

those things whereof you are now ashamed? You cannot look back without horror of conscience; as the unclean person, when he looketh back, and considereth that his flesh and body is consumed by sin, Prov. v. 11-13. He speaketh there of some noisome disease that hath gotten into his body. But then, on the other side, the side of godliness, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts,' Oh! what peace, what serenity of mind, what hopes of eternal life, what comfortable entertainment shall you have in heaven! Determine beforehand what it will come to. Thus you see the difference between a sinful and godly course.

### SERMON LXIV.

*Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words.*—VER. 57.

DAVID doth in this place make out his right and title, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord,' &c. Here is—

1. David's protestation, *thou art my portion, O Lord.*

2. David's resolution, *I have said that I would keep thy words.*

In the first of these, in David's protestation, you may take notice of his claim, and of the sincerity of it.

1. Of his claim to God, 'Thou art my portion.' A part or portion, in the original use of the word, signifies a less quantity taken from a greater; a part is used in opposition to the whole. But with respect to the matter in hand, it is not used in such a sense, but for our lot and happiness; not *sensu mathematico*, not with reference to a whole, but *politico et forensi*, with respect to choice, interest, and possession; and the allusion is taken either from the distribution of the land of Canaan, where every one had his portion appointed to him by lot, and measured to him by rod and lines: therefore it is said, 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage;' or else it is an allusion to the partage of an ordinary estate, where every child hath his portion assigned him to live upon. Thus he lays claim to God himself.

2. The sincerity of this claim may be gathered, because he speaks by way of address to God. He doth not say barely, 'He is my portion,' but challengeth God to his face, 'Lord, thou art my portion.' Elsewhere it is said, Lam. iii. 24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul.' There he doth not speak it by way of address to God, but he adds, My soul saith. But here to God himself, who knows the secrets of the heart. To speak thus of God to God argues our sincerity, when to God's face we avow our trust and choice; as Peter, John xxi. 17, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee;' he appeals to God's omniscieny; such an appeal is there to God for the truth of this assertion; as in that other place, when the believing soul lays claim to God, the integrity of that claim is also asserted, not only by the lips or mouth, but also the soul. There is *oratio mentalis, vocalis, vitalis*: there is the speech of the heart, in the real inclina-

tion of it; and the speech of the tongue, in outward profession; and the speech of the life, by answerable practice. All three must be joined together; what the tongue utters, the heart and life must consent to. All will say, God is their portion; but it is not what the tongue says, but what the heart saith; and what the heart saith will appear in the course of your actions; there is the real proof and evidence of it. Thus much for David's protestation, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord;' he speaks to God himself.

Secondly, Take notice of David's resolution, 'I have said that I would keep thy word.' It is good to see what kind of inference the saints draw from this principle, that God is their portion. Sometimes they infer thence dependence upon God, sometimes subjection and obedience to him; for this principle doth not only establish our comfort, but our duty. Sometimes to establish dependence: Lam. iii. 24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.' I will look for all from him, live upon him as a man doth upon his portion. But here David infers duty and obedience: 'I have said that I would keep thy words.'

In this resolution we may observe—

1. The formality or manner of making, *I have said*: it is by way of practical decree.

2. The matter of it, *I will keep thy words*.

1. For the formality or manner of it, 'I have said,' I decreed within myself, I have fully concluded; here was not a light or inconsiderate purpose, but such as was deliberate, fixed, a practical decree upon a debate. Whoever would enter upon a strict course displeasing to flesh and blood, must seriously consider and then fixedly determine: deliberation and determination are both necessary. There must be consultation or deliberation, that he may sit down and count the charges; otherwise, if profession of godliness be lightly taken up, it will be as lightly left. Then there must be determination, or binding the heart by firm purpose; and if we join the next verse, supplication or begging God's strength, then all is done. Now this firm purpose I have said will help against inconstancy, or against backwardness or unreadiness of heart. Against inconstancy: Many good motions we start, but they die away for want of coming to a resolution, or issuing forth a practical decree for God: James i. 8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' But David, when he had considered all things, then 'I have said that I will keep thy words;' he was fully resolved. Then it will help against laziness, listlessness, and backwardness of heart. David, when he was grown shy of God, and his heart hung off from him, some great distemper was upon his soul, and he was loath to look God in the face, what course did he take then? He issues forth a practical decree: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord.' He thrusts himself forward, and charges himself to go to God: I am resolved I will break off silence, and open my case to God. Thus we must excite ourselves by renewing a decree in the soul; determine, I will do thus and thus for God, whatever comes of it.

2. For the matter, 'I will keep thy words.' Keeping God's word notes an exact and tender respect, when a man keeps it as a jewel, as

a precious treasure, that it may not be hazarded; or keeps it 'as the apple of his eye,' Prov. vii. 2. The eye is soon offended with the least dust; so when we are chary of the word of God, loath to offend God in anything, then are we said to keep his word.

Two points lie clear in the text:—

1. That God alone is the godly man's portion.
2. That those which have chosen God for their portion will manifest it by a fixed resolution and strict care of obedience.

It must needs be so; if God be his portion, his great business will be to keep in with him.

*Doct.* 1. That God alone is the godly man's portion.

This will appear by scripture and by reason.

1. By scripture: Ps. xvi. 5, 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup.' There is a double metaphor; first, an allusion to the shares of the land of Canaan, so God is the portion of mine inheritance, saith David; and an allusion to the manner of a feast, where every man had his allowance of meat set by his cup: but snares and brimstone are said to be the portion of a wicked man's cup. As every man had his allowance set by his flagon of wine, especially in a solemn feast, so God is the portion of my cup. So Ps. lxxiii. 26, 'The Lord is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever, when my flesh and my heart faileth,' that is, when my body yields to the decay of nature; yea, when all our courage seems to be lost, borne down by difficulties that we endure in the flesh, God is a portion that will never fail.

2. To give some reasons of it. It will appear to be so—

[1.] By considering what is requisite to a man's portion.

[2.] Why a godly man looks upon God under this notion.

*First*, If a man were left to his free choice, what he would choose to take for his portion; not what is his portion in his strait, when he can have no better, but if he were left to his free choice:—

1. He would require that it be something good, or apprehended to be so.

2. That it be something to which he hath a title and interest, to which he can lay claim, or is in possession or expectation of according to right.

3. He would choose that which is suitable to the capacities, necessities, and desires of him whose portion it is.

4. That it be sufficient to supply all his wants, so as he may live upon it.

5. That it be such a thing wherein he may find satisfaction and acquiescence, so that he needs seek no more and ask no more.

6. Such a thing wherein he may take complacency and great delight, where he may be well pleased and rejoiced.

Now, all these things are to be found in God, and with good reason the saints make this choice, and say, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord.'

[1.] That which is to be chosen for our portion must be good: 'There is none good but one, and that is God,' Mat. xix. 17. It is Christ's own proposition: he is good of himself, good in himself, yea, good itself. There is no good above him, besides him, or beyond him. But if anything else be good, it is either from him or with him. But that I may more distinctly speak to this—

(1.) God is primitively and originally good; the creature is but derivatively good. He is good of himself, which nothing else is, the fountain-good, and therefore is called 'the fountain of living waters,' Jer. ii. 13. The creatures are but dry pits or broken cisterns. Other things, what good they have it is of him. God must needs be infinitely better and greater than they, for all things which are good they have from God.

(2.) God is the chiefest good, and other things are only good in subordination. All creature goodness is but a stricture of that perfect good which is in God; and therefore, if we find any good in them, that should lead us to the greater good, even to the Creator. Who would leave the substance to follow the shadow? or desire the picture to the dishonour and neglect of the person whom it represents? Certainly so they do that run after the creature and neglect God, that seek happiness in sublunary enjoyments, to the wrong and neglect of God. That small good which the creatures have is not to hold us on to them, but to lead us to him, as the streams will direct us to the fountain, and the steps of the ladder are not to stand still upon, but to ascend higher. If your affections be detained in the creature, you set the creature in God's stead; you pervert it from its natural use, which is to set forth the invisible things of God, his excellency, his goodness, his godhead, and his power to do you good, and to send you to him that made them. But how usually doth that which should carry us to God divert and detain us from him! If a prince should woo a virgin by a messenger, and she should leave him, and cleave to the messenger, and those he sent as spokesmen and servants, this were an extreme folly. By the beauty and sweetness of the creatures, God's end is to draw us to himself as the chiefest good; for that which we love in other things is but a shadow and an obscure resemblance of that which is in him. There is sweetness in the creature, mixed with imperfection; the sweetness is to draw us to God, but the imperfection is to drive us from setting our hearts on them. There is somewhat good in them: look up to the Creator; but there is vanity and vexation of spirit, and this is to drive us off from these sublunary things.

(3.) He is infinitely good. In this portion one hath not the less because another enjoys it with him. Here is a sharing without division, a partaking without prejudice of a co-partner, for every man hath his portion whole and entire; it is no less to us because others enjoy it too. We straiten others in worldly things so much as we are enlarged ourselves; for these things are finite, and cannot be divided but they must be lessened, and therefore are not large enough. But this good is infinite, and sufficeth the whole world, and every one possesseth it entire; as the same speech may be heard of all, yet no man heareth less because another heareth it with him; or as the same sun shines upon all; I have not the less light because it shines upon another as well as me. So God is all in all. If there be any difference, the more we possess him the better; as in a choir of voices, every one is not only solaced with his own voice, but with the harmony of those that sing in concert with him. Worldly inheritance is lessened by a multitude of co-heirs. In outward estates many a fair stream is drawn

dry or runs low by being parted and dispersed in several channels; but God, that is infinite, cannot be lessened.

(4.) He is an eternal good, and so the most durable portion: 'He is my portion for ever,' Ps. lxxiii. 26. The good things of this life are but like flowers; they be for a season and then they wither, they are perishing and of a short continuance; we carry away nothing of it in our hands when we go to the grave. When we leave all other portions and inheritances, then we begin to take possession of this portion; yea, at that time when men see the vanity of making other things their portion, a child of God sees the happiness of his portion—at death. Death blows away all vain deceits; then carnal men begin to perceive their error. When their portion comes to be taken away from them, then what indignation have they upon themselves for the folly of their choice, how the world hath deceived them! A godly man hath the beginning here, then he comes to have a consummate and most perfect enjoyment of it. Death cannot separate us from our portion. Indeed it separates us from all things that withhold us from it, but it is a means to perfect our union with God, and make way for our full fruition of him. Well, then, if this be that which is required in a portion, that it be good, there is none good but God; he is originally, independently, chiefly, infinitely, and eternally good, and therefore there is reason why we should choose God for our portion.

[2.] That a thing be our portion, it is necessary that we have an interest in it and title to it; not only that it be good, but that we may claim it as ours; for that is that which sweeteneth everything to us, that it is ours to use. Now God is not only good, but he is also ours; he makes over himself to us in covenant, Gen. xvii.; therefore we may lay claim to him, as a man to his patrimony or inheritance to which he is born, and say, Lord, thou art mine: Zech. xiii. 9, 'I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God.' As God owns an interest in them, so they own him: He is my God; 'I will be thy God;' so saith God in the covenant. It is more than if God had said, I will be thy friend, thy father; these are notions of a limited sense. But 'I will be thy God,' that hath an infinite importance, a greater weight and efficacy in that expression: 'I will be thy God,' that is, I will do thee good in the way of infinite and eternal power. And that is the reason why Christ proves the resurrection from thence: Mat. xxii. 32, 'I am the God of Abraham,' &c.; for to be a God to any is to be a benefactor to them, and a benefactor becoming an infinite and eternal power. Therefore certainly it assures us of greater things than this life affords, something becoming a God to give. If God be Abraham's God, a God to his whole person (his soul is not Abraham), then it strongly proves the resurrection of the body; then Abraham, both body and soul, must have a happiness greater than this life can afford. Hence that expression of the apostle, Heb. xi. 16, 'God is not ashamed to be called their God.' These words seem as if they did express God's condescension, as if he would be called the God of a few patriarchs. No; the meaning of the words is this, in regard of the slenderness of their present condition, God could not with honour. What! be a God to Jacob, and suffer him to have such a wandering life? He might be ashamed to be their God if he had not better

things to bestow upon them, 'But he hath provided for them a city,' a heavenly kingdom. Not only given them that which they enjoyed in houses, their flocks and herds, which were multiplied; these were slender things to take up the whole significancy of that expression, I will be their God. But now God is not ashamed to be called their God; that is, God can with honour and without shame take that title upon him, for he hath everlasting happiness in the world to come to bestow upon them. Thus whatever God is, hath, or can do, it is thine. Look, as the apostle saith, Heb. vi., that 'when God had no greater thing to swear by, he swore by himself,' so we may say, when he had no greater thing to bestow upon his people, he gives and bestows himself, as fully and wholly makes over himself to every believing soul, so that they have as full a plea and sure right to God as any man hath to his patrimony to which he was born. I will act answerably, becoming an infinite power and goodness, for thy good. This is the significancy of that ample and glorious expression which God useth in the covenant of grace. As when a covenant was made between the king of Israel and the king of Judah, the tenor of it was, 'My horses are as thy horses, my strength as thy strength,' 1 Kings xxii. 4. So whatever is God's is ours for our benefit, and what is ours is God's for his service. Mark, God not only saith, I will be yours, but, be a God, that is, I will act like a God. In pardon of sin: Hosea xi. 9, 'I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man.' He will not pardon as a man, but as a God. Man's patience is soon spent and soon tired. What! seven times a day forgive my brother? But he will pardon as a God. And so, when he sanctifies, he will sanctify as a God: 2 Peter i. 3, 'By his divine power he hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.' And so in defence and maintenance, which is part of the covenant: I will feed, maintain, protect thee as a God; that is, not as one that is to be limited in the course of second causes. When he pleases he can give us water, not only out of the fountain, but out of the rock; when there is nothing visible to supply and maintain you, then, I will be a God; then he will glorify us like a God, like an infinite and eternal power. For as God is an infinite God, so he gives us a far more exceeding weight of glory; and as an eternal God, he gives us an eternal weight of glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17. The glory he bestows upon us suits with the infiniteness and eternity of his essence. As it is said of Araunah, that was of the royal extraction of the Jebusites, 'He gave like a king to a king,' worthy of his blood and descent; he had a generous mind: so God will give like a God; therefore, he not only saith, I will be thine, but, be thy God. You think it much when you view a large compass, and can look abroad and say, All this is mine; but one that hath chosen God for his portion hath much more to say: God is mine.

