

us.' If we did receive it with more heed, we would retain it with more constancy; lay them up, keep them choicely.

2. Affection, that is a great friend to memory. What we esteem most we best remember. *Omnia quæ curant senes meminere*—an old man will not forget where he laid his bag of gold. Delight and love will renew and revive the object upon our thoughts. Here in the text we have this truth asserted, 'I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.' Affection to truths cometh from the application. In a public edict a man will be sure to carry away what is proper to his case.

3. Meditation. We must be often viewing and meditating of what we have laid up in the memory. It availeth not to the health of the body to eat much, but to digest what is eaten. Tumultuary reading and hearing, without meditation, is like greedy swallowing much meat. When little is thought on, it doth not turn to profit. This concocteth and digesteth what we have heard. The more a thing is revolved in the mind, the deeper impression it maketh.

4. Beware of inuring the mind to vain thoughts; for this distracts it, and hindereth the impression of things upon it. The face is not seen in running waters; nor can things be written in the memory, unless the mind be close and fixed. Lead is capable of engraving, because it is firm and solid; but quicksilver, because it is fluid, will not admit it. An inconsistent, wandering mind reapeth little fruit from what is read or heard.

5. Order is a help to memory. Heads of doctrine are as cells wherein to bestow all things that are heard from the word. He that is well instructed in the principles of religion will most easily and firmly remember divine truths. *Methodus est catena memorie*, to link truths one to another, that we may consider them in their proportion.

6. Get a lively sense of what you hear or read, and you will remember it by a good token: Ps. cxix. 93, 'I will never forget thy precepts, for by them thou hast quickened me.' They that are quickened by a sermon will never forget such a sermon.

7. Holy conference. The speaking often of good things keeps them in the heart; and the keeping of them there causeth us to speak to those that are about.

8. Get the memory sanctified, as well as other faculties, and pray for the Spirit; for that faculty is corrupted as well as others.

SERMON XVIII.

Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.—VER. 17.

In the former part we heard of the virtue and excellency of the word, and therefore how much the saints desire to understand it, meditate of it, speak of it, and transfer it into their practice. Now, whosoever will resolve upon such a course, will necessarily be put upon prayer; for

mark how David's purposes and prayers are intermingled, *I will*, and *I will*; and then presently prayeth again, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.'

In this request observe—

1. It is generally expressed, together with his own relation to God, *deal bountifully with thy servant*.

2. It is particularly explained wherein he would have this bounty expressed:—

[1.] In the prorogation of his life, *that I may live*.

[2.] In the continuance of his grace, *and keep thy word*; the one in order to the other. David doth not simply pray for life, but in order to such an end; and the general request concerneth both parts, yea, rather the latter than the former, that whilst I live I may keep thy word, as counting that to be the greatest benefit or argument of God's bounty, to have a heart framed to the obedience of his will.

I might observe many things; as (1.) What a great honour it is to be God's servant. David, a great king, giveth himself this title, 'thy servant;' and Constantine counted it a greater honour to be a Christian than to be head of the empire. (2.) That all we have or expect cometh from God's bounty to us. So doth David express himself, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant;' as intimating not only the measure, but the rise and source of what he expected from God. (3.) That among all the benefits which we expect from the bounty of God, this is one of the greatest, to have an heart to 'keep his word.' (4.) God's word must not only be understood, but obeyed; for this is the meaning of keeping the word: John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them,' &c. *Hath* implieth knowledge. We must have them before we can keep them; but when we have them, we must keep them, and do what we know. But omitting all these points, which will be more fitly discussed elsewhere, I shall only point out two lessons:—

1. The cause of life, and that is God's bounty.

2. The end and scope of life; God's service.

First, The cause of life, *deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live*. Observe—

Doct. The prorogation of our lives is not the fruit of our merits, but the free grace of God.

1. Long life is in itself a blessing, and so promised, though more in the Old Testament than in the New, when eternity was more sparingly revealed. That it is promised as a blessing is evident: Prov. xxviii. 16, 'He that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.' And in the fifth commandment: Exod. xx. 12, 'That thy days may be long in the land of the living.' So Ps. xci. 16, 'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation;' not only heaven hereafter, but long life here. It is in itself a benefit, a mercy to the godly and the wicked. To the godly, that they may not be gathered till ripe; for God hath set a mark upon it: Prov. xvi. 31, 'The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in a way of righteousness.' It is some kind of resemblance of God, who is the Ancient of days. It was a title of honour, 'Paul the aged.' It giveth many advantages of glorifying God, and doing good to others. It is no small benefit to those that

employ it well. To those that are in a state of sin, the continuance of life is a mercy, as it affords them time to repent and reconcile themselves to God. And the contrary is threatened as a curse: Eccles. viii. 13, 'He shall not prolong his days, because he feareth not God.' For wicked men to have the sun go down at noon-day, and to be cut off before their preparations or expectations, and so thrown headlong into hell by a speedy death, is a great misery.

2. It is such a mercy as we have by God's gift. He is interested in it upon a double account.

[1.] There is a constant providential influence and supportation, by which we are maintained in life, and without which all creatures vanish into nothing; as the beams of the sun are no longer continued in the air than the sun shineth, or as the impress is retained no longer upon the waters than the seal is kept on. When God suspendeth his providential influence and supportation, all doth vanish and disappear: Heb. i. 3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;' as a weighty thing is held up in the air by the hand that sustaineth it, or the vessels of the house hang upon 'a nail in a sure place.' God, that made all things by his word, upholdeth all things by the same word. A word made the world, and can undo the world. So Acts xvii. 28, 'In him we live and move and have our being.' We cannot draw breath without him for a moment; as the pipe hath no breath but what the musician puts into it. We can neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor drink, without this intimate support and influence from him. The scripture sets it out by a man's holding a thing in his hand: Job xii. 10, 'In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.' Now, if God do but loosen his hand, his almighty grasp, all cometh to nothing: Job vi. 9, 'Let him loose his hand, and cut me off.' Life, and the comforts of life, depend upon God in every kind.

[2.] There is a watchful eye and care of his providence over his people, whereby their life is preserved against all the dangers wherewith it is assaulted. God taketh care of all his creatures: Ps. xxxvi. 6, 'He preserveth man and beast;' but man much more: 1 Cor. ix. 9, 'Doth God take care of oxen?' He dealeth bountifully with his enemies, but much more doth he 'preserve the feet of his saints,' 1 Sam. ii. 9. The care of his providence hath its degrees; it is more intensively exercised about things of worth and value, and most of all about the life of his saints. When Satan had a commission to exercise Job, first his person was exempted: Job i. 12, 'Upon himself put not forth thy hand;' next his life: Job ii. 6, 'Behold he is in thy hand, but save his life.' A godly man hath an invisible guard and hedge round about him. We are not sensible of it; but Satan, who is our enemy, he is sensible of it: when he would make his assault, he cannot find a gap and breach, till God open it to him. Both these notions are sufficient to possess us how much God is interested in prolonging our lives.

3. The next thing is, that we have it by the mere bounty and free grace of God. It is not from his strict remunerative justice, but his kind love and tender mercy. The air we breathe in, we have it not by merit, but by grace: Lam. iii. 22, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that

we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' The reasons are two:—

[1.] We deserve nothing at his hand.

[2.] We deserve the contrary.

(1.) We cannot merit of God: Job. xxii. 2, 'Can a man be profitable to God, as he that is wise is profitable to himself?' Job xxxv. 7, 'If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he at thy hand?' Whatever God doth for creatures, he doth it freely, because he cannot be obliged or pre-engaged by us. In innocency Adam could *impetrare*, but not *mereri*—obtain it by covenant, not challenge by desert. Therefore God conferreth as freely as he createth.

(2.) If God would deal with us upon terms of merit, we cannot give him a valuable compensation for temporal life—Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am less than the least of all thy mercies.' None of God's mercies can simply be said to be little; whatever cometh from the great God should be great in our value and esteem; as a small remembrance from a great king. Yet in comparison between the blessings, one may be said to be least, the other greatest. Temporal life with its appendages, compared with spiritual and eternal, is in the rank of his least mercies. God giveth life to the plants, to the trees, to the beasts of the field; and yet, when we and our deservings come into the balance, we are found wanting: 'I am not worthy,' &c. All our righteousness doth not deserve the air we breathe in. It is so defective, if a man were to pay for his life, it could not merit the continuance of it.

[2.] We have deserved the contrary; we have put ourselves out of God's protection by sin. Death waylaid us when we were in our mother's womb; and as soon as we were born, there was a sentence in force against us: 'Death came upon all, for that all have sinned,' Rom. v. 12; and still we continue the forfeiture, and every day provoke God to cut us off; so that it is a kind of pardoning mercy that continueth us every moment. Of this we are most sensible in case of danger and sickness, when there is but a step between us and death; for then the old bond beginneth to be put in suit, and God cometh to execute the sentence of the law; and deliverance in such a case is called forgiveness and remission, and that even to the wicked and impenitent. As Ps. lxxviii. 38, 'And he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not.' It is called a remission improperly, because it was a reprieve for the time from the temporal judgment; it was not an executing the sentence, or a destroying the sinner presently; and that not from anything in the sinner, but from God's pity over him as his creature. But now a godly man hath a true pardon renewed at such time, and he is 'loved from the grave;' for so it is in the Hebrew: Isa. xxxviii. 17, 'Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of destruction.' To be loved out of a danger, and loved out of the sickness, oh! that is a blessed thing.

Use 1. To acknowledge the Lord's goodness in these common mercies. We did not give life to ourselves, and we cannot keep it in ourselves. God made us, and God keepeth us. It was not our parents that fashioned us in the womb; they could not tell what the child would prove, male or female, beautiful or deformed. They

could not tell the number or posture of the veins, or bones, or muscles; it was all the curious workmanship of a wise God; and it is the same God that hath kept us hitherto: Isa. xlv. 3, 4, 'By me ye are borne from the belly, and carried from the womb; even to old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you,' &c. We have been supported and tenderly handled by God, as parents and nurses carry their younglings in their arms. Many times wanton children are ready to scratch the faces of those that carry them; so have we put many affronts upon him, yet to the very last doth he carry us in the arms of his providence. In infancy we were not in a capacity to know the God of our mercies, and to look after him; but nevertheless he looked after us. Afterwards we knew how to grieve him and offend him, long before how to love and serve him. Oh, how early did our naughty hearts appear! and all along how little have we done for God, 'in whom we live and move and have our being!' 'He is not far from us,' in the effects of his care and providence; but we are far from him by the distance of our thoughts and affections, by the carnal bent of our hearts. It is a good morning exercise for us humbly and thankfully to consider of his continual mercies. For God's 'compassions are new every morning,' Lam. iii. 22—as fresh as if never tired with former acts of grace, nor wearied with former offences. It is some recompense for the time of sleep; half our time passeth away, and we do not show one act of love and kindness unto God; therefore, as soon as we are awakened we should be with God, Ps. cxxxix. 18. How many are gone down to the chambers of death since the last night!

2. It quickeneth us to love and serve God, who is 'the strength of our lives, and the length of our days,' Deut. xxx. 20. Thy life is wholly in God's hands. Man cannot add a cubic to his stature, nor make one hair white or black at his own pleasure. It is the Lord's providential influence that keepeth thee alive; in point of gratitude, thou shouldst serve him: 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live.' But I may urge also, in point of hope, God's servants can best recommend themselves to his care and keeping by prayer, and expect to walk continually under divine protection. Those that provoke God continually, they may be continued by the bounty and indulgence of his providence; but yet they can look for no such thing, and in the issue it proveth to be in wrath, for their sins are more and judgments greater: it is but to 'treasure up wrath to the day of wrath.'

3. If life temporal be the fruit of God's bounty, much more life eternal: Rom. vi. 23, 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.' One is wages, the other a gift.

4. It informeth us that we may lawfully pray for life, with submission to the will of God, and that death may not come upon us suddenly, contrary to the ordinary course of nature. I was loath to make a distinct doctrine of it, yet I could not decline the giving out of this truth.

How will this stand with our desires of dissolution, and willingness to depart and to be with Christ, which certainly all Christians that believe eternity should cherish in their hearts?

To this I answer—1. By concession; that we are to train up our-

selves in an expectation of our dissolution, that we may be willing when the time is come, and God hath no more work for us to do in the world; we are to awaken our desires after the presence of Christ in heaven, to show both our faith in him and love to him. Since Christ was willing to come down to us, though it were to meet with shame and pain, why should we be loath to return to him? Jacob's spirit revived when he saw the waggons which Joseph sent to carry him. Death is the chariot to carry you to Christ, and therefore it should not be unwelcome to us.

2. By correction; though it be lawful and expedient to desire death, yet we are not anxiously to long after it till the time come; there may be sin in desiring death, as when we grow weary of life out of desperation, and the tiresomeness of the cross; and there may be grace in desiring life, that we may keep his word, longer express our gratitude to him here in the world, to mourn for sin, to promote his glory. More fully to make this evident to you, I shall show how we may desire death, how not. To answer in several propositions:—

[1.] There is a great deal of difference between serious desires and passionate expressions. The desires of the children of God are deliberate and resolved, conceived upon good grounds, after much struggling with flesh and blood to bring their hearts to it. Carnal men are loath that God should take them at their word; as he in the fable that called for death, and when he came, desired him to help him up with his burden. Alas! they do not consider what it is to be in the state of the dead, and to come unprovided and unfurnished into God's presence. We often wish ourselves in our graves; but if God should take us at our word, we would make many pauses and exceptions. Men that in their miseries call for death, when sickness cometh will run to the physician, and promise many things if they may be recovered. None more unwilling to die than those that in a passion wish for death.

[2.] We must carefully look to the grounds of these wishes and desires. First, Carnal wishes for death arise either—(1.) Out of violent anger and a pet against providence; as Jonah iv. 8, 'The sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than live.' The children of Israel murmured when they felt the famine of the wilderness: Exod. xvi. 3, 'And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt,' &c. When men are vexed with the world, they look upon death as a relief, to take vengeance upon God, to deprive him of a servant. (2.) In deep sorrow; as Job iii. 3; Elijah, 1 Kings xix. 4: 'He requested for himself that he might die; and he said, It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.' (3.) From the peevishness of fond and doting love: 2 Sam. xviii. 33, 'And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O Absalom, my son, would God I had died for thee! O Absalom, my son, my son!' like the wives of the East Indians, that burn themselves to follow their dead husbands. (4.) From distrust and despair, when the evil

is too hard to be resisted or endured: Job vii. 15, 'My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than my life.' In all these cases it is but a shameful retreat from the conflict and burden of the present life, from carnal irksomeness under the calamity, or a distrust of God's help. There may be murder in a rash wish, if it proceed from a vexed heart. These are but froward thoughts, not a sanctified resolution. Secondly, Such desires of death and dissolution as are lawful, and must be cherished, come from a good ground, from a heart crucified and deadened to the world, and set on things above: Col. iii. 1, 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.' From a competent assurance of grace: Rom. viii. 23, 'Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' From some blessed experience of heavenly comforts, having tasted the fruits, clusters of Canaan, they desire to be there. So Simeon: Luke ii. 29, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;' the eyes of his faith, as well as the eyes of his body. Now, Lord, I do but wait, as a merchantman richly laden desireth to be at his port. A great love to Christ excites desires to be with him: Phil. i. 23, 'I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better;' Phil. iii. 19, 20, 'For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' They long to see and be where he is; heart and head should be together. Weariness of sin, and a great zeal for God's glory, are powerful incentives in the saints: Rom. vii. 23, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' They would be in heaven, that they may sin no more.

[3.] You must look to the end; not have a blind notion of heaven, and look for a Turkish paradise full of ease and plenty; a carnal heaven, as the Jews looked for a carnal Messiah; but for a state of perfect union and communion with the blessed and holy God.

[4.] The manner must be regarded; it must be done with submission, Phil. i. 24; otherwise we encroach upon God's right, and would deprive him of a servant without his leave. A Christian will die and live as the Lord willeth; if it be the Lord's pleasure, a believer is satisfied with long life: Ps. xci. 16, 'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation;' he will 'wait till the change come,' when God shall give him a discharge by his own immediate hand, or by enemies. God knoweth how to choose the fittest time, otherwise we know not what we ask.

Secondly, Now let me speak of the scope of our lives. David simply doth not desire life, but in order to service. The point is—

That if we desire long life, we should desire it to glorify God by obedience to his word.

Let me give you some instances, then reasons.

1. Instances: Ps. cxviii. 17, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' This was David's hope in the prolongation of life, that he should have farther opportunity to honour God; and this argument he urgeth to God when he prayeth for life: Ps. vi. 5, 'For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who

shall give thee thanks?' It would be better for him to be with God; but then the life is worth the having, when the extolling of Christ is the main scope at which we aim. So Paul: Phil. i. 20, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death,' &c. Paul was in some hesitation which he should choose, life or death; and he determineth of both as God might be magnified by either of them, and so was at a point of indifference. If God should give him his option or wish, he would give the case back again to God, to determine as it might be most for his service and glory. He was not swayed by any low and base motives of contentment in the world, or any low and creature enjoyments; these are contemptible things to come into the balance with everlasting glory. It was only his service in the gospel, and the public good of the church, that made the case doubtful.

Reas. 1. This is the perfection of our lives, and that which maketh it to be life indeed. Communion with God is the vitality of it, without which we are rather dead than alive. Life natural we have in common with the beasts and plants; but in keeping the word, we live the life of God: Eph. iv. 18, 'Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God.' To natural men it is a gloomy thing; but to believers this is the life of life, and that which is the joy of their hearts. To increase in stature, and to grow bulky, that is the life of plants; the greatest and biggest of the kind are most perfect. To live and enjoy pleasures without remorse, that is the perfection and life of beasts, that have no conscience, that shall not be called to an account. To gratify present interests, and to be able to turn and wind worldly affairs, that is the life of carnal men, that have no sense of eternity. But the perfection of the life of man as a reasonable creature is to measure our actions by God's word, and to refer them to his glory.

Reas. 2. It is the end of our lives that God may be served: 'All things are by him, and through him, and to him,' Rom. xi. 36; angels, men, beasts, inanimate creatures. He expects more from men than from beasts, and from saints than from men; and therefore life by them is not to be desired and loved but for this end: Rom. xiv. 6-8, 'He that regardeth a day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord eateth not, and giveth God thanks: for none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.'

Use 1. For reproof. Every man desireth life. The whole world would all and every one of them put up this request to God, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live;' but there is not one man in a hundred that considereth why he should live. Some would live to please the flesh, and to wallow in the delights of the present world; a brutish wish! An heathen could say, he doth not deserve the name of a man that would spend his time in pleasure one day. These would not leave their husks and their hog trough. This was

not David's desire, but that he might keep the law, and faithfully worship God.

Some, again, desire to see their children well bestowed, or to free their estate from incumbrance; this is distrust, as if we did not leave a God behind us, who hath promised to be a father of the fatherless, and to take care of our little ones. Can we venture ourselves in God's hands, and can we not venture our families with him, whose goodness extendeth to all his creatures? Some are loath to leave such as are dear to them, wife and children and friends; and is not God better, and Christ better? These must be loved in God and after God. We set friends in the place of God and Christ, when we can be content to be absent longer from God merely upon this ground, because we are loath to be separated from our friends. 'He that loveth father and mother, and husband and wife, more than me, is not worthy of me,' saith Christ. Oh, how far are these from any Christian affection! Surely to a believer it is a piece of self-denial to be kept out of heaven longer; therefore it must be sweetened by some valuable compensation; something there must be to calm the mind contentedly to spare the enjoyment of it for a while. Now, next to the good pleasure of God, which is the reason of reasons, there is some benefit which we pitch upon. Nothing is worthy to be compared but our service, if God may have glory, if our lives may do good. A gracious heart must be satisfied with gracious reasons. Some may desire life, because they are dismayed with the terrors of death; but this is unbelief. Hath not Christ delivered us not only from the hurt of death, but the fear of death? Heb. ii. 14, 'And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' Where is your faith? 'Death is yours,' 1 Cor. iii. 22. It is a sin simply to desire life; but look to the causes and ends of it.

Use 2. It directeth us how to dispose of our lives. For this end take a few considerations.

[1.] This life is not to be valued but by opportunities of service to God. It is not who liveth most plentifully, but most serviceably to God's glory: Acts xiii. 36, 'David, after he had served his generation, by the will of God he fell asleep.' Every one was made to serve God in his generation, and hath his office and use as an instrument of divine providence, from the king to the peasant. We are undone if the creatures, made to serve us, should fail in their season. We were made to serve God in our season.

[2.] This service is determined by the course of God's providence. He is the great master of the scenes, that appointeth us what part to act, and sets to every man his calling and state of life. John xvii. 4, our Saviour saith, 'I have finished the work thou hast given me to do.' We must not be our own carvers, prescribe to God at what rate we will be maintained, nor what kind of work we will perform. Those that are free may covenant with you, and make their bargain, what kind of service they will undertake; but we are at God's absolute dispose, to be used as vessels of honour or dishonour, as fitted and disposed.

[3.] In the management of this work we must measure our actions by God's word, and refer them to his glory. By God's word: Ps.

cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.' His glory: Col. iii. 17, 'And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.'

[4.] Death shall not prevent us, till we have ended our appointed service. As long as God hath work for us to do, he will maintain life and strength: Gal. i. 15, 'Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace.' The decree taketh date from the womb. God frames parts and temper; God rocketh us in our cradles, taketh care of us in our infancy, and all the turns of our lives.

[5.] If God will use us to a great age, we must be content. You may adorn your profession, and bring forth fruit in old age. The longest life is too short to honour God: Ps. xcii. 13, 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.' We should count it our happiness to be still used, and that we are fully rewarded by being employed in further service.

[6.] Life must be willingly laid down when we cannot keep it but with forsaking the word: Luke xiv. 26, 'If any man come unto me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'

[7.] The life of eternity must be subordinate to this great end, the glory of God; our desire of it must be, that we may be to the praise of God.

SERMON XIX.

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.—VER. 18.

THE heathens thought that man had not a power over his life, but a power over his actions—*Quod vivamus, Deorum munus est; quod bene vivamus, nostrum.* But the Psalmist acknowledgeth God in both: 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy law;' that he could not live nor keep the word without God's grace. This latter he amplifieth in this verse, that he was so far from keeping it, that he could not so much as know it savingly and practically without divine grace: 'Lord, open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' Here is—

1. A request, 'open thou mine eyes.'

2. The reason, from the end, benefit, and fruit of it, 'that I may,' or then I shall, 'behold wondrous things out of thy law.'

In which reason is intimated the necessity of divine illumination, and then the profit of it.

1. The necessity, *that I may behold, &c.*—i.e., otherwise I cannot.

2. The profit, *then I shall behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

Doct. 1. That we need that God should open our eyes, if we would have a right understanding of his word.

1. What is meant by opening the eyes.

2. The necessity of such a work in order to a right understanding of the word of God.

First, What is meant by opening the eyes. Before I come to the particular explication of the terms, let me premise two observations.

1. The saints do not complain of the obscurity of the law, but of their own blindness. The Psalmist doth not say, 'Lord, make a plainer law,' but, 'Lord, open mine eyes.' Blind men might as well complain of God that he doth not make a sun whereby they might see. The word is 'A light that shineth in a dark place,' 2 Peter i. 19. There is no want of light in the scripture, but there is a veil of darkness upon our hearts; so that if in this clear light we cannot see, the defect is not in the word, but in ourselves.

2. The light which they beg is not anything besides the word. When God is said to enlighten us, it is not that we should expect new revelations, but that we may see the wonders in his word, or get a clear sight of what is already revealed. Those that vent their own dreams under the name of the Spirit and divine light, they do not give you *mysteria*, but *monstra*, portentous opinions; not show you the wondrous things of God's law, but the prodigies of their own brain; unhappy abortives, that die as soon as they come to light: Isa. viii. 20, 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' The light which we have is not without the word, but by the word.

Now to the phrase. The Hebrew signifieth 'unveil mine eyes.' There is a double work—negative and positive: there is a taking away the veil, and an infusion of light. Paul's cure of his natural blindness is a fit emblem of our cure of spiritual blindness: Acts ix. 18, 'Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith.' First the scales fall from our eyes, and then we receive sight.

1. There is a taking away the veil before we can have a true discerning of the mysteries that are revealed in the word of God: 2 Cor. iii. 14, 15, the apostle, speaking of the Jews, saith, 'But their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away, in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ: but even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts.' Now this veil is diverse.

