God, 2 Cor. vii. 1; having such promises of God's being in us, and dwelling in us, and maintaining communion with us, then 'let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit;' Col. i. 10, 'that ye might walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing,' *εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν*. If you do not consent to keep all, you can keep none; for the same reasons that move us to break one, will move us to break all. Herod, that heard John gladly, when his lust moved him to it, put him to death. To be sure it must be total.

Reasons of this esteem.

1. From the excellency of God's law. The law of God deserves it: Deut. iv. 6, 'Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' We should esteem the law, because it doth not infringe our natures, but makes them perfect, puts an excellency upon us. But of this in other verses.

2. This esteem and approbation is the ground of practice. When we are convinced of the ways of God, and the excellency that is in them, the heart consenteth and embraceth them, and then followeth a ready practice; we will observe what we do approve. Whereas, on the contrary, if we have no esteem for the ways of God, we shall take no care to walk in them, but could wish such laws expunged; for still these two go together—hearty embracing and diligent practice. The will is the great master-wheel. Now esteem implieth the bent of the will or heart; it implieth consent and election; it is the act of the will, is the act of the man: Prov. xxiii. 26, 'My son, give me thy heart.' The man is never overcome till then. You may kill him, but you cannot conquer him till he give his consent. There may be a kind of force and violence offered to the other faculties; the under-

standing may be overcome with light, which though it would, it cannot keep out. The conscience may be awakened, though men endeavour to lull it asleep; but the will is free, and is not conquered, but by its own consent and choice. The Lord will not force himself upon any; he dealeth with the reasonable creatures in a covenant way, to which our consent is required. It only bindeth as a law, till we consent to yield to it as a covenant: 2 Chron. xxx. 8, 'Yield yourselves to the Lord.' Now bring your hearts once to consent, and heartily approve of the ways of God, and the rest will succeed without difficulty. It will not be hard to give a law to the tongue, to restrain the hand, govern the body; our affections will more easily come to hand if we have a will to the things of God. The smallest matters against our wills are grievous to us. It was no great matter for Haman to lead Mordecai's horse, but it was an unwelcome and unpleasant service; he had no mind to it. It is no great matter for men to do the things that God requireth; but they have no mind to it, and therefore are off and on: James i. 8, 'The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.'

3. This is some comfort to a child of God, that though he faileth in some part of his duty, yet he esteemeth all; for where this approbation is, you may use the apostle's plea, 'Not I, but sin that dwelleth in me;' Rom. vii. 15, 'For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I.' The allowance or approbation of the will is there spoken of; he speaketh of willing and nilling, loving, delighting, and hating. Though you cannot do that good you would, in that purity and perfection which love requireth, and the renewed heart intendeth, yet your hearts are upon your work: 'The evil which I hate, I do.' The new nature hates and dislikes what the carnal part prompts to.

*Use.* Learn to approve the law of God in all things, as right and good for you.

1. Do not dispense with yourselves in anything. In two cases we are apt to do so:—(1.) In small things; it is nothing, we think; it is but a little one. Nothing that cometh from God should be light and contemptible; though the matter be never so small, if God hath interposed, it should be regarded by us. There may be great obstinacy in small sins, as a slender line may be very crooked, or as in some cases the dye is more than the cloth. Will you break with God in a small matter? If some great matter were required, would you not have done it? as 2 Kings v. 13; dare you offend this holy God for trifles? (2.) Do not dispense with yourselves, though never so contrary to your humour and interest. This is to set up a toleration in your own hearts, or a court of faculties without God's leave: 'God be merciful to me, if I bow in the house of Rimmon.'

2. Do not so much as wish there were no such law. It is a contradiction of the law when you could wish there were no law to put a restraint upon your beloved lusts and darling corruptions. Carnal men wish there were no God, not as a creator and preserver, but as a lawgiver. There may be much enmity in such a thought. Every thought must be brought into subjection to Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. x. 5. Not a disallowing thought of God's government but doth much pre-

judice your hearts. God hath given such laws, that if all things were left to our own option and choice, nothing better could be devised to preserve the liberty and perfection of the human nature. It is an ill note to count the command grievous. Holiness is so amiable in itself, that men are not frightened unto God's laws, but choose them.

3. Bring thy heart to approve the law by mortifying that distemper that ariseth against it, be it pride, self-conceit, sensuality, covetousness. Appetite that is lost to wholesome food is restored by purging the stomach; there is a preparation of mind required to receiving of moral things. So in divine things: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit.' We are prepossessed, *intus existens prohibet exitum*. Therefore bring your heart to approve God's law *removendo prohibens*, by mortifying those corruptions that rise against it.