[3.] That which a man would make his portion if he were free to choose, it should be a proper and suitable good, our own good. The heart of man aims at not only *bonum*, good in common, but also *bonum congruum*, a suitable fitting good. Every element moveth to its own place, and every living creature desires food proper to itself. So man is not only carried to good, but good that suits to his capacity and necessity. The soul, being a spirit, must have a spiritual good.

Indeed, as it acts in the body, and accommodates itself with the necessities of the body, and seeks the good of the body, so it may be carried out to honours, pleasures, and profits, for these are the conveniences of the bodily life: but as it is a spirit, and can live apart from the body, it must have something above these, a spiritual object; and as it is immortal, it must have an immortal good. Now, for a spiritual immortal good do we grope and feel about until we find it, and then there is a great deal of satisfaction: Acts xvii. 27, 'That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.' So we are groping and feeling about, as the blind Sodomites did for Lot's door, for some good that may suit the capacity of our souls: we were made for God, and therefore cannot have full contentment without God. But I speak not now of man as man, but suppose him to have a new nature put into him, that carries him after satisfaction: 'We are made partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter i. 4. It is called so because it comes from God and tends to him. Now, there must be something suitable to this nature. Pleasure is when those things are enjoyed that suit with us, when the object and the faculty are suited. When every appetite hath a fit diet to feed upon, then a marvellous deal of pleasure and contentment results from thence: Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.' All things seek a suitable good. Now, they that are after the spirit, that have a new spiritual divine nature put into them, renewed souls, they must have an object proper, and therefore must have something above the concerns of the body, and above the fleshly nature; for everything delights in that which is suitable, as a fish in the stream, and an ox to lick up the grass; and man must have a suitable good as a rational being; but as a spiritual being, must have another good. Grace restores us to the inclinations of nature when it was innocent; therefore the soul, that came from God, must centre in God, and it cannot be quiet without him.

[4.] That which a man would make his portion, it must be sufficient to supply all his wants, that he may have enough to live upon. Now, saith the Lord, 'I am God all-sufficient,' Gen. xvii. 1; sufficient for the necessities of this life, and that which is to come. He is the fountain of all blessings, spiritual, temporal, eternal; not only their power for ever, but their portion for ever, satisfied with him now and in the life to come: Ps. cxlii. 5, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord, in the land of the living.' They expect all from him; not only peace and righteousness, grace and glory, but food, maintenance, defence, to bear them out in his work. The creature is but God's instrument, or as an empty pipe, unless God flow in by it. If God help them not, the creature cannot help them. These are streams that have water only so long as the spring fills them. Well, then, here is a portion that is every way sufficient. All other portions are accompanied with a want, but this alone sufficeth all. Some things give health, wealth, but not peace; some things give peace, but not honour. But God is all to us—health, wealth, peace, honour, grace, and glory: 'All things are yours, because you are Christ's, and Christ is God's,' so runs the Christian charter; there is *omne bonum in summo bono*—all things

in the chiefest good. So Rev. xxi. 7, 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things.' How so? 'For I will be his God.' He that hath God hath him that hath power and command of all things, and therefore shall inherit all things, 'For I will be his God.' And that is the reason of the apostle's riddle, 2 Cor. vi. 10, 'As having nothing, yet possessing all things;' that is, all things in God, when they have nothing in the creature. Many times they are kept bare and low, but God carries the purse for them; all things are at his dispose; and we are kept more bare and low that we may be sensible of the strange supplies of his providence. Alas! without him in the midst of our sufficiencies we may be in straits.

[5.] That a man would choose that for his portion wherein he may be contented, satisfied, and sit down as having enough. Now this is only in God. When we choose other things for our portion, still our sore runs upon us; there are some crannies and vacuities of soul that are to be filled up; if we could satisfy our affections, we cannot satisfy our consciences; nothing can content the desires of the soul but God himself; other things may busy us, and vex us, but cannot satisfy us: 'All things are vanity and vexation of spirit.' If a man would make a critical search, as Solomon did; he set himself to see what pleasures and honours would do to content the heart of man, and what riches and learning would do; he had a large estate and heart, and so was in a capacity to try all things, to see if he could extract satisfaction from them; yet he concludes, 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.' Whosoever will follow this course will come home with disappointment. But in this portion there is contentment; we need no more but God, and there is nothing besides him worth our desire. Necessities that are not supplied by him are but fancies; it is want of grace if we want anything else when we have God for our portion: Ps. xvii. 14, 'From the men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure.' A carnal man's happiness is patched up with a great many creatures; they must have dainty fare, costly apparel, this and that, and still their sore runs upon them; they have a fulness of all things, and yet they are not filled. But now, saith David, ver. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Though God do not make out himself in that latitude and fulness as he will hereafter, yet at present to have communion with God is enough: 'I shall be filled.' There are some desires that are working after God, but they will be filled hereafter. It is true we are not now perfect, but that is no fault of our portion, but the defect of our capacity. Though we have not that fulness that we shall have hereafter, yet we have it initially. Here we have the first-fruits, have it virtually, hope and look for it; there is something begun in the soul that will increase towards this satisfaction. Certainly this is a portion that can alone be possessed with content. God is satisfied with himself and sufficient to his own happiness, therefore surely there is enough in him to fill the creature. That which fills an ocean will fill a bucket; that which will fill a gallon will fill a pint; those revenues that will defray an emperor's expenses are enough for a beggar or poor man. So, when the Lord himself is satisfied with



himself, and it is his happiness to enjoy himself, there needs no more; there is enough in God to satisfy. If our desires run out after other things, they are desires not to be satisfied, but to be mortified. If we hunger after other contentments, they are like feverish desires, not to be satisfied, but to be abated in the soul; for he that fills all things hath enough to fill up our hearts.

[6.] Complacency and delight. That which a man would take pleasure in, there where he may have abundant matter of rejoicing and delight, this a man would choose for his portion. Now in God he hath the truest and sincerest delight. This is matter of rejoicing; as David saith, Ps. xvi. 5, 6, 'The Lord is my portion.' What then? 'I have a goodly heritage.' Here is that which will revive and refresh my heart enough. There is no rejoicing that is sincere but this. As the discomforts of the new creature are more real than all other discomforts, and pierce deeper—'a wounded spirit who can bear?'—so the joys of the new creature, none go so deep: Ps. iv. 6, 'Thou hast put more gladness into my heart,' &c. Others do but tickle the senses, a little refresh the outward man, please the more brutish part, but this the heart. And this is such a joy as can be better felt than uttered: 2 Peter i. 8, it is 'unspeakable,' and none can know the strength and sweetness of it till it be felt: 'a stranger' cannot conceive it, 'doth not intermeddle with his joy,' Prov. xiv. 10. One drop of this is more than an ocean of carnal pleasure. When we have other things without God, we can never be serious. Take the merriest blades in the world, and dig them to the bottom; still there is something of sadness and remorse that doth sour all their content: conscience is secretly repining, and ready to embitter their joy. Though men strive to bear it down, yet it is ever returning upon them; therefore they cannot be truly cheerful. The most jolly sinners have their pangs that take off the edge of their bravery. Carnal rejoicing makes a great noise, like thorns under a pot, but it is but a blaze and gone. But this is a solid joy and comfort, wherewith a man may look death in the face with cheerfulness, and think of the world to come and not be sad. Alas! a little thing puts the merriest sinner into the stocks of conscience. He that makes it his business to add one pleasure to another, and spend his days in vanity, how soon is his mirth removed! Therefore, if a man would choose a portion to have joy at the highest rate, he should choose God for his portion.

*Secondly,* How comes a godly man to look upon God under this notion, that no less will content him but God himself? Why, he hath another apprehension, and another manner of heart to close with him, than carnal men; his understanding is enlightened, and his heart inclined by grace.

1. He sees more into the worth of spiritual and heavenly things. He hath faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, of things that do not lie under the judgment of sense and present reason; he can spy things under a veil, and his eyes are opened to see 'what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,' Eph. i. 17, 18; and therefore he is convinced of the fulness and sufficiency that is in God, and the emptiness and straitness that is in the creature; God hath given him counsel, his reins instruct him, Ps. xvi. 7. All by nature are

blind, ignorant, apt to dote upon the creature; but by grace their eyes are opened, that they have another manner of discerning, that they do not see things only by discourse, but their hearts are affected. Others may discourse, but they have not this divine light and spiritual understanding, by which spiritual things may be discerned; as matters of opinion they may, but not as matters of choice. A carnal man may argue out with reason the worth and excellency of God, but he hath not a refined apprehension and persuasive counsel, which is in God's people.

2. Their hearts are inclined to choose him for their portion. They do not only see an alluring worth in the object, but there is an attracting virtue, by which the heart is drawn unto God: John vi. 44, 'No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.' The great article of the covenant of grace is to take God for our God. Now all the articles of the new covenant are not only precepts but promises. The conditions *of* the covenant are conditions *in* the covenant; God gives what he requires. And therefore, as the great article of the covenant is to take God for our God, so the great blessing of the covenant is to have a new heart, or a new placing of our desires and affections. Sin lieth in a conversion from God to the creature; grace, in turning us to God again. The change is mainly seen in fixing our chiefest good and our last end. God gives his people a heart to close with him, and accept of him as their portion, to fix upon him as their chiefest good and their last end.

*Use 1.* To reprove them that do not take God for their portion. Godly men must have God himself; they prefer him above all, and saving grace above other benefits, Ps. iv. 6, 7. There is the disposition of the godly and the carnal. 'The many say, Who will show us any good?' But, 'Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us.' A carnal man is for good in common, any good, but not for the light of God's countenance; nothing will satisfy the saints but the light of God's countenance; they prefer him above his gifts, and among his gifts they prefer saving graces and renewing mercies, such as begin and confirm them in their union with God in Christ. But carnal men go no further than the world; they choose not God, but his gifts; and among these not the best, but the common sort, such as suit with the appetite of the fleshly nature, and the more brutish part of these—riches, pleasures, and honours; and these too, not as coming from God, but as coming to them by chance. They not only say good in general, but 'who will show me,' &c. As they look after uncertain blessings, so they look after an uncertain author, as they fall out in the course of second causes. If they have these, they bless their hearts, and content themselves. To convince these men of the baseness of their choice, and make them bethink themselves, their choice is part of their punishment. There cannot be a greater punishment than that they should have what they choose, that they should be written in the earth, Jer. xvii. 13; they shall have this and no more; that God should say to them, Silver and gold you shall have, but 'in this matter no lot nor portion,' Acts viii. Their bellies shall be filled with hid treasure, they shall have gorgeous apparel, dainty fare, substance enough to leave to their babes, but be deprived of heaven. It is the greatest misery that can be, to be condemned to this kind of happiness; that we should thus

degrade ourselves, and sit upon the threshold when they might sit upon the throne, and lick only the dust of his footstool. But wicked men will not be sensible of this now, but one day they shall, of the misery of this their foolish choice; at death usually: Jer. xvii. 11, 'At his latter end he shall be a fool.' Then his heart will rave against him: O fool, madman! that thou wert not as careful to get the favour of God, as to get this worldly pelf! when he must go into another world, and he is launching out into the great gulf of eternity. And in hell they will be sensible: Luke xvi. 25, 'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things,' &c. The conscience of their foolish choice is a part of their torment, when their heart shall return upon them and say, This was because thou wouldst look after temporal things; when snares, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest is poured out upon them. What thoughts have they of their portion when they are cast out with the devil and damned spirits! Carnal men think the difference between them and others will ever hold out when they glitter in the world. Oh, but the time is coming when death will undeceive them! And at the day of judgment they will be sensible of it, when they shall be refused as the outcasts of the world, and when the saints shall have their portion, when the Lord shall take the godly to himself, receive them into his bosom, and welcome them to heaven, and call them to his right hand; and they shall be banished out of his presence with a 'Go, ye cursed;' when they shall become the loathing of God, the scorn of angels and blessed spirits; when it shall be said, as in Ps. lii. 7, 'Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.' Oh, then, how will conscience return upon the wretchedness and folly of their hearts, and be exercised upon it! This will vex and gall them in hell, with anxious thoughts of it to all eternity. As by the fire that never shall be quenched is signified the wrath of God, so by the worm that never dies the violent working of conscience upon the folly of choosing perishing vanities.