[1.] The veil of ignorance. Though man hath reason, and is capable of understanding the sense and importance of the words that are used about the mysteries of godliness, yea, and the matter too, yet he gets not the saving knowledge of them by his natural abilities. There is a grammatical knowledge and a spiritual knowledge; a man may know things grammatically and literally that is ignorant of them spiritually; as a child may read the letters and words that doth not conceive of the sense. So a man may know what is said concerning God and Christ, and sin and grace, the vanity of the creature, the excellency of heaven, and have yet no saving knowledge of these things; and therefore the scripture useth the expression that they oversee in seeing; as Acts xxviii. 26, 'Hearing, ye shall hear, and not understand; seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive.' Though truths are never so plainly delivered, never so powerfully pressed, and though they are capable to understand

the words, yet they do not take the truth into their hearts, so as to profit by it. So Deut. xxix. 2-4, 'Ye have seen,' yet 'ye have not an heart to see.' Most will declaim against the vanity of the creature and evil of sin; but they do not see with an affective heart-piercing light; they have on them the veil of spiritual ignorance.

[2.] The veil of carnal knowledge and wisdom, that puffeth up, 1 Cor. viii. 1, 2, by which, seeing not, we think we see. This is a great hindrance to the entertaining of the word. So Christ telleth the Pharisees, who were conceited of their own knowledge, John ix. 39, 'For judgment am I come into this world, that they which see not might see, and they which see might be made blind.' The Pharisees were the rabbis of the age, the most seeing and learned men of that time. Carnal men are puffed up with a conceit of their own abilities, and so are obstructed by them from profiting by the gospel.

[3.] The veil of prejudice and corrupt affections. The passions of the mind, love and fear, desire and anger, hinder us from judging aright in the things of God. Our hearts are overcast with strong affections to the world, and so cannot clearly judge either of practical truths or of the controversies of the age. Not of practical truths: When Christ had taught that they 'could not serve God and mammon,' it is said, Luke xvi. 14, 'And the Pharisees, that were covetous, derided him.' Holy mortifying truths are displeasing to a carnal ear, though they be represented with never so much evidence. How will men distinguish themselves out of their duty! They shift, and stretch, and turn and wind hither and thither, and prove truth to be no truth, rather than part with their lusts. So present truths, as the apostle calls them, 2 Peter i. 12, when the dust of interest is raised, are not discerned. The orthodoxy of the world is usually an age too short: 2 Cor. iv. 4, 'The god of this world hath blinded their eyes.'

[4.] The veil of carnal sense: 2 Peter i. 9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.' There are so many mists and clouds in the lower world, that men cannot outsee time, and without the prospective of faith have a sight of eternity. Nature is short-sighted, so inured to present things that we receive no light concerning things to come. These are the scales that are upon our eyes.

2. There is an infusion of light, without which men of excellent wit and sharp understanding in other things are stark blind in the things of God. What this light is will appear by the degrees of knowledge and the uses of this light.

[1.] The degrees of knowledge.

(1.) In some there is a simple nescience, both of terms or notions, and things, as in those that have not a revelation, or have not regarded it when the revelation is made. As the Gentiles, that have not a revelation: Eph. iv. 18, 'Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' Or rude and ignorant Christians, that have not the advantage of education, so as to understand the notions in which the doctrine of God is propounded: Isa. xxviii. 9, 10, 'Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts: for precept must be upon precept, precept upon pre-

cept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.' So sottish and brutish are some, that a man had need teach them as he teacheth little children, letter after letter, and line after line, little good done.

(2.) In others there is a grammatical knowledge but not a spiritual, a repeating things by rote, a talking of all that a Christian enjoyeth.

(3.) Besides the grammatical knowledge, there is a dogmatical knowledge, when the truths of the word are not only understood, but begin to settle into an opinion that we bustle for in the world. An opinionative receiving of the truth is different from a saving receiving of the truth. Many are orthodox, or have so much judgment and knowledge as to hold the truth strictly, but the heart is not possessed with the life and power of it. Those are intended in Rom. ii. 20, 'An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which have the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.' And such are described 2 Tim. iii. 8, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' It is not to be imagined that this is always in design, though many times carnal men swim with the stream, and take up with the opinions that are current in their age; but also out of conviction of judgment; there is somewhat of conscience in it. A sound judgment is a different thing from a sound heart. The truths of God have great evidence with them; and therefore a rational man, being helped with some common work of the Spirit, may close with them, though they have no experience of the power and prevailing influence of them.

(4.) Besides this dogmatical knowledge, by which we see round about the compass of truths revealed in the word, there is a gracious illumination when men are taught so as drawn to God, John vi. 44, 45, and they do so understand Christ's doctrine as to apply and make a right use of it; such a knowledge as is called not only sight, but taste: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' and a feeling of what we understand: Phil. i. 9, 'And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.' This sense and experimental knowledge is that which the saints seek after.

[2.] The uses of this spiritual illumination.

(1.) To give us a clear sight of the truths of God.

(2.) An applicative sight.

(3.) An affective sight.

(4.) A transforming sight.

(5.) Such a sense of the truth as is prevalent over lusts and interests.

(1.) A clear sight of the truths of God. Others have but an hear-say knowledge, gathered out of books and sermons, and the common report which is made of Christ; but he that is divinely enlightened drinks of the fountain, and so his draught is more fresh and sweet. They do not talk of things by rote after others, but it is written upon their hearts: Heb. viii. 10, 'I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts;' and so groweth more intimate and satisfactory, and moving upon them.

(2.) An applicative sight; not only knowledge, but prudence: Prov.

viii. 12, 'I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence.' Wisdom is the knowledge of principles; prudence is an ability to apply them to our comfort and use, that we may know it for our good, Job v. 28. Many are right in generals; but the Spirit doth not only reveal the truths of the gospel, but applieth those truths to awaken the conscience that was asleep in sin. Many men that are unrenewed may be stored with general truths concerning the misery of man, redemption by Christ, the privileges of a Christian; but they do not reflect the light of these truths upon themselves, so as to consider their own case; and so it serveth rather for matter of opinion and discourse than for life and conversation; it is not directive.

(3.) An affective sight: Prov. ii. 10, 'When wisdom entereth upon thy heart,' which is the seat of affections, it stirs up in the soul answerable motions to every truth; whereas when truths rest in empty barren notions, without feeling and an answerable touch upon the heart, the knowledge of them is like a winter's sun, that shineth, but warmeth not; the misery of man is not affective, and doctrines of redemption by Christ are apprehended without any joy and relish.

(4.) A transforming sight: 2 Cor. iii. 18, 'We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' It is a light that is both directive and persuasive. A man may hear the gospel *νομικῶς*, when it is only known as a rule, not as a means to convey the Spirit; whereas a believer hears the law *εὐαγγελικῶς*. The apostle preferreth the gospel above the law in the afore-mentioned place, for comfortableness, perspicuity, efficacy, &c.

(5.) It is a light that prevaieth over our lusts and interest, such a light as hath fire in it to destroy lusts: 1 John ii. 3, 4, 'He that saith I know him, and doth not keep his commandments, is a liar.' A true knowledge and sight of God is able to bridle lusts and purify the conscience. Therefore it is said, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God,' 3 John 11; hath not a true sight, whatever speculations he may have about the nature of God. Other light doth not check and control vicious desires; reason is not restored to its dominion: Rom. i. 18, the reputed wise men of the world 'held the truth in unrighteousness.' Truth may talk its fill, but can do nothing; as a man that is bound hand and foot may rave and evaporate his passions, but cannot relieve himself from the oppressor or the force that he is under.

Secondly, Reasons that show the necessity of this work.

1. Spiritual blindness is natural to us, as that man that was blind from his birth, John ix. 1. We are not all born blind in body, but all in mind. By tasting the tree of knowledge, all Adam's sons have lost their knowledge. Satan hath brought a greater shame upon us than Nahash the Ammonite would have brought upon the men of Jabesh-Gilead in putting out their right eyes. The eye of the soul is put out, so as we cannot see the light that shineth in the word. By the fall we lost the true and perfect light of reason, but retain the pride of reason. It is no small part of our blindness that we cannot endure to hear of it: Rev. iii. 17, 'Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art

wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' Man desireth to be thought sinful rather than weak, and will sooner own a wickedness in morals than a weakness in intellectuals. Men are dishonest out of choice, and therefore think there is more of liberty and bravery in it; but to be simple argueth imperfection; Job xi. 12, 'Vain man would be accounted wise, though man be born like a wild-ass's colt;' not only for untamedness and affectation of liberty, but for rudeness and grossness of conceit; yet man would be accounted wise. The Pharisees took it ill that Christ charged them with blindness: John ix. 40, 'Are we blind also?' We all affect the reputation of wisdom, more than the reality; that is the reason why we are so touchy in point of error; we can easier brook a sin reprov'd than an error taxed. Till we have spiritual eye-salve, we do not know it, and will not hear of this blindness, Rev. iii. 17. It is a degree of spiritual knowledge to know that we know nothing.

2. Observe how much spiritual blindness is worse than bodily. Those that are under bodily blindness are glad of a remedy, glad of a guide.

[1.] Glad of a remedy. How feelingly doth that man speak, Mark x. 51, 'What wouldst thou have me to do? Lord, that mine eyes may be opened.' Those that are blind spiritually are not for a remedy; not only ignorant, but unteachable; and so their blindness groweth upon them; to their natural, there is an adventitious blindness. If we cannot keep out the light, we rage against it.

[2.] Glad of a guide; as Elymas the sorcerer, when he was stricken blind, looked about for somebody to lead him by the hand, Acts xiii. 11. But the blind world cannot endure to be directed, or 'the blind lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch.' He that prophesieth of strong wine is the teacher of this people, saith the prophet. Men love those that gratify their lusts and humours: let one come soundly, and declare the counsel and will of God to them, he is distasted.

3. We cannot help ourselves out of this misery without God's help. Our incapacity is best understood by opening that noted place, 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things that are of God, for they are folly to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' Let us a little open that place: *ἄνθρωπος ψυχικός*, 'the souly man,' that is, a man considered in his pure naturals. Jude 19; *ψυχικοί, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες*, 'sensual, having not the Spirit.' However, he useth the best word by which a natural man can be described; he doth not say *σάρκικοι*, not only those that are brutish and depraved by vicious habits, but take nature in its excellency, soul-light in its highest splendour and perfection, though the man be not absolutely given up to vile affections. Well, it is said of him that he neither doth nor can receive the things of God, *οὐ δέχεται*, and *οὐ δύναται γινῶναι*. The *τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος*, 'the things of the Spirit,' are such truths as depend upon mere revelation, and are above the reach and knowledge of nature. There are *τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, 'things of God,' that may be known by a natural light: Rom. i. 19, 'That which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them;' but *τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος*, things revealed in the word, though a natural man be able to understand the phrases

and sentences, and be able to discourse of them, yet he wanteth faith, and a spiritual sense and relish of them; they are folly to him. It noteth the utter contempt of spiritual things by a carnal heart, who looketh upon redemption by Christ crucified, with the consequent benefits, as things frivolous and vain. Paul at Athens was accounted 'a babbler,' Acts xvii. 18. The same disposition is still in natural men; for though these truths, by the prescription and consent of many ages, have now obtained veneration and credit, yet carefully to observe them, to live to the tenor of them, whatever hazards and inconveniences we are exposed to in the world, is still counted foolish. Mark, for greater emphasis, it is *μωρία*, folly, as carnal wisdom is *ἔχθρα*, 'enmity against God,' Rom. viii. 7. 'Neither can he know them.' It is out of sloth and opposition and moral impotency; as it is said, Rom. viii. 7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.' Reason is a short and defective light, not only actually ignorant, but unable to conceive of them. It is not only through negligence he doth not, but through weakness he cannot. Take mere nature in itself, and, like plants neglected, it soon runs wild; as the nations barbarous and not polished with arts and civility have more of the beast than the man in them: Jude 10, 'But what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.' Suppose they use the spectacles of art, and the natural light of reason be helped by industry and learning, yet how erroneous in things of religion: Rom. i. 21, 'When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened,' &c. The most civil nations were most foolish in matters of worship; and many placed fevers, and human passions, and every paltry thing, among the gods. The Scythians worshipped thunder, the Persians the sun; the most stupid and blockish nations seemed most wise in the choice of their gods; others were given up to more gross superstitions. All the arts in the world could not fully repair the ruins of the fall. The heathens invented logic for polishing reason; grammar and rhetoric for language; for government, and as a help to human society, laws; for bodily necessities, physic; for mollifying and charming the passions, so far as concerned human conversation, ethics; for families and private societies, economics: but for the soul and religious concerns, how blind and foolish were they! Nay, go higher. Suppose, besides the spectacles of art, nature be furnished with the glass of the word; yet John i. 5, 'The light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.' We see how great scholars are defective in the most useful and practical points. Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, was ignorant of regeneration, John iii. 10. They always err in one point or another. And in these things of moment, if they get an opinion and a dogmatical faith, and have an exact model and frame of truth, yet as long as they are carnal and unregenerate, how much doth a plain godly Christian exceed them in lively affection and serious practice! And whilst they are disputing of the natures and offices of Christ, and the nature of justification and sanctification, others enjoy what they speak of, and have a greater relish and savour and power of these truths upon their hearts. For ever it was a truth, and ever will be, Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of

the flesh ; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.' Nature can go no farther than itself, than a fleshly inclination moveth it. They have not this transforming light, and that sense of religion which is prevalent over lusts and worldly interests.

The next reason is, because they must be 'spiritually discerned;' that is, to know them inwardly, thoroughly, and with some relish and savour; there must be a higher light, there must be a cognation and proportion between the object and the faculty. Divine things must be seen by a divine light, and spiritual things by a spiritual light. Sense, which is the light of beasts, cannot trace the workings or flights of reason in her contemplations. We cannot see a soul or an angel by the light of a candle ; so fleshly wisdom cannot judge of divine things. The object must be not only revealed, but we must have an answerable light ; so that when you have done all, you must say, 'How can I understand without an interpreter?' Acts viii. 31. And this interpreter must be the Spirit of God—*Ejus est interpretari, ejus est condere*. To discern, so as to make a right judgment and estimate of things, dependeth upon God's help.

4. When this blindness is in part cured, yet still we need that God should open our eyes to the very last. We know nothing as we ought to know. David, a regenerate man, and well instructed, prayeth to have his eyes opened ; for we need more light every day : Luke xxiv. 45, 'Then opened he their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures.' Christ first opened the scriptures, then he opened their understandings.

Use 1. To show us the reason why the word prevaileth so little when it is preached with power and evidence ; their eyes are not opened : Isa. liii. 1, 'Who hath believed our report ; and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ?' No teaching will prevail till we are taught of God.

Use 2. What need we have to consult with God, whenever we make use of the word, in reading, hearing, study. In reading, when thou openest the Bible to read, say, 'Lord, open mine eyes.' When thou hearest, beg a sight of the truth, and how to apply it for thy comfort. *Hæc audiunt quasi somniantes*, Luther saith of the most—in seeing they see not, in hearing they hear not. There was a fountain by Hagar, but she could not see it : Gen. xxi. 19, 'God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad to drink.' So for study ; it is dangerous to set upon the study of divine things in the strength of wit and human helps. Men go forth in the strength of their own parts, or lean upon the judgment of writers, and so are left in darkness and confusion. We would sooner come to the decision of a truth if we would go to God, and desire him to rend the veil of prejudices and interests.

Use 3. Is to press us to seek after this blessing, the opening of the eyes. Magnify the creating power of God : 2 Cor. iv. 6, 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Make use of Christ : Col. ii. 3, 'In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ;' beg it earnestly of him. The apostle prayeth, Eph. i. 17, 18, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may 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,' &c. Yea,

mourn for it in cases of dubious anxiety. John wept when the book of the seven seals was not opened, Rev. v. 4. Mourn over your ignorance ; refer all to practice: John vii. 17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' Wait for light in the use of means, with a simple, docile, sincere, humble mind : Ps. xxv. 9, 'The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.'

Doct. 2. Those whose eyes are opened by God, they see wondrous things in his word, more than ever they thought.

'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' *Law* is not taken strictly for the covenant of works, nor for the decalogue as a rule of life ; but more generally for the whole word of God, which is full of wonders, or high and heavenly mysteries. In the decalogue or moral law there is wonderful purity, when we get a spiritual sense of it : Ps. cxix. 96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection ; but thy commandments are exceeding broad ;' and Ps. xix. 7, 8, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul : the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple : the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' A wonderful equity : Rom. vii. 12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good.' A marvellous wisdom : Deut. iv. 6, 'Keep therefore, and do them ; for this is your wisdom and 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.' In the whole word of God, the harmony and correspondence between all the parts, how the mystery grew from a dark revelation to clearer, is admirable. In the gospel, every article of faith is a mystery to be wondered at. The person of Christ : 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit,' &c. A virgin conceiveth, the Word is made flesh, the redemption and reconciliation of mankind, are the wonderful works of the Lord's grace. It is 'the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery,' 1 Cor. ii. 7. 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory ;' and it is called the 'mystery hidden from ages,' Eph. iii. 9. The glory of heaven is admirable : Eph. i. 18, 'The riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints in light.' That a clod of earth should be made an heir of heaven, deserves the highest wonder. All these are mysteries. So the wonderful effects of the word in convincing sinners : 1 Cor. xiv. 25, 'Thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest ; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' Heb. iv. 12 : 'The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' It is a searching and discovering word : John iv. 29, 'See a man that hath told me all that ever I did.' In changing sinners : 1 Peter ii. 9, 'That ye may show forth the praises of him that hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' Peter's getting out of prison was nothing to it. In comforting, every grace is a mystery, to depend upon what we see not, to be as a rock in the midst of a storm. 'Dying, yet we live ; as poor,

yet making many rich.' 2 Cor. vi. 9, 10. All the operations of the Spirit are wonderful: 1 Peter i. 8, 'Joy unspeakable and full of glory;' Phil. iv. 7, 'Peace that passeth all understanding;' Rom. viii. 26, 'Groans that cannot be uttered.'

And now, what divine illumination contributeth to the sight of these wonders?

1. It revealeth the truth of them, which otherwise is incomprehensible to the flesh: Mat. xvi. 17, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.' Without this, no certain knowledge of Christ's person and office.

2. It more intimately acquainteth us with them: Mat. xiii. 11, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; to others it is not given.' All God's works are full of wonder, yet blind men cannot see them, though the sun shineth never so clearly. A beautiful room into which there is but a crevice, when we lay our eye close to it, we see it.

Use 1. From hence we may learn, that it is one degree of profit to see so much in the word of God as to admire it; either at the mysteries of godliness or ungodliness, which the word discovereth, ὁ βάθος. They that are most enlightened have most cause to wonder; for then they find truths which exceed all common reason, such as do not come into the minds of others, or, if they do, they seem incredible.

Use 2 is to encourage us to study the word; the wonders of God's works are many, but the wonders of his word greater. *Quot articuli, tot miracula*, the Papists say of Aquinas's *Sums*; but more truly may it be said of the word of God; all the doctrines of the word are a continued mystery. After man was fallen, it came not into the head of any creature how to satisfy justice, to make up the breach. Oh, the folly of them that despise the word, as curious wits and worldlings do, as if it were a mean knowledge in comparison of what may be acquired from Aristotle and Plato or the politicians of the world! If there be in it some rudiments, something common with other writings, yet there are greater things than these: 'The deep things of God,' 1 Cor. ii. 11; never such a revelation made to the world. And worldly men, that despise this study of the word, they despise that which angels wonder at, Eph. iii. 10, and 'desire to pry into,' 1 Peter i. 12, and make great matters of trifles. The Sun of righteousness, is not he worth the beholding?

Use 3. Let us cease wondering at worldly things, great places, honours, heaps of wealth, fair buildings, as the disciples, Mark xiii. 1, 'Master, see what manner of stones and buildings are here!' It is said of Christ, Col. ii. 9, 'In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily!' Fulness of the Godhead! oh, wonderful! The people wondered at that mass of money provided by David to build God a house, 1 Chron. xxix. 7, 8. Oh! but the unsearchable riches of grace, the rare plot of man's redemption, μέγα μυστήριον, how wonderful! All in and about Christ is rare. His name is Wonderful. All the promises of God are τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, 'exceeding great and precious promises,' 2 Peter i. 4; they transcend man's capacity. It condemneth the stupidity of them that are nothing moved or taken with things so great and wonderful—great in themselves, and should be precious to us.

SERMON XX.

I am a stranger in the earth : hide not thy commandments from me.—VER. 19.

IN the 18th verse David had begged divine illumination, ‘Open mine eyes,’ &c. He doth not desire God to make a plainer law, but to give him a clearer sight. That request he backs with three reasons in the following verses:—

1. His condition in the world, ‘I am a stranger in the earth.’ Strangers in a foreign country need guidance and direction.

2. His earnest affection to the word, ver. 20, ‘My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.’ David had an earnest longing to be acquainted more with the will of God.

3. God’s judgments upon those that condemn the word, ‘Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.’ It is dangerous to walk beside the rule: Rom. i. 18, ‘The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,’ &c. God hath owned both tables; he hath punished ungodliness, a violation of the first table; and unrighteousness, a violation of the second table. Here God hath declared how he will own his name, therefore he begs illumination.

Now, the text giveth you this first reason, his condition in the world.

Here observe two things:—

1. A representation of his case, *I am a stranger upon earth.*

2. His request to God, *hide not thy commandments from me.*

First, A representation of his case with respect to his quality,—what he was, a *stranger*; and the place where, upon *earth*; not in heaven, he was familiar there. And how a stranger upon earth, in point of *happiness*,—I do not find here that which satisfieth my soul; he had his home, his rest elsewhere; but not in point of *service*, for he had much work to do.

Doct. God’s children are strangers upon earth, and do so account themselves.

They live here as others do, but they are not at home; their hearts are above, they do not take up their rest here; they are strangers, and account themselves to be so when they have most of worldly conveniences.

First, To open it. Sometimes it may be understood in a literal sense, and sometimes in a moral.

(1.) Sometimes in a literal sense. Thus the patriarchs, that had a wandering life, and were forced to flit from place to place without any certain abode, they confessed themselves to be strangers. Jacob saith, Gen. xlvii. 9, ‘Few and evil have the years of my life been.’ (2.) Morally also, and more generally, it is true of the saints, they are strangers. In some sense it is true of good and bad. We are all travelling into another world, and are every day nearer to eternity. As in a ship, whether men sleep or wake, stand or sit, whether they think of it, yea or nay, the voyage still goes onward. So, whatever we think, and whatever we do, we hasten towards death. In this sense even

wicked men may be strangers and pilgrims in condition, though not in affection. All men in condition, will they nill they, must into the other world, as they yield to the decays of nature, and every day they are a step nearer to their long home. Heathens have had a sense of this notion. Saith one of them, *Ex hac vita discedo tanquam ex hospitio, non tanquam ex domo*—I go out of this life as out of an inn. Here we are but passengers, not inhabitants to dwell. But now to be strangers and pilgrims in affection, that is proper to the children of God; Heb. xi. 13–15, it is made the fruit of their faith; ‘Because they were persuaded of the promises, therefore they confessed themselves pilgrims and strangers on earth.’ The voice of nature saith, It is good to be here; let God do with heaven what he pleaseth. Natural men are contented with their present portion, and cannot endure to think of change; and therefore, though they are travelling to eternity, yet they are not pilgrims in affection. But now God’s children are so in condition and in affection too; they count heaven their home, and the world to be a strange place. They are pilgrims in affection in a threefold regard:—

1. Because they are most sensible of their frailty. The frailty of the present life is a common lesson, but not easily believed. None have such a sense of it upon their hearts as they that are taught by God: Ps. xc. 12, ‘So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;’ and, ‘Teach me to know how frail I am,’ saith David. Worldly men, though they are of this opinion, and cannot deny it, yet they do not consider it; in seeing they see not; their minds are taken up with other things; they are not sensible.

2. The term is proper to the children of God, because they are unsatisfied with their present estate; they would not abide here for ever if God would give them leave. Wicked men are pilgrims against their will; but saints are ever looking for, longing for, groaning for a better estate: Rom. viii. 23, ‘We which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.’ They desire and ‘groan to be clothed upon,’ 2 Cor. v. 2.

3. The notion is most proper to them, because they have an interest in a better inheritance. Wicked men are sure to go out of the world, but they are not sure to go to heaven. Now, the children of God they know there is an inheritance kept for them; here they have the right, but there they shall have the possession, 1 John iii. 1. So that well might I form the point thus: That godly men are, and count themselves to be, strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Others are in a journey, but they are not sensible of it, and they have no home to go to, and no desire to part with the world.