4. When you see no other reason to yield to God's law, let his will and sovereign authority be reason enough to you. This is reason enough for God to use to his creatures: 'I am the Lord,' Lev. xviii. 4, 5, 'Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord.' This is the will of God. We owe God blind obedience. This should silence all perverse reasonings against God, both as to his laws and providence. His will is supreme, and our will must be yielded up to his.

Secondly, We come to the other branch, *and I hate every false way*. Where we have—the act, *hate*; the object, *false way*; the extent, *every*, whatsoever is contrary to the purity of God's word.

*Doct.* That it is a good note of a renewed and obedient heart to hate every false way.

This will appear from—

1. The sorts and kinds of hatred.

2. The causes.

3. The effects, or the comparison of hatred with anger.

1. From the sorts and kinds of hatred, which are reckoned up to be two—(1.) *Odium abominationis*; (2.) *Odium inimicitie*.

[1.] *Odium abominationis*, a hatred of flight and aversion, called by some *odium offensionis*, the hatred of offence. It is defined by Aquinas to be *dissonantia quedam appetitus, ad id quod apprehenditur ut repugnans*, &c. It is a repugnancy of the appetite to what is apprehended, as contrary and prejudicial to it. Such there is in the will of the regenerate, for they apprehend sin as repugnant and contrary to their renewed will; to the unregenerate it is agreeable and suitable, as draff to the appetite of a swine, or grass and hay to a bullock or horse. Now this hatred is a good sign, that cannot be found in another that is not born of God. The mortification of sin standeth principally in the hatred of it. Sin dieth when it dieth in the affections; when we look upon it as an offence to us, destructive to our happiness, and as it is truly grieved for and hated by us. The unregenerate may hate sin, materially considered; that is, the thing which is a sin; but they cannot hate it formally considered, as sin under the notion of a sin; for then they would hate all sin, *a quatenus ad omne valet consequentia*. As, for instance, thus: A covetous man

hateth prodigal and riotous courses, not as they are sinful and contrary to God's law, but as contrary to his humour and covetous will.

[2.] *Odium inimicitiae*, or the hatred of enmity. This enmity is nothing else but a willing of evil or mischief to the thing or person hated, and that out of mere displacency, dislike, or distaste of the person hated. This is a sure note; the regenerate hate their sins, in that they would have them arraigned, crucified, mortified; they would fain see the heart-blood of sin let out; therefore they oppose, watch against, and resist it as their mortal, deadly enemy. When a man pursues sin, would have the life of it, this enmity cannot be quiet; it is an active enmity, diligent in praying, mourning, watching, striving, using all holy means to get it out of our hearts, wishing, groaning, waiting, complaining, that we may get rid of it: Rom. vii. 24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' They follow their work hard.

2. The causes of this hatred. There are three causes of it:—

[1.] Spiritual knowledge and illumination, that is one cause of hatred: Ps. cxix. 104, 'Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.' When the heart is thick-set, and well fraughted with divine knowledge, a man cannot sin freely. Those that are exercised in the word of God find some consideration or other to quicken to the hatred of sin. The word is a proper instrument to destroy sin: Ps. cxix. 11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee;' Eph. vi. 13. Our affections follow our apprehensions. We come to the heart by the mind: Jer. xxxi. 19, 'After I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh.' In the word of God are the most proper reasons and arguments to kill sin.

[2.] The love of God: Ps. xevii. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord hate evil.' He doth not say forbear it, but hate it. The cause of hatred is the love of that good unto which the thing or person hated is contrary and repugnant. Love to the chiefest good is accompanied with hatred of sin, which is the chiefest evil. The one is as natural to grace as the other. The new nature hath its flight and aversation, as well as its choice and prosecution, to things that are hurtful to it, as well as good and profitable.

[3.] A filial fear of God: Prov. viii. 13, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride and arrogancy and the evil way and the froward mouth do I hate.' Certainly this is to fear God, to hate what God hateth, and as God hateth, and because God hateth. Now God hateth all sin, pride, and arrogancy; that is, sins of thought, which put us upon vain and foolish musings. And then the sins of the tongue are expressed by 'froward mouth.' Nothing so natural to us as filthy and evil speaking. And then the sins of practice, 'the evil way.' They that fear God will hate all these sins. These graces are strangers to unrenewed hearts. It argueth a divine nature when we hate when, what, and as, and because God hates it. *Eadem velle et nolle est summa amicitia.*

3. A third argument is from the comparison of hatred with anger. Unregenerate men may be angry with sin, because anger is consistent with love. One may be angry with his wife, children, friends, whom yet he tenderly affects.

[1.] Anger is a sudden and short, hatred a lasting and durable passion. Anger is *furor brevis*, curable by time; hatred incurable by the greatest tract of time. The unregenerate are displeased with their sins for a spurt, but the regenerate constantly disaffected towards them. There is, 1 John iii. 9, *σπέρμα*, there is a constant principle of resistance in the renewed heart. Passion is a casual dislike, but the new nature a rooted enmity, a habitual aversion to what is evil.