*Use 2.* It exhorts us to this necessary duty, to choose God for our portion. It is not a slight thing, but that upon which your eternal happiness doth depend; it is the fundamental article of the covenant of grace: and the question God puts you to is, whether you will choose him for your portion? therefore he begins the commandments with this, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' God is not your God unless he be set uppermost in your souls; he cannot be your portion unless he be your chiefest good. There is no possibility of entering into covenant with God unless you subscribe to this main article. Again, as it is a very necessary work, so it is an evidence and fruit of God's election; if a man would come to know the thoughts of God concerning him before all the world, what his destiny is. God's election or choosing of you is manifested by your election or your choosing of God, for all God's works leave an impression upon the creature. He chooseth us that we might choose him: 'I will say, You are my people, and you shall say, I am your God.' Again, you must have something for your portion. There is no man hath a sufficiency in himself. The soul is like a sponge, always thirsting, and seeking of something from without to be filled—a chaos of desires. Man was

made to live in dependence. Now, of all portions in the world, there is none worth the having but God himself; nothing else can make you completely blessed, and satisfy all the necessities and all the capacities of soul and body. When you have outward things, what have you for your conscience? If these things could fill up your affections, they bear no proportion with conscience; your sore will run upon you, and your inward griefs will not be cured. But this is such a portion, that besides internal grace, there shall be a competent measure of outward things. God will provide for you: Ps. xxiii. 1, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' What then? 'I shall not want.' This interest will give you temporal things and the comforts of this life, so that you have the fountain of all other mercies. While others do but drink of the streams, and of streams where they are muddy, where they partake of the soil through which they run, you go to the clear fountain. Alas! others do but pluck the leaves and flowers, but you have the fruits and very root itself, the perpetual fountain and well-spring of comfort, and root of all the blessedness the heart can wish for. Again, all other comforts grow upon this interest, and when all other things are lost, this can supply you again. All worldly things, when we have them, yet they have not a root; but you have the root, so that when other things fail, this will yield you all manner of supplies. Yea, this is that which seasons and makes all other things comfortable, when we have them and the love of God with them. This man of God had a kingdom and a great deal of wealth; he was a victorious king, as we may see by his offering, 1 Chron. xxix., what cart-loads of gold and silver he offers to God: yet in the midst of all this fulness he saith, 'Thou art my portion.' Other portions may turn to a man's hurt, as they are occasions of sin, as they expose to envy and danger. Many a man is undone both here and hereafter by making the creature his portion; but never any man was undone by making God his portion. It was the end of our creation. God, passing by all other creatures, set his heart upon man. He made all things for man, and man for himself. All other things were either subject to our dominion, or created for our use; but man was made immediately for God, for the enjoyment of God; made for himself, and for none else besides himself. We should have no rest in ourselves until we come to the enjoyment of God. God was not refreshed from his work, he rested not until he made man; therefore man should not rest until he comes to God. God takes us for his portion, and therefore you should take God for your portion: Deut. xxxii. 9, 'For the Lord's portion is his people;' Zech. ii. 12, 'And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again.' If God shall choose a company of men to be his portion, certainly it becomes them again to choose him. God is willing to communicate his goodness, therefore why should we be satisfied with other things? He reasons with us, is angry that we will run to other things. Why will you lay out your time and strength in that which will not satisfy you? Isa. lv. 2. He doth invite you to come and choose him. He complains, and takes it grievously when he offers himself in the gospel: Ps. lxxxi. 11, 'Israel would none of me.' Oh! shall the God that made us thus passionately offer himself to us, and shall he be refused? Let this persuade you to choose God for your portion.

*Use 3.* For trial. Have you chosen God for your portion? This will be seen—

1. By your endeavours to get anything of God into your hearts. No man seeketh after God; there is the great complaint. If you did choose God, you would pursue all ways and means that you might gain him, and count all things but dung for Christ, as the apostle doth; then nothing would detain you from him, you would not be satisfied: Oh! I must have God; and God would be followed after: Ps. lxxiii. 25, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?'

2. By your prayers. What do you pray for? When you come to God, what do your hearts run upon? what do you seek for from God? Is it God himself? To seek to God and not for God is but a carnal design upon God: Hosea vii. 14, 'They howl upon their beds for corn, and wine, and oil.' They are but brutish desires, that terminate in other things, that are carried out more after them than God's favour and grace; therefore his favour must be sought in the first place.

3. By your behaviour under trouble when other things fail: Lam. iii. 24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore I will hope in him.' When they were driven from their other portions (for that is spoken of), when all manner of calamities did befall them, and they were cast out, and their inheritance turned to strangers, then, 'Lord, thou art our portion.' When you have nothing left but God, can you live upon God? and can he be all in all to you? 1 Sam. xxx. 6, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' When the Amalekites carried away all, yet this was his comfort, God was left still. And so Hab. iii. 18, 'When the labour of the olive shall fail,' &c. What then? 'Then I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.' When you can count yourself happy enough in God, *Deus meus et omnia*—if I have God, I have all; then you have chosen God for your portion.

4. By your delight in God: Ps. xxxvii. 4, 'Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' When this is the great rejoicing of your souls, that you can get but one beam of God's love and his favour darted upon your consciences, this is that which revives more than all other temporal things whatever.

5. In mourning for his absence; if your God be gone, that is the grief of your souls. God can supply the want of the creature, but no creature can supply the want of God; therefore it is ground of trouble if he hide his face. This lamenting and mourning after a withdrawn God is frequently spoken of in scripture. But the great evidence lies in the words, 'Thou art my portion, O Lord!' What then? 'I have said, that I would keep thy words.' Hence observe—

*Doct. 2.* Those which have chosen God for their portion will manifest it by a fixed resolution and strict care of obedience.

They are loath to break with God, rather break with anything else. It must needs be so, because—

1. Holiness is a means of maintaining communion between us and God, and keeping up an interest in him as our only happiness: 1 John i. 6, 7, 'If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another: but if we walk in darkness, and say we have fellowship with him, we lie, and do not the truth.' Unless there be a care to please him, certainly you do not choose him for your portion; for

if all your comfort and happiness lies in God, all your diligence and care will be to please God. God was the portion of the Levites, it is said, because they ministered before him, Num. xviii. 20. So it is true of the spiritual Levites, they that are careful to walk with God, minister before him, and keep close with him; God will be their portion. All sincere Christians are purified as the sons of Levi.

2. Because this is the only evidence. They that love God will love his word, and if they love it they will live by it, and square their actions accordingly. By careless walking you blot your evidences, and so weaken your comfort.

3. Because God is your portion, therefore it should encourage us to keep his word: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me and be thou perfect.' If we have an all-sufficient portion, all our business should be to keep in with God. All warping comes from doubting of God's all-sufficiency, as if God alone were not enough for us. Carnal fear, love, hope, doth draw us off from God to the creature, we are afraid to lose worldly enjoyments, so break with God. Therefore, if we look upon God as all-sufficient, it will necessarily follow we should encourage ourselves to serve him.

4. If we do not keep his word, our lusts will carry us forth elsewhere. There are certain corrupt principles within you will draw you off from God to another portion: Ezek. xiv. 5, 'They are all estranged from me through their idols.' What kind of idols were these? Idols of wood and stone? No; the prophet explains them, 'They have set up their idols in their heart,' ver. 3. Christians, a man may be an idolater in opinion, and grossly, when he worships stocks and stones; and he may be an idolater spiritually and in practice. And which is most incurable of these two, think you? Certainly the spiritual idolater. A man may easily be convinced of his false worship by reason and argument, what a brutish thing it is to worship stocks and stones, things that have no life, nor can help him; but he cannot be convinced of his spiritual idolatry, or cured of that but by grace. Covetousness is idolatry, because it draws off our love, fear, trust, from God and his service, to riches, and so proves a snare to the soul. Idolatry in our affections is more dangerous than gross idolatry in our opinions and outward worship, when our affections carry us out to another good.

5. Again, out of gratitude, when God doth all for us, can we deny him anything? Dost thou love God as the chiefest good, and wilt not thou fear to offend him? Whoever chooseth God for his portion will have David's disposition, 'I have said I will keep thy words;' he will be exact and punctual to keep in with God.

## SERMON LXV.

*I entreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.*—VER. 58.

IN the former verse I took notice of two parts—David's protestation, 'Thou art my portion;' and his resolution, 'I will keep thy words.'

To either of the branches this verse may be supposed to have respect. To the former thus, as a second evidence: if we make God our portion, this will necessarily follow, we shall desire his favour above all things else. Our portion is that good which we choose, renouncing all things else; therefore, when our hearts are set upon it, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?' Ps. lxxiii. 25. When you entreat his favour with your whole heart, that is the evidence God is your portion. Or you may refer it to the latter clause thus, 'I said I will keep thy words,' therefore I entreat thy favour. We cannot carry on a good purpose without God's favour, unless he assist us therein. When we are most resolved, we must expect opposition and assaults both from within and without. The devil will seek all he can to oppose you, and to shake your resolutions, and your lusts will rage anew upon a severe restraint. Therefore those that resolve to enter into a strict course must seek relief from God's favour and mercy, as David here, 'I entreated thy favour with my whole heart.' In the words we have an account of David's practice upon a choice and resolution; he betook himself to prayer.

Here you have—

1. The object or principal thing sought, *God's favour*.

2. The manner, *with my whole heart*, with a sincere affection. He doth not say, with his lips only, but his heart; and not with his heart only, but with his whole heart.

3. The sum of his request, or the fountain of all that he expected from God, *be merciful to me*.

4. The rule or ground of his expectation, *according to thy word*. The meaning is, that God, according to his promise, would graciously help him.

*First*, For the first, 'I entreated thy favour;' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'I painfully sought thy face;' meaning that he did with importunate and humble suit beg the smile of God's countenance. By face is meant favour: Prov. xxix. 26, many seek the ruler's favour;' it is, the ruler's face, that he may look cheerfully upon them: and I painfully sought, so the word signifies; it notes such importunity as is necessary for so great a blessing. The note is this—

*Doct.* God's people, those that have made him their portion, they earnestly and constantly, above all things, desire his favour.

1. This God calls for: Ps. cv. 4, 'Seek the Lord, seek his face evermore.' None have such communion with God but they need seek more: Ps. xxvii. 8, 'Thou saidst, Seek my face; thy face, Lord, will I seek.' 'Thou saidst;' it is that which God speaks in all his ordinances; the whole drift of the word is to press us to get and keep the sense of God's love ever fresh in our hearts.

2. The nature of the saints carries them to it. This is the difference between them and carnal men, Ps. iv. 6, 7. The light of his countenance is spoken of either with allusion to the sun, whose light displayed cheers the plants; or with allusion to the smiles of a friend. Ore good look from God the children of God prefer above all the world. All earthly things cannot please them so much as a smile from God, nor put such gladness in their hearts. But more especially do they seek it most painfully—

[1.] When they have never as yet attained any sense of it, but lie under doubts, fears, and anxious uncertainty; then, if God will but look upon them, make out his love to their consciences, what a comfort will that be to them! A man may want assurance and have grace, but he cannot slight assurance and have grace. He that is without it may be one of God's children, but he that doth not look after it, and is satisfied without it, certainly is none of that number. Therefore this is the desire and earnest prayer of all God's people in common, that God would cause his face to shine upon them: Ps. lxxx. 1, 'Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth;' that is, that sittest upon the mercy-seat. Oh, that he would be good to them in Christ! for between the cherubims there was the mercy-seat, where God sat. The meaning is, that he would a little dart in beams of comfort to their consciences.

[2.] They thus painfully entreat the favour of God when they have lost it by sin; for then they are afflicted with a double evil—want of so great a comfort, and a sense of their own folly. A sense of God's favour may be withheld out of mere sovereignty, yet even then God's children will be earnest; but when it is withdrawn out of justice, as a correction for our folly and careless walking, there is greater cause of earnestness, that we may redeem and recover our loss again; then we are to be more earnest: 'Turn us again, Lord God of hosts, and cause thine anger towards us to cease,' Ps. lxxx. 7. By their former experience they know the sweetness of God's favour, and by their present loss the bitterness of the want of it. Basil hath a notable comparison. He saith, if an object be too bright, it must be set at a distance from the eye that we may see better; so worldly things must be set at a distance from us: therefore God seems to be at a distance, hides his face, that his people might know by the loss and want of it how to value their blessings.

How far do they discover their earnestness?

(1.) In that they seek it above all other things—above corn, wine, and oil. This is not their painful desire to be made great, rich, high, honourable, happy in the world. All the world doth them no good without the favour of God. As all the stars, though they shine together, do not dispel the darkness of the night, so no creatures can comfort us sufficiently when God hides his face from them: Ps. xxx. 1, 'Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled.' They cannot find God as they were wont. As at funeral feasts, dear friends have little comfort when they miss their old friend that was wont to bid them welcome at the house; so when God is gone, what comfort can they take in their portion? Many will say, Why are you pensive and sad? you have a great many friends, a great estate! Oh! you do not know the wound of a gracious heart, and how little these things are in comparison of the favour of God!

(2.) They manifest it in this, their contentedness with him, though they are kept low and bare in outward things: Ps. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' It is enough for them to have the face of God, though they do not flourish in worldly plenty as others do, when in the exercise of grace they can find God propitious, 'behold his face in righteousness.' If they have not the candle they have the sun. If



they go to God, they are welcome upon all occasions. If the world frown upon them, God doth not so : they are beloved of him, and in favour with him, and that satisfieth them.

What may be the reasons why the children of God so prize his favour ?