Now take some instances of this. That this is proper to God’s children to count the world a strange place, and heaven to be their home. Those that had the best right and the greatest possessions here, they will do so; those that had the greatest right: Heb. xi. 9, ‘Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country.’ What right could there be greater than that which was demised and made over to him by God? Yet in the land of promise he lived as in a strange place. So David here, and in other places, that had so ample

a possession ; he was king over an opulent and flourishing kingdom ; yet, Ps. xxxix. 12, 'I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.' Not only he that was a wandering partridge, and flitted up and down ; but David that was settled in a throne, he that was so powerful and victorious a prince. But you will say, Possibly David might speak thus when he was chased like a flea upon the mountains, when he was hunted to and fro like a partridge. No ; but when he had peace, and was fully settled in the throne ; when he could offer so many cart-loads of gold and silver, 2 Chron. xxix. 13 ; then he doth acknowledge, 'Lord, I am a stranger.' Jesus Christ, who was Lord paramount, he tells us, 'I am not of this world,' John xvii. 14. He was 'a stranger to his brethren, and an alien among his mother's children,' Ps. lxxix. 8. He that was Lord of all had neither house nor home. He passed through the world to sanctify it for a place of service ; but his heart and constant residence was not here, to fix it as in a place of rest. And so all that are Christ's have the spirit of Christ, and say, as David in the text, 'I am a stranger upon earth.' We do not dwell upon earth, but only pass through it.

But why do the children of God count themselves to be strangers here ?

1. They are born elsewhere. Everything tends to the place of their original, as men love their native soil ; things bred in the water return thither ; inanimate things tend to their centre ; a stone will fall to the ground, though it be broken in pieces with the fall ; wind that is imprisoned in the bowels of the earth raiseth terrible convulsions and earthquakes until it get up to its own place. All things seek to return thither from whence they came. And so grace, which came from heaven, it carrieth the soul thither again : 'Jerusalem from above is the mother of us all.' Heaven is our native country, and therefore thither is the tendency and aim of the gracious soul that is born from above. It is very notable that contempt of the world is usually made the fruit of our regeneration : 1 John v. 4, 'Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world ;' and 2 Peter i. 4, 'Made partakers of the divine nature, that we might escape the corruptions of the world through lust.' There is somewhat of God in it then ; and that which comes from God carries the soul thither where God is. In the new nature there is a strong inclination which disposeth us to look after another world ; therefore it is said, 'Begotten to a lively hope,' 1 Peter i. 3. As soon as we are made children, we begin to look after a child's portion. There is another aim when we are born again ; then the heart is carried out to God.

2. There lies their inheritance : Eph. i. 3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.' Why ! he hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in earthly places. Why is it said only 'in heavenly places' ? There was their beginning, and there is their accomplishment. The main thing Christ aimed at was that we might be translated to heavenly places. Christ will set us high enough, and therefore he will not give us our portion in the world ; that is an unquiet place. Here we are not out of gunshot and harm's way. He would not give it us in an earthly paradise ; there Adam enjoyed God among beasts. He would give it us in the most glorious manner, that

we might enjoy God among the angels. The world is not a fit place. Here God will show his bounty to all his children. It is a common inn, where sons and bastards are entertained; a place of trial, not of recompense; God's footstool, and not his throne, Isa. lxvi. 1. The world is Satan's walk, the devil's circuit: 'Whence comest thou? From compassing the earth,' Job i. A place defiled with sin, Isa. xxiv. 5; 'given to the children of men,' Ps. cxv. 16. Here God will show his bounty to all his creatures, to beasts, and to all kinds of men. It is sometimes the slaughter-house and shambles of the saints: they are 'slain upon earth,' Rev. xviii. 24; a receptacle for elect and reprobate. Therefore here they have not their blessing; our inheritance lies elsewhere.

3. There are all our kindred. *Ubi pater, ibi patria*—where our father is, there our country is. Now when we pray, we say to him, 'Our Father which art in heaven.' There are we strangers, where we are absent from God, Christ, and glorified saints; and while we are here upon earth we have not such enjoyment of God. There is our Father; it is his house. Heaven is called our Father's house; and there is 'our elder brother:' Col. iii. 1, 'Set your hearts upon things above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God;' and there is the best of our kindred and family: 'They shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' Mat. viii. 11. Well, then, the children of God, they count themselves to be strangers here, because their kindred are elsewhere.

4. There they abide longest. That we account our home where we abide. An inn cannot be called our home, where we come but for a night, and away; but now there we are 'for ever with the Lord.' Here we are in motion, there in rest. The world must be surely left. If we had a certain term of years fixed, yet it would be very short in comparison of eternity. All the time we spend here it is but a night, but a moment, in comparison of eternity. We live longest in the other world, and therefore there is our home: Micah ii. 10, 'Arise, depart hence; this is not your rest.' God speaks it of the land of Canaan, when they had polluted it with sin. It is true of all the world. Sin hath brought in death, and there must be a riddance. It is but a passage from danger. Israel dwelt first in a wandering camp, before they came to dwell in cities and walled towns; and the apostle alludes to that, 'Here we have no abiding city; we look for one to come.' As the Israelites did look for walled towns and cities of the Amorites to be possessed by them, so here we have but a wandering camp, we look for a city. And mark, as it was with them in their outward estate, so in the mysteries of their religion; they were first seated in a tabernacle, and then in a temple: in a tabernacle, which was a figure of the church; then in a temple, which was a figure of heaven; for you know, as in the temple there were three partitions—the outward court, the holy place, and the holy of holies—so there are three heavens. The third heaven Paul speaks of—the heaven of heavens; and there is the starry heaven, and the airy heaven, the outward court. This life being so frail, so fickle, we cannot call our abode here our home. 'What is your life?' saith the apostle; 'it is but as a vapour,' James iv. 14; a little warm breath

turned in and out by the nostrils: Job vii. 1, 'Is there not an appointed time for man upon earth? His days are as the days of an hireling.' A hired servant you do not intend should live with you for ever; you hire him for a day or two, and when he hath ended his work, he receives his wages and is gone. So all our days are but a little while; we do our service, and then we must be gone. Actors, when they have finished their parts, are seen no more. They go within the curtain. So when we have fulfilled our course, God furnisheth the world with a new scene of acts and actors.

5. The necessary exercise of their graces doth make them count their lives here but a pilgrimage, and themselves but strangers upon earth, viz., faith, love, hope.

[1.] Faith shows the truth and the worth of things to come. Faith will make them strangers: Heb. xi. 13, 'They saw these things and were persuaded of them, and they counted themselves pilgrims and strangers.' Oh! were we persuaded of things to come, we would be hasting towards them. We cry, Home, home! We talk of heaven and eternity, but we do not believe them. Sense and reason cannot out-see time, nor look above the clouds and mists of the lower world, 'afar off,' in the apostle's phrase, 2 Peter i. 9; but faith shows the truth of things to come. We that are here upon earth, when we look to heaven, the stars seem to us but so many spangles. Oh! but when we get into heaven and look downward, the world then will seem but as a molehill. That which now to sense seems such a glorious thing will be as nothing.

[2.] The love of Christ which is in the saints makes them to account themselves as strangers. A child of God cannot be satisfied with things here below, because his love is set upon God. Two things the heart looks after, as soon as it is awakened by grace, and love puts us upon them both, viz., a perfect enjoyment of God, and a perfect obedience to God. (1.) That they may be with God and Christ. The saints have heard much of Christ, read much of him, tasted and felt much of him; they would fain see him, and be with him, Phil. i. 23. If they had the choicest contentment the world could afford, this would not satisfy them so much as to be there 'where Christ is, and to behold his glory.' The apostle thinks this to be motive enough to a gracious heart to seek things above, for there 'Christ is at the right hand of God;' love will catch hold of that, Col. iii. 1. The place is lovely for Christ's sake. Love will not suffer them to count this to be their home. Though Christ is present with them now spiritually while they are here, yet the presence and nearness is but distance, but a kind of absence, compared with that which is to come; and therefore this very presence doth not quench their desires, but kindles them, and sets them a-longing for more. All the presence, the communion, the sight of Christ they get now, is but mediate, through the glass of the ordinance, 1 Cor. xiii. 12; and it is frequently interrupted, his face is many times hidden, Ps. xxx. 7; and it is not full, as it shall be there, Ps. xvi. 11. But now in heaven it will be immediate; God will be 'all in all;' and there it will be constant, 'they shall be ever with the Lord;' and there they shall be 'satisfied with his likeness,' Ps. xvii. 15; then they shall enjoy his presence indeed. So that love

upon these considerations sets them a-longing and groaning. (2.) As love makes them desire the company of Christ, so entire subjection to God ; they would have perfect grace and freedom from sin, therefore are ever groaning,—Oh ! when shall we be rid of this body of death ? Rom. vii. 23. There is a final perfect estate for which the new creature was made, and they are ever tending towards that happy state wherein they shall grieve God no more.

[3.] Hope was made for things to come, especially for our full and final happiness. God fits us with graces as well as happiness ; not only grants us a glorious estate, but gives us grace to expect it. Hope would be of no use if it did not lift up the head, and look out for a better estate than the world yieldeth. Hope fastens upon God's title in the covenant, 'I am thy God.' Now God could not with honour take this title, and give us no better than present things : Heb. xi. 16, 'Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.' Mark the apostle's reason. Many expound these words so as if the meaning were but this, that they did only express God's condescension, that he would take his title, not from the potentates of the world, but from a few wandering patriarchs ; that God was not ashamed to be called their God. Alas ! the words have a quite other sense. Rather it expresseth an answerable bounty : unless the Lord would give them something answerable to their hopes, more than was visible in the lives of the patriarch, God would be ashamed to be called their God. Do but look upon the slenderness of their condition. If that he gave them in the world were all their reward, what is this to own that magnificent title, 'I am the God of Abraham,' &c. No ; now he hath something better than all the honours and riches of the world ; now he may fitly be called their God. Christ builds the doctrine of the resurrection upon the same argument, 'God is the God of Abraham,' &c. ; therefore they shall have a blessed estate in soul and body, Mat. xxii. 32. To be a God to any, is to be a benefactor, and that according to the extent and largeness of an infinite and eternal power.

Use 1. Are you strangers and pilgrims ? David, and such as he was, that were of his stamp, counted themselves strangers upon earth. If you be so—

1. You will always be drawing home, and would not desire to stay long from Christ. A traveller would pass over his journey as soon as he can, and be hastening homeward : Phil. i. 23, 'I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.' Is there any looking, longing, waiting for your blessed estate ? It is no hard matter to get a Christian out of the world ; his better part is gone already, his heart is there. Do your hearts draw homeward ? Are your desires stronger and stronger every day after eternal life ? Natural motion grows swifter and swifter still, as it draws nearer and nearer its centre. So certainly a Christian, if he had the motions of the new nature, he would be drawing homeward more every day.

2. What provision do you make for another world if you are strangers ? Many bestow all their labour and travail about earthly things, and neglect their precious and immortal souls. They are at home ; all their care is that they may live well here. O Christians !

what provision do you make for heaven? A traveller doth not buy such things as he cannot carry with him, as trees, houses, household stuff; but jewels, pearls, and such as are portable. Our wealth doth not follow us into the other world, but our works do. We are travelling to a country whose commodities will not be bought with gold and silver, and therefore are we storing ourselves for heaven, for such things as are current there. Men that make a voyage to the Indies will carry such wares as are acceptable there, else they do nothing. Do you make it your business every day to get clearer evidences for heaven, to treasure up a good foundation, 1 Tim. vi. 19; and do you labour every day to grow more meet for heaven, Col. i. 12. That is the great work of a Christian, to get evidences and a meetness for heaven. These are the months of our purification; we are now to cleanse ourselves for the embraces of the great God. When we grow more mortified, strict, holy, heavenly, then we ripen apace, and hasten homeward: Ps. lxxxiv. 7, 'They shall go on from strength to strength,' &c. Every degree of grace it is a step nearer; and therefore do you grow more meet for this blessed estate.

3. In the fulness of your worldly enjoyments do you mind your country? He that was going pilgrim to Jerusalem, cried out, Oh, this is not the holy city! So, whatever enjoyments you have, do your hearts call you off, and say, Soul, this is not thy rest; this is not that thou shouldst take comfort in; thou art bound for heaven? Do you miss your country and your parents? The men of the world would have their portion here, here is their rest; but when you have most of the world at will, are you strangers? 1 Cor. vii. 31, 'Using this world as not abusing it;' that is, so making use of God's bounty as expecting a greater happiness. How do we use the world as not abusing it? When we use it as a type, as a motive, and as a help to heaven. As a kind of type, the enjoyment of temporal things should stir us up to a more serious consideration of heavenly; as the prodigal's husks put him in mind of bread in his father's house. The company of your relations puts you in mind of the company of God and Christ. The cities of the Amorites, their walled towns, put the patriarchs in mind of a city which had foundations, Heb. xi. 16. If an earthly city be so glorious, what is the heavenly city? These are the comforts of a strange place. You abuse them when you forget home, and therefore take heed; if the creature be sweet, heaven is better. And when you use them as a motive to serve God more cheerfully, the more you find him a good master: 1 Tim. vi. 17, 'Trust in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;' to make you more earnest in good works. 2 Sam. vii. 2, saith David there, 'I dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God within curtains.' When you have such kind of reasonings stirred up within you—What do I for God, that hath enlarged my house here? And when you use them as a help, your worldly enjoyments as instruments of piety and charity. Here is a man's trial, what he doth in a full condition, whether his heart be for home still, yea or nay; when he hath the world at will, if then he be treasuring up a good foundation, and encouraging himself to serve God faithfully.

4. What is your solace in your affliction, and the inconveniences

that you meet with in your pilgrimage? Doth this comfort you—Home will pay for all? Heb. x. 34, ‘Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and enduring substance.’ Do you reckon upon a more enduring substance? Though the world frown upon you as a step-mother, yet you remember you have a better home. From whence do you fetch your supports in any cross? Doth this comfort you in the midst of the molestations of the world?—They do not know your birth, your breeding, your hopes, nor your expectations. Strangers may be abused in a foreign place; when we come home, this will be forgotten. The saints walk up and down like a prince that travels abroad in disguise; though he be slighted, abused, he doth not appear what he shall be. You have a glorious inheritance reserved for you; this is your cordial and the reviving of your souls, and that which doth your heart good to think of; and so you can be contented to suffer loss and inconveniences upon these hopes. The discourse between Modestus, a governor under Valens, and Basil, in Nazianzen his twentieth Oration, is very notable. I shall only transcribe what is exactly to the purpose in hand. When he threatened him with banishment, I know no banishment, saith he, who know no abiding-place here in the world. I do not count this place mine, nor can I say the other is not mine; rather all is God’s, whose stranger and pilgrim I am. This was that which supported him in the midst of those threatenings. Therefore from whence do you fetch your support.

5. If religion be kept up in height and majesty, the world will count you strangers, they will stand wondering at your conversation, 1 Peter iv. 4. Men gaze upon those that come hither in a foreign habit, that do not conform to the fashions of the country; and so a child of God is wondered at, that walks in a counter-motion to the studies and practices of other men, as one that is not conformed to the world, Rom. xii. 2. What do you discover of the spirit of your country, so as to convince others?

This much by way of inquiry, namely, whether we are strangers, yea or nay?

Use 2. Behave yourselves as strangers here upon earth.

1. Avoid ‘fleshly lusts,’ 1 Peter ii. 11; these cloud the eye, and besot the heart, and make us altogether for a present good; they weaken our desires of heaven. It is the apostle’s argument, ‘As strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts.’ The flesh-pots of Egypt made Israel to despise Canaan; and so this is that which will take off our hearts from things to come, from the inheritance of the saints in light, and from that blessed estate God hath promised.

2. Grasp not at too much of the world; but what comes with a fair providence upon honest endeavours, accept with thanks: 1 Tim. vi. 9, ‘They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare,’ &c. The devil hath you upon the hip, when you make that your business and scope; not he that is, but *will* be rich, that fixes that as his scope. Then the heart is filled with sins, and the head with cares.

3. If an estate comes in slowly, remember, a little will serve our turns to heaven; more would be but a burden and snare. Those that

have their portion here, most of worldly things, what do they get by it? A little belly-cheer, Ps. xvii. 14, 'and they leave the rest to their babes.' Dainty cheer is no great matter; and to leave our posterity great is but to leave them in a snare. Children are under a providence and a covenant as well as we, and it is blasphemous to think we can provide for them better than God.

4. If God give abundance, rest not in it with a carnal complacency: Ps. lxii. 10, 'If riches increase, set not your heart on them.' Suffer not thy heart to rejoice in them as your only portion, so as to grow proud of them, so as to count them your good things, Luke xvi. 25; you that are strangers have better things to mind.

5. Keep up a warm respect to your everlasting home. It is not enough to despise the world, but you must look after a better country. Many of a slight temper may despise worldly profits; their corruptions do not run out that way: Heb. xiii. 14, 'We have here no abiding city, but we seek one to come.' Desires, thoughts, and groans, these are the harbingers of the soul that we send into the land of promise. By this means we tell God that we would be at home.

6. Enjoy as much of heaven as you can in your pilgrimage, in ordinances, in the first-fruits of the Spirit, in communion with saints, Grace is but young glory, and joy in the Holy Ghost is the suburbs of heaven; and therefore you should get somewhat of your country before you come at it. As the winds do carry the odours and sweet smells of Arabia into the neighbouring provinces, so by the breathings of the Holy Ghost upon our hearts do we get a smell of the upper paradise; it is in some measure begun in us before we can get thither; and therefore enjoy as much of heaven as possibly you can in the time of your pilgrimage. We have our taste here; it is begun in union with Christ, and in the work of grace upon the heart. And in ordinances. Prayer brings us to the throne of grace; it gives us an entrance into God's presence: Heb. x. 19, the apostle calls it, 'a boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.' A Christian enters heaven while he is here in the world. In the word preached heaven is brought down to us. The gospel is called the kingdom of heaven. And by reading we do as it were converse with the saints departed, that writ what we read. Meditation brings us into the company of God; it puts our heads above the clouds, in the midst of blessed spirits there. As if we saw Jesus Christ upon the throne, and his saints triumphing about him. Communion of saints is heaven begun; therefore you that are strangers should much delight there. A man that is abroad would be glad to meet with his own countrymen; we should be glad of company to go with us to heaven; these are to be our companions for evermore, therefore we should converse with them here.

Secondly, I proceed to the latter clause, 'Hide not thy commandments from me.' Here is his request. To make short work of it, I shall endeavour to make out the connection and sense of these words in these propositions.

1. Every man here upon earth, especially a godly man, is but a stranger and passenger. Every man is so in point of condition; he must go hence, and quit all his enjoyments in the world—wicked men

whether they will or no ; but a godly man is so in affection, and cannot be satisfied with his present state. This I have insisted upon.

2. It concerns him that is a stranger to look after a better and more durable state. Every man should do so. He that lives here for a while is concerned ; his greatest care should be for that place where he lives longest ; therefore eternity should be his scope. A godly man will do so. Those whose hearts are not set upon earthly things, they must have heaven. The more their affections are estranged from the one, the more they are taken up about the other, Col. iii. 2. Heaven and earth are like two scales in a balance ; that which is taken from the one is put into the other.

3. There is no sufficient direction how to attain this durable estate but in the word of God. Without this we are but like poor pilgrims and wayfaring men in a strange country, not able to discern the way home. A blessed state is only sufficiently revealed in the word : 2 Tim. i. 10, ' Life and immortality is brought to light in the gospel.' The heathens did but guess at it, and had some obscure sense of an estate after this life ; but it is brought to light with most clearness in the word ; so the way thither is only pointed out by the word. It is the word of God makes us wise to salvation, and our line and rule to lead us to the heavenly Canaan ; and therefore it concerns those that look after this durable state, to consult with the word.

4. There is no understanding God's word but by the light of the Spirit : Job xxxii. 8, ' There is a spirit in man ; but the inspiration of the Almighty, that giveth understanding.' Though the word have light in it, yet the spirit of man cannot move till he enlightens us with that lively light that makes way for the dominion of the truth in our hearts, and conveyeth influence into our hearts. This is that light David begs when he saith, ' Hide not thy commandments from me.' David was not ignorant of the ten commandments, of their sound ; but he begs their spiritual sense and use.

5. If we would have the Spirit, we must ask it of God in prayer ; for God ' gives the Spirit to those that ask him,' Luke xi. 13 ; and therefore we must say, as David, Ps. xliii. 3, ' Oh, send out thy light and thy truth : let them lead me ; let them bring me to thy holy hill, to thy tabernacle.'

6. When we beg it of God, we must do it with submission to his sovereignty, and with subscription to his justice. Therefore doth David use this manner of speech, ' Hide not thy commandments from me.' God doth hide when he doth not open our eyes to see. Now the Lord may choose whether he will do this or no ; for he is sovereign, and may in justice forbear to do so, because we have abused the light we have ; it will be hid from us unless he reveal it. The mystery of grace is wholly at God's dispose ; and whosoever begs it, he must refer himself to the holy and sovereign good pleasure of God, who may give out and withhold his efficacious grace according to his pleasure : Mat. xi. 25, 26, ' I thank thee, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes ; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.' Here is the Lord's sovereignty ; he doth in these things as he pleaseth ; therefore David submits to it. And then it implies, it may be just with

God to leave us unto our natural blindness, and suffer Satan to blind us more. It is fully consistent with the honour of his justice ; therefore it is said, John xii. 40, ' He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts,' &c. ; that is, judicially, suffering them to increase their own blindness by their sin ; blindness, that is their sin ; and the Lord may leave it as a judgment upon them.

Use. Here is direction to you that know you are but pilgrims. The great thing you should seek after is the straightest way to heaven. If you have a sense of eternity, and a sense of your present frailty, you should look how to get home to your country. To this end—

1. Study the word. Why ? This is your antidote against infection, and a cordial to cheer us in the way. It is an antidote against infection : 2 Peter i. 4, ' By the promises we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.' The world is an infectious place ; therefore you had need take the promises next your heart to keep your hopes alive. And here is your cordial to keep you from fainting, that which makes you to rejoice in the midst of present afflictions, Ps. cxix. 54. It is a cordial to cheer us up, to revive us in the way, till we come to our journey's end. This will make up losses, sweeten difficulties, allay your sorrows. Then it is your direction, the way to lead you home : Ps. cxix. 105, ' Thy word is a light to my feet and a lantern to my paths.' We shall soon pass over this life ; all our care should be to pass it over well, there are so many by-paths in the world, and in a strange place we may soon miscarry.

2. Entreat the Lord of his abundant grace to pity poor strangers, who are ignorant ; and desire him he would not hide his word from you, that you may walk in the nearest, closest way wherein he would have you walk. He may hide it from you as an absolute supreme Lord, for he is bound to give his grace to none ; and he may do it as a just judge ; he may leave you to your own infatuations and prejudices. Say, Lord, pity a poor stranger and pilgrim.

The word may be hidden two ways, and take care of both :—

1. In point of external administration, when the powerful means are wanting. Oh ! it is a great mark of God's displeasure, when men are given up by their own choice to blind guides, to those that have no skill or no will to edify, or no abilities rightly to divide the word of truth ; only fill the ear with clamour and noise, but do not inform conscience, or move the heart by solid and powerful instruction from the word of God.

2. In point of internal influence, when the comforts and quickenings of the Spirit are withholden : ' Lord, withhold not thy Spirit from me.'

SERMON XXI.

My soul breaketh for the longing it hath unto thy judgments at all times.—VER. 20.

DAVID had begged divine illumination, ver. 18. The reason of his request was, because he was a stranger upon earth, and a stranger may easily be bewildered. Now here is a second reason why he would

have God to open his eyes, because his heart was carried out with so strong an affection to the word. He that asketh a thing coldly doth but bespeak his own denial. But David was in good earnest when he prayeth for light; it was not a dead-hearted, perfunctory petition, but such as came from an ardent, strong affection, 'My soul breaketh,' &c.

In the words we have—

1. The object of David's affection, *thy judgments*.

2. The quality or kind of his affection:—

[1.] It was vehement, *my soul breaketh with longing*.

[2.] It was constant, *at all times*.

By *misphalim*, *judgments*, is meant the word, which is the infallible rule of God's proceeding with sinners.

For the affection, I shall open that, and there first speak of the vehemency, 'My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath.' It is a metaphorical expression, to set forth the earnestness of his affection. The Septuagint renders it thus: *ἐπεπόθησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι τὰ κρίματά σου*—'My soul coveteth to desire thy judgments.' Desire is the stretching forth of the soul to the thing desired. Now as things that are stretched out do break and crack in stretching; so, saith David, 'My soul breaketh for the longing.' Here is no respect to brokenness of heart in this place, it is only strength of desire that is expressed; and the expression is used the rather—

1. Because affections, when strong, are painful, and affect the body with impressions answerable thereunto.

2. Not only the denial, but the delay of satisfying the affection, increaseth the pain. When they have not what they do desire, they are even broken in heart; as Prov. xiii. 12, 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life;' like apples of paradise, comforting and reviving. Now the constancy and continuance of this desire is set forth in these words, *at all times*; not for a flash and pang, but it was the ordinary frame of his heart.

Doct. God's children have a strong, constant, and earnest bent of affection towards his word.

1. To open the nature of this affection.

2. The reasons of it.

First, The nature. There consider the object, the end, the properties, and the effects.