[2.] Anger is only against singulars, but hatred is *εὐς τὰ γένη*, to the whole kind. Thus we hate every wolf and every serpent, every thief and every calumniator. So is this universal; it respects sin as sin, and hateth all sin, though never so profitable and pleasant. Not upon foreign and accidental reasons; as, Esther iii. 16, Haman thought scorn to lay hands upon Mordecai alone, but sought the destruction of all the Jews. The same reasons that incline us to hate one sin, incline us to hate all sin. The violation of God's law is a contempt of God's authority, a breach of spiritual friendship; one grieveth the Spirit of God as well as the other. Every sin is hateful to God, so it is to those that are made partakers of the divine nature.

[3.] Anger may be pacified or appeased with the sufferings of the thing or person with which we are angry, but hatred is implacable; nothing can content and satisfy it but the ruin or not being of the thing and party hated. David was angry with Absalom, but loath to have him destroyed, only corrected and reduced: when he sent out forces against him, 'Deal gently with the young man.' So many deal with their sins; we reason, pray, strive, complain; but it is but an angry fit; we are displeased with them at present, but could easily be reconciled. They seek not after the death, but the restraint and imprisonment of their corruptions and lusts, that they may not disgrace or otherwise prejudice them. Nothing contents the regenerate but the killing and mortification of them; they would have them dealt with as Samuel by Agag, hewn in pieces; therefore they study revenge upon their sins: Gal. v. 24, 'Crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts.'

[4.] From the state of the regenerate. They have sin in them, but yet they hate it. Their will and consent to sin is always abated, and made remiss by a contrary principle, the grace that is in their wills: Gal. v. 17, 'The spirit lusteth against the flesh.' Sin cannot reign in them with a full and uncontrolled dominion: Rom. vi. 14, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you.'

*Use 1.* How few are there that are God's children, for how few are there that hate sin! Some love it, Job xx. 12, 13, and the love of sin is the life of it; and what is it they hate? They hate the word that discovers sin, John iii. 20; they hate God's messengers that do cry aloud against sin, and do rub their sores; as Ahab said of Micaiah, 'He doth never prophesy good of me.' They hate the magistrate that would reform them, they hate God's image in his saints; they cannot endure the lustre of holiness that shineth forth in them.

*Use 2.* Do we indeed hate sin? We had need look after this.

1. Because this is the true principle of resistance against sin. Till a man hateth it, the soul is not thoroughly resolved against it, as a man is never thoroughly gained to God till he love holiness for holiness' sake: his affections may be bribed with other considerations, but then

he is rooted in godliness. So a man is not resolved against sin till he hate it for its own sake. He may be frightened out of sin for a fit, put out of humour with it, but his heart is in again with his old lusts, till there be a detestation of sin; but when once he cometh to hate it, persuasions cannot easily move him, nor example draw him, nor difficulties compel him, to that which is evil; nor allurements, that have a great force upon us: 'Straightway he followed her.' But they cast away sin with indignation: Hosea xiv. 8, 'What have I any more to do with idols?'

2. This is a true distinctive note between good and bad. Men may forbear sin that do not hate it: they forbear it by constraint, for fear of punishment, shame, worldly ends; but regard it in their hearts. Ps. lxvi. 18. The dog hath a mind to the pail, but feareth the cudgel. But God judgeth not as man judgeth.

## SERMON CXLI.

*Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.*—VER. 129.

IN the words are two parts—

1. The dignity and excellency of God's testimonies, *thy testimonies are wonderful.*

2. The effect it had upon David's heart, *therefore doth my soul keep them.*

Accordingly two points—

*Doct. 1.* That the testimonies of God, when duly considered and thoroughly understood, will indeed be found to be wonderful.

*Doct. 2.* The wonderful excellency of the word should beget in our hearts a readiness and diligent care to keep it.

*Doct. 1.* The testimonies of God are wonderful.

1. The word in itself is wonderful, as containing truths of a sublime nature.

2. It is wonderful in its effects; as it produceth effects rare and strange.

1. In itself considered, it is sometimes called the mystery of faith, as it containeth principles of faith; and sometimes a mystery of godliness, as it containeth rules of practice. As it is a mystery of faith, there are many strange doctrines in it above the reach of man's capacity, which we could neither invent nor understand, unless we be enlightened by the Spirit of God; as that three to be one, and one to be three; God to be made man, &c.; these are riddles to a carnal mind. And as it is a rule of faith, still it offereth matter of wonder, the duty of man being represented with such exactness and comprehensiveness: Ps. cxix. 96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.'

2. What rare effects it produceth: where it is entertained it maketh a Christian become a wonder to himself and others.

[1.] A wonder to himself: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'He hath called us out of