(1st.) The worth of the thing itself : Ps. lxxiii. 3, 'Thy favour is better than life,' better than all comforts, better in itself, for this is that which we are never weary of. A man may be weary of all outward comforts : 'Days may come wherein there is no pleasure,' Eccles. xii. 1 ; 'At that time the soul abhors dainty food,' Job xxxiii. 20. Pleasure, nay, life itself, may be a burden, but none ever was weary of the love of God, that cannot be a burden ; this doth not satiate and cloy us. Again, the love of God cannot be supplied and recompensed by other things : when a man loseth other things it may be made up in better. If a man be poor in this world, God hath chosen him to be rich in faith ; if afflicted and destitute of outward provisions, yet they have inward comforts and graces, and they will supply and make up this loss. But the loss of God's favour cannot be supplied ; when that departs from you, and a man loseth the hope he seemeth to have, what a sorry comfort is it, having forfeited the love of God, to seek our amends in the creature ! Then this is more durable than the present life. Other comforts fail, but the love of God never fails. This is the original of all other comforts : Ps. xxx. 7, 'By thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong ;' and Ps. xlv. 3, 'Their own arm did not save them, but the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.' Sure it is better to drink of the fountain than of the stream : all is from the favour of God. In short, it is the vitality and the cause of life, and the cause of all comfort. This is better than life.

(2d.) They are affected with that which is their true misery, therefore they most importunately beg the favour of God. Every man prays according to the sense that he hath, according to that which he counts his misery. He that hath a sense of no other calamity but to be poor, scorned, or exposed to contempt, or the absence of the creature, prays accordingly. Sometimes he howls like a dog in pain, or beasts that want food, Hosea vii. 14. But he that hath a deeper sense of his greatest necessities, he is affected with sin, which is the cause of all trouble ; therefore he must have the favour of God and the grace of God. A godly and a carnal man differ as a child and a man in their apprehensions about pain and trouble. A child that is sick and would be eased of its present smart and pain, looks to nothing but that ; but an understanding man knows the cause must be taken away. A child speaks according to the sense and apprehension it hath—take away his aching head or burning heat ; but the understanding man looks not only after present ease, but health, that the root of the distemper may be removed. So a worldly man would have affliction gone, and looks no further, but a godly man hath a deeper sense, he must have the favour of God ; therefore his heart works painfully within him till this be obtained.

(3d.) They entreat the favour of God with all their hearts, because their business lies mainly with God. Their work is to walk closely

with God, and keep up a strict communion with him. A carnal man's business lies with God sometimes in his trouble; but when he licks himself whole and is at ease, he can live without it. But a godly man's business is always with God, for God is always with him, in trouble and out of trouble. Therefore that is a notable speech, Ps. xci. 9, 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation;' a refuge, that is a place of retreat in time of war; a habitation, there is our residence in time of peace, when every one sits under his own vine and fig-tree. Now, a godly man makes God not only his refuge but his habitation; therefore it concerns him to prize the favour of God, and keep in with him, for he is otherwise at an utter loss; therefore he must study to get all clear: if God be angry with him, his business is at a stand, and he cannot walk cheerfully with him from whom he expects all.

*Use 1.* To reprove those that are indifferent whether they enjoy God's favour, yea or nay; so they may enjoy the creature they are satisfied. Surely God is not these men's portion, for their only care is what they shall eat, how they may be clothed, how to live well in the world; but were never acquainted with this kind of trouble about God's favour: Ps. x. 4, it is said, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.' He never troubles himself how to keep in with God; it never goes to his heart. He is such an one as can bring to pass whatever he projecteth and desireth, without troubling himself with the fetters of religion and the care of a strict duty: he can live at large, and yet obtain his heart's desire, and thinketh them the only wise men, fit for his imitation, that can increase in worldly enjoyments without troubling themselves with such niceties as perplex others: he scorneth to trouble himself with prayer, and the observances which are necessary to waiting upon God. Again, it reproves those that lie stupid and senseless under God's active displeasure. These are not as gross as the former, but make some profession of respect to God, but have not yet a tender sense of God's accesses and recesses, his comings and goings. When the Lord hides himself from their prayers, and doth not give out the wonted influences of his grace and comfort, they mind it not, do not with earnestness seek to recover it again. If you did make this your business without interruption, when you have not the smiles of God, the want of this would create pain.

*Use 2.* Of exhortation, to press us, if we would have God for our God, then to seek his favour above all things. Wait with an affectionate earnestness in every ordinance for some new discovery, some comfortable intimation of God's word: Ps. cxxx. 6, 'My soul waiteth for thee.' What? for outward deliverances? No; but 'I wait for the Lord, and in his word do I hope.' Again, in every enjoyment it is not enough to have the creature with God's leave (so can all men have it, it is their portion), but you must have it with God's love, as a token from God, wrapt up in the bowels of Christ. God gives many gifts to wicked men, but doth not give them his love. This we should look after, that we may find our comforts to be sprinkled with love, that if God deliver you out of any strait, he may love you out of it, Isa. xxxviii. 17.

*Secondly*, For the manner, 'I have sought thy favour.' How? 'With my whole heart.' Note—

*Doct.* When we pray for the favour of God, it must be with our whole heart.

There is this intended in it—

1. The constant favour and presence of God, we must pray for it, for without prayer faith lies idle, Heb. iv. 16.

2. They that pray for it, their hearts must be set upon what they pray. It is not enough that our tongues babble out a cold form, as many learn to pray as parrots speak, by rote. They say, not pray a prayer: James v. 17, 'Elias prayed earnestly;' in the margin, and so in the original, he 'prayed in prayer.' A man may take up words of course, and say things after others, which are not indeed the real desires of his heart; so they pray as if they prayed not, slightly, without any warmth and affection.

3. It is not enough that our hearts concur, but our whole hearts must go along with this work. Many times we pray but with half a heart:—

[1.] Partly when prayer is a fruit of memory and invention, but not the fruit of conscience. Common illumination will tell us how prayer is to be formed according to the tenor of the Christian faith; so men may repeat words such as the understanding judgeth fit, without any answerable touch upon the heart. This is their sin who are more careful about notions in prayer than the affections.

[2.] A man prays but with a piece of his heart when he prays rather with his conscience than with his affections. Will you distinguish this, a dictate of conscience must be distinguished from a purpose of heart. Conscience may tell us what is to be done, yet the heart have no liking to it. Austin saith when he was a carnal man he had some kind of conscience, and prayed against his sins; but, saith he, I was afraid God would hear me. The favour of God is necessary, but the heart many times is not engaged in the pursuit of it. We oftener pray from our memories than our consciences, and oftener from our consciences than our affections; the heart is not put into the duty.

[3.] When our affections are divided to carnal things, and the comfortable part of spiritual things. No doubt there is no man but would have the favour of God, but it is with a condition that he may live as he does, and be as he is, and so the prevailing part of his soul bends him to his present course; he regards iniquity in his heart, and sin hath an interest and lies very near; he would have the favour of God abstractedly, but when he considers how his lusts must be parted with, there his heart is divided.

*Use.* Oh! then, look to it that you beg the Lord's favour with all your heart. God knows the heart. Rebekah dressed up Jacob so that his father mistook him. Ay! but God cannot mistake; his eye is not dim as Isaac's, he sees the heart; therefore let your heart, and whole heart, go out in the pursuit.

*Quest.* How shall we know when our hearts are thus thoroughly bent, if you seek him with all your hearts?

*Ans.* Then you will observe how you speed when you look after him; you will see what becomes of your requests. 'I will hearken

what God will speak,' saith David, and 'will pray and look up;' as Elijah looked up to see the cloud a-coming. Again, if we pray with the whole heart there will be importunate arguings; desire will take no nay: Ps. lxxiii. 8, 'My soul followeth hard after thee.' Oh! it will be a painful, grievous thing to your souls if you do not speed in your prayers. Not a slight motion, or cold wish, but such as deeply affects the heart, and not easily put off and satisfied with other things. Wicked men would have the favour of God, but they are easily put out of the humour. Again, then we pray with the whole heart when there is such a desire as not to be discouraged, but you venture again, when the Lord seems to put off and give a check to your requests: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.' Still desires grow hotter and hotter, and when there is a kind of impudence not to be put off. Again, such as do excite endeavours for the obtaining of God's love and a sense of his favour. It will cost us pain and trouble when we are hard at work, and will be diligent in this thing. But when you rest in a few cold prayers, you are never hearty with God: Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired.' What then? 'That will I seek after,' and use a great deal of diligence to come by it.

*Thirdly*, The fountain of all that we expect is mercy. All that seek God's favour must expect it upon terms of grace: 'Be merciful unto me.' We cannot say, Pay me what thou owest, or, Give me for my money. All whom God accepts to his grace and favour are unworthy: Isa. lv. 1, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price.' Secondly, They who are received to favour still need mercy to pardon failings, Gal. v. The best are but sanctified in part, and have the dregs of corruption always remaining, and frequently stirring in them.

*Use*. Let us thus deal with God: Hosea xiv. 2, 'Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.' The sum of all our requests is, that God would be merciful to us.

*Fourthly*, The rule and ground of confidence is 'according to thy word.' God's word is the rule of our confidence, for therein is God's stated course. If we would have favour from God and mercy, it must be upon his own terms. God will accept of us in Christ, if we repent, believe, and obey, and seek his favour diligently: he will not deny those who seek, ask, knock. We would have mercy, but will not observe God's directions. We must ask according to God's will, not without a promise, nor against a command. God is made a voluntary debtor by his promise. These are notable props of faith, when we are encouraged to seek by the offer, to apply by the promise. We thrive no more in a comfortable sense of God's love, because we take not this course.

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## SERMON LXVI.

*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.—*  
VER. 59.

IN these words we have—

1. David's exercise, *I thought on my ways.*
- 2: The effect of it, *I turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

In the former verse he beggeth mercy and the favour of God. Now those that beg mercy must be in a capacity to receive mercy. God is ready to show mercy, but to whom? To the penitent, that humbly seek it, and turn from the evil of their ways. We cannot expect God should be favourable to us while we continue in a course of sin. Therefore David sheweth that he entreated God's mercy and favour upon God's terms, that he was one of those converted by grace: '*I thought on my ways,*' &c. Some copies of the Septuagint have it τὰς ὁδοὺς σοῦ διελογισάμην, '*I considered thy ways,*' much to the same purpose; for a serious consideration of the excellency of God's ways is of use, as well as of the naughtiness of our own. But other copies read better, according to the original Hebrew, '*I thought on my ways,*' our omissions, commissions, purposes, practices, the course of our thoughts, words, deeds.

In the other part, when we are said to turn our feet unto God's testimonies, it is meant of the conversion of the whole soul, evidenced by the course of our feet or practices. So Eccles. v. 1, '*Keep thy feet when thou goest into the house of God;*' the meaning is, look to thy heart and affections. We are sometimes said to turn to God, and sometimes to the testimonies or commands of God. We turn to God as the object or last end; to his testimonies as the rule of our conversation to lead us thither. So that by it is meant an effectual conversion of the whole man, to walk according to the rule of God's word.

The text issueth itself into this one point:—

*Doct.* That serious consideration of our own ways maketh way for sound conversion to God.

In the managing of this doctrine I shall discuss two things:—

1. The necessity of serious consideration in order to repentance.
2. How much it concerneth us after we have considered effectually to turn to the Lord.

*First,* The necessity of serious consideration in order to repentance. And there—

1. What is consideration.
2. The objects of it, or the things that must be considered.
3. I shall argue the necessity of this.

*First,* What is this consideration or thinking upon our ways? In the general, it is a returning upon our hearts, or a serious and anxious debating with ourselves concerning our eternal condition. For the understanding whereof, consider that a carnal man is mindless and altogether careless of his eternal interests, like a fool or madman, or one out of his wits. We were '*sometimes foolish,*' ἀνόητοι. Titus iii. 3, like men asleep or distracted; they do not know what they are doing,

nor what will be the issue of things, till God awaken their hearts to think of their condition, and then they begin to act like men again, and to be sensible of their case. Thus it is said of the prodigal, Luke xv. 17, *εἰς ἑαυτὸν ᾗλθεν*, that 'he came to himself;' as a man when he is drunk, we say he is not himself, he doth not consider what he doth, nor consider the danger of his actions. And the Psalmist, speaking of the conversion of the Gentiles, saith, Ps. xxii. 27, 'The ends of the earth shall remember, and turn unto the Lord;' that is, shall recollect themselves, and consider of the end of their lives, whence they are, whither they are going, and what shall become of them to all eternity, as if all this while they had forgotten the purpose for which they were sent into the world, who was their master, what was their business. Alas! before this serious consideration, men in seeing see not, and in hearing hear not, as a man that is musing of another matter is not affected with what you tell him; he heareth and doth not hear. It is the awakening of the heart which is God's first work, before he giveth other grace: Eph. v. 14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' First awake, and then arise from the dead, before which men have but such languid notions of God and Christ and salvation by him as men have in a dream; but when we come to weigh and scan things with affection and application, then the soul is awakened.