1. The object of this affection is the word of God written or preached. As it is written in the scriptures, so it is their constant exercise to read it, and consult with it often: Ps. i. 2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night'; and Josh. i. 8, 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' As it is preached and explained: they submit to God's ordinance in that also, who hath appointed pastors and teachers, as well as prophets and apostles: Eph. iv. 11—prophets and apostles to write scriptures; so pastors and teachers to open and apply scripture; therefore James i. 19, they are 'swift to hear;' that is, take all occasions for that end and purpose.

2. For the end of this affection; it is a sanctified subjection to God; and strength and growth in the spiritual life: 1 Peter ii. 2, 'As new-

born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; not merely that you may know, but that you may grow thereby; not to replenish the head with notions, but that you may increase in spiritual strength, and find more liberty of heart towards God.

3. For the properties of it. You have them here in the text:—

[1.] They must be earnest.

[2.] A constant bent of heart.

[1.] An earnest bent of heart. Common and ordinary affection or desire after the word will not serve the turn; not a faint and cold wish, but such as hath heat and warmth in it. It is good to see by what expressions the desires of the saints are set forth in scripture. By the desire of infants after the breast, 1 Peter ii. 2; they cannot live without it. It is set forth also by the panting of the hart after the water-brooks, Ps. xlii. 1. To meet with God in his word is as a brook of water to a chased hart; it refresheth and revives it. It is set forth by the desires of a longing woman, ver. 40 of this psalm, 'Behold I have longed after thy precepts.' The children of God are fond of nothing so much as of his word and ordinances. It is set forth by the appetite which a hungry man hath toward his meat after a long abstinence: Ps. lxxxiv. 2, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord.' Or, as a weary traveller and thirsty man longeth after drink: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'My soul thirsteth for thee,' &c. Or, as cool air to the weary: Ps. cxix. 131, 'I opened my mouth and panted; for I longed for thy commandments;' a metaphor taken from a man tired with running, gaping for breath to take in some cool air and refreshing. What think you of all these expressions? are they strains and reaches of wit, or the real experiences of the children of God? The truth is, we have such languid motions this way, that we know not how to understand the force of such expressions, therefore we think them to be conceits, we that are so cold and indifferent whether we meet with God in his word, yea or nay.

[2.] As it is not cold, so it is not fleeting, but constant. Many men have good affections for a while, but they abide not; as I shall give you some kinds.

(1.) Some out of error in judgment think the word of God is only fit for novices (as the Stancarists¹), to enter us into the rudiments of religion, but too low a dispensation for our after growth. It is milk for babes, they think; but afterwards we must live immediately upon the Spirit. But we see that David's affection ever carried him to the word, not only at his first acquaintance with God, but at all times, as in the text.

(2.) Some prize the word in adversity, when they have no other comforts to live upon; then they can be content to study the word to comfort them in their distresses; but when they are well at ease they despise it. But David made use of it at all times; in prosperity, to humble him; in adversity, to comfort him; in the one, to keep him from pride; in the other, to keep him from despair: in affliction the word was his cordial; in worldly increase it was his antidote; and so

¹ Stancarus was professor of Hebrew at Königsberg, where he maintained a violent controversy with Ōsiander. He afterwards went into Poland, where he excited much commotion. There he died in 1574.—ED.

at all times his heart was carried out to the word either for one necessity or another.

(3.) Some during a qualm of conscience have an affection for holy things; as we desire strong waters in a pang, not for a constant diet. While the terrors of God are upon them, nothing will satisfy them but the word: Oh, 'send for Moses and Aaron,' then when the plague was upon them; but as their trouble wears off, so doth their affection to the word of God. It is fear that drives them to the word, and not love.

(4.) Some out of a general sense of the excellency that is in the word; they go on smoothly for a while, as Herod, who heard gladly, Mark vi. 20. So do many till the word come to cross their lusts and touch their darling sin, then they run to earthly pleasures again, and out of a sense of difficulty and carnal despondency, they give over the pursuit.

(5.) Some are taken with the mere novelty: John v. 35, 'Ye were willing to rejoice in his light for a season;' while the doctrine is novel, and ministers have countenance from great men, as John had from Herod, and their gifts are in the flourish—none but John in their account; but when the conceit of novelty was gone, and John fell under the cross, then their affection was spent.

(6.) Some in case of dubious anxiety, or in doubtful debates, may desire to know the truth, and be much and earnest in the study of the word; but when they get above their scruples, and in plain truths, ordinary cases, they neglect it. Whereas David longed for the word of God at all times, to feel the power of God accompanying it, so as to find strength against his corruptions, and that he might be established in waiting upon God. This was the constant and stable desire of his soul.

Thus you see the word of God is the object, either read or preached. The end of it is, that they may grow in grace, and that their hearts may be more subjected to God, and may be strengthened in waiting upon him: and the manner of this desire is vehement and constant; not at times; but it is the usual frame and temper of their hearts.

4. The effects of this desire, what it worketh. I will mention but two:—

[1.] It draws off the heart from other things: Ps. cxix. 136, 'Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not unto covetousness;' implying, that when the heart is drawn out after God's testimonies, it is drawn off from carnal pursuits. Desires are the vigorous bent of the soul, and therefore, as the stream of a river, they can run but one way. Our passionate desires of earthly things certainly will be abated if spiritual desires prevail in us: for being acquainted with a better object, they begin to disdain and loathe other things.

[2.] It maketh us diligent and painful in the use of means, that we may get knowledge and strength by the word. Where strong desires are, there will be great endeavours: Prov. viii. 34, 'Watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.' A man that hath a desire after grace and strength by the word of God will daily be redeeming occasions of waiting upon God. It is but a slight wish, not serious desire, that is not seconded with answerable endeavours.

Secondly, Having opened the nature of these desires, let me show the reasons of this vehement and constant bent of heart towards the word of God.

1. Of the vehemency.

2. Of the constancy.

First, The reasons of this vehemency; they are these—natural instinct, experience, and necessity.

[1.] Natural instinct: 1 Peter ii. 2, ‘As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word.’ Children desire the dug, not by instruction, but by instinct, without a teacher. All creatures desire to preserve that life which they have; and therefore by a natural propension they run to that thing from whence they received life. Mere instinct carrieth the brute creatures to the teats of their dams; and every effect looks to the cause, to receive from thence its last perfection. Trees, that receive life from the earth and the sun, they send forth their branches to receive the sun, and stretch their roots into the earth which brought them forth. Fishes will not out of the water which breeds them. Chickens are no sooner out of the shell, but they shroud themselves under the feathers of the hen. The little lamb runs to the dam’s teat, though there be a thousand sheep of the same wool and colour; as if it said, here I received that I have, and here I’ll seek that I want. By such a native inbred desire do the saints run to God, to seek a supply of strength and nourishment; and the desire is very strong and vehement: ‘One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after,’ &c. There were other things David might desire, but this one thing his heart was set upon, that he might enjoy constant communion with God in the use of public ordinances. What is the reason of this? I answer—The spiritual nature. You may as well ask what teacheth the young lambs to suck, as who taught the regenerate to long for the word. What teacheth the chicken to run under the wing of the hen? The cause of appetite is not persuasion and discourse, but inclination; not argument, but nature. Appetite is an effect of life. By natural tendency the new creature is carried out to its support from the word of God, there to be comforted and nourished. It shows that all who have not such a kindly appetite to the word of God, that can relish nothing but meats, drinks, wealth, vanity, they were never acquainted with this new nature.

[2.] Experience is another cause of this desire. A child of God is not satisfied with a slight taste of the word, but he desires more; when he hath felt the comfort of it, he is still longing to receive more from God: James i. 18, ‘He hath begotten us by the word of truth.’ What follows? ‘Wherefore be swift to hear.’ A man that hath had experience of the power of the word taketh all occasions; he knows there is strength, grace, and liberty of heart to be found there. So 1 Peter ii. 3, ‘As new-born babes, &c., if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.’ Certainly a man that hath had any taste of communion with God will desire a fuller measure, as by tasting of excellent meats we get an appetite to them. Carnal men do not know what it is to enjoy God in ordinances, and therefore do not long for them; they do not taste the sweetness of the word: Ps. xix.

10, 'The statutes of the Lord are sweeter than the honey or the honeycomb.' The children of God find more true pleasure in the ordinances, in the statutes of God, than in all things in the world, though to carnal men they are but as dry sticks, burdensome exercises. The reason follows, ver. 11, 'Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward.' He commendeth the word from his own experience; he had felt the effects and good use of it in his own heart; he had been warned, and had a great deal of comfort and refreshing by it; therefore it is sweeter than the honey and the honeycomb. So Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2, 'O God, my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee.' What to do? 'To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' He that hath had once a sight of God, would not be long out of his company. He compareth his desire of communion with God with hunger and thirst; his desire is greater than the hunger and thirst that men suffer in a dry wilderness where there is no water to give refreshment. He had seen God, and would now see him again; the remembrance of those former pleasures of the sanctuary revived his desires: so that besides nature, there is this experience.

[3.] The next cause is necessity. We should take delight in the word of God for its excellency, though we stood in no need of it. But our necessity is very great, and this awakens desire. The word is not only compared to things which make for conveniency of life, as to wine and honey, but is compared also to things that are of absolute necessity, bread and water. It is called 'bread of life,' and 'water of life.' Bread of life; we cannot live without it: Job xxiii. 12, 'I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food.' Food is that which keeps us in life, and enables us to action and work. And as water: Isa. xlii. 3, 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.' This is as water to a fainting traveller. Christian, the soul is better than the body, and eternal life is to be preferred before life natural; therefore the necessities of the soul are greater, and should be more urging than the necessities of the body. The famine of the word is threatened as a very great evil, Amos viii. 11. Now because the necessities of the saints are so great, therefore have they their hearts carried out with such longing after the statutes of God. And this necessity is not only at first, when they are weak, but it continueth with them as long as the imperfection continueth with them, and till they come to heaven. Every grace in a child of God needs increase and support; there is something that is lacking to their faith, to their love, to their knowledge: 1 Thes. iii. 10, the apostle saith, 'That I might perfect that which is lacking to your faith.' They that are above ordinances are not acquainted with their own hearts, they are not men of spiritual experience, they do not know the weaknesses and languishings a child of God is incident to; it is wholly inconsistent to the nature of grace. Wherever there is life there must be food, because of the constant depastion of the natural heat upon the natural moisture. Though the stomach be never so full at present, yet anon it will be hungry again. So because of the constant combat that is between the flesh and spirit, wherever there is spiritual life it will be sensible of the necessity of food. Well,

then, it is hunger and necessity that sharpens appetite; being sensible of spiritual languishing, and need to repair strength daily, therefore are their hearts carried out. Thus you see the reasons of this vehement affection.

Secondly, The reasons of the constancy of this respect.

1. Because it is natural and kindly to the regenerate; therefore, as it is vehement, so it is constant. For it is not a light motion, but such as is deeply rooted; not a good liking, but a thorough bent of heart; it is that which setteth into another nature. Now that which is as a nature to us is known by its uniformity and constancy.

2. They love the word for its own sake, as it is God's word; therefore they ever love it. Other men love it for foreign reasons, as out of novelty, which is an adulterous affection; or out of public countenance, as it is in fashion and repute, and therefore are soon weary of it. He that loves a woman for foreign reasons, as beauty and portion, when these cease, his love ceaseth.

Use 1. Is to reprove the coldness and cursed satiety and loathing of the word of God that is abroad. There is a plenty of means, even to a surfeit. Men are gospel-glutted, Christ-glutted, and sermon-glutted; and therefore are at a very great indifferency, and under a mighty coldness as to the word of God. Usually we are more sensible of the benefit of the word in the want of it than we are in the enjoyment of it: 1 Sam. iii. 1, 'The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.' When the public ministry of the prophets was rare and scarce, then it was precious and sweet. When the Papists denied the use of the scripture in the vulgar tongue, oh! what would we give then for a little scrap and fragment of the word of God in English!—a load of hay for a chapter in James. So in times of restraint, how savoury is a godly sermon! But now visions are open, men begin to surfeit of the word. *In semet ipsam*, saith Tertullian, *semper abundantia contumeliosa est*—plenty lesseneth the price of things. As in Solomon's time, gold and silver were as dirt in the streets, 1 Kings x. 32, so the word of God, though it be so precious and excellent, yet when we have plenty of it, line upon line, precept upon precept, by God's indulgence, then we begin to be glutted. People grow wanton when they have abundance of means. This is the temper of English professors at this day; they are guilty of surfeiting of the word, and that is very dangerous, either of a people or person. Now, that there is such a fulness and satiety appears partly—

1. By seldom attendance upon the word. We do not redeem time to hear the word; when brought home to our doors, we seldom step out to hear it. They use to say, a surfeit of bread is most dangerous; surely a surfeit of the bread of life is so; when men are full, and begin to despise the word as if not worth the hearing. God usually sends a famine to correct that surfeit of the word: Amos viii. 11, 12, 'I will send a famine of hearing the word of the Lord, and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.' Usually that is the way that God taketh for a glutted people, that scorn and neglect the word, when they might gather it in like manna from heaven every day; that they may ride many miles before they

hear a savoury sermon; and then those that were not for the word, or desirous to be rid of it, may long for a little comfort and reviving by it, and cannot enjoy it.

2. Men bewray this satiety and fulness of the word by fond affection of luscious strains; wholesome doctrines will not down with them, unless it be cooked and sauced to their wanton appetites. O Christians! the spiritual appetite desires τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, 'the sincere milk of the word,' 1 Peter ii. 2—unmixed milk; give them plain, simple milk, without human mixtures and compositions. The relish of the word is spoiled by the garish strains of a frothy eloquence. A plain solid truth is more suitable to a gracious heart. A man that hath a natural instinct to the word delights in the simplicity of it. An infant hath a distinguishing palate, and knows the mother's milk, and pukes and casts when it sucks another. So certainly, if we had true spiritual life, we would be delighted in the word for the word's sake, the more plain it is, provided it be sound. I am not for a loose, careless delivering of God's message; but it is the sound, plain, and wholesome ministry which suits with a gracious appetite. It argues a distempered heart when we must have quails and dainties, and loathe manna. Consider; in heaven, where we have the most simple apprehension of things, we have the highest affection to them; no need of rhetoric in heaven. And certainly the more heavenly we are, the more perfect in grace, the more wisdom shall we see in plain scriptural truth, infinitely exceeding all the wisdom of the heathen. Many think the word of God too plain for their mouths to preach it; others too stale for their ears to hear it; and they must have the fancies of men: Jer. viii. 9, 'They have rejected my word; and what wisdom is in them?' It is strange to see how many will disguise religion to please the lusts of men. They mock Christ, as the soldiers did, that put a centurion's coat upon him for a robe, and then, 'Hail, King of the Jews.' So they wrap up Christ in the foolish garments of their own fancy, and so expose him to mockage rather than reverence.

3. This satiety bewrays itself by our affections to novel opinions, and erroneous conceits: 2 Tim. iv. 3, 'The time will come that they will not endure sound doctrine, having itching ears, and shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.' Observe it when you will, that soul is nigh to spiritual blasting that begins to have a loathing of a plain truth; and men must have new things and conceits in religion, and so grow weary of opinions, as they do of fashions; and then by God's just judgment they run from one fancy to another, till they quite run themselves out of breath, and have shaken off all religion and good conscience. Therefore take heed of being given up to this vertiginous spirit, to be turned and 'tossed up and down with every wind of doctrine,' Eph. iv. 14. Περιφερόμενοι, the apostle's word, signifies to be carried round in a circle; he alludes to a mariner's compass,¹ that is carried by every wind; this wind takes them, and then another; such light chaff are men

¹ Manton could scarcely suppose that the mariner's compass was known to the apostle. Neither would the description be at all applicable to it. I suspect he refers to some other instrument, of the nature of a weathercock, under that name.—ED.

when they begin to loathe the plain truths of God. But it is an argument of a gracious heart when we can receive old truth with new affections, and look for the power of God and new quickenings.

4. This levity and instability of spirit is because they look for all the virtue of religion from their notions and their opinions, and not from Christ; then they think this change of opinion shall make them better; their hearts shall be changed. They try experiments so long, till the Lord hath given them up to a spirit of infatuation, and then all comes to nothing, but they as a brand are fit for the burning.

5. By our worldly projects. Men show a loathing of this word by their eagerness to the world; their hearts, with Martha, are cumbered with many things, while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to hear his word, Luke x. We are very fervorous in worldly affairs; there we can experiment this kind of affection which David speaks of to the word. Beware of this coldness to the word; it is an ill symptom both to nations and persons.

Use 2. To press us to get this fervent and constant affection to the word. To this end consider—

1. Whose word it is. God's word; and your best affections are due to him: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'Our desires are to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name;' there you shall hear of God, there God hath displayed his name. Our desires are to thee; not only so, but to thy 'memorial,' to 'the remembrance of thy name;' that is, to his word, which is as the bellows to blow up the sparks, and to quicken our affections to him.

2. See what benefits we have by the word of God; how beneficial it is to enlighten and direct us, quicken and comfort us, supply and strengthen us.

[1.] To enlighten and direct us. 'Light is pleasant,' saith Solomon; 'it is a good thing to behold the sun with our eyes,' Eccles. xi. 7. If light natural be pleasant, what is light spiritual? Therefore the Psalmist compares the word to the sun. The visible world can no more be without the one than the intellectual world can be without the other; and the one doth as much rejoice the heart as the other: Ps. xix. 8, 'The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the judgments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes.' Oh! it is a comfort to have light to see our way. When men begin to have a conscience about heavenly things, oh! then they judge so indeed. To others we speak in vain when we tell them what light they shall have by the word. They say those that live under the arctic pole, at the autumnal equinoctial the sun setteth to them, and doth not rise again till the vernal, and so are six whole months under a perpetual night, as if they were buried in a grave; but at the time of its return, with what clapping of hands and expressions of joy do they welcome the sun again into their parts! So when the word of God is made known to us, how should we welcome it! The city of Geneva gave this for a motto, *Post tenebras lux*—after darkness, light; implying that the return of the gospel was as light after a long darkness; as the coming of the sun again to those northern people. While Paul and his company were in that great storm at sea, when they saw neither sun nor stars for many days, and were afraid they should

fall upon rocks and dangerous shelves, oh ! with what longing did they expect to see day again ! Acts xxvii. So a poor bewildered soul that had lost its way, or when a child of God doth see but by half a light, how desirable is sure direction ! Now this cannot be had but from the word of God, 'To the law and to the testimony.'

[2.] To comfort us in all straits. In the word of God there is a salve for every sore, and a promise for every condition. God hath plentifully opened his good-will to sinners. Therefore the children of God, when they labour under the guilt of sin, there they can hear of God's promises of pardon : Isa. lv. 7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' Against apostasy they have that promise : Jer. xxxii. 40, 'I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.' When they are under weak performances, the word will tell them, 'The Lord will spare you, and pity you as a man spares his only son,' Mal. iii. 17 ; and when they lie under troubles, inconveniences, and deep crosses, there is a promise—the Lord will be with them in affliction ; the word will show them Christ in the affliction, and heaven beyond the affliction ; and then they are comforted, 1 Cor. x. 13. When they are troubled about worldly provisions, providing for themselves and families, it saith, Be contented, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,' Heb. xiii. 5. When their children come to their minds and thoughts, what will become of them when we are dead and gone, the word will tell you of promises made to you and your children, and of God's taking care of them. In short, God is a sun and shield, and no good thing will he withhold,' &c. Ps. lxxxiv. 11. There is all manner of blessings adopted and taken into covenant. Look round about the covenant, look into the word of God ; there is nothing wanting for the comfort of believers ; in every condition there is a promise to support and bear them up. Now, because of this comfort they have in the word of God, therefore it quickens their desires.

[3.] To supply and strengthen us. It is our food. Alas ! what a poor languishing Christian will a man be that doth not often make use of the word ! This strengthens him against corruptions, quickens him in duties, and gives success in conflicts. The sword of the Spirit is the choicest weapon. It is 'the power of God to salvation,' Rom. i. 16 ; and 'the word of his grace, which is able to build us up,' Acts xx. 32. If our heart be dead in prayer, here is the rod of Moses to strike upon the rock to make the waters gush out. Therefore, since we have such benefit by the word, we should long and desire to get such a strong affection.

3. Consider what benefit you will have by these desires after the word. It will keep up our diligence, and will make us exercise ourselves therein. Desire doth all that is done in the world ; digging for knowledge is tedious, but the end sweetens it. They that have an affection to the word shall never be destitute of success therein ; 'God will fulfil the desire of the saints.' He that satisfieth the gaping of the young raven will these desires. A strong affection to the word is the argument that moves God : Ps. cxlv. 19, 'He will fulfil the desire

of them that fear him ; he also will hear their cry, and will save them.' And if this desire be painful, yet it is salutary and healthful to the soul. In this sickness there is health ; in this weakness there is strength ; in this thirst, comfort ; and in this hunger, satisfaction.

For means—

[1.] Get a high esteem of spiritual enjoyments. Valuation and esteem precede desire. Wicked men, that value themselves by carnal comforts, their souls run out with vehement longing that way. A child of God, that values himself by spiritual enjoyments, by knowledge, grace, subjection to God, that counts these his greatest benefits, his main desire is to be acquainted with the word of God. The word hath a subserviency to his end. Poor low-spirited creatures, that value themselves by the plenty of external accommodations, they will never feel this longing after the word. Prov. viii. 10, 'Receive instruction rather than silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold.'

[2.] Let a man live in the awe of God, and make it his business to maintain communion with him, and then he will be longing after him. This will show the necessity of the word of God for his comfort and strength upon all occasions. A lively Christian, that is put to it in good earnest, he must have the word by him to direct, comfort, and strengthen him ; as he that labours hard must have his meals, or else he will faint and be overcome by his labour. We content ourselves with a loose profession, and so do not see the need of food, have not this hungering longing desire after the bread of life. Painted fire needs no fuel ; a dead formal profession is easily kept up ; but a man that makes it his business to maintain communion with him, and much exercised to godliness, is hungering and thirsting that he might meet with God.

SERMON XXII.

Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.—VER. 21.

IN the 18th verse, the prophet had begged divine illumination, that his eyes might be opened to see more into the nature of the word. He backeth that petition with three arguments. The first is taken from his condition in the world, 'I am a stranger upon earth.' The second argument is taken from the vehemency of his affection to the word, 'My soul breaketh,' &c. A man that is regenerate, as David was, he hath not only some faint and languid motions towards holy things, but a great and strong affection of heart, 'My heart even breaketh for the longing,' &c. In this verse here is the third reason, 'Open mine eyes.' Why ? Because erring from the commandment is dangerous, and bringeth us under God's curse, which will be executed by the rebukes of his providence. There have been ever some that opposed God, but yet they have ever been blasted by God ; he hath always vindicated the contempt of his law by the severe executions of his justice upon the contemners of it, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud.' We should not let pass God's judgments without profit ; but the more

the law is owned from heaven, the more entirely should we apply ourselves to the obedience of it. Therefore this is one reason why David begs for light, direction, and strength, for 'thou hast rebuked the proud,' &c.; therefore, Lord, teach me, that I may not come under the rebukes of thine anger.

Some read the words in two distinct sentences, 'Thou hast rebuked the proud;' and then, 'Cursed are they which do err from thy commandments.' But it comes all to one with our reading; therefore I shall not stand to insist upon examining the ground of this difference.

In the words observe—

1. The term that is given to wicked men, *the proud*, so commonly called in scripture: Mal. iii. 15, 'They call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up.'

2. The instance and discovery of their pride, they *err from thy commandments*.

3. The evil state in which they are, they *are cursed*. Though the wicked are not presently punished, yet they are all cursed, and in time they shall be punished.

4. The begun execution of this curse, *thou hast rebuked them*, that is, punished or destroyed: Ps. vi. 1, 'Rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.'

The points are—

1. That the worst sort of proud creatures are those that do err from God's commandments; for so is the description here, 'The proud have erred,' &c.

2. These proud ones, they are cursed. Those that continue in obstinacy and impenitency in their sins and errors, they are under a curse.

3. They are not only cursed, but are also rebuked; that is, not only threatened, but this curse shall be surely executed. In this world it is begun many times, and in part executed, but in the next fully and sorely.

Doct. 1. That the worst sort of proud creatures are those that err from God's commandments.

Here we must distinguish of *erring*, then of *pride*.

First, Of erring from God's commandments. There is an erring out of frailty, and an erring out of obstinacy.

1. An erring out of frailty; and so David saith, Ps. cxix. 176, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep;' and again, Ps. xix. 12, 'Who can understand his errors?' This is not meant here of every failing and slip, every sin of ignorance and incogitancy; no, nor every act of rebellion and perverseness of affection which may be found in the children of God. Though there be a pride in all sins against knowledge and light, that kind of sinning is interpretatively a confronting of God, a despising of his commandments; as David is said to do, 2 Sam. xii. 9, *pro hic et nunc*, for the time; the will of the creature is set up against the creator; yet this is not the erring here spoken of.