Now God bringeth us to this—

1. Partly by his word, which sheweth our natural face, James i. 23, 24, or natural estate and condition before God. It is appointed for this purpose, to be the instrument to awaken men, to discover them to themselves. Now, because this may make but a weak impression, such as may soon be blotted out, *ἀνδρὶ παρακύψαντι*, they forget and fall asleep again; therefore to this God joineth his rod. Therefore—

2. Partly by afflictions; as the prodigal, when he was reduced to husks and rags, then he came to himself and was brought to his right mind. Again, 1 Kings viii. 47, 'If in the land of their affliction they shall bethink themselves and repent;' the Hebrew is, 'bring it back to their hearts.' Affliction is sanctified to this end, to open the eyes; it bringeth us to ourselves. So Haggai, i. 5, 7, 'Now consider your ways,' now *θέσθε τὰς καρδίας ἐπὶ τὰς ὁδοὺς ὑμῶν*, 'lay your hearts upon your ways;' when they sowed much and brought in little, and what they earned was put into a bag with holes; that is, when the hand of God was upon them, and the visible curse of his providence. When the word of God doth not effectually discover men to themselves, then he sends afflictions to put them upon a search, and by his rod whippeth them out of their sleepy dreams and carnal security.

3. By his Spirit: and the first effect of his operations is compunction: Acts ii. 37, 'When they heard this they were pricked in heart, and cried out, Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?' It makes them anxious and solicitous. I ascribe this work to the Spirit, because it was a time when the Spirit was newly poured forth. Well then, in the general, it is God's awakening the heart to a serious and anxious debate with itself concerning its eternal condition, before which we go on sleepily in a course of sin; but then the soul crieth out,

What have I done, and what shall I do? how carelessly have I lived! and what shall become of me to all eternity?

More particularly, this thinking upon our ways involveth in its full latitude three grand duties:—

1. As it relateth to our past estate, or the ways wherein we have walked, self-examining, or a serious searching and inquiring in what condition we are before God. This is necessary to conversion and turning to the Lord: Lam. iii. 40, ‘Let us search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord.’ There needeth a serious calling ourselves to an account, or a strict view and survey of our former courses, if we would amend what is amiss in them; and still, as we renew our repentance, this course must we take.

2. As it relateth to present actions, or the ways wherein we are to walk, so it implieth prudent consideration before we do anything; let us see our warrant, that we may do nothing but what is agreeable to God’s word: Prov. iv. 26, 27, ‘Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established: turn not to the right hand or to the left; remove thy foot from evil.’ We have a narrow line to walk by, but a foot of ground to go upon; and therefore we should not walk at hazard, but with much exactness: Eph. v. 15, ‘See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise;’ therefore we need to weigh all our actions in the balance of the sanctuary, that if anything displease God we may avoid it. The conscience of our weakness, and the strictness of our rule, should make us take the better heed to ourselves.

3. With respect to the tendency and issues of things; and so it noteth fore-consideration or deliberation in order to choice. God biddeth his people ‘stand upon the ways and see, and inquire after the old paths, which is the good way, and walk therein,’ Jer. vi. 16; as travellers, when they are at a loss or in doubt of their way, seeing divers paths before them, are careful to inform themselves aright that they may take the next, readiest, and best way for their journey’s end. An awakened conscience is like Hercules, *in vivo*; there are two ways present themselves—the way of sin and flesh-pleasing, and the way of God’s commandments; or, as it is Mat. vii. 13, 14, ‘the broad way,’ and ‘the narrow way.’ The broad way of sin seemeth pleasant and enticing, but it leadeth to death; the narrow way is rough and craggy, troublesome to flesh and blood, but the end is life and peace. Now the soul debateth upon the choice which of these is better, by weighing the loss and gain on either side, and the final issue and tendency of both these ways; or rather, the awakened soul is in the case of a man that is yet to choose; or like a man that is out of the way, and wants his usual marks. He bethinketh himself, If I go on in this broad beaten road of corruption, I am sure to go down to the chambers of death, and perish evermore. Oh! but let me make a stop; it is better to take God’s direction than the way of mine own heart; it is a way that will undo me for ever. Hitherto I have gone awry; how shall I do to get into the right way? I would be happy, and this course will never make me so; surely it is better to take God’s counsel than to please the flesh. No course will satisfy conscience, no course will make you happy, but a life led according to the word of God. Thus you see it implieth—

1. An examination of our past course, or a looking into our own estate.

2. A careful watch over future actions.

3. A consideration of the issue and event of things. I have viewed my life past. I have been wrong, and I see it will be bitterness in the issue; therefore I purpose to give up myself to a course of obedience, and therefore to consider well of my actions for the future. Now this is a work that is not once to be done, but always. As often as we look to ourselves, we shall find something that needeth amendment; and therefore we need to press the heart with new and pregnant thoughts to mind our duty, and to use constant caution, and taking heed to our ways that we may not go wrong. Ps. xxxix. 1, thus did David, to keep his heart right, 'I thought on my ways.'

Secondly, The objects of this consideration, or the things that must be considered; that may be gathered out of the former discourse. But—

1. Who made thee? Ecces. xii. 1, 'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' It is a great advantage to call to mind whose creatures we are; for this will shame us, that we have done no more than we have done for him, from whom we have all that we have; and this in youth, when the effects of this creating bounty are most fresh upon our senses. In good earnest consider, who was it that made thee a reasonable creature; not a stone, and without life; nor a plant, and without sense; nor a beast, and without reason; but a man, with reason, and understanding, and will, and affections; that thou mayest know him, and love him, and enjoy him. And hast thou never thought of the God that made thee? Art thou of those hare-brained fools that go on rashly in a course of sin, and 'God is not in all their thoughts'? Ps. x. 4. How canst thou look upon the body without thoughts of him whose workmanship it is? or think of thy soul without thinking of God whose image and superscription it bears, and without whom thou canst not so much as think? Shall it be troublesome to thee to have frequent thoughts of God, when thou canst go musing of vanity all the day long? Shall every trifle find a room in thy heart, when God findeth no room there? 'He is not far from every one of us,' Acts xvii. 27, but we are far from him. He is before thee, behind thee, round about thee, yea, within thee, or else thou couldst not keep thy breath in thy body for a moment, and wilt thou not then take some time to season thy heart with thoughts of God? The first miscarriage of men came from this: Rom. i. 28, 'They liked not to retain God in their knowledge.' Thoughts of God and right opinions of God were a burden to them, and therefore they gave up themselves to an ungodly course and evil state of mind. And wilt thou put such a scorn and contempt upon thy Creator as never seriously to think of him? yea, when thoughts of God rush in upon thy mind, to turn them out as unwelcome guests? This is to degenerate into the state of devils, a part of whose torment it is to think of God: they 'believe and tremble;' the more explicit thoughts they have of the name of God, the more is their horror increased. Oh! then let thy meditations of God be sweet and serious, Ps. civ. 34. Everything that passeth before thine eyes proclaims an invisible God, an infinite and eternal power, that made thee



and all things else. Shall the heavens above, the earth beneath thee say, Remember God; and every creature, every pile of grass thou treadest upon, call to thee, Remember God; and wilt thou be so stupid and scornful as not to cast a look upon him? Then we begin to be serious when thoughts of God are more fastened upon our hearts.

2. Why did he make thee? Not in vain; for no wise agent will make a thing to no purpose, especially with such advice, 'Let us make man.' Certainly not for a life of sin, to break his laws, and follow your lusts, and satisfy your fleshly desires. Was this God's end, that the creature might rebel against himself? This is not consistent with his goodness, to make us for such an end; or if so, why did he make the rules of justice and equity natural to us, so that man is a law to himself? Rom. ii. 14. Nor for sport and recreation, to eat, drink, and be merry, or to melt away your days in ease and idleness. He spake rather like a beast than a man, 'Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry; thou hast goods laid up for many years,' Luke xii. 19. If merely for pleasures, why did he give us a conscience? The brute beasts are fitter for such a use, who have no conscience, and therefore no remorse to embitter their pleasures. What was the end for which God made us? Was it to gather wealth, and that the soul might cater for the body, and that we might live well here in the world? No; for then God's work would terminate in itself. And why were such noble faculties given us, such a high-flying reason, that hath a sense of another world, if this were all God's end, that we might grovel here upon earth, and scrape and heap up this world's riches? We see they are the basest of men who are given to this kind of pursuits. Surely this was not God's end. But why was it? Prov. xvi. 4, 'God hath made all things for himself,' for his glory; and so man to glorify him and enjoy him. The beasts were made to glorify him in their kind, but man to enjoy him. This is my end, to seek after God, to please him, to serve him: Ps. xiv. 2, 'The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God.' God, that hath fixed his end, observeth what man doth in compliance with it, what affection and care they have to find him, please him, glorify him. Reason will tell us as well as scripture that the first cause must be the last end, and we must end there where we began at first: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' Well, then, I was not made for nothing, not to sin away my life, nor to sport it away, nor to talk it away, nor to drudge it away in the servile and basest offices of this life; my end is to enjoy God, and my work and business is to serve and glorify him.

3. How little you have answered this end! God complaineth of our backwardness to this work: Jer. viii. 6, 'No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' God, upon a review, found every day's work good, very good in themselves, and their correspondence and frame, Gen. i. 31; but when we consider our ways, we shall find that all is evil, very evil. We have too long gone on in a course of sin, and the more we go on, the more we shall go astray, and wander from the great end for which we were created, which was God's service and honour. Oh! consider your ways, especially when con-

science is set awork by the word, or when we smart under the folly of our own wanderings, and God maketh us sensible of our mistake by some smart scourge. If we never seriously thought on our ways before, then is a time to think of them, and to count it a mercy that we are not left to go on in a course of sin without checks and disappointments. Oh! look upon the drift and course of your lives and actions, pry into every corner of them. What have I been doing hitherto? spending my days in vanity and sin? Have I remembered my Creator, made it my work to serve him, my scope to glorify him? Have I looked after this as the *unum necessarium*, the great law and business of my life, that I might enjoy communion with God? Oh! for how long a time hath God been kept out of his right, and I have been sowing to the flesh, and never minded the great errand for which I was sent into the world! None can excuse himself.

4. The unkindness and baseness of such a course, that you may make it odious to the soul. God hath not only made me, but kept me, and provided for me day after day. 'The God which fed me all my lifetime,' saith Jacob, Gen. xlviii. 15. I have been fed at his table, clothed at his cost, defended, kept, when long ago God might have struck me dead in my sins; and yet all this while I have not thought of God, to pay the return of my thanks and obedience to my great benefactor. The very beasts are more dutiful in their kind to man, who, as God's instrument, provideth for them: Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but my people will not know, Israel will not consider.' How senseless have I been of the great obligations wherein I stand bound to God! There is the fault; we do not know, and will not consider what hath been done to God for this.

5. What it will come to, or what will become of you, if you should still so continue, or if I should go on in this course, what will be my portion for ever? Nothing but an eternal separation from God, and endless torments with the devil and his angels: Ps. l. 22, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' Oh! this is the means to awaken the conscience, and to affect the heart with high and right thoughts of God. What will be the end of those that go far away from God, if they do not make haste to come home to him? Eternal and merciless vengeance; for God will not always bear with forgetful sinners; they shall be torn in pieces, the soul sent to hell, and the body to the grave. Oh! it concerneth the poor impenitent wretch that now goeth on fearless in a course of sin, immediately to stop in his march, lest he be hurried away to the place of torment, and there be no escaping. Now, urge this upon the heart, and exercise your thoughts in the remembrance of it; and if you have overcome and overwrestled some former qualms of conscience, now lay it to heart, and do so no more. It may be the hour is at hand when God will take away your souls from you, and all your sins shall be set in order before you, and the stupid conscience, that is now senseless, shall have a lively feeling of all your rebellions and unkindnesses done to God, as the paper which was but now white, when stamped with the printing-irons hath a story written upon it in legible characters.

6. How much it concerneth you to come out of this condition

speedily, for God is not a God to be neglected or dallied with. When he calls in the seasons of grace he will be observed, otherwise you may call and he will have no regard: 'They shall call, and I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but not find me,' Prov. i. 28. When you receive many checks of conscience, entreaties of grace, motions of the Spirit in vain, God will be gone. God doth commonly give men a day, and no man or angel knoweth how long this day shall last. God gave Cain a day: 'If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? if thou dost ill, sin lieth at the door.' Oh! then, when you begin to have thoughts of turning unto God, let them not be quelled. God reckoneth every hour, 'These three years,' 'this second epistle,' 'this second miracle;' and when his patience will expire you cannot tell.

7. How happy it will be for you when once you change your course! The prodigal remembered the plenty in his father's house; you will find a manifest difference: Rom. vi. 21, 22, 'What fruit had you then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death: but now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.' In the way, no such gripes of conscience, no shame, sorrow, fears; in the end, everlasting life. It was your mistaking that called the days of sin good days. Oh! but when fruitful in holiness you will have present comfort and serenity of mind, a taste of the clusters of Canaan in the wilderness, hope of a glorious state, and the best will be at last. Compare pain with pain, pleasure with pleasure. We do not compare aright the pains of godliness with pleasures of sin; and yet there you may see the discharging of our duty will yield more true comfort and peace than all the pleasures of sin can bring us.

8. What hopes by Christ: Heb. iii. 1, 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Jesus Christ;' what provision God hath made.

Thirdly, Let me argue the necessity of this consideration.

1. Otherwise men are rash, careless, and precipitant, and act as they are carried on by their own lusts; whereas, if they did consider, it would stop them in the course of sin. They rush like a horse into the battle, because 'no man saith, What have I done?' Jer. viii. 6. Men run on like a headstrong horse after their lusts and fancies; whereas, if they do seriously bethink themselves, and cast in a few grave thoughts about things to come, it would be like the putting in of cold water into a boiling pot, abate the fervour of their lusts. Men are wicked because they are inconsiderate; there are arguments enough against sin if they would but pause and weigh them seriously; but we do not think of heaven and hell, and therefore they do not work upon us: Eccles. xi. 9, 'Remember that for all these things God will bring thee to judgment.'

2. This serious consideration is a good means to awaken us from the sleep of security. When we consider the end why we were made, the rule we are to walk by, and poise ourselves about conformity or inconformity to this rule, and do withal revolve the issues of things in our minds, it cannot but rouse us up out of our sloth and stupidity, and make us act more vigorously and regularly as to the ends of our

creation. Oh! what shall I do? The first grace is awakening; that maketh way for other graces; Eph. v. 14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' Whereas otherwise, when we consider not, we are stupid and sottish: Isa. xlv. 19, 'None considereth in his heart, Is there not a lie in my right hand? I have burnt part in the fire,' Eccles. v. 1, they 'offer the sacrifice of fools,' for 'they consider not that they have done evil;' they do not weigh their actions. The reason why they go wrong and continue wrong is, they do not seriously ponder and debate with themselves what it will come to.

3. By consideration we come to find where the work of God sticketh with us, and so conviction being the more particular, worketh the more kindly. A blunt iron that toucheth many points doth not so soon go to the quick as a needle that toucheth but one point: Mal. iii. 7, 'Return, and they said, Wherein shall we return?' We do not see the need of repentance so much as by prying narrowly into our own ways. In short, without this, life is not so regular, the heart is not overpowered with such strong and full reason to comply with God's counsel.

*Secondly*, How much it concerneth us, after we have considered our ways, to turn to the Lord, and diligently to pursue the course which he hath prescribed: 'I turned my feet unto thy testimonies.' A sound conversion is here described.

1. *I turned*, in the thorough purpose of his heart, that is the act on our part. It is by God's grace that we are turned, but we turn ourselves when the purpose of our souls is fixed: 'Turn me, and I shall be turned.' God inclineth the heart, and we manifest it by binding ourselves by a thorough purpose. A wish, an offer, when it endeth only in that, we have not considered enough; but when the heart is bent, I am turned. The prodigal, when he took up, came to himself, and had reasoned the case, says, 'I will go to my father,' Luke xv. 18. It must be such a purpose as is diligently pursued.

2. The object or rule, *my feet unto thy testimonies*. By his feet is meant the course of his life. Our will and natural inclination should be no rule to us, but God's testimonies. We must entirely give up ourselves to the direction of his word: 'As many as walk according to this rule,' Gal. vi. 16. We are not to walk as we list. There is a fixed determinate rule, which must be kept with all accurateness and attention; a godly man is very tender of breaking this rule; he makes conscience of keeping to this rule.

Now it concerneth us to make sure work of it.

[1.] Because convictions lost occasion the greater hardness of heart. No iron so hard as that which has been often heated and often quenched; and no heart so bad as theirs that seemed to have some serious and anxious thoughts about their eternal condition. The devil is the more busy and watchful about them because of their offer to escape; and God is the more provoked because they started aside when they were at the point of yielding; as better a match were never proposed, than to break off just as it is ready to be concluded. Always according to the closeness of the application, if it succeed not, so doth our hardness of heart increase. They that were ministerially stirred,

when they pull away the shoulder, their hearts grow like an adamant stone: Zech. vii. 11, 12, 'But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.' When the Spirit is in a way of striving, Gen vi. 3, when you are any way affected, if resistance be continued, he withdraws. When men blunt the edge of conscience, deaden their affections, they lose all feeling: 2 Peter ii. 20, 21, 'For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.' They sin against former knowledge, experience, and sense of the truth. As their light is, so their resisting causeth hardness, and all the sensible work cometh to nothing. But that is not all, it turneth to loss; it maketh it more difficult than it was before in regard of us; it maketh us more careless. When we had some stirring in our consciences before, we healed it slightly, and we think to do so again.

[2.] You will provoke God to use a rougher dispensation when the persuasions of the word and the strivings of the Spirit cannot bring you to repentance. They will not be won by arguments; God teacheth them by blows, as Gideon did the men of Succoth by briers and thorns. Therefore they shall shortly find themselves so involved in the fruit of their sins, as they shall not look off from it; their guilt shall lay hold of them at every hand: Hosea vii. 2, 'They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their sins; now their doings have beset them round about.' We should be much with our hearts, considering our case, how it is with us. God useth not the rod till forced to it: 'He doth not willingly grieve nor afflict the children of men,' Lam. iii. 33. When milder means work but half a cure, the rest is supplied by some pressing judgments; his work is stopped, and therefore he promotes it this way.

[3.] It is a sign your consideration is not serious when you are off and on, and it produceth no good effect in the soul. A plaster may be sovereign, but when you are still pulling it off and putting it on, it does no good. Light thoughts work not; when they are deep and ponderous, then they leave a durable impression. Still it is, 'Remember and turn:' Ps. xxii. 27, 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord.' Bethink and repent: 1 Kings viii. 47, 'If they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captives, and repent'; 'Search and try, and turn unto the Lord.' Some are *semper victuri*, always considering, about to live: but you must resolve: kindly convictions will not die, nor let the convinced sinner alone till they appear in the fruits of obedience.

[4.] The devil hath his purposes: Mat. xiii. 19, 'The wicked one catcheth away that which was sown in his heart;' he watcheth troubled sinners, that the work may die away.

Use 1. To reprove us—

1. For not considering our ways. When did you ever go aside, and seriously debate with yourselves about your turning to God? Did you ever lay it to your hearts how matters stand between you and God? There are certain seasons when God calleth you to it, and that is—

[1.] When the doctrine of life and the way of salvation hath been represented unto you with evidence and power, and you have felt some stirring and trouble in your consciences. Did you go home and say, Rom. viii. 31, ‘What shall we then say to these things?’ God hath spoken to me this day; now shall all this be lost and come to nothing? Heb. ii. 3, ‘How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation?’ Now I am called to mind Christ and salvation more. If I should give no heed to these things, or only give them the hearing for the present, oh! what will become of me? There is a special providence in every message, warning, offer, or instruction by the word. Acts xiii. 26, ‘To you is this word of salvation sent;’ he doth not say, We brought it, but, God sent it; as some message of God for your trial. Do we think of these things which we have heard and learned?

[2.] When God appeareth against you in a course of judgments, cutting off one comfort after another, now taking away a child, then blasting the estate: ‘Now consider your ways;’ Eccles. vii. 14, ‘In the day of adversity consider;’ then is the duty in season. Affliction doth not rise out of the dust; God hath some end in these providences; and what is his end but to make me mindful of my duty to him? See for what end these things come, and to what issue they tend, that we may hear the rod, and know the meaning of the providence. If you do not consider, God will make you consider before he hath done with you. Jer. xxiii. 20, ‘The anger of the Lord shall not return till he hath performed all the thoughts of his heart, and then you shall consider it perfectly.’ God will follow blow after blow till we do consider his mind and purpose. Jer. xxx. 24, ‘The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return until he hath done it, and until he hath performed the intents of his heart.’

2. To reprove us for not taking this advantage. When we are set a-thinking of our ways, we have many thoughts and sensible stirrings, but they come to nothing, because we do not follow it close. You think, and have some workings of conscience, but do they end in a fixed purpose? Some break through all, as Saul forces himself, 1 Sam. xiii. 12. Break through all restraints of conscience. Felix had his qualm, but he puts it off to another season. Oh! consider these things will one day be a witness against you, the sensible workings upon your hearts by the word and rod.

Use 2. To stir us up to this work, serious consideration in order to sound conversion.

1. Be frequent in it. If daily you called yourselves to an account, all acts of grace would thrive the better. Seneca or Sextius, *Quid hodie malum sanasti? cui vitio obstitisti?* You have God’s example in reviewing every day’s work, and in dealing with Adam before he slept. The man that was unclean was to wash his clothes at eventide.

2. Seriously set yourself to it : Deut. xxxii. 46, 'Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day.' It is a weighty matter of life and death : Ps. iv. 4, 'Commune with your hearts and be still.' This is the way to check sin, and to come on most hopefully in a course of obedience.

3. Drive your thoughts to a resolution, to rectify whatever is amiss; never leave thinking of your ways till you grow anxious about eternal life, nor let your anxiousness cease till you bring it to somewhat; grow to some resolution about the ways of God. Pray God to make your consideration effectual : 2 Tim. ii. 7, 'Consider what I have said, and the Lord give you understanding in all things;' this is but the means, God giveth the grace.

## SERMON LXVII.

*I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*—VER. 60.

IN the verse immediately preceding the man of God speaks of repentance as the fruit of consideration and self-examining : 'I considered my ways, and then turned my feet to thy testimonies.' But when did he turn ? For though we see the evil of our ways, we are naturally slow to get it redressed. Therefore David did not only turn to God, but he did it speedily. We have an account of that in this verse, 'I made haste,' &c. This readiness in the work of obedience is doubly expressed—affirmatively and negatively. Affirmatively, 'I made haste;' negatively, 'I delayed not.' This double expression increaseth the sense, according to the manner of the Hebrews; as Ps. cxviii. 17, 'I shall not die, but live,' that is, surely live; so here, 'I made haste, and delayed not,' that is, I verily delayed not a moment; as soon as he had thought of his ways, and taken up resolutions of walking closely with God, he did put it into practice. The Septuagint reads the words thus : I was ready, and was not troubled or diverted by fear of danger. Indeed, besides our natural slowness to good, this is one usual ground of delays, we distract ourselves with fears, and when God hath made known his will to us in many duties, we think of tarrying till the times are more quiet and favour our practice, and our affairs are in a better posture. A good improvement may be made of that translation; but the words run better, as they run more generally, with us, 'I made haste, and delayed not,' &c.; and from thence observe—

*Doct.* That the call of God, whether to amendment and newness of life, or to any particular duty, must be without delay obeyed.

To illustrate the point by these reasons :—

*Reas.* 1. Ready obedience is a good evidence of a sound impression of grace left upon our hearts. There is a slighter conviction which breedeth a sense of duty, but doth not urge us thoroughly to the performance of it; and so men stand reasoning instead of running, debating the case with God: and there is a more sound conviction which is accompanied with a prevailing efficacy, and when we have

this upon our spirits, then all excuses and delays are laid aside, and we come off readily and kindly in the way of compliance with God's call. This is doctrinally spoken of, Cant. i. 4, 'Draw me, and we will run after thee.' Running is an earnest and speedy motion. From whence comes it? From drawing; it is a fruit of drawing, or the sweet and powerful attraction which the Spirit of God useth in the hearts of the elect. Instances I might give you in several calls and conversions spoken of in scripture. When Christ called Andrew and Peter,<sup>1</sup> 'They left their father and followed after him,' Mark i. 20. So when Christ called Zaccheus, 'he made haste, and came down from the tree, and received him joyfully,' Luke xix. 6. So Christ to Matthew, 'Follow me, and straightway he followed him,' Mat. ix. 9. Julian the apostate scoffs at these passages, as if it were irrational to conceive such a thing could be, that men should so soon leave their course of gain and calling; or else that Christ's followers were a kind of sots and fools, weak, and poor-spirited creatures, that upon a word speaking they would come off presently all of a sudden: but impulsions of the Spirit carry their own reason with them, and draw the heart without any more ado. But such as he were not acquainted with the workings of the Holy Ghost in conversion, therefore scoff at these things. So Gal. i. 16, 'Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.' When our call is clear, there needs no debate. When men stand reasoning instead of running, there is not a thorough work upon them.

*Reas. 2.* The sooner we turn to the ways of God the better we speed. How so?

1. Partly in this, that the work goes on the more kindly, as being carried forth in the strength of the present influence and impulsion of grace; whereas, if the heart grow cold again, it will be the more difficult. A blow while the iron is hot doth more than ten at another time when it grows cold again. So when thy heart grows cold, thou wilt not have that advantage as when thou art under a warm conviction. And indeed that is the devil's cheat, to speak of hereafter, to elude the importunity of the present conviction that is upon you. John v. 4, You know when the waters were stirred, then was the time to put in, he that stepped in first had experience of the sanative virtue of the waters; so when the heart is stirred, we should not lose this advantage, but come on upon that call. There are several metaphors in scripture that do express this; sometimes, we must open when God knocks, Cant. v.; we must enter when God opens, lest the door be shut against us, Mat. xxv.; we must come forth when he bids us, as Lot out of Sodom, lest we perish: when a thing is done speedily and in season it is a great advantage.

2. The more welcome to God the sooner we turn to him. We value a gift not only by its own worth, but by the readiness of him that gives; if we have it at first asking, we count it a greater kindness, and give the more thanks; so the less we stand hucking with God, and demurring upon his call, the more acceptable is our obedience. Pharaoh did at length let Israel go, but was forced to it, and with much ado, no thanks to him. It is true indeed, if we turn at length

<sup>1</sup> Read 'James and John,'—Ed.



seriously, heartily, we are accepted with God, but not so accepted as when we come in at first. Surely the fewer calls we withstand, the less we provoke God, and the more ready entertainment do we find. The spouse, that would not open at the first knock, but only at length, when her bowels were troubled, when she thought of her unkindness, then she went out to open to her beloved, but then her beloved was gone. You will not find God at your beck when you dally with him. Your comforts will cost you longer waiting for, when you make God wait for entrance, and would not give way to the work of his grace.