2. There is an erring out of obstinacy, impenitency, and habitual contempt of the lawgiver. This is spoken of, Ps. xcv. 10, 'It is a people that do err in their hearts.' To err in mind is bad, to err out of ignorance; but it is a people that stubbornly refuse to walk in the ways

God hath enjoined them. Some err out of simple nescience, ignorance, or mistake, or else through the cloud with which some present temptation overcasts the mind. These err in their minds, but others err in their hearts, that care not for, or do not desire to hear of, their duty to God. A man that erreth out of ignorance can say, 'Lord, I know not;' but those that err in their heart, they say, 'We desire not the knowledge of thy ways,' Job xxi. 14; they do not only fall into sin, but love to continue in it. The apostle speaks of 'ungodly deeds ungodly committed,' Jude 15. The matter of sin is not so much to be regarded as the manner, with what heart it is done, ungodly committed, with contempt of God. Now, such contemnners of God and his law are here described, as all obstinate and impenitent sinners are.

Secondly, We must distinguish of pride, which is either moral or spiritual.

1. Moral pride is an over-high conceit of ourselves, or our own excellencies, discovered by our disdain and contempt of others. So it is said of Nebuchadnezzar, 'his heart was lifted up.' This is that pride that is spoken of 1 Peter v. 5, 'God resisteth the proud.' There should be a mutual condescension between men; for God resisteth the proud, that is, those that are lifted up above others.

2. Spiritual pride, that is, disobedience and impenitency, which is discovered by a neglect of God and contempt of his law; and that pride is often so taken appeareth by these scriptures: Mal. iv. 1, 'The day of the Lord shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble.' Mark, they that do wickedly, and the proud, are made synonymous expressions. So Neh. ix. 16, 'But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments.' Their obstinacy in sin, or unsubmission to God, is made to be pride. So Jeremiah, when he gives the people good counsel to prevent ensuing judgments, 'Hear ye, give ear, be not proud,' Jer. xiii. 15; that is, do not obstinately refuse to comply with God's will. And afterward, ver. 17, 'My soul shall weep sore for your pride.' So that unhumiliated sinners are guilty of this spiritual pride, of contempt of God himself.

Having opened these things, that by erring is meant not out of frailty, but by obstinacy; that by pride is not meant that moral pride by which we condemn others, but that spiritual pride, when our hearts are unhumiliated and unsubdued to God, my work is now to prove—

1. That obstinacy and impenitency is pride.

2. That it is the worst sort of pride.

First, That there is pride in impenitency and obstinacy in a course of sin. Why?

1. Because they neglect God. To slight a superior, and not to give him due respect, hath ever been accounted pride. Surely then this is pride with a witness, to neglect 'God, who is over all, blessed for ever:' P's. x. 4, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God;' that is, of his heart, bewrayed by his countenance, he will not seek after God, and 'God is not in all his thoughts;' that is, scarce troubled with such a thought of what will please or displease God; he doth not think it necessary or worth the time to look after.

2. They oppose God, and set themselves as parties against him:

James iv. 6, 'God resisteth the proud;' God standeth in a posture of war against the proud. The word implies that every proud man is in battle array or posture of war against God: so every impenitent person sets himself against God. The quarrel between God and him is, who shall stoop, whose will shall stand? whether God shall serve or they? Isa. xliii. 24, 'You have made me to serve with your sins, and wearied me with your iniquities.' Indeed, they do not only oppose him, but they would depose him, or put him out of the throne, while they would subject God's will to their own. He that would be at his own dispose, and do what pleaseth him, is a god to himself.

3. In all this opposition they slight God, and despise—(1.) His authority in making the law; (2.) His power and greatness in making good the sanction of the law.

[1.] They despise the authority of God in the law itself. When men will set up their own will in a contradiction to God, it is a mighty dishonour to God: 2 Sam. xii. 9, 'Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?' Every sin that is committed slights the law that forbids it, as if it were not to be stood upon; it is no matter what God saith to the contrary. There is fearing the commandment, and despising the commandment. Fearing the commandment, that is the effect of a wise heart: Prov. xiii. 13, 'He that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' If God interpose, it is more than if there were an angel in the way with a flaming sword. There is a commandment in the way; he fears it, his way is hedged up, he dares not go on. But now impenitency, that slights the commandment. A sinner dares do that which an angel durst not do. It is said of Michael the archangel, Jude 9, that 'he durst not bring a railing accusation;' he had not the boldness. Thus they despise the authority of God in the law.

[2.] They despise the power of God in the sanction of the law, when they will run the hazard of those sad threatenings, as if they were a vain scarecrow, as if they could make good their cause against God: 1 Cor. x. 22, 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?' Sinning is an entering the lists with God, as if they could carry their cause against him; and therefore one great cure of hardness of heart and impenitency is seriously to meditate upon God's power: Deut. x. 16, 17, 'Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.' Why? 'For the Lord your God is a God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and terrible.' Do you know what God is? and will you contend with him? Certainly you will fail in the enterprise and undertaking.

Secondly, Let me prove there are none so proud as they that can brave it thus with God. I will take the rise of my argument thus—

1. Of all pride, that against superiors is most heinous.
2. Of all superiors, God is the highest, and deserveth our chiefest respect.

1. Of all pride, that against superiors is most heinous. Pride bewrayeth itself either by a disdain of inferiors, neglect of equals, or contempt of superiors. Now, of all the others, this is the most offensive, because there is more to check it; therefore it is threatened as a great disorder, Isa. iii. 4, 5, that 'the base should rise against the

honourable, and the child should behave himself proudly against the ancient.' When men carry themselves insolently to those that are far their betters, that is counted a great arrogancy in the world: to injure equals or contemn inferiors is not so much. There is the ground of the argument.

2. Of all superiors, God is the highest, and deserves our chiefest respect; therefore to deal proudly against him is worst of all. Consider—

[1.] That God hath an absolute jurisdiction.

[2.] His supremacy is not precarious.

[3.] In the management of his supremacy he useth much condescension. Now, to stand out against him, oh, what egregious pride is this!

[1.] He hath an absolute jurisdiction over us. Those that are our betters, we are to honour and respect them, though they have not power over us; but God is not only honourable, but chief and supreme, and hath a full right in us. In the civil law they distinguish of a twofold dominion; there is *dominium jurisdictionis* and *dominium proprietatis*—the dominion of jurisdiction and of propriety. The dominion of jurisdiction is proper to reasonable creatures, who only are capable of government. Propriety, that respects other things, as our goods and lands; and propriety argues a greater right and a greater dominion. A man may have a jurisdiction over others when he hath not an absolute dispose over them, as a prince over his subjects. Nay, a man that hath a jurisdiction and propriety too, his propriety is greater over his lands and estate than over his servants, though they be slaves; yet, because they partake of the same nature with himself, he hath not such a power to dispose of them as he hath to dispose of his goods and lands. Now God hath not only an absolute jurisdiction over us, which were enough in the case, but he hath a propriety, a more absolute power over every man than the greatest monarch hath—what shall I say—over his subjects, over his slaves? nay, a greater propriety than he hath over his goods and lands. Why? For he made us out of nothing; he is our potter, we his clay: he hath such a power over us, to dispose of us according to his will, as a potter over his clay to form what vessel he pleaseth. Now for a man to strive with his maker, it is as if the clay should lift up itself against the potter. So much the prophet saith, Isa. xlv. 9, 'Woe unto him that striveth with his maker.' What! shall the pot lift up itself against the potter? That were monstrous, since it is his. Now the potter did not make the matter, only bestows form and art upon it, but God gives us form, matter, and all, and shall we rise up against him, and contemn him?

[2.] Consider that his supremacy is not precarious; it doth not stand to the courtesy of man, that is, whether man will yield God to be supreme, yea or nay; but it is backed with a mighty power: 1 Peter v. 6, 'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.' God's hand is a mighty hand, and therefore we should humble ourselves. It is a madness to contend with the Lord of hosts. What are we to the Lord, who can stop our breath in a moment? Job iv. 9, 'By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils they are consumed.'

With a breath God can destroy us all, and resolve us into nothing ; therefore, to rise up against God, this is the greater pride. Other superiors cannot always maintain their right ; they may be foiled in the contention ; but surely God will have the best of it ; it is madness to contest with him.

[3.] God hath not only right, and that backed with an almighty power, but in the management of his supremacy over men he useth much condescension. To instance that in two things.

(1.) In making motions of peace to such proud and obstinate creatures as we are, that can be of no use or profit to him ; ay ! and though he be the wronged party. There is in us that which Austin calls *infirmilas animositatis*—the weakness of strength of stomach. We are striving who shall yield first. Though it be for our interest and advantage to be reconciled, yet we are looking who shall submit first ; but the Lord, though he can back his sovereignty with power, yet he comes down from the throne of sovereignty, and makes offers of grace, and prays you to be reconciled. When he might destroy, then he beseecheth, and speaketh supplications to the creature ; he comes and entreats you with a great deal of affectionate earnestness. Oh ! that God should stoop thus to a handful of unprofitable dust—creatures that can no way be of use and profit to him ! What pride is this, to stand it out against such a God !

(2.) In seeking to reclaim us, and soften us by many mercies, and by his kind dealing with us. God would break the heart rather than the back of the sinner, and therefore he seeks to melt us with acts of kindness. Now for us to continue our pride and rebellion after all this, what a pride is this—of how horrible a nature ? Rom. ii. 4, ‘ Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance, not considering that the goodness of God should lead us to repentance ? ’ God withholds his hand, and is loath to strike ; nay, not only so, but doth follow us with acts of grace and kindness, and maintain us with his own expenses, and yet the proud heart of man will not relent. Mark that word, they ‘ despise his goodness ; ’ they do in effect say, God shall not have my heart for all this. Oh, how great is this pride ! These are considerations that may give us a little light to judge of that pride that is in obstinacy and impenitency in sin. If you consider God’s absolute right, he hath not only a dominion of jurisdiction over us, but a full propriety in us, to use us at his pleasure ; and this right of his is backed with almighty power, and doth not stand with the creature’s courtesy ; and though it be so, yet it is managed with a great deal of condescension and love ; he beseecheth poor creatures, and tendereth offers of peace, and they are fed and maintained at his charge, and taste of his goodness and bounty.

Use 1. It informs us, how humble soever men appear otherwise, yet they are proud if they have never submitted to God with brokenness of heart, seeking his pardon and favour. There are many which are facile to men, and yet full of contumacy and stoutness of stomach against God ; they can stoop to the poorest worm, and court their favour, but yet deal insolently with their maker. But if men were persuaded of the truth of God’s being, they would sooner be convinced of the naughtiness of their hearts, by comparing their carriage to God

and men. Many there are that are tender of wounding the reputation of men, yet dishonour God and are never troubled. Many that look upon it as an uncomely thing to despise their neighbour, to deal hotly with an underling, and vaunt it, yet never made conscience of submitting themselves to God, who is their undoubted superior. Men count it part of humility and good manners to yield to those that are over them, and to pay them all kind of respect and subjection; yet they never care to seek the favour of God, and humble themselves seriously for their offences against him. You take it ill in the world when the people of mean quality insult over you, when such times fall out as the base rise up against the honourable. What are you to God? Poor base worms! will you contend with your maker? Do you count it to be heavy disorder, and a strange inversion of all states and conditions, that men of mean and low fortunes should brave it over you, and sway things in the world? and how ill may God take it that you stout it out against him? There is a greater distance between him and you, than between you and your fellow-creatures; therefore, if it be grievous to you, what a heinous offence is it to stand out against God?

Use 2. It instructs us what is the way to reduce and bring home sinners to God, by breaking their pride, or, as the expression is, Job xxxiii. 17, by 'hiding pride from man;' by which is meant taking away pride; for that which is taken away is hidden or cannot be seen. As the hiding of sin is the taking away sin, so the hiding of pride is the cure of it.

1. By humble and broken-hearted addresses to God for his pardon and his grace. There is no way to cure the pride of unregeneracy but by brokenness of heart. Come and put your mouths in the dust, and acknowledge that you have too long stood it out against God. As the nobles of the king of Assyria came with ropes about their necks, and submitted themselves; so, Jer. xxxi. 9, 'They shall return with weeping and supplications.' This is the way to come out of your sins, to go and bemoan the stubbornness and pride of your hearts; as Ephraim bemoaned himself, and smote upon his thigh, and complained of his obstinacy, Jer. xxxi. 18. Christians, first or last God will bring you to this; if you do not stoop voluntarily, you shall by force; if your hearts be not broken by the power of his grace, they shall be broken in pieces by the power of his providence: Rom. xiv. 11, 'As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me.' God hath sworn, 'As I live;' now in every oath there is an implicit imprecation, that is, if this be not done, then let this befall me. So there is an implicit imprecation in that oath, Count me not a living God if I do not make the creature stoop. If you stand it out against the power of his word, can you stand it out against the power of Christ when he comes in glory? Ezek. xxii. 14, 'Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee?' Oh, how will your faces gather blackness and darkness in that day!

2. Yield up yourselves to be governed by his will and pleasure. It is not enough to come weary and heavy laden, not only to be sensible of the burden of sin, and beg for pardon, but we must take Christ's yoke, Mat. xi. 29. Nature sticks at this: a proud heart is loath to come under the yoke. We would taste of the sweetness of mercy, but

cannot endure the bonds and restraint of duty; as Ephraim would tread out the corn, but was loath to break the clods, Hosea x. 11. The prophet alludes to the manner among the Jews; their fashion was to tread or thresh out their corn by the feet of beasts, and the ox his mouth was not to be muzzled; it was easy work, and afforded abundance of food, Deut. xxv. 4. We would have comfort, but not duty.

3. We must constantly cherish a humble frame of spirit, if we would maintain communion with God, Micah vi. 8; not only walk with God, but humble thyself to walk with God. Why? He is a great sovereign, and he will be exactly observed and constantly depended upon; and if you slip, you must bewail your failings, and from first to last all must be ascribed to grace.

Doct. 2. These proud are cursed, or, those that obstinately and impenitently continue in their sins, they are under a curse.

1. I shall open the nature of this curse.

2. Show how impenitent sinners come under this curse.

First, The nature and quality of this curse; or what is that curse which lies upon all wicked men? That will best be understood by considering that scripture wherein the tenor of the law is described: Deut. xxxvii. 26, 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them;' and Gal. iii. 10, 'Cursed is every one which continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' Where there is considerable, the duty which the law exacteth, and then the penalty which the law inflicteth.

1. The duty which the law exacteth; every one must continue in the words of this law to do it. An innocent holy nature, that is presupposed, for it is said the person must continue. It doth not consider man as lapsed or fallen, or as having already broken with God. And then he must continue in all things; there is a universal, a perfect obedience, that is indispensably required, while we are in our natural condition. And then the perpetuity; he must hold out to the last; if he fail in one point he is gone. All this is indispensably exacted of all them that live under the tenor of this covenant: 'He that doth them shall live in them;' and 'the soul that sinneth shall die.' There is required perpetual, perfect, personal obedience. What will you do if this covenant lie upon you, as it doth upon all men in their natural condition? If God call you to a punctual account of the most inoffensive day that ever you past over, what will become of you? 'If thou, O Lord, shalt mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?' Ps. cxxx. 3. Better never have been born than be liable to that judgment. Oh! therefore, when the law shall take a sinner by the throat, and say, 'Pay me that which thou owest,' what shall a poor sinner do? This is the duty exacted.

2. The penalty that shall be inflicted, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in the words of this law to do it.' The law hath a mouth that speaketh terrible things. *Cursed*, it is but one word, but it may be spread abroad into very large considerations. In one place it is said, 'The Lord will not spare him. All the curses that are written in this book of this law shall light upon him,' Deut. xxix. 20. The book of the law is full of curses, and all together they show you what is the portion of an impenitent sinner. In another place it is said,

‘Every curse and every plague which is not written in the book of this law will the Lord bring upon thee,’ Deut. xxviii. 61. Mark, though it be not specified in the law. God hath threatened sundry sorts of punishments, yet he hath many plagues in store which are not committed to record or writing; therefore, whatever is written or unwritten, revealed in the word or dispensed in providence by way of plague and misery, it is but the interpretation of this one word, ‘Cursed is he that continueth not,’ &c. However, because particulars are most affective, I will name some parts of the curse.

[1.] This is one part of the cursed condition of a sinner that is under the law, that the knowledge of his duty doth but the more irritate corruption: Rom. vii. 9, ‘The commandment came, and sin revived.’ The more we understand of the necessity of our subjection to God, the more is the soul opposite to God. Sin takes occasion by the commandment, as oppositions do more exasperate and enrage a waspish spirit.

[2.] This exaction of duty doth either terrify or stupify the conscience; he that escapeth the one suffereth the other. Either men are terrified: indeed all sinners are liable to it; the conscience of a sinner is a sore place, and the apostle saith they are ‘liable to bondage all their days,’ Heb. ii. 14; as Belshazzar trembled to see the handwriting upon the wall, and Felix trembled to hear of judgment to come; so a carnal man is afraid to think of his condition, and some are actually under horror, and wherever they go, as the devils do, they carry their own hell about them. Or if conscience be not terrified, then it is stupified; they grow senseless of their misery, and are ‘past feeling,’ Eph. iv. 19; and that is a very sad estate, and dangerous temper of soul, when men have outgrown all feelings of conscience, and worn out the prints of conviction. These are the two extremes that all Christless persons are incident unto.

[3.] There is a curse upon all that a man hath, as long as he continues in his rebellion and obstinacy against God; he is ‘cursed in his basket and store, in his going out, and coming in,’ &c., Deut. xxviii. 15–17. A man is cursed in his table; that becomes a snare; his afflictions are but beginnings of sorrows. It is a miserable thing to lie in such an estate. If the curse do not break out so visibly or sensibly, it is because now it is the day of God’s patience, and he waits for our return. But mark, God’s spiritual providence is the more dreadful. When God ‘rains snares’ upon men, all the seeming comforts which they have do but harden them in an evil course, and hold them the faster in the bonds of iniquity.

[4.] There is a curse upon all he doth; his duties are lost, his prayers are ‘turned into sin,’ his hearing is ‘the savour of death unto death,’ whilst he remaineth in his impenitency. It is said: Prov. xxi. 27, ‘The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?’ Though he should come in the best manner he can with his flocks and herds, yet all will be to no purpose, it is an abomination to God.

[5.] Impenitency binds over a man, body and soul, to everlasting torment. In time it will come to that, ‘Go ye cursed,’ &c., Mat. xxv. 41. They are only continued until they have filled up their measure,

and are ripened for hell, and then they lie eternally under the wrath of God. Look, as it is sweet to hear, 'Come ye blessed,' &c., so dreadful in that day to hear, 'Go ye cursed,' &c. Thus are the proud cursed, that is, obstinate, impenitent sinners, while they stand off from God.

Secondly, Let me examine upon what score they are cursed.

1. Every man by nature is under the curse; for until they are in Christ they are under Adam's covenant, and Adam's covenant will yield no blessing to the fallen creature: Gal. iii. 10, 'As many as are under the works of the law are under the curse,' &c. Mark, every man that remains under the law, that hath not gotten an interest in Christ, the curse of the first covenant remains upon him, and accordingly at the last day he shall have judgment without mercy; he shall be judged according to the terms of that covenant: for there are but two states, under the law, or under grace; therefore, while they are in a state of nature, they must needs be under wrath. So John iii. 18, 'He that believeth not is condemned already;' that is, in the sentence of the law; there is a curse gone out against him; the man is gone, lost, condemned already.

2. This curse abideth upon us until we believe in Christ. The sentence of the law is not repealed: John iii. 36, 'He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him;' Gal. iii. 13, 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us,' &c.

3. When Christ is tendered, and finally refused, then the sentence of the law is ratified in the gospel or the court of mercy. A court of chancery God hath set up in the gospel for penitent sinners. But then it follows, 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men choose darkness,' &c. When God shall tender men better conditions by Christ, and they turn their backs upon it, then is this curse confirmed.

Use 1. Consider how matters stand between God and us; examine how it is with you. Here let me lay down these propositions by way of trial:—

1. Every man by nature is in a cursed condition, Eph. ii. 3; every man is liable to Adam's forfeiture and breach; the elect children of God as well as others are liable to the curse.

2. There is no way to escape this curse but by flying to Christ for refuge, Heb. vi. 18. As a man would flee from the avenger of blood, so should we flee from the curse of the law that is at our heels. Wrath is abroad seeking out sinners; now, saith the apostle, 'Oh, that I might be found in him!'

3. A sense of this benefit we have by Christ will necessarily beget an unfeigned love to him; else we can have no evidence, but the curse doth still remain: and therefore it is said, 1 Cor. xvi. 22, 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha,' accursed till the Lord come, that is, for ever and ever. How can a man think he shall be the better for Christ that doth not love Christ, nor delight in him, and have no value for him? And therefore, if you have not this love to Christ, it is a sign you have no benefit by him, you have not that faith that will give you a title.

4. This love must be expressed by a sincere obedience; for 'this is love, to keep his commandments,' 1 John v. 3; and Gal. v. 24, 'They

that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the lusts thereof.' They are not Christ's, are not to be reckoned to him, that merely make a profession of his name, and with whom his memory seems to be precious; but they are Christ's that testify love to Christ. Do you perform duties for Christ's sake?

Use 2. To press you to come out of the curse which cleaves to all impenitent sinners. Oh, what a dreadful condition are they in! And how soon God may take advantage of this curse, and cut us off from a possibility of grace, we cannot tell; and at the last day this curse will be ratified. Therefore be sensible of the burden; come out of it. 'This is God's end in shutting up a sinner under such a fatal necessity; either you must perish for ever or run to Christ. This should quicken us the more to fly to his mercy.

Thirdly, 'They are not only cursed, but rebuked,' 'Thou hast rebuked the proud,' &c. Observe—

Doct. 3. The rebukes of God's providence upon impenitent sinners are of great use to the saints.

1. They are arguments of his displeasure against the proud and against the impenitent. God, that is so merciful to the humble and broken-hearted, that looketh to him that is poor and contrite and trembles at the word, Isa. lxvi. 3, he can be severe and just against those that deal proudly, that lift up the heel against him, Ps. lxxviii. 21: it is twice repeated, 'Our God is a God of salvation, but he will wound the head of his enemies,' &c. Mark, though mercy be God's delight—verily he is a God of salvation—yet we must not imagine a God all honey and all sweetness. If men be proud, obstinate, and impenitent, they shall be cursed; and not only cursed, but they shall be rebuked.

2. It is a proof and document given to the world how tender God is of his word, how willing to satisfy the world. This is the rule we must stand by, 'Thou hast rebuked them.' Why? 'Because they erred from thy commandment.' God hath authorised and ratified the law by the rebukes of his providence, and made it authentic and valid in the hearts and consciences of men: Rom. i. 18, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,' &c. Mark, it is *revealed from heaven*. The events which fall out in the world we should not look upon as casual strokes, or a chance that happened to us in the way, but as discoveries from heaven. The word is the rule of life. Mark, *against all ungodliness*; this is the breach of the first table; and *against all unrighteousness*, which is the breach of the second table. God hath owned both tables: Heb. ii. 2, 'The word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' He means the law, which was delivered by the ministry of angels. Now, every *transgression*, by that he means sins of commission; and every *disobedience*, by that he means sins of omission; and God hath met with every breach and every violation of the law. How punctually God hath exemplified every commandment in his judgment! And if we would make collections of providence, we might easily find this, how God hath rebuked pride, and that because they err from his commandment.

Again, it may be improved as a check against envy at the prosperity of the wicked. Do not call the proud happy; they are cursed already, and in time shall be punished: 'Mark the end of the wicked,' Ps. xxxvi. 17. First or last, God will manifest from heaven his displeasure against their impenitency. By daily experience we may see that they thrive ill that set themselves against God.

And then it serves to confirm the truth of the threatening. Oh! when God inflicteth judgments, remember the curse of the law is not in vain. After the thundering of the threatening, there will break out the bolt of confusion and destruction upon the wicked, so that you must either do or die for it.

Use. Let this persuade men to break off their sins by repentance, that you may be sensible of the wretchedness of your condition. God's words are deeds. Men may curse, and yet God may bless for all that; but God's curse is sure to take place. Let us make that use which David doth of it, to excite our affections to the word of God by the vengeance which God taketh of the pride and scorn of others. The examples of others shipwrecking themselves by their rebellion against God are sanctified when they make us more careful and watchful 'that we err not from God's commandments.'

SERMON XXIII.

Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.—VER. 22.

DAVID was derided for keeping close to God's word, possibly by those proud ones mentioned in the former verse. They contemned the word themselves, and would not suffer others to keep it; as the Pharisees would neither enter into the kingdom of God themselves, nor suffer others to enter. But David makes this an argument to beg the Lord's grace, to wit, light and strength, that he might give no occasion to their reproach; and if it lighted upon him, that it might not rest upon him. Or by the proud men may be meant Saul's courtiers, who traduced his innocency, and sought to overwhelm him with slander. Now, God knew his conscience and integrity, and therefore could best clear him.