3. You speed better, because your personal benefit is the greater, the sooner you turn to the Lord. You have more knowledge, more experience, you get more comfort, you would be more profitable to others, more useful to God. If ever God touch your hearts, and once you come to experiment what an excellent thing it is to live in communion with God, you will be sorry you began no sooner. Paul complains that he was as a man 'born out of due time,' 1 Cor. xv. 8, and so had not the advantage of seeing Christ in the flesh, until he showed himself to him from heaven in the vision upon his conversion. You lose many a comfortable sight of Christ because you were so late acquainted with him. And it is said of Andronicus and Junius, Rom. xvi. 7, 'they were in Christ before me.' Certainly he that is first in Christ, and sooner called to grace, hath the advantage of us. An early acquaintance with God gives us advantages both in point of enjoyment and service. In point of enjoyment; peace, comfort, joy in the Holy Ghost. A man would not want these things, they are so valuable in themselves; the want of them is an incomparable loss to us. Certainly they would have been much better than all those flesh-pleasing vanities that you dote upon, and keep you from Christ. A man that hath for a long while wasted his time and strength in driving on a peddling trade, when he is acquainted with a more gainful course, Oh, saith he, that I had known this sooner! so, none have any taste of the ways of God, but they will wish so; Oh, that I had sooner renounced my carnal delights, and betaken myself to the service of God!

Then advantages in point of service. What honour might we have brought to God, what good done to others, if we had begun sooner! Oh, saith one, had I but the time to spend again which I trifled away in the devil's service! What use might I have made of the vigour and freshness of my youth, and quickness of my parts for God, and the large tract of time which I spent in sin and vanity! Every day in a carnal state was a loss of opportunity of service, the glorifying of God, the great end for which you were made.

*Reas. 3.* There is danger and hazard in delay and putting off a business of such concernment, as conversion to God and his ways is, upon such uncertainties. For the understanding of the force of this reason—

1. Let us determine that this is a business of the greatest concernment, and that will show us the folly of our delays, for certainly the greatest work should first be thought of. Now if you will believe the word of God, that will tell you the salvation of your souls should be your main care: Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' &c.; Ps. xxvii. 4, 'One thing have I desired of the

Lord, and that will I seek after,' &c. Whatever is neglected, this is a business that must be looked after. And Luke x. 42, 'One thing is needful.' Let us argue from these places. Certainly that which is necessary should be preferred before that which is superfluous. A man would take care to get meat rather than sauce, and would prefer his business before his recreation, that which is eternal before that which is temporal. It is not necessary we should be great and rich in the world. Within a little while it will not be a pin to choose what part we have acted here. But it is necessary we should be gracious, holy, and acquainted with God in Christ; that is our business. Again, that which is eternal should be preferred before that which is temporal. You count him a fool that is very exact and careful to get his room in an inn furnished, when he neglects his house where his constant abode is. In the other world there is our long home; and if all our care should be here for the present estate, where we tarry but for a night, but a little while, and neglect eternity, our everlasting happiness, that were a very great folly. That which is spiritual, which concerns our soul, should be preferred before that which is carnal and corporal, and only concerns the body, for the better part should have the most care. As for instance, a man that is wounded and cut through his clothes and skin and all, will sooner look to have the wound closed up in his body than the rent made up in his garment. So the distempers of the inward man should be first cured before we look after the outward man, which is as it were the garment and clothing, for these outward things shall be added. Here is your work, to please God, not satisfy the flesh. This is that which concerns us not only for a while but for ever, and concerns the inward man. This is the grand business of concernment; therefore we should delay other things rather than delay the work of our salvation; yet usually all other things have a quick despatch, and this only is neglected and lies by the wall.

2. That this business of concernment is left upon great hazard and uncertainty.

[1.] Life is uncertain. He that does seriously consider the uncertain shortness of the present life, how can he delay a moment, lest he be called home to God before his great errand for which he was sent into the world be done? Many of you, when you seriously think of it, would not for a thousand worlds die the next day so unprovided, unfurnished with promises, evidences, experiences; and yet it may be so that that may be the time when they shall be called home to God. This life is but 'a vapour,' James iv. 4, a little warm breath turned in and out by the nostrils, that is soon choked and stopped; and 'thou knowest not what will be on the morrow,' Prov. xxvii. 1. As that devout person said when he was invited to a meal the next day, to come to-morrow to a feast, I have not had a morrow for these many years. We have no security for the next day but our own word, and he that hath nothing but his own word to secure him is very weakly secured. Life is short, and we make it shorter by continuing in sin. It is uncertain: if there were a fixed time and period wherein we knew our continuance should be in the world, then we should be tempted to wallow freely in our carnal lusts, and entertain sin a little longer, and put off repentance till hereafter. But God hath left life upon

great uncertainties ; the hand of providence may soon crop you off, long before you come to your flower. None are nearer to destruction than those that promise themselves a longer time in sin : Luke xii. 19, 'Thou hast goods laid up for many years,' but 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.' God loves to disappoint secure careless souls that promise themselves a longer life without his leave ; he will break in upon a sudden. A poor careless sinner would fain keep his soul a little longer. No, it is demanded now : he doth not give it up, but it is taken away from him. Reason with thyself as Isaac, Gen. xxvii. 2 (I allude to it), 'Behold now I am old, I know not the day of my death ; make me savoury meats that my soul may bless thee before I die.' So reason, I have spent so much time in the world, and I know not the day of my dissolution, when God will call me home ; oh, let me go to God that he may bless me before I die !

[2.] You know not whether the means of grace shall be continued to you or no, and such affectionate offers and melting entreaties : Acts xiii. 46, 'Since you put away the word of God from you, you judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life.' God will not always wait upon a lingering sinner, but will take the denial and be gone. They judge themselves unworthy of that grace, they pass sentence upon themselves : 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2, 'Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation : we beseech you receive not the grace of God in vain.' God hath his seasons, and when these are past, will not treat with us in such a mild affectionate manner. The means of grace are removed from a people by strange providences, when they have slighted the offers of grace : Luke xiii. 7, 'These three years I came seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none : cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground ?' In that text there is—(1.) God's righteous expectation, 'These three years I came seeking fruit.' He was the dresser of the vineyard ; they were the three years of his ministry, as by a serious harmonising the evangelists will appear that he was just now entering upon his last half year they had his ministry among them. (2.) Their unthankful frustration, 'I find none,' nothing answerable to what means they enjoyed. (3.) God's terrible denunciation, 'Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground ?' God will root up a people, or remove the means ; and therefore will ye leave it upon such uncertainties ?

[3.] There is an uncertainty of grace : 2 Tim. ii. 25, 'If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.' It is a mere hazard, it may be he will, it may be not. It is uncertain whether the Spirit of God will ever put in your heart a thought of turning to God again : Gen. vi. 3, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man.' The Spirit of God strives for a long while, follows a sinner, casts in many an anxious thought, troubles and shakes him out of his carnal quiet and security, but this will not always last. Ah, Christians ! there are certain seasons, if we had the skill to take hold of them ; there is an appointed fixed time when God is nearer to us than at another time, and we shall never have our hearts at such an advantage : Isa. lv. 6, 'Call upon him while he is near, and while he may be found.' There are certain seasons which are times of finding. Some are of opinion that there are certain seasons when a man may be rich if he will, when God offereth him an opportunity for an estate in

the world, if he knew the time and how to take hold of it. Certainly to those that live under the means of grace there is a time of finding, when God is nearer to them than at another time, and therefore will you slip that, and leave it upon such great uncertainties?

[4.] There is an uncertainty in this ; we are not certain of having the use of our natural faculties ; we may lose our understandings by a stupid disease, and God may bring a judgment upon those that dally with him in the work of repentance. It is a usual judgment upon them that while they were alive did forget God, when they come to die, to forget themselves, and have not the free use of their reason, but, invaded with some stupid disease, die in their sins, and so pass into another world.

*Reas. 4.* The fourth reason is the great mischief of delay.

1. The longer we delay the greater indisposition is there upon us to embrace the ways of God. O Christians ! when we press you to holy things, to turn yourselves to the Lord, you begin to make some essay, and then are discouraged, and find it is hard and tedious to flesh and blood, and so you give over. Now mark, if it be hard to-day, it will be harder the next, so the third onward, for it is hardness of heart that makes the work of God hard. Now the more we provoke God, the more we resist his call, the more hard the heart is ; the impulsions of his grace are not so strong as before, and the heart every day is more hardened. As a path weareth the harder by frequent treading, so the heart is more hard, the mind more blind, the will more obstinate, the affections more engaged and rooted in a course of sin : Jer. xiii. 23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.' Oh, to break off an inveterate custom is hard ! A plant newly set is more easily taken up than a plant that hath taken root. When we grow old and rotten in the way of sin, it will be much harder for us than now it is : the longer we lie soaking here in sin, the farther off from God.

2. We provide the more discomfort for ourselves. Always the proportion of our sorrow is according to the measure of our sins. Whether it be godly sorrow, the sorrow of repentance, or despairing sorrow, those horrors which are impressed upon us as a punishment of our rebellion and impenitency, in both senses you still increase your sorrow the more you sin. For the sorrow of repentance, it is clear that sorrow must carry proportion with our offences. She that had much forgiven wept much. Certainly it will cost you the more tears, a greater humbling before God, the longer you continue in a course of sin against him. And for the sorrow of punishment, you are 'treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath,' Rom. ii. 5. Your burden will be greater and more increased upon you. It is too heavy for your shoulders already to bear ; why should we add to the weight of it? Either our sorrow of repentance will be greater, or the anxious sense of our punishment ; for in both God observes, and God requires a proportion.

3. Consider how unfit we shall be for God's service if we delay a little longer, when our strength is spent, and vigour of youth exhausted ; when our ears grow deaf, eyes dim, understanding dull, affections spent, memory lost. Is this a time to begin with God, and to look

after the business of our souls? Certainly he that made all, that was our Creator, deserves the flower of our strength, Eccles. xii. 1. When the tackling is spoiled and ship rotten, is that a time to put to sea? or rather when the ship is new built? Shall the devil feast upon the flower and freshness of your youth, and God only have the scraps and fragments of the devil's table? When we are good for nothing else, then to think we are good enough for God and the business of religion, which requires all our might and all our strength, when we are spent, is it a time to begin our warfare, or in our youth?

4. There is this, the just suspicion which is upon a late repentance; it is seldom sound; it is no true repentance which ariseth merely from horror and fear of hell. It may be but the beginnings of everlasting despair, and their desires may be but offers of self-love after their own ease. All men seek the Lord at length, but wise men seek him betimes. The difference is made on some in time, on others out of time, upon their death-beds. The most profane would have God for their portion when they can sin no more, and enjoy the world no longer. How can we tell this is a sound work? It seems to be a very questionable thing, merely proceeding from self-love and natural desires of happiness in all men. When we begin with God, we begin out of self-love, we come for our ease and interest, that we may be safe and happy; afterwards we come to a delight of spirit in his service, and having opportunity, show in our works the power of our affection to God, and manifest the soundness of our conversion. It is possible a death-bed repentance may be true, but it is very doubtful. There is but one instance, which is that of the thief upon the cross. The scriptures are a history of five thousand years; yet all that while we have but one instance of a man that repented when he came to die; and in that one instance there is an extraordinary conjunction of circumstances, such as will never fall out again. Christ was at the thief's right hand, in the height of his love, drawing sinners to salvation; and probably this man had never any such call till then. Some may at the eleventh hour be converted, because they were not called till then. Every one came when they were called. Therefore, there being so great and just a suspicion that lies against a late repentance, certainly we should not delay.

*Reas. 5.* The reasons for delay are very inconsiderable. Solomon saith, Prov. xxvi. 16, that 'the sluggard thinks himself wiser than seven men that can render a reason.' Mark, as Solomon's fool is not to be taken literally, but spiritually, so Solomon's sluggard is not to be taken morally, but spiritually. They that are sluggish and slow of heart in the things of God, they think they have a great deal of reason on their side, and will not be persuaded on the contrary but they shall do well enough for all that; and they can argue against the calls and injunctions of God. Yet how little can they say for themselves! See what reasons may be said for delay; I mean not that they plead and argue, but it is that which sways them, that which lies next the heart is this; why they keep off from God, and are satisfied with their present estate.

1. The pleasures of sin are sweet, and they are loath to forego them, and to engage their souls in the severities of a strict obedience. Here

is the bottom reason, this is, that which sways them. I will not speak to this plea as it lies against conversion itself, but only as it makes men to delay. If I were to plead for conversion itself, I would tell these carnalists of higher pleasure; that their delights shall not be abrogated, but preserved; their delight shall be transplanted from Egypt to Canaan, that it may thrive and prosper in a happier soil; that they may have purer contentments, and those chaste and happy satisfactions of enjoying communion with God. But I shall only deal with them as it relates to the delay of conversion. Therefore I thus argue: These pleasures of sin must one day be renounced, or you are for ever miserable; and if you must one day, why not now? For mark, sin will be as sweet hereafter as it now is, and salvation is always dispensed upon the same terms; you cannot be saved hereafter with less ado, or bring down Christ and heaven to a lower rate; and, therefore, if this be a reason now, it will ever lie as a reason against Christ and religion, then you will never tend to look after the ways of life; if you are loath to part with sin now, you will never part with it. The laws of Christianity are always the same. God will not bate you anything of repentance, and your heart is not like to be better, but worse, that is the sum of it; and therefore this reason signifies nothing when it comes to be tried in the balance of the sanctuary, and yet this is the main reason.