In the words, as in most of the other verses, you have—

1. A request, *remove from me reproach and contempt.*
2. A reason and argument to enforce the request, *for I have kept thy testimonies.*

First, for the request, 'Remove from me reproach and contempt.' The word signifies, Roll from upon me, let it not come at me, or let it not stay with me.

And then the argument, 'for I have kept thy testimonies.' The reason may be either thus:—(1.) He pleads that he was innocent of what was charged upon him, and had not deserved those aspersions. (2.) He intimates that it was for his obedience, for this very cause that he had kept the word, therefore was reproach rolled upon him.

(3.) It may be conceived thus, that his respect to God's word was not abated for this reproach. He still kept God's testimonies, how wicked soever he did appear in the eyes of the world. It is either an assertion of his innocency, or he shows the ground why this reproach came upon him; or he pleads his respect to God, and his service was not lessened, whatever reproach he met with in the performance of it.

The points from hence are many.

1. It is no strange thing that they which keep God's testimonies should be slandered and reproached.

2. As it is the usual lot of God's people to be reproached, so it is very grievous to them, and heavy to bear.

3. It being grievous, we may lawfully seek the removal of it. So doth David, and so may we, with submission to God's will.

4. In removal of it, it is best to deal with God about it; for God is the great witness of our sincerity, as knowing all things, and so to be appealed to in the case. Again, God is the most powerful assertor of our innocency; he hath the hearts and tongues of men in his own hands, and can either prevent the slanderer from uttering reproach, or the hearer from entertainment of the reproach. He that hath such power over the consciences of men can clear up our innocency; therefore it is best to deal with God about it; and prayer many times proves a better vindication than an apology.

5. In seeking relief with God from this evil, it is a great comfort and ground of confidence when we are innocent of what is charged. In some cases we must humble ourselves, and then God will take care for our credit. We must plead guilty when by our own fault we have given too much occasion to the slanders of the wicked: so Ps. cxix. 39, 'Turn away my reproach which I fear, for thy judgments are good.' *My reproach*, for it was in part deserved by himself, and therefore he feared the sad consequences of it, and humbles himself before God. But at other times we may stand upon our integrity, as David saith here, 'Turn away my reproach and contempt, for I have kept thy testimonies.'

These are the points which may be drawn from this verse; but I shall insist but upon one of them, which, in the prosecution of it, will comprise all the rest; and that is this—

Doct. That reproaches are a usual, but yet a great and grievous, affliction to the children of God. I will show—

1. They are a usual affliction.

2. They are a grievous affliction.

First, They are a usual affliction. Reproaches are either such as light upon religion itself, or upon our own persons.

1. Upon religion itself. Sometimes the truth is traduced, and the way of God is evil spoken of, disguised with the nicknames of sedition, heresy, schism, faction. Look, as astronomers miscall the glorious stars by the name of the dog-star, the bear, the dragon's tail, and the like—they put upon them names of a horrid sound—so do carnal men miscall the glorious things of God, his holy ways; they put an ill name upon them: Acts xxiv. 14, 'After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers.' The Jews called Christianity a heresy, or an apostasy from the old religion; and so

do Papists call the Reformation. Luther, when he was charged with apostasy from the faith, answered thus: I confess I am an apostate, but from the devil's cause; I have not kept touch with the devil. Cant. v. 7, we read that the spouse's veil was taken from her by the watchmen; so the comeliness of the church is taken away by the imputations of evil men. Thus there may reproaches light upon religion itself.

2. On our persons; and so either for religion's sake, or upon a private and personal respect.

[1.] For religion's sake; and thus God's children have been often calumniated. It is foretold by Christ as the lot of his people; and therefore he provides against it: Mat. v. 11, 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.' Those who have no strength and power to inflict other injuries have these weapons of malice always in readiness. When other kinds of persecutions and violences are restrained, yet men take a liberty of censuring and speaking all manner of evil falsely of the children of God; and ever this hath been verified in the experience of the saints. Their lives are a real reproach to the wicked, they do upbraid them; and therefore, to be quits with them, the wicked reproach them by censures and calumniations. I shall give some instances. Moses had his portion of reproaches: Heb. xi. 26, 'Esteeming the reproaches of Christ better riches than the treasures of Egypt.' Possibly the Holy Ghost means there when he was scoffed at for joining himself with so mean and afflicted a people; they thought Moses was mad to quit all his honours. Christ himself was accused of the two highest crimes of either table—blasphemy and sedition: of blasphemy, which is the highest crime against the first table; and of sedition, which is the highest crime against the second. And all that will be Christ's they must expect to bear his reproach: Heb. xiii. 13, 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.' The apostle alludes to the sacrifice of atonement, which was to be slain without the camp. So Jesus Christ was cast out of the city; and we must be contented thus to be cast off by the world, to be cast forth from among men as vile and accursed, bearing Christ's reproach.

[2.] For personal reproaches; this is very usual with God's children also, reproaches upon private and personal occasions. God may let loose a railing Shimei against David. Many times he complains of his reproaches, often in this psalm, more in other psalms: Ps. xxxi. 13, 'For I have heard the slander of many; they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life.' Sundry sorts of persons made him the butt upon which they let fly the arrows of censure and reproach: Ps. xxxv. 15, 'The objects gathered themselves together against me; they did tear me, and ceased not;' meaning his name was torn and rent in pieces, and that by the objects: such bold and saucy dust will be flying in the faces of God's people. So I may speak of Jeremiah, and Joseph, and other servants of God; yea, our Lord himself endured the contradiction of sinners. Jesus Christ, that was so just and innocent, which did so much good in every place, yet meets with odious aspersions. So Ps. lxiv. 3, 4, 'They bend their bows to shoot

their arrows, even bitter words; that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not.' Perfection meets with envy, and envy will vent itself by detraction—a usual affliction for the people of God, and therefore we cannot say they are wicked because they are traduced, and we should not presently condemn all those of whom we hear evil. It was the fashion of the primitive times to clothe Christians with bear-skins, and bait them with the dogs. God's best children may be clad in an ill livery; and therefore we should not easily take up these slanders. Thus it is a usual affliction.

Secondly, It is a grievous affliction. Ver. 39, David saith he looked upon it as a great evil. In the account of scripture it is persecution. Ishmael is said to persecute Isaac: Gal. iv. 29. How? Because he mocked him. Compare it with Gen. xxi. 9: 'Sarah saw the son of the bondwoman mocking Isaac;' and in the reddition and interpretation, the Holy Ghost calls it a persecution. So they are called 'cruel mockings,' Heb. xi. 36. There is as much cruelty, and as deep a wound made by the tongue of reproach many times as by the fist of wickedness. Reproach must needs be grievous to God's children, upon a natural and upon a spiritual account.

1. Upon a natural account, because a good name is a great blessing. See how it is against nature. It is more grievous than ordinary crosses. Many would lose their goods cheerfully, yet they grieve more for the loss of their name. Some constitutions are affected more with shame than with fear, and above all their possessions they prize their name and credit. To most proud spirits, disgraceful punishment is much more dreadful than painful: Ps. xxii. 7, 'All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head.' A good name is more precious than life to some: Eccles. vii. 1, 'A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.' The coupling of these two sentences shows men had rather die than lose their name. If a man die, he may leave his name and memory behind him that may live still; therefore it is more hateful to have our names and credit mangled than be pierced with a sharp sword.

2. Upon a spiritual account it is a grievous affliction. It is not barely for their own sake, because their innocency is taxed; but for God's sake, whose glory is concerned in the honour of his servants, and whose truth is struck at through their sides. This is grievous to grace. Why? Next to a good conscience there is no greater blessing than a good name; and certainly he that is prodigal of his credit will not be very tender of his conscience; and therefore the children of God, upon gracious reasons, stand upon their name, it is the next thing to conscience they have to keep. Grace values a good name, partly because it is God's gift; it is a blessing adopted and taken into the covenant, as well as other blessings. It is one of the promises of God: 'He will hide us as in a pavilion from the strife of tongues,' Ps. xxxi. 20. This is frequent in the Old Testament, where heaven is but sparingly mentioned; a good name is often mentioned. Partly because it is a shadow of eternity. When a man dies, his name lives, which is a pledge of our living with God after death; as spices, when

broken and dissolved, leave an excellent scent, so he leaves his name behind him. And partly because it is put above riches: Prov. xxii. 1, 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' It is better, more pure and sublime than wealth, and more worthy our esteem. They are low and dreggy spirits whose hearts run after wealth; the greatest spirits run out upon fame and honour: so Eccles. vii. 1, 'A good name is better than precious ointment.' Aromatical ointments were things of great use and esteem among the Jews, and counted the chief part of their treasures; now a good name is better than precious ointment. And partly because of the great inconveniences which follow the loss of name. The glory of God is much interested in the credit of his servants. The credit of religion depends much upon the credit of the persons that profess it. When godly men are evil spoken of, the way of truth suffers; and when we are polluted, God is polluted: Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 'They profaned my holy name when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land;' that is, by their scandals. The offences are charged upon us, but in effect they prove the disgrace of Christ. Christ, that will hereafter be admired of his saints, will now be glorified and honoured in them. The shame of those things charged upon us redounds to God and religion till we be clear. And as the honour of God is concerned in it, so again their safety lies in it. Observe it, Satan is first a liar, then a murderer. First, men are smitten with the tongue of slander, and afterwards with the fist of wickedness: the showers of slander are but presages and beginnings of grievous storms of persecution; wicked men take more liberty when the children of God are imprisoned as criminals; therefore it is the usual practice of Satan first to blast the repute of religious persons, then to prosecute them as offenders. Possibly this may be the meaning of that, Ps. v. 9, 'Their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue;' that is, the slanders of the wicked are a preparation to death, as an open sepulchre is prepared to swallow and take in the dead carcase. I expound it thus, because we find the phrase used in this sense. The force and power of the Babylonian, Jer. v. 16, is called an 'open sepulchre;' they are all mighty men; that is, you can expect nothing but death from the force and puissance of their assaults. So here their reproach is not only a burying-place for our names, but our persons; for first men slander, then molest the children of God. When the Arian emperor raged against the orthodox Christians, and the bishops and pastors of the churches were suppressed everywhere, they durst not meddle with Polonus, out of a reverence of the unspottedness of his fame; and therefore a good report is a great security and protection against violence. And then they desire a good name to honour God with it. A blemished instrument is little worth. Who would take meat from a leprous hand? It is Satan's policy, when he cannot discourage instruments from the work of God, then to blemish and blast them. Therefore, those that have anything to do for God in the world should be tender of their credit, especially those that are called to public office, that they may carry on their work with more success. Therefore one of the qualifications of a minister is, 'He must have a good report of them that are without,

lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil,' 1 Tim. iii. 7. I suppose it is taken there appellatively, lest he fall into the snare of the slanderer; I will not absolutely determine. Men set snares for you, and they watch for your halting. Thus grace presseth a good name, because of the consequences of it.

Use 1. Here is advice to persons reproached. Acknowledge God in the affliction, though it be great and grievous. God hath an aim in all things that befall you. The general aim of all afflictions is to try, purge, and make white: Dan. xi. 35; or as it is in Deut. viii. 13, 'To humble thee, prove thee, and do thee good at the latter end.' Your enemies may intend harm, but God means good; you should receive good by this, as by every affliction. Plutarch, in his excellent discourse, How a man should profit by his enemies, brings in a comparison of one Jason, that had an impostume, which was let out by the wounds an enemy gave him; so many times our impostumes, and the corrupt matter that is within us, is let out by the gashes and wounds which those that meant harm to us give to our name and credit.

First, God doth it to humble thee. Carnal men shoot at rovers, but many times we find the soul is pricked in the quick; when they shoot their arrows of detraction and slanders, it may revive guilt, and put us upon serious humiliation before God. There are many sins to which this affliction is very proper.

1. It seems to be a proper cure for the sin of pride; be it pride in the mind, which is self-conceit; or pride in the affections, which is called vainglory; all sorts of pride; there is no such effectual remedy as this. Possibly we have been too self-conceited, then God giveth us to such scandals that may show us what we are. Many times our very graces do us hurt, as well as our sins; and we may be puffed up with what we have received. So for vainglory, when we are apt too much to please ourselves in the opinions others have of us, which is an evil the people of God are liable to, this pride God will cure by reproach. Pride is one of the oldest enemies ever God had; it was born in heaven in the breast of the fallen angels, for which they are laid low; and when his children harbour it, God hath a quarrel against it. When Paul was puffed up, when the bladder was swollen, God sent him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure, 2 Cor. xii. 7. Possibly it was some eminent affliction; but when he expresseth it afterwards, he mentioneth reproaches, ver. 10, 'Therefore I will rejoice in infirmities,' that is, sickness; nay, 'I will rejoice in reproaches.'

2. For carnal walking. When we are negligent, and do not take notice of the fleshliness and folly we are guilty of and allow in our hearts, that breaks out into our actions. God suffers others to reproach us and gather up our failings, that we may see what cause we have to take our ways to heart. Every man that would live strictly had need of faithful friends or watchful enemies; of faithful friends to admonish him, or watchful enemies to censure him. God makes use of watchful enemies to show us the spots in our garments that are to be washed off. Many times a friend is blinded with love, and grows as partial to us as ourselves; therefore God sets spies for us to watch

for our halting: Jer. xx. 10, 'I heard the defaming of many: report, say they, and we will report it: all my familiars watched for my halting.' They lie in wait to take us tripping; and God sees it needful that we should have enemies as well as friends; how ignorant else should a man be of himself! Therefore God useth them as a rod to brush the dust from our clothes.

3. The sin God would humble us for is censuring. If we have not been so tender of the credit of others, God will make us taste the bitterness of affliction ourselves, and recompense the like measure into our bosoms: Mat. vii. 1, 2, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' We shall find others to judge as hardly of us as we do of them. Good thoughts and speeches of others are the best preservative of our own name; and therefore, when reproach falls upon you, it is not enough you should not slight it, though you know the report to be false; but a Christian is to examine himself: have we not drawn it upon ourselves by slandering others, or talking intemperately of others? and doth not God pay us home in our own coin? He that is much given to censuring seldom or never escapes severe censuring from others. It is said, 'Let his own words grieve him.' Your own words will fall upon you; therefore humble thyself before God for the reproaches thou hast cast upon others. Thus the Lord ordereth it with good advice to humble us, and that for pride, careless walking, and for censuring others.

Secondly, It is to try thee.

1. To try your faith in the great day of accounts. Can you comfort yourselves in the solemn vindication of the day of judgment, and in God's approbation then? 2 Cor. x. 18, 'He is approved whom the Lord commendeth.' Men cannot defend thee if God condemn thee, they cannot condemn thee if God acquit thee; and therefore canst thou stand to God's judgment? In a race it is not what the standers-by say, but what he that is the judge of the games will determine. We are all in a race, and it is not what men say of us, but what God saith, who is judge of all: 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4, 'It is a small thing that I should be judged of man's judgment; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.' In the original it is 'man's day,' and so in the margin. We shall never be resolute for God, until we come to this, to count it a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment. Now is man's day, but God hath his day hereafter. So to try our faith in particular promises: Ps. cxix. 42, 'So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me; for I trust in thy word.' A Christian, when he gives up himself to God, he gives up everything he hath to God; not only gives his soul to God to keep, but that God may take charge of his person, estate, and good name. Now God requires a trust according to the extent of the covenant, a waiting and confidence in his power. He can turn the hearts of men, and give them favour in their eyes: Ps. xxxvii. 6, 'He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.'

2. As to try our faith, so our patience. We should prevent reproach as much as we can; but then we must bear it when we cannot avoid it. They reproach, but I pray, Ps. cix. 4; that was David's exercise

and revenge ; he took that advantage, to pray for them. God will try how we can bear the injuries of men. The grace of patience must be tried as well as other graces. We read that Shimei went railing upon David to the peril of his life ; saith David, ' It may be God hath bid him curse.' A mad dog that bites another makes him as mad as himself ; so usually the injuries and reproaches of others foster up our revenge, and then there is no difference between us and them : they sin, and we sin. Revenge and injury differ only in order ; injury is first, and revenge is next. Saith Lactantius, If it be evil in another, for thee to imitate him, to be as mad as they, break out in passion and virulency, it is more evil in thyself, because thou sinnest twice, against a rule and against an example ; therefore God tries whether we will be passionate or patient. The patience of his servants is mightily discovered by reproaches : 1 Cor. iv. 12, ' Being reviled, we bless ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we entreat.' There must be a season to try every grace ; and therefore now God trieth us, whether we can with a meek humble submission yield up ourselves ; or whether we are exasperated and drawn into bitterness of passion, yea or nay.

3. God tries our uprightness. Many are turned out of the way by reproaches ; the devil works much upon stomach and spleen. Tertullian being reproached by the priests of Rome, in revenge turns Montanist. Now God tries us to see whether we will hold on our course. The moon shines and holds on its course though the dogs bark ; so a child of God should hold on his way though men talk their fill. In the text, though proud men reproached and contemned David, yet all this did not unsettle him. Some men can be religious no longer than when they are counted to be religious ; but when their secular interest is in danger, they fall off. Thus when men injure them, they do as it were take a revenge upon God himself. Those carnal men that fall off from God are like pettish servants that run away from their master when he strikes them ; a good servant will take a buffet patiently, and go about his master's work ; and if we were seasoned as we should be for God, we would pass ' through evil report and good report,' 2 Cor. vi. 8, and still keep our integrity.

Thirdly, God ordereth this grievous and sharp affliction to do you good or to better you. Reproach is like soap, which seems to defile clothes, but it cleanseth them. There is nothing so bad but we may make some good use of it, a Christian may gain some advantage by it. Dung seems to stain the grass, but it makes the ground fruitful, and to rise up at spring with a fresh verdure. Reproaches are a necessary help to a godly conversation, to make us walk with more care ; and therefore there is another piece of holy revenge we should take upon them, to make us walk more strictly and more watchfully, the more they slander us and speak of us as evil-doers ; the way is not to contend for esteem, so much as to stop their mouths by a good apology. Passionate returns will but increase sin, but a holy conversation will silence them.

Use 2. To them that either devise or receive reproaches ; both are very sinful.

First, To you that devise them, that speak reproachfully of others. Consider—

1. You hazard the repute of your own sincerity : James i. 26, 'Whosoever seemeth religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.' Hypocrites, and men that put themselves into a garb of religion, and are all for censuring, take a mighty freedom this way ; these men bewray the rottenness of their hearts. Those that are so much abroad are seldom at home ; they do not inquire and look into their own hearts. Alas ! in our own sight we should be the worst of men. The children of God do ever thus speak of themselves as 'the least of saints,' the 'greatest of sinners,' 'more brutish than any men,' of 'sinners whereof I am chief.' Why ? Because we can know others only by guess and imagination, but they can speak of themselves out of inward feeling ; therefore we should have a deeper sense of our own condition. But now a man that is much in judging and reproving others is seldom within ; for if he did but consider himself, if he had but an account of his own failings, he would not be so apt to blemish others. It is a cheap zeal to let fly at the miscarriages and sins of others, and to allow our own. Consider, thou hast enough to observe already in thyself.

2. You rob them of the most precious treasure. He that robs thee of thy name is the worst kind of thief : Prov. xxii. 1, 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' A man that is taken pilfering another man's goods, he is ashamed when he is found ; so should a censurer : you rob him of a more excellent treasure.

3. You offend God, and draw public hatred. It is the devil's work to be 'the accuser of the brethren,' Rev. xii. 10. The devil doth not commit adultery, doth not break the Sabbath, nor dishonour parents ; these are not laws given to him. If the devil will bear false witness, he is an accuser of the brethren ; it is the devil's proper sin, and therefore slanderer and devil have one name, *Diabolus*.

Object. But must we in no case speak evil of another ? or may we not speak of another's sin in no case ?

Sol. 1. It is a very hard matter to speak any evil of another without sin ; for if it be without cause, then it is downright slander, and is against truth ; if it be for a light and small cause, then it is against charity ; if it be for things indifferent, or for lesser failings, indiscretions, or weaknesses, still it is against charity : James iv. 11, 'Speak not evil one of another, brethren.' It is worse in brethren. Many take liberty to traduce God's choice servants that are in difference. For a soldier to speak evil of soldiers, or a scholar of scholars, is worse than for those that hate these functions. So for you, Christians, to speak evil one of another, you gratify the triumphs of hell, and bring a reproach upon the ways of Christ. In things doubtful, judge the best ; in things hidden and secret we can take no cognisance : when the fact is open, we do not know the aim nor the intent of the heart. It is the devil's work to judge thus : 'Doth Job serve God for nought ?' when he could not traduce his action. If the practice be open and public, we do not know what alleviating circumstances it may bear, what grievous temptations they had, or whether they have repented, yea or nay. The devil is called a slanderer, because he doth accuse the saints. It is too true many times what he accuseth them of. Ay ! but he accuseth them when they are pardoned ; he rakes up the

filth God hath covered; he accuseth the brethren after repentance, after they are acquitted by the Lord's grace; and so you may incur the like: and therefore it is a very hard matter to avoid sin; in one way or other we shall dash upon the command; better let it alone.

2. Speak not *of* him, but *to* him; and so change a sin into a duty. I say, when you turn admonition into censure, you exchange a duty for a sin. 'Admonish one another,' is a thing spoken of in scripture; but 'speak not evil one of another.'

3. If you speak of the failings of others, it should be with tenderness and grief; as when they are incorrigible and likely to infect others, or when it is for the manifest glory of God: Phil. iii. 19, 'There are some of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping,' &c. He speaks of some seducers that, under the form of godliness, did undermine the purport of the Christian religion, merely took up the profession of it for their own ends. It should be done with a mighty deal of caution; not out of idleness for want of talk—that is babble; not out of hatred and revenge—that is malice: though the matter is true, yet we must not speak of men's faults to please others—that is flattery.

Secondly, To them that receive the slander. He is a slanderer that wrongs his neighbours' credit by upholding an ill report against them. It is hard to say which is worse, railing or receiving. Ps. xv. 3, when an inhabitant of Sion is described, it is said, 'He that receiveth not a report, and takes it not up against his neighbour;' so Prov. xvii. 4, 'A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips, and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.' It is not only a point of wickedness to have a naughty tongue or false lips, but to give heed. He is a liar that receiveth a lie, and loves it when brought to him. God will plague all those that love lies. As in treason, all that are acquainted with the plot are responsible; so you are responsible for your ears, as they for their tongue. It is good to have a spiritual tongue, that will heal the wounds that others make in men's reputation: Prov. xii. 18, 'There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health.' Some carry a sword in their mouths, others balsam to heal the wounds that are made.

Use 3. If this be so usual and grievous an affliction, and that even to the children of God, and that not only upon the account of nature, but of grace, then it puts us upon seeking comfort against reproaches.

1. The witness of a good conscience within. If you be innocent, it is not against thee they speak, but against another, whom the slanderer takes thee to be. The hair will grow again though it be shaven, as long as the roots remain. A good conscience is the root of a good credit; and though the razor of censure hath brought on baldness, yet it will grow again. God will either turn their hearts or support thee under it.

2. Reproaches cannot make thee vile in God's sight. The world's filth many times are God's jewels. Many that were praised in the world are now in hell, and many that were disgraced in the world are in great favour and esteem with God; many times their contempt doth increase their esteem with God, and therefore they cannot hurt thee. They may persecute thee; but if thou be patient, they cannot impose

upon thee, and burden thy cause in his eyes.' God doth not ask the world's vote and suffrage whether such and such shall be justified or received into glory, yea or nay. If they be infirmities and defects, humble thyself, and God will cover them, Ps. xxxii. 1. God is wont to scatter reproaches cast upon his children, as the sun scatters the clouds, Ps. xxxvii., and heaven will make amends for all.

3. The profit thou gainest by them, the watchfulness, the diligence, all this will be sweet. I might have given comfort against reproaches for religion. These are honourable, they are the reproaches of Christ, Heb. xi. 26 ; Heb. xiii. 13. It is as honourable before God as ignominious before men. And we cannot expect better fare than our master : 'The disciple is not above his lord, nor the servant above his master : it is enough for the disciple to be as his lord, and the servant as his master,' Mat. x. 24, 25. We cannot expect to fare better than Christ did, and it is an honour to suffer as he did.

Again, if cripples mock us for going upright, let us pity them. The judgment of wicked men is depraved, not to be stood upon ; and this contempt one day will be cast upon themselves : Ps. xlix. 14, 'The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning.'

SERMON XXIV.

Princes also did sit and speak against me : but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.—VER. 23.

THIS psalm expresseth David's affection to the word, as the result of all that experience which he had of the comfort and use of it. In the present verse two things :—

1. David's trouble.

2. His remedy.

1. His trouble, *princes did sit and speak against me.*

2. The remedy that he used, *but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.*

First, The evil wherewith he was exercised. There are several circumstances produced by way of aggravation of his trouble :—

1. Who? 'Princes also ;' his trial came not only from the contempt and reproach of base people, spoken of in the former verse, but from princes also, by whom are meant Saul's courtiers and counsellors.

2. How? 'Did sit ;' not only when occasionally met together in private in their chambers or at their tables, but when they sat in council, or when they sat together on the seat of judgment, they consulted to ruin him ; or upon the throne (where nothing but just and holy should be expected) passed a judicial sentence against him.

3. What? 'Did speak against me ;' it was not reproach only that troubled him, but the powers of the world gave false sentence against him. To be spoken of as an evil-doer is a less temptation than to be condemned as a malefactor.

Secondly, His remedy ; where observe—

1. The title he gives himself, but 'thy servant.' He speaketh

modestly of himself, in the third person; and fitly doth he say, 'thy servant.' We owe duty to a higher master, when they decree anything contrary to God's word.

2. His practice and exercise, 'Did meditate on thy statutes.' This is spoken for two reasons:—

[1.] That he was not discouraged by their opposition, but held to his duty; he was maligned for God's word's sake, and yet kept up his respect to the word of God, and never left meditating therein.

[2.] To show the way of his relief and cure under this trouble, by exercising himself in the word, which in the next verse he sheweth yielded him a double benefit—comfort and counsel.

(1.) It was of use to comfort him and strengthen faith.

(2) To direct him that he might keep within the bounds of true obedience; there being in the word of God both sweet promises and a sure rule.

Observe from the evil wherewith he was exercised:—

Doct. It is many times the lot of God's people that princes do sit and speak against them in councils and upon the throne of judgment.

1. For consulting against them to their ruin. We have instances of a council gathered against Christ: John xi. 47, 'Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doth many miracles.' They meet together, and plot the ruin of Christ and his kingdom; and they were those that were of chief authority in the place. Another instance: Acts iv. 27, 28, 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.' There is their agreement to put Christ to death. In the Old Testament, Pharaoh and his nobles: Exod. i. 10, 'Come on, *κατασοφίζόμεθα*, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.' And against Daniel the princes of the Persian empire consult how to entrap him in the matter of his God, Dan. vi. 4–6, &c.

2. For abusing the throne of judgment and civil courts of judicature, to the molestation of the saints. I shall cite but two places: Ps. xciv. 20, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?' It is no strange, but yet no small temptation, that the oppression of God's people is marked with a pretence and colour of law and public authority, and the mischief should proceed from thence where it should be remedied, namely, from the seat of justice. So, Mat. x. 17, 18, Christ foretelleth they shall have enemies armed with power and public authority: 'Beware of men, for they will deliver you to the councils, and they shall scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake.' Not only subordinate, but supreme governors may be drawn to condemn and oppress the godly. In so plain a case more instances need not.

Reasons of it, on God's part, and on the part of the persecutors.

First, On God's part, he permitteth it—

1. To show that he can carry on his work though authority be against him, and that his people do not subsist by outward force, but the goodness of his providence, and so hath the sole glory of their preservation. When the Christian religion came first abroad in the world, 'not many noble nor many mighty were called;' the powers of the world were against it, and yet it held up the head, and was dispersed far and near. Falsehoods need some outward interest to back them, and the supports of a secular arm; but God's interest doth many times stand alone, though God doth now and then make 'kings nursing-fathers, and queens nursing-mothers,' according to his promise, Isa. xlix. 23. Oftentimes the church is destitute of all worldly props: Micah v. 7, 'And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.' Yea, the power of the world is against it, and yet it subsists. Thus it was in the primitive times; there were only a handful of contemptible people that professed the gospel; yet it got ground daily, not by force of arms or the power of the long sword, but by God's secret blessing. Ambrose giveth the reason why God suffered it to be so, *Ne videretur auctoritate traxisse aliquos, et veritatis ratio non pompæ gratiâ prævaleret*—lest this new religion should seem to be planted with power rather than by its own evidence, and the authority of men should sway more with the world than the truth of God. There is a wonderful increase without any human concurrence, as the Lord saith, 'The remnant of his people shall be as a dew from the Lord, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men,' without man's consent or concurrence. So that God alone hath the glory of their preservation.

2. That the patience of his people may be put to the utmost probation. When they are exercised with all kinds of trials, not only the hatred of the vulgar, but the opposition of the magistrate, carried on under a form of legal procedure. In the primitive times, sometimes the Christians were exposed to the hatred and fury of the people, *lapidibus nos invadit inimicum vulgus*; at other times exposed to the injuries of laws, and persecutions carried on by authority against them. There was an uproar at Ephesus against the Christians, Acts xix., and there seemed to be a formal process at Jerusalem, Acts iv. This latter temptation seemeth to be the more sore and grievous, because God's ordinance, which is magistracy, is wrested to give countenance to malicious designs, and because it cuts off all means of human help, and so 'patience hath *ἐργον τέλειον*, its perfect work,' James i. 4. There is some glory in suffering the rage and evil word of the vulgar, for they are supposed not to make the wisest choice; but when men of wisdom and power, and such as are clothed with the majesty of God's ordinance, are set against us, then is patience put to the utmost proof, and whether we regard God or man most, and who is the object of our fear, those that have power of life and death temporal, or him that hath power of life and death eternal.

3. That his people may be weaned from fleshly dependencies, and doting upon civil powers, and so be driven to depend upon him alone. Ps. xciv. 20–22, 'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with

thee, which establish mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the Lord is my defence, and my God is the rock of my refuge.' There would not be such use of faith and dependence upon God if our danger were not great. It is harder to trust in God with means than without means. We are beaten out when outward helps fail, otherwise we are apt to neglect God, and then a world of mischief ensueth. When the emperor of the Romans began to favour the Christians, poison was said to be poured into the church; and in the sunshine of worldly countenance, like green timber, they began to warp and cleave asunder; and what religion got in breadth it lost in strength and vigour. God's people never live up to the beauty and majesty of their principles so much as when they are forced immediately to live upon God, and depend upon him for their safety.

4. That their testimony and witness-bearing to God's truths may be the more public and authentic in the view of the world. This testimony is either to them for their conviction and conversion: Mat. xxiv. 14, 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations;' or against them: Mat. x. 18, 'And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.' It is for a testimony, and that should comfort them in all their sufferings: Mark xiv. 9, 'Verily I say unto you, Whersoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.' The testimony is more valid as being confirmed by their courage in troubles; they are principles that they will suffer for; which, as it is a warning to the professors of religion that they should own no principles in a time of peace but what they would confirm by their avowed testimony in the extremity of trials; so also it should convince their enemies in case they be put upon this exercise. It is needful that every truth should have a sealed testimony; that is, we should not only vent opinions, but be willing to suffer for them if God should call us out so to do. God hath been ever tender of imposing upon the world without sufficient evidence, and therefore would not have his people stand upon their lives and temporal concerns, that thereby they may give greater satisfaction to the world concerning the weight of those truths which they do profess.

Secondly, On the persecutors' part, or the persons molesting; so the causes are—

1. Their ignorance and blind zeal: John xvi. 2, 'They shall put you out of their synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that they do God good service.' They think it to be an acceptable service to God to molest and trouble those that are indeed his people. Those princes that sat and spake against David were not pagans and men of another religion, but of Israel; and it is often the lot of God's people to be persecuted, not only by pagans and openly profane men, but even by men that profess the true religion—pseudo-Christians, Rev. xiv. 13, those that pretend they are for God and his cause, and seem to be carried on with a great zeal, and do not oppose truth as truth, but their quarrel is coloured by specious pretences.

2. Their prejudices lightly taken up against the people of God. Satan is first a liar, and then a murderer: John viii. 44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it.' By lies he bringeth about his bloody design. Christ was first called a Samaritan, and one that had a devil; and then they did persecute him as such a one. And, as was observed before, as Christians of old were covered with the skins of wild beasts, that dogs and lions might tear them the more speedily, so by odious imputations God's people are brought into distaste with the world, and then molested and troubled, represented as a company of hypocrites and unjust dealers; and under that cloak, true religion is undermined. Now, in the persecutor, this is faulty, because they lightly take up every false suggestion; and so Christians are condemned διὰ τὴν φήμην, as Justin Martyr complained, because of the common reproach, without any distinct inquiry into their way and practice, *nolunt audire quod auditum damnare non possunt*.

3. Their erroneous principle in civil policy, that Christ's kingdom and the freedom of his worshippers is not consistent with civil interests. Whatever hath been the matter, worldly rulers have been jealous of Christ's interest and kingdom, as if it could not consist with public safety, and the civil interests of that state and nation where it is admitted; and suggestions of this kind do easily prevail with them: Esther iii. 8, 'It is not for the king's profit to suffer them;' and John xi. 48, 'If we let him alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.' Reason of state is an ancient plea against the interest of religion. In the Roman empire, though the Christians were inconsiderable as to any public charge, yet they had a jealous eye upon them. Justin Martyr sheweth the reason of it, ὅτι βασιλείαν ὀνομάζομεν, because they were often speaking of a kingdom; though they meant it of the kingdom of heaven, and were far enough from all rebellion.

Use 1. It informeth us that we should not measure the verity of religion by the greatness of those that are with it or against it. This was one of the Pharisees' arguments, 'Do any of the rulers believe in him? But this people, that know not the law, are accursed.' John vii. 48, 49. Alas! men of authority and great place may be often against God's interest: James ii. 1, 'Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, in respect of persons.' Mark that title that is given to Christ, 'the Lord of glory;' he is able to put glory enough upon his worshippers, though they have nothing of outward pomp and splendour; and 'not many mighty are called,' 1 Cor. i. 26. Many will say they have none of quality to join with them, none but ignorant people. If a man had judged so in the first times, when the gospel came first abroad in the world, would not Christianity itself have seemed a very contemptible thing? Therefore a simple, plain-hearted love to Christ and his truth, whether powers be averse or friendly, is that which is required of us.

2. It reproveth those who are soon discouraged with the reproach which base people cast upon the ways of God. David stood both in

the one temptation and in the other, the reproach and contempt of the vulgar, and also when princes sat and spake against him. But to these we may say, as Jer. xii. 5, 'If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how wilt thou contend with horses?' If we be such tender milkops that we cannot suffer a disgraceful word from the basest of the people, what shall we do when we meet with other manner of conflicts and oppositions in the farther progress of our duty to God? If we are tired out with the disgrace and affronts of these mean ones, and cannot put up with a scornful word at their hands without disorder, what shall we do when we are to contest for God's interest with those great and masterly ones that are armed with power and authority, and it may be the advantage of laws against us? *Scommata nostra ferre non potes*, said the Antiochians to Julian in another case, *quomodo feres Persarum tela?* God's servants do often receive discouragement from the people and from authority, but the goodness of their cause and the favour of God makes them joyfully persevere.

3. It teacheth us what to do when this is not our case. I have treated as this scripture hath led me of the oppositions of princes and worldly powers against the people of God; it may be you may judge it unseasonable; but how soon it may be seasonable you cannot tell, considering the spirit of enmity against the power of godliness. Blessed be God that it is not so seasonable now. But what use shall we now make of it?

[1.] To bless God when he giveth religious rulers, and such as are well affected to religion. It is a fulfilling of his promise: Isa. xlix. 23, 'And kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and queens thy nursing-mothers.' God's interest in the world is usually weak, and his people, like little children, had need to be nursed up by the countenance and defence of worldly potentates. Now, when they discharge their duty, and do afford patronage and protection, it should be acknowledged to God's glory, in whose hands their hearts are; and the rather by us, because of the iron yoke that was upon us, and those hard taskmasters under which we formerly groaned. We have our own discontents, as well as former ages; but because all things are not as we could wish them, shall we be thankful for none? The liberty of religion is such a blessing as we cannot enough acknowledge, and doth sufficiently countervail other inconveniences. Oh! therefore let us not sour our spirits into an unthankful frame, by dwelling too much upon our discontents and private dissatisfactions; it is a mercy that the sword of authority is not drawn against religion. When God meaneth good or evil to a nation, he usually dispenseth it by their magistrates. If good, then he puts wisdom and grace into the hearts of those that govern, or government into the hands of those that are wise and gracious. When he meaneth evil, he sendeth them evil magistrates: Isa. xix. 4, 'The Egyptians will I give over into the hands of a cruel lord, and a fierce king shall rule over them.' But when good governors, it is a mercy, and a presage of good.

[2.] To pity those whose case it is that princes sit and speak against them, as it is of many of the people of God now in the world. When we suffer not by immediate and direct passion, we should suffer by

way of fellow-feeling and compassion. It is charged as a great crime that 'those that were at ease in Sion were not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph,' Amos vi. 6, compared with the 1st verse. It may be used proverbially; as the butler forgot Joseph when he was well at court; and his brethren did eat bread and little regarded the afflictions of his soul when cast into the pit. But I suppose them literally, because the half tribe of Manasseh was carried captive by Tiglath Pileser, that they did not sympathise with them, *propter confractionem Joseph*—for the breach made upon Joseph. God layeth affliction upon some of his people, to try the sympathy of others; as on Protestants in Poland, the emperor's dominions, Savoy, some parts of France, and elsewhere.

[3.] To be the more strict and holy, and improve this good day of the church's peace. They that are not holy in a time of peace will not be holy and constant in a time of trouble: Acts ix. 31, 'When the churches had rest, they walked in the fear of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.' When we are not called to passive obedience and suffering, our active obedience should be the more cheerfully performed. Now where is it so? Our fathers suffered more willingly for Christ than we speak of him. Our inward peace and comfort will cost us more in getting, and therefore we should be more in service. Oh! let us not abuse this rest we have, to the neglect of God, or to vain contentions, as green timber warpeth and breaketh in the sunshine. The contentions of the pastors, saith Eusebius, did usher in the truth,¹ which was Diocletian's persecution.

[4.] Here is caution, and a word of counsel to the princes of the nations, or the heads of the people, that now are met together and sit in council. Oh! do not sit and speak against such as are God's people; that is, do not decree anything against them. Some would have the magistrate to do nothing in religion; but that would leave things at a strange loose and disorder. Certainly you should at least provide for the liberties of God's people, that they should 'lead a quiet life in godliness and honesty,' 1 Tim. ii. 2; that they may be secured, and the peace kept, not only as to their civil interests, but whilst they worship God according to their conscience, which can never be as long as those swarms of libertines are publicly tolerated, which every day increase in number, power, and malice. And again, the great security of magistrates lieth in an oath of fealty, which only receiveth value from religion; therefore the magistrate is concerned in what religion is professed in a nation, as well as in things civil. But now, whilst you interpose in religion, be sure you do not contradict or undermine God's interest; and be not courted by any prepossessions of your own, or the crafty insinuations of others, to oppress by your sentence and suffrage those that fear God in the land, and do make conscience of their ways. The magistrate's interposing in religion is to me an unquestionable duty, and yet to be managed with great caution: Ps. ii. 10, 'Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings, and be instructed, ye judges of the earth.' What by natural prejudices against the strict and more severe ways of godliness, what by private whispers and subtle disguises, men may be tempted to oppose Christ's kingdom, cause, and

¹ Qu. 'tenth' ?—ED.

people; therefore they should be wary, as they would be faithful in their places, and love their own souls, to go upon sure clear grounds. You are to promote Christ's service, otherwise you will be answerable for your neglect; and yet you are to take heed, lest, whilst you think you do God service, you subvert not his interest, and so you be answerable for your mistake. To deal more particularly would be a diversion. I only intend it as a warning, and to show you the necessity of consulting with those who are best able to judge in the case where your duty lieth.

Secondly, David's remedy: 'But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.'

Doct. The best way to ease the heart from trouble that doth arise from the opposition of men of power and place, is by serious consulting with God's word.

Because the time will not bear a large prosecution, I shall open the force of this clause in three propositions.

1. A holy divertisement is the best way to ease the trouble of our thoughts. Certainly it is not good altogether to pore upon our sorrows; a diversion is a prudent course. David did not merely sit down and bemoan the calamity of his condition, and so sink under the burden, but runneth to the word. As husbandmen, when their ground is overflowed by waters, make ditches and water-furrows to carry it away; so when our minds and thoughts are overwhelmed with trouble, it is good to divert them to some other matter. But every diversion will not become saints; it must be a holy diversion: Ps. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' The case was the same with that of the text, when the throne of iniquity frameth mischief by a law; as you shall see here, when he had many perplexed thoughts about the abuse of power against himself. But now where lay his ease in diversion? Would every diversion suit his purpose? No; '*Thy* comforts,' of God's allowance, of God's providing, comforts proper to saints. Wicked men in trouble run to their pot and pipe, and games and sports, and merry company, and so defeat the providence rather than improve it; but David, who was God's servant, must have God's comforts. So elsewhere, when his thoughts were troubled about the power of the wicked, 'I went into the sanctuary, there I understood their end:' Ps. lxxiii. 17. He goeth to divert his mind by the use of God's ordinances, and so came to be settled against the temptation.

2. Among all sorts of holy divertisements none is of such use as God's word. There is matter enough to take up our thoughts and allay our cares and fears, and to swallow up our sorrows and griefs, to direct us in all straits. In brief, there is comfort there and counsel there.

[1.] Comfort, whilst the word teacheth us to look off from men to God, from providence to the covenant, from things temporal to things eternal, from men to God, as Moses 'feared not the wrath of the king when he saw him that is invisible,' Heb. xi. 27; and Eccles. v. 8, 'If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perversion 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.' There is a higher judge that sitteth in heaven; and if he pass sentence for us when they pass sentence against us, we need to be the less troubled. If he give us the pardon of sins and the testimony of a good conscience, it is no matter what men say against us: Ps. xl. 4, 'Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.' Is not God able to bear you out in his work? From providence to the covenant: providence is a very riddle; we shall not know what to make of it till we gather principles of faith from the covenant: Heb. xiii. 5, 'He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' God overrules all for good: Rom. viii. 28, 'We know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those that are the called according to his purpose.' From things temporal to eternal: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18, 'For our light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal;' Rom. viii. 18, 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.' A feather or a straw against a talent, a man would be ashamed to compare them together.

[2.] For counsel. A Christian should not be troubled so much about what he should suffer, as what he should do, that he may do nothing unseemly to his calling and hopes, but be kept blameless to the heavenly kingdom. Now, the word of God will teach him how to carry himself in dangers, to pray for persecutors (fire is not quenched with fire, nor evil overcome with evil); how to keep ourselves from unlawful shifts and means, how to avoid revenge, lying, flattering, yielding against conscience, or waxing weary of well-doing, that we may not fight against Satan or his instruments by their own weapons, for so we shall be easily overcome. The wicked shall not be so wise to contrive the mischief, as a saint instructed by the word is how to carry himself under it: Ps. cxix. 98, 'Through thy commandments thou hast made me wiser than my enemies.' Malice and policy shall not teach them to persecute, as God's word to carry yourselves in the trouble.

3. The word must not be slightly read, but our hearts must be exercised in the meditation of it. A cursory reading doth not work upon us so much as serious thoughts. In all studies, meditation is both the mother and nurse of knowledge, and so it is of godliness, without which we do but know truths by rote and hearsay, and talk one after another like parrots; but when a truth is chased into the heart by deep inculcative thoughts, then it worketh with us, and we feel the power of it. Musing maketh the fire burn, ponderous thoughts are the bellows that blow it up. Eggs come to be quickened by sitting abroad upon them. In a sanctified heart the seeds of comfort by meditation come to maturity; by constant meditation our affections are quickened, this turneth the promises into marrow: Ps. lxxiii. 5, 6, 'My soul shall be filled as with marrow and fatness, when I meditate on thee in the night watches.' It giveth more than a vanishing taste, which hypocrites have.

Use 1. In all your troubles learn this method, to cure them by

gracious means, prayer or meditation. By meditation on the word of God, that will tell you that we are born to trouble, and therefore we should no more think it strange to see God's children molested here than to see a shower of rain fall after a sunshine, or that the night should succeed the day: 1 Peter iv. 12, 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, as though some strange thing happened unto you.' It were strange if otherwise; as if a man were told that his journey lay through a rough stony country, and should pass over a smooth carpet-way. Our waymark is many tribulations: Acts xiv. 22, 'Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of heaven.' God had one Son without sin, none without the cross.

2. That afflictions, though in themselves they are legal punishments, fruits of sin, yet by the grace of God they are medicinal to his people: 1 Cor. xi. 32, 'When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.'

3. We never advance more in Christianity than under the cross: Heb. xii. 10, '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;' Ps. cxix. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.'

4. Rather undergo the greatest calamities than commit the smallest sin: Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.'

5. That all crosses are nothing to desertions of God and terrors of conscience: Prov. xviii. 14, 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?'

6. That a meek suffering conduceth much to God's glory: 1 Peter iv. 14, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified;' whilst you do nothing unworthy of his presence in you and the truth you profess.

SERMON XXV.

Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.—VER. 24.

DAVID in the former verse had mentioned the greatness of his trial, that not only the basest sort, but princes also were set against him. Then he mentions his remedy; he had recourse to God's word, 'But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.'

Now he shows the double benefit which he had by the word of God, not only wisdom how to carry himself during that trouble, but also comfort; comfort in trouble, and counsel in duty; it seasoned his affliction and guided his business and affairs. What would a man have more in such a perplexed case than be directed and comforted? David had both these, 'Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors.'

First, *Thy testimonies are my delight*; or, as it is in the Hebrew, *delights*.

Secondly, *They are my counsellors.* In the Hebrew it is, *the men of my counsel*, which is fitly mentioned, for he had spoken of princes sitting in council against him. Princes do nothing without the advice of their privy council; a child of God hath also his privy council, God's testimonies. On the one side there was Saul and his nobles and counsellors; on the other side there was David and God's testimonies. Now who were better furnished, think you, they to persecute and trouble him, or David how to carry himself under this trouble? Alphonsus, king of Arragon, being asked who were the best counsellors, answered, the dead; meaning books, which cannot flatter, but do without partiality declare the truth. Now of all such dead counsellors, God's testimonies have the pre-eminence. A poor godly man, even then when he is deserted of all, and hath nobody to plead for him, he hath his senate and his council of state about him, the prophets and apostles, and other 'holy men of God, that spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' A man so furnished is never less alone than when alone; for he hath counsellors about him that tell him what is to be believed or done; and they are such counsellors as cannot err, as will not flatter him, nor applaud him in any sin, nor discourage or dissuade him from that which is good, whatever hazards it expose him to. And truly, if we be wise, we should choose such counsellors as these, 'Thy testimonies are the men of my counsel.'

First, Let me speak of the first benefit, 'Thy testimonies are my delight.'

Doct. That a child of God, though under deep affliction, finds a great deal of delight and comfort in the word of God.

This was David's case, princes sat and spake against him, decrees were made against him, yet 'thy testimonies are my delight.' Let us see—

1. What manner of delight this is that we find in the word.

2. What the word ministereth or contributeth towards it.

First, What kind of delight it is? A delight better than carnal rejoicing. Wicked men, that flow in ease and plenty, have not so much comfort as a godly man hath in the enjoyment of God, according to the tenor of his word: Ps. iv. 7, 'Thou hast put more gladness into my heart, than when their corn, wine, and oil increased.' We have no reason to change conditions with worldly men, as merry as they seem to be, and as much as they possess in the world.

But more particularly, wherein is the difference?

1. This delight is a real joy: 2 Cor. vi. 10, 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.' Their sorrow is but seeming, but their joy is real; it is joy in good earnest: Heb. xii. 11, 'No affliction seemeth joyous but grievous.' As to seeming, they are in a sad condition, but it doth but so seem. A wicked man is as it were glad and merry, but indeed he is dejected and sorrowful; the godly man is as it were sorrowful, but indeed comforted.

2. It is a cordial joy: Ps. iv. 7, 'Thou hast put more gladness into my heart.' That is a delight indeed which puts a gladness into the heart, which not only tickles the outward senses, but affects the soul and comforts the conscience. Carnal joy makes a loud noise, and therefore it is compared to 'the crackling of thorns under a pot;' but

this is that which goes to the heart, that fills it with serenity and peace. Carnal joy is like the morning dew, which wets the surface ; but godly joy is like a soaking shower that goes to the root, and makes the plant flourish. They that indulge false comfort rather laugh than are merry. But now he that is exercised in the word of God, and fetcheth his comfort out of the promises, he is glad at the very heart.

3. It is a great joy : 1 Peter, i. 8, ' In whom believing, ye rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' It doth ravish the heart, so that it is better felt than uttered, it is unspeakable and glorious. The higher the life, always the greater the feeling. The good and evil of no life can be so great as the good and evil of the spiritual life, because it is the highest life of all, and therefore hath the highest sense joined with it. Man is more capable of being afflicted than beasts, and beasts than plants, and a godly man more than other men ; he hath a higher life, therefore the good and evil is greater. A wounded spirit is the greatest misery any creature can feel on this side hell. So answerably are its joys : as the groans and sorrows of the spiritual life are unutterable, so are the joys of it unspeakable.

4. It is a more pure joy than worldlings can have. The more intellectual any comfort is, the more excellent in the kind. Though beasts may have pain and pleasure poured in upon them by the senses, yet properly they have not sorrow and delight. The joy of carnal men is pleasure rather than delight ; it is not fed by the promises and ordinances, but by such dreggy and outward contentments as the world affords, and so of the same nature with the contentment of the beasts. But now the more intellectual and chaste our delights are, the more suitable to the human nature. Well, then, none hath a delight so separate from the lees as a Christian that rejoiceth in the promises of God. He that delights in natural knowledge, hath, questionless, a purer object and greater contentment of soul than the sensualist can possibly have, that delights only in meats, and drinks, and sports, in pleasures that are in common with the beasts. Further yet, he that delights in bare contemplation of the word, as it is an excellent doctrine suited to man's necessities, as the stony ground ' received the word with joy,' Mat. xiii. 20, certainly he hath yet a purer gladness than merely that man that is versed in natural studies. Oh ! but when a man can reflect upon the promises, as having an interest in them, that delight which flows from faith, and is accompanied with such a certainty, surely that is a more pure delight than the other, and doth more ravish the heart ; they have more intimate and spiritual joy than others have.

5. It is a joy that ends well. Carnal rejoicing makes way for sorrow : ' The end of that mirth is heaviness,' Prov. xiv. 13. It is a poor forced thing, saith Cooper. A man in a burning fever is eased no longer by drinking strong drink than while he is drinking of it, for then it seems to cool him, but presently it increaseth his heat ; so when men seek ease and comfort in troubles from outward external things, though they seem to mitigate their heaviness for the present, yet they increase it the more afterward.

6. It is not a joy that perverts the heart. Carnal comforts, the more we use them, the more we are ensnared by them : Eccles. ii. 2, ' I have said of laughter, It is mad ; and of mirth, What doth it ?' For what

serious and sober use doth carnal rejoicing serve? There is no profit by it, but much hurt and danger; therefore Solomon preferreth sorrow before it: Eccles. vii. 3, 'Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.' But now, the more of this delight we have, the more we delight ourselves in the word of God, the more we love God, the better the heart is.

7. It is a delight that overcomes the sense of our affliction, and all the evils that do befall us; and therefore it is said of the heirs of promise that they have 'strong consolation,' Heb. vi. 18. The strength is seen by the effects; therefore it is strong, because it supports and revives, notwithstanding troubles. It establisheth the heart, notwithstanding all the floods and storms of temptations that light upon it: 1 Thes. i. 6, it is said of them, that 'they received the word with much affliction and joy in the Holy Ghost.'

Secondly, How do we find it in the word? 'His testimonies are my delight.' The word requires this joy in troubles, and the word ministers it to the soul.

It requires this joy: James i. 2, 'Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.' We are not only with patience to submit to God's will, but also to rejoice in it: so Mat. v. 12, 'When men persecute and revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name sake, rejoice and be exceeding glad.' Many times when other ways of persecution cease, yet there is reviling. Those that have no strength and power to do other injuries, yet have such weapons of malice always in readiness. Some, being not good Christians themselves, will defame those that are so; that so, when they cannot reach them in practice, they may depress them by censure; when they cannot go so high as they, they may bring them as low as themselves by detraction. Now, though this be a great evil, we should bear it not heavily but cheerfully; rejoice and be exceeding glad in hope of the promises: Rom. v. 3, 'We glory in tribulation.' A true believer, that hath received the word of God as the rule of his life and guide of his hopes, he can not only be patient, but cheerful, glory in his tribulation. A carnal man is not so comfortable in his best estate as he at his worst.

Again, it gives us matter and ground of joy. God speaks a great deal of comfort to an afflicted spirit. It was one end why the scriptures were penned: Rom. xv. 4, 'That we through patience and comfort of the scripture might have hope;' and Heb. xii. 5, 'Have you forgotten the consolation, that speaks to you as children?' The great drift of the word is to provide matter of comfort, and that in our worst estate.

But now, what are the usual comforts that may occasion this delight and joy in the Holy Ghost in the midst of deep affliction?

1. The scripture gives us ground of comfort from the author of our afflictions, who is our Father, and never manifests the comfort of adoption so much as then when we are under chastening: Heb. xii. 5, 'The consolation that speaks to you as children;' and John xviii. 11, 'The cup which my Father hath put into my hands, shall I not drink it?' It is a bitter cup, but it is from a father, not from a judge or an enemy. Nothing but good can come from him

who is love and goodness itself; nothing but what is useful from a father, whose affection is not to be measured by the bitterness of the dispensation, but by his aims, what he intends. If God should let us alone to follow our own ways, it were an argument we were none of his children.

2. The necessity of affliction: 1 Peter i. 6, 'Ye are for a season in trouble, if need be.' Before the corn be ripened, it needs all kind of weathers, and therefore the husbandman is as glad of showers as sunshine, because they both conduce to fruitfulness. We need all kind of dispensations, and cannot well be without the many troubles that do befall us.

3. The nature and use of affliction. It is a medicine, not a poison; it works out the remainders of sin: Isa. xxvii. 9, 'By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin.' Afflictions are useful, and help to mortification. It is a file to get off our rust; a flail, wherewith we are threshed, that our husk may fly off; a fire to purge and eat out our dross: 'He verily for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness,' Heb. xii. 10. If God take away any outward comforts from us, and give us graces instead of them, it is a blessed exchange, if he strip us of our garments, and clothe us with his own royal robe, as holiness is. God himself is glorious in holiness. Now, that we may be partakers of his holiness, surely that is for our profit.

4. For the manner of God's afflicting, it is in measure: Isa. xxvii. 8, 'In measure when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it. He stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.' So Jer. xlvi. 28, 'Fear thou not, O Jacob, my servant, saith the Lord,' &c. So 1 Cor. x. 13, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above measure.' His conduct is very gentle: as Jacob drove on as the little ones were able to bear, Gen. xxxiii., so doth God with a great deal of moderation measure out sufferings in a due proportion, not to our offences only, but our strength; as a father, in correcting his children, regards their weakness as well as their wantonness, laying less upon the more infirm, though alike faulty.

5. Another comfort which the scripture propounds is the help we shall have in affliction to bear it, partly from the comforts of his Spirit, and partly from the supports of his grace.

[1.] By way of consolation: 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost' at such a time, Rom. v. 3. Cordials are for those that are fainting. In time of trouble we have most sensible experience of God's love. God deals with his children many times as Joseph did with his brethren; he calls them spies, and puts them in prison, but at length he could hold no longer, but tells them, 'I am your brother Joseph.' So God seems to deal roughly with his people, and take away their dearest comforts from them. Ay! but before the trouble be over, he can hold no longer, but saith, I am your God, your father, and exceeding great reward. His bowels yearn towards us, and he opens his heart to us, and sheds abroad his love in our conscience.

[2.] Partly by the supports and influences of his grace: Ps. cxxxviii. 3, 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' When David was in trouble, this was his

comfort, though he could not get deliverance yet he got support. God is many times gone to appearance, but he will never forsake us as to inward support and strength: Heb. xiii. 5, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.'

6. From the fruit and final issue of all: 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.' He that can find Christ in his afflictions, and can see heaven beyond it, needs not to be troubled. All the notions of heaven are diversified. Why? That they may be suited to those divers trials and many evils we have in the world. Sometimes it is expressed by *glory* and *honour*, to counterbalance the *disgrace* which God's children meet with here; that the reproach of men may not make us more sad than the eternal glory may make us comfortable. Sometimes it is expressed by *substance*, because sometimes God's children are *poor*, and suffer loss of *goods*, Heb. x. 34. Sometimes it is called our *redemption*, our *country*, to comfort us in *exile* and banishment for the name of Christ, Heb. xi. 14, 15. Sometimes it is called *life eternal*, because we may be called to suffer even to *blood*. Thus the word offereth this comfort against all the evils that befall us, that we may counterbalance every particular trouble with what the promises hold forth concerning our blessed hopes.

Use 1. Well, then, let us exercise ourselves in the word of God, and let all his promises be as so many cordials to us. To this end get an interest in these promises, for the heirs of promise have 'strong consolation,' Heb. vi. 18. There is strong, great, real, and pure comfort, but it is to the heirs of promise. So Rom. v. 4, 'Not only so, but we rejoice in tribulation.' Who are those? Those that are justified by faith in Christ, ver. 1. To others, afflictions are the punishments of sin, and an occasion of despair, not of rejoicing. Ay! but when we are interested in reconciliation with God, then we take this comfort out of the word of God.

2. It informs us of the excellency of God's testimonies above all outward enjoyments. When we have them to the full, they cannot give us any solid true peace of conscience, nor cure one sad thought. Now beg of God that he will comfort you when all things else fail: 'When the labour of the olive shall fail, I will comfort myself in the Lord my God,' Hab. iii. 18. I say, when we are under any burden, nay, when we are under any sorrow for sin, when afflictions revive stings of conscience, or else the word hath awakened them, yet there is comfort to be had by running to the word of God.

3. It shows us what is the property of believers, to delight in the testimonies of God, when all things go cross to them. Temporaries, when things run smoothly, they have a comfort in the word. Oh! but when the afflictions of the gospel fall upon them, they fall a murmuring presently. But a true believer can hold up his head; and though he hath much affliction, yet he can have much joy in the Holy Ghost, and a great deal of comfort from the word of God.

There follows another benefit, 'Thy testimonies are my counsellors,' or 'men of my counsel.' From thence observe—

Doct. 2. That one great benefit we have from the word of God is counsel, how to direct our affairs according to his will.

For the clearing of this, let me lay down these propositions—

1. That our great interest is to keep in with God, or approve ourselves to him.

2. Whoever would keep in with God needs counsel and direction in all his ways.

3. The only good counsel we can have is from God in his word.

4. The counsel God hath given us in his word is sufficient and full out for all our necessities.

Prop. 1. That our great interest is to keep in with God, and approve ourselves to him in all our actions; for God is the scope and end of our lives and actions, as the thing pressed, ‘That we may walk worthy of God in all well-pleasing,’ Col. i. 10. God, being our chiefest good, must be our last end; therefore in every action there must be a habitual purpose, and in all actions of weight and moment there must be an actual purpose, to please God. Every ordinary affair must be carried forth in the strength of the habitual purpose, but in all actions we would make a business of there must be an actual purpose. And because his authority alone can sway the conscience, which is under his dominion, therefore it concerns us in all things to ‘exercise ourselves that we may have a good conscience, void of offence both towards God and man,’ Acts xxiv. 16. And again, we are to approve our ways to God, and to keep in with him, because to him we are to give an account, 2 Cor. v. 9, 10. There will a time come when every action of ours shall be taken into consideration, and weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, with all our principles and ends; therefore we strive, we are ambitious (so the word signifies); our great ambition should be, living or dying, to be accepted with God. Again, surely it should be our business to approve ourselves to God in every action, because all the success of our actions depends upon his concurrence and blessing. Now we shall find this is often asserted in scripture. When a man’s ways are full of hazards, likely to be exposed to great opposition, your great work is to keep in with God, approve your hearts to him: Prov. xvi. 7, ‘When a man’s ways please the Lord, he will make even his enemies to be at peace with him.’ God hath a mighty power over the spirits of men; therefore this is to go to the fountain-head, to stop all opposition there; and, on the other side, without this care of pleasing God, all goes to loss. Counsels, though never so wisely laid, yet are blasted if we do not make this our business, to approve our hearts to God in those actions. Remember, in one place it is said, ‘The counsel of the froward is carried headlong,’ Job v. 13; and in another place, Isa. xlv. 25, ‘The counsel of wise men he turneth backward.’ When men do not study to please God, and approve their hearts to him, God leaves them to precipitate counsels; sometimes they are carried forward, at other times they are carried backward; the event is cross to their design. Sometimes God lets them fall into precipitant counsels that they may undo themselves, at other times disappoints their counsels, and that which they have designed.

Prop. 2. Whosoever would keep in with God, he needs good counsel and direction in all his ways. Both in regard of the darkness of his understanding, his corrupt affections, and inordinate self-love, man is not able to rule and govern himself, but needs counsel: Prov. xii. 15,

'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.' When a man engageth in any action, such is the darkness and perverseness of man's heart that he should not be over-confident of his own apprehensions, or of his own inclinations, but should hearken after counsel; and Prov. xxviii. 26, 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.' Both these proverbs are to be understood not so much of wise managing of civil affairs as of spiritual direction. Surely it is ill trusting ourselves and counsels and inclinations of our own hearts. Blind affections usually govern a man's life; and all sinners have an evil counsellor in their bosom, some lust or other, and therefore need to be directed. The counsel of the flesh is, Favour thyself. Every evil affection gives ill counsel. Covetousness saith, Preserve thy worldly interest. Voluptuousness saith, You need not be so strict and nice, and abridge yourselves of the comforts of the world. Paul saith, Gal. i. 16, 'I conferred not with flesh and blood.' Flesh and blood are evil counsellors, and under pretence of safety will suggest what is for our ruin. What will the flesh say when it is to be denied, and the blood say when it is to be spilt and shed for God's sake? These will persuade us rather to please ourselves than please God. They will persuade us to desert our duty.

Prop. 3. The only good counsel that we can have is from God in his word: Ps. lxxiii. 24, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me unto glory.' We have it from God, and we have it from his word; for there is a guide and a rule. Man is so weak and so perverse that he needs both a guide and a rule. The guide is the Spirit of God, and the rule is the word of God: thou shalt guide me, but by thy counsel. By these two alone can we be led in the way to true happiness. The Spirit he is a sure guide; and the word, that is a clear rule. We are dark, but the scriptures are not dark. I observed out of the 18th verse, when the saints called upon God, they do not say, Lord, make a plainer law, but, Lord, give me better eyes. We are dark, and need the illumination of the Spirit; the scriptures are light: Prov. vi. 23, 'The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light.' In all matters of practical obedience it is clear and open.

Prop. 4. The counsel that God hath given us in his word is sufficient and full out to all our necessities. Let me instance this in particulars.

1. The word gives us counsel for our general choice; it is the rule of all faith and obedience. The scriptures are the counsel of God, sent to remedy the miseries of the fall; therefore it is said, Acts xx. 27, 'I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.' It is God's counsel how man should be reconciled, how he should be converted, and come to the enjoyment of himself. David, when he had chosen God for his portion, he saith, Ps. xvi. 7, 'Blessed be God who hath given me counsel.' In the word he gives us counsel how to come to him for our happiness, and by grace he sets it on upon the heart: this is the counsel of God concerning our salvation.

2. Not only in our general choice, but in all our particular actions, so far as they have a tendency unto that end: Ps. exix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.' It is a lamp and a light. We are full of darkness and error; but as we follow

the direction of God, it is a lamp not only to our path, but to our steps, to our feet; not only to our path, to our general course, but it directeth us in every particular action.

3. In dark and doubtful passages, when a man multiplieth consultations and perplexed thoughts, and changeth conclusions as a sick man doth his bed, and knows not what course to take, whether this or that; then the word will direct him what to do, so as that a man may find quiet in his soul. Indeed here is the question, How far the word of God is a counsellor to us in such perplexed and doubtful cases?

[1.] The word of God will help him to understand how far he is concerned in such an action in point of duty and conscience; for otherwise it were not 'able to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works,' 2 Tim. iii. 17. Now it is a great relief to the soul when a man understands how far he is concerned in point of duty. The conflict many times lies not only between light and lust, or light and interest—then a gracious man knows what part to take; but when it lies between duty and duty, then it is tedious and troublesome to him. Now the word clearly will tell you what is your duty in any action, whatever it be.

[2.] As to the prudent management of the action in order to success, the word will teach you to go to God for wisdom, James i. 6, and to observe his answer.

[3.] So in all actions, the word will teach you to ask God's leave and God's blessing. Christians, it is not enough to ask God's counsel, but ask his leave in any particular action, in disposing our dwellings, or our concernments of children, and the like: Judges i., 'Who shall go up and fight against the Canaanites?' They would fain have the Lord decide it. And again, 'Shall I go up to Ramoth-Gilead?' In all actions our business is to ask God's leave. David always runs to the oracle and ephod, 'Shall I go up to Hebron?' And Jacob in his journeys would neither go to Laban nor come from him without a warrant and leave from God. So we ask God's leave in prayer, and observe the bent of our hearts after prayer.

[4.] The word of God teacheth a man, when he understandeth his duty, and hath God's leave, to submit the event to God, and that easeth the heart, because he may be sure of success, comfort, and support: Ps. xxxvii. 5, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass;' and Prov. xvi. 3, 'Commit thy work unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' It easeth us of a great deal of trouble and care; so that when a man hath brought his affections to submit to whatever God should determine in point of success, when he hath moderated and calmed his spirit, that he is resolved to bear the event whatever it be, this easeth the soul of a deal of trouble. Thus you see how we may make the statutes of God to be the men of our counsel.

Use 1. What a singular mercy is it that God hath given us the scripture, where we have counsel upon all occasions, how to manage our affairs prudently, bear afflictions comfortably, and with composed hearts to get through all events and dangers that we meet with in our passage to heaven! We should have groped up and down, as the Sodomites for Lot's door, if we had not this rule of faith and obedience.

It is a rule that teacheth us how to think well, for it reacheth to the thoughts; to speak well, for it giveth a law to all our words; to do well in all our civil actions and trading: how to keep a good conscience, and approve ourselves to God; how in natural actions, eating, drinking, to season them with God's fear; and religious actions, how we may pray and worship; how to govern ourselves, our own hearts and affections; to converse with others in all relations, as fathers, children, masters, servants, magistrates, ministers, people; and how to hold communion with God: all which are demonstrations of the sufficiency of the scripture for our direction, and what reason there is that we should take the testimonies of God to be the men of our counsel.

Use 2. For reproof to those that turn the back upon God's counsels. Who are those?

1. Such as neglect the general duties of Christianity, as faith, and repentance. God hath given us counsel what to do in order to eternal life, and we regard it not. The great quarrel between God and sinners is about the neglect of this counsel, which he hath given them for their soul's good: Prov. i. 25, 'They set at nought all my counsel;' and ver. 30, 'They would none of my counsel.' Oh! when your friends have advised you, and you despise it, and take another course, it troubleth them. You know how heinously Achitophel took it when his counsel was despised. Equals, when their counsel is despised, take it very ill; much more superiors when they give counsel. The entreaty and advice of a superior carrieth the force of a command. So it is here with God; it is called counsel, not as if it were an arbitrary thing whether we did regard it or no; but because of God's mild condescension. When men are in danger of perishing for ever, the Lord gives us counsel. You are in a miserable estate; he is pleased to tell you how to come out of your misery. The word of God, therefore, is called the counsel of God. It is sad when we shall reject the counsel of God: Luke vii. 30, 'They rejected the counsel of God against themselves.' There is two sentences, they rejected the counsel of God, and it was against themselves; it was to their own loss and destruction. God loseth nothing when we despise his counsel; but you lose all—your eternal happiness. This is so great an evil that God punisheth it with itself. When men will not take God's counsel, then it is the most dreadful judgment he can lay upon us to give us up to our own counsel, Ps. lxxxi. 11. Oh, what a heavy judgment was it to be given up to the counsels of their own heart!

2. It reproves such as do not consult with God's word about their affairs, but merely live as they are acted by their own lusts, or 'walk at all adventures;' so the expression in the marginal reading is, Lev. xxvi. 21. It is as the action falls; they do not care whether it please God, or be the rule of their duty, yea or nay. These are far from the temper of God's children. It is sad in persons, much more in nations, when men run headlong upon all manner of disorders, against right and honesty; it tends to ruin: Deut. xxxii. 28, 'They are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.'

3. Such as go flatly against the counsel of God, and, to gratify their own interest, pervert all that is just and honest: Ps. cvii. 11,

'They rebelled against the word of the Lord, and contemned the counsel of the Most High.' These do but expose themselves to speedy ruin. Job xviii. 7, Bildad said of the wicked, 'His own counsel shall cast him down.' They need no other means to ruin them than their own brutish course. When men dare break the commandment of God without any reluctancy, to gratify a worldly interest, though for the present no evil comes of it, yet afterwards they shall smart: Prov. xix. 20, 'Hear counsel and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise for thy latter end.' Consider what it will come to afterwards, when thou comest to die; then you will wish, Oh that I had taken God's counsel, that I had not gone with such a daring spirit against the plain counsel of God's word!

4. Such as pretend to ask counsel from the word, but it is according to the idol of their own hearts; that come with their own conclusions and preconceptions and prejudices, against God's counsel: Ezek. xiv. 3, 4, 'Son of man, these have set up their idols in their heart,' &c. Men will come and pretend to ask God's counsel and leave upon their undertakings, when they are resolved upon a wicked enterprise before; then God must be called upon and sought to, and so they make God's ordinance a lacquey, merely to be a covert to their evil practices; as those in Jer. xlii., that came to the prophet, and they were preposessed, and had their resolutions aforehand.

Use 3. To press us to this consulting with the word of God, to make the testimonies of the Lord the men of our counsel. There are many qualifications and tempers of heart necessary.

1. Fear of God: Ps. xxv. 12, 'What man is he that feareth the Lord? him will he teach the way that he shall choose;' he that is in doubt and perplexed, and would have counsel from God's word. Who is the man that is like to have it? He that feareth the Lord. There is a great suitableness between the qualification and the promise. Partly he that fears God hath a greater awe of the word than others have, and is loath to do anything contrary to God's will; he would fain know what is God's mind in every particular case: Ps. cxix. 161, 'My heart standeth in awe of thy word.' To offend God, and to baulk the direction of God's word, that is the greatest terror to him, greater than all other dangers. Now such a man is less apt to miscarry by the rashness and impetuous bent of carnal affections. And he that fears God, he aims at God's glory rather than his own interest, and so is rather swayed by reasons of conscience and religion than of carnal concerns. Many times the doubtfulness that is upon the spirit is because of conflicts between lust and knowledge; our light is weakened by an inordinate affection to our own interest, otherwise we would soon come to the deciding our case by the word of God. Now he that would fain know God's mind in everything, this is the man whom God will direct.

2. The second qualification is 'the meek:' Ps. xxv. 9, 'The meek he will guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way.' By the meek is meant a man humble, that will submit himself to God, whatever condition he shall appoint. This man God in his word will teach and direct.

3. The third qualification mentioned in order to this is a constant

dependence upon God : Prov. v. 6, ‘Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding : in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.’ Oh ! when a man is brought off from this spiritual idolatry, of making his bosom to be his oracle, and his own heart to be his counsellor, when he doth in the poverty of his spirit humbly and entirely cast himself upon the help of God, and acknowledge him in all his ways, then he shall see a clear direction what God would have him to do. You have another place to this purpose, Ps. cxliii. 8, ‘Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk ; for I lift up my soul unto thee.’ Oh ! when a man goes every morning to God, and desires the direction of his Spirit, and professeth to God in the poverty of his own spirit that he knows not how to guide his way for that day, then God will teach him the way he shall walk. So Ps. xxv. 4, 5, ‘Show me thy ways, O Lord ; teach me thy paths.’ What is his argument ? ‘On thee do I wait all the day.’ When you live in a constant dependence upon God, then will the Lord undertake to direct and guide you.

4. Obedience or Christian practice, that is one of the qualifications that make you capable for direction from the word of God : John vii. 17, ‘If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.’ A man does not know whether this opinion or that be according to God’s mind, when there are plausible pretences on every side. He that maketh conscience of known truth, and walketh up to his light, he that doth not search to satisfy curiosity, but out of a thorough resolution to obey and submit his neck to the yoke of Christ, whatever he shall find to be the way of Christ, that man shall know what is the way in times of controversy and doubtful uncertainty. He that will say, as a famous German divine, If we had six hundred necks, let us submit them all to the yoke of Christ ; he that is resolved to submit to the mind of Christ, how contrary soever to his interest, to the prejudices and prepossessions of his own heart, he shall know the doctrine that is of God.

SERMON XXVI.

My soul cleaveth unto the dust : quicken thou me according to thy word.—VER. 25.

THE man of God in this psalm had spoken before of the common and universal benefits of the word, as it agreeth to all times and conditions of believers ; for it belongeth to all, in what state soever they are, to look upon it as a direction in the way to get true happiness, and to stir up suitable affections in their hearts. Now he sheweth what use the word hath in each special condition, especially in the time of great afflictions. David did often change states, but his affection to the word never changeth.

Here is—(1.) A representation of David’s case ; (2.) His supplication or petition thereupon ; wherein—(1st.) The request itself ; (2d.) The argument to enforce it.