2. They can plead other things; hope God will be merciful to them hereafter; though they indulge themselves a little longer in sin, he will at length save them. I answer—You cannot bend his mercy and make it save; it is a mere uncertainty, peradventure he will, peradventure not. Would you take poison, out of hope that afterward you may meet with an antidote? And this is the very case between God and us. I answer further—There are shrewd suspicions that God will not be merciful to those that run such a desperate adventure; for whoever delays his repentance doth in effect pawn his soul with the devil, and leaves it in his hands, and says, Here, Satan, keep my soul; if I fetch it not again by such a day, it is thine for ever: and can you think mercy will bring it out? Again, there are great causes of fear, because there is such a thing as judicial hardness of heart, by a sentence of obduration. There are some that God gives up to their own ways and counsels, and God inflicts this sentence upon those that continue in sin, notwithstanding conviction of their hearts to the contrary: Prov. i. 25, 26, ‘Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.’ There are thousands in hell merely upon this account, that have forfeited the benefit of God’s mercy, and tenders of his grace, and have been shut up by hardness of heart, by God’s sentence of obduration; the most dreadful punishment that can light upon a creature on this side hell.

3. Ay! but we are willing, and would turn to the Lord now, but we have no leisure, and have not those conveniencies that we shall have hereafter, for then we shall get things into a better frame and posture. Oh, no; it is mere hypocrisy to think you are willing when you delay, for there is nothing hinders but a want of will, and a loathness to comply with the commands of God. When we dare not flatly deny, then we delay. *Non vacat*, that is the sinner’s plea, I am not at leisure; but *non placet*,

there is the reality. Mat. xxii. 7, they which were invited to the wedding varnished their denial over with an excuse. Delay is a denial, for if they were willing there would be no excuse. To be rid of importunate and troublesome creditors, we promise them payment another time, and we know our estate will be more wasted by that time; it is but to put them off: so this delay and putting off God is but a shift. Here is the misery, God always comes unseasonably to a carnal heart. It was the devils that said, Mat. viii. 29, 'Art thou come to torment us before our time?' Good things are a torment to a carnal heart, and they always come out of time. Certainly that is the best time when the word is pressed upon the heart with evidence, light, and power, and when God treats with thee about thine eternal peace.

*Reas. 6.* There are very urgent reasons to quicken us to make haste.

1. The state wherein we are at present is so bad and dangerous that we can never soon enough come out of it. The state of a man in his carnal condition is compared in scripture to a prison: Rom. xi. 32, 'God hath concluded or shut them all up in unbelief.' And mark, it is a prison that is all on fire. Oh, when poor captives are bolted and shut up in a flaming prison, how will they run hither and thither to get out! So should we run and strive to get out of this flaming prison. You cannot be too soon out of the power of the devil, or from under the curse of the law, the danger of hell-fire, and the dominion of sin: Mat. iii. 7, 'Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' He doth not say, to go, nor to run, but to flee. Fleeing from wrath to come, that is the truest motion. And so Heb. vi. 18; they which had the avenger of blood at their heels fled for refuge to take hold of the hope set before them. If there be poison in our bowels we think we can never soon enough cast it out. If fire hath taken hold of a building, we do not say we will quench it hereafter, the next week, or next month, but think we can never soon enough quench it. Or if there be a wound in the body, we do not let it alone till it fester and rankle. Christians, you may apply all this to the present case; here the danger is greater. There is no poison so deadly as sin, which hath infected all mankind: no wound so dangerous, for that will be the death of body and soul: no fire so dreadful as the wrath of God; therefore we cannot soon enough come out of this condition.

2. We cannot be happy soon enough, for the state we make after is the arms of God, the bosom of Jesus, the hope of eternal life; we cannot soon enough get within the compass of such privileges. Oh! shall Christ lie by as a dead commodity or breaded<sup>1</sup> ware? It shows we know not the gift of God, John iv. If we had a due sense and value of his excellency, we would take the morning market, and let not Christ Jesus, with all his benefits, lie by as a commodity that may be had at the last, at any time of the day; we would look upon him as the quickest ware in the market, and flock to him 'as doves to the windows,' Isa. lx. 8. You would force your way that you might get into his heart; you would count all things but dross and dung that you might gain him. It will be sweet to be encircled in the embraces of Jesus Christ, to have 'his left hand under your head, and his right hand to embrace you,' Cant. ii. 6; and will you delay when he stands offering himself, and stretching out his hand all the day long to receive you?

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'braided,' that is, scorned, reproached; whence, *upbraid*?—Ed.

## SERMON LXVIII.

*I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*—VER. 60.

I COME now to the application.

*Use* 1. To reprove the dallying with God which we are conscious to in the work of conversion, which is so common and natural to us. We are apt to put off God from time to time, from childhood to youth, from youth to man's age, from man's age to old age, and from old age to death-bed; and so the devil steals away one hour after another till all time be past.

I shall—(1.) Speak of the causes of this delay; (2.) Represent the heinousness of it, that you may not stroke this sin with a gentle censure, and think lightly of the matter.

First, Of the causes of this delay.

1. Unbelief, or want of a due sense or sight of things to come. If men were persuaded of eternal life and eternal death, they would not stand hovering so long between heaven and hell, but presently engage their hearts to draw nigh to God. But we 'cannot see afar off,' 2 Peter i. 9. Nature is purblind: to carnal hearts there is a mist upon eternity, they have no prospective whereby to look into another world, therefore it hath no influence upon them to quicken them to more speed and earnestness. If we had a due sense of eternal death, surely we would be fleeing from wrath to come; no motion should be earnest and swift enough to get from such a danger. If we had a due sense of eternal life, we would be 'running to take hold of the hope that is before us,' Heb. vi. 18.

2. Security. If men have a cold belief of heaven and hell, if they take up the current opinions of the country, yet do not take it into their serious thoughts, they 'put far away the evil day,' Amos vi. 3. Things at a distance do not startle us, as a clap of thunder afar off doth not fright us so much as when it is just over our heads in our own zenith. We look upon these things as to come, so put off the thought of them. Next to a want of sound belief, the want of a serious consideration is the cause why men dally with God. If we had the same thoughts living and dying, our motions would be more earnest and ready. When death and eternity is near, we are otherwise affected than when we look upon it as afar off. One said of a zealous preacher, He preacheth as if death were at my back. Oh, could we look upon death as at our back or heels! If men did but consider that within a few days they must go to heaven or hell, that there is but the slender thread of a frail life upon which they depend, that is soon fretted asunder, they would not venture any longer to be out of a state of grace, nor dally with God. But we think we may live long, and time enough to repent by leisure; we put far off the day of our change, and so are undone by our own security.

3. Averseness of heart from God. That which makes us desirous to stay longer in a way of sin, doth indeed make us loath to turn at all; and what is that? Obstinacy and unsubmission of heart to God: 'The carnal mind is enmity to the law of God,' Rom. viii. 7. We



manifest our enmity to the law of God by delays as well as by a downright opposition. Neh. iv. 6, it is said the work went on speedily. Why? 'For the people had a mind to the work.' Where there is an earnest bent of heart, there we cannot linger and dally any longer. But men have no love nor affection to God, therefore do they delay and keep off from him.

4. The love of the world rooted in us, the love of present delights and present contentments. This is so deeply rooted in our nature that here we stick, and are loath to come off kindly to the work of God. In Mat. xxii., when they were invited to the marriage-feast of the king's son, that is, to the privileges of the gospel, what did they plead? The farm, oxen, merchandise, and one had married a wife; they were loath to be divorced from their dearest lusts, and to renounce the satisfaction which they had in carnal things, that so they might walk with God in a way of strict obedience.

Secondly, Let me represent the heinousness of it. Because we are apt to stroke it with a gentle censure, and to speak of this with soft words, let us see what this delay and putting off God is, when he comes with a great deal of importunity and affectionate earnestness, inviting us to partake of his grace.

1. It is flat disobedience to God. You think it is but putting it off for a while; no, it is flat disobedience. Why? God is as peremptory for the time and season as he is for the duty itself. God doth not only say, Turn to me, but, To-day, 'even while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts,' Heb. iii. 7, 8. The Lord deals with us as the Roman ambassador dealt with Antiochus, when he was shifting and putting off the matter, that he might not give a direct answer to the Romans. The ambassador draws a circle round about him, saith he, *Intra hunc*, Let me have an answer before thou passest from hence. So God will not only have an answer, but a present answer. If he saith, To-day, it is flat disobedience for you to say, To-morrow. He saith, Now is the time of salvation. We are charged in his name and by his authority to do it now, in this instant.

2. It is ingratitude and unthankfulness for God's eternal love: Ps. ciii. 17, 'From everlasting to everlasting thy loving-kindness is great to them that fear thee.' From all eternity God was mindful of us, and before the world was. With reverence we may speak it: ever since he was God he was our God: from eternity to eternity his loving-kindness is great; and shall we adjourn and put him off to an odd corner of our lives, when he thought he could never soon enough think of us? Shall the whole duration of God be taken up by his love to us, and shall we be content to grieve the Spirit of God, and trample his laws under our feet for all this? Can you have hearts to abuse such a God, and to deal so unkindly with him?

3. It is base disingenuity: we do not deal with God as we would have God to deal with us. If we have any business or errand at the throne of grace, we would be heard presently, and are ready to complain if we have not a quick despatch: Ps. cii. 2, 'Lord, hear me speedily.' Here is our language when praying for any relief we stand in need of. To-day is a season for mercy, but to-morrow we make always to be the season for duty. We would have God to tarry our

sinful leisure, till the heat of our lusts be spent, and fervours of youth be abated ; yet we will not tarry his holy leisure. We are bound, but the Lord is free whether he will answer us or no ; yet we murmur if God come not in at our beck. We are always in haste if in any danger and want any relief ; we cry, How long ? And shall God stand waiting till we turn from our evil ways ? If any cry, How long ? God may, as he doth Jer. xiii. 27, ' When shall it once be ? '

4. It is base self-love when we can be content to dishonour God longer, provided that at length we may be saved. Shall I say that this is to prefer our salvation before God ? No, but it is to prefer our sins before God. And it shows that we are not willing to part with sin upon reasons of duty, or any real inclination of heart towards God, but only upon reasons of interest, that we may be saved ; yea, never to part with it at all if you might have your wills. Not but that a man may and ought to eye rewards and punishments. It is part of the exercise of our faith to eye the reward, and also to eye the punishment ; but this manifests an inordinate respect to the reward when we would enjoy our personal happiness, and so that be obtained at length, we care not how God be disobeyed and dishonoured. You do but in effect say to God thus, Let me despise thy commands, and abuse thy mercies a little longer ; then I will look after my salvation, when my lusts are satisfied. This is base self-love. Christ did not redeem us only that we might die well, but that we might live well ; not only that we might be safe at last, but glorify God here upon earth ; not only that we might enter into heaven, but do him service, and that all our days : Luke i. 74, ' Being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life. '

5. It is great injustice and injury to God, who hath been too long kept out of his right already. Oh, look back ! How ungratefully have you spent all your former time ! Too much time hath been spent already, and you would delay longer : 1 Peter iv. 3, ' The time past may more than suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, ' &c. It is enough, and should be more than enough, and now you should not stay a moment. As those that have delayed their journey, when they begin and set out, mend their pace that they may redeem their time and accomplish their journey ; so should we, for the time past is more than enough to be spent in worldly vanity and carnal excess : Rom. xiii. 11-14, ' It is high time to awake out of sin. ' God hath been encroached upon for a long time, and that should and will be a grief of heart to you, that you have not all this while acknowledged or paid your debt to your lord. The thought of this should prevail with us the more, because the payment of a debt to a man should not be delayed, to put off a poor man till to-morrow ' when thou hast it by thee, ' Prov. iii. 28 ; and the wages of a servant should not abide with us, Lev. xix. 13. We are not to defraud a poor servant, nor to delay him, but to make him quick payment ; and shall we defraud our great Creator of the debt we owe to him, and put him off from day to day ?

*Use 2.* To exhort us with speed to turn to the Lord, and to comply with his motions. Let us not put off God from day to day. I shall

urge it—(1.) As to the general case ; (2.) As to particular duties which are pressed upon you.

First, As to the general case. Oh ! go and bethink yourselves, how do matters stand between God and thy soul ? Debate it seriously, that if you have neglected God and his salvation already, you may now turn to him without delay. Let me press you further.

1. You can never part with sin soon enough ; it is a cursed inmate, that will surely bring mischief upon the soul that harbours it. It will set its own dwelling on fire. If there be a mote in the eye, a thorn in the foot, we take them out without delay ; and is not sin a greater mischief, and sooner to be looked into and parted with ? Certainly the evil of sin is greater than all evil, and hereafter the trouble will be greater ; therefore we can never soon enough part with it.

2. Let this move you : sin must have a quick despatch, and shall not God ? It would defeat temptations if we would but delay them, it would stop the furies of anger, and suppress the motions of lust. Augustus the emperor advised those who were angry to repeat the Greek alphabet, meaning that they might take time to consider. So for uncleanness and other sins ; if the practice and execution of many lusts were but delayed, we would not be so frequent in them as we are, to the dishonour of God and scandal of religion. Prov. vii. 22, it is said of the young man enticed by the harlot, that ‘ forthwith he went after her.’ When our lusts are agog, all the checks of conscience and persuasions of the word will not prevail for a little respite. Now, shall sin have a more ready entertainment than God ? Will you rush upon the practice of sin like a horse into the battle, and come on in the service of God like a snail ? Will you be so eager and passionate upon the impulsion of every lust, and so hardly be entreated by the Spirit of God and by the word of God ?

3. If you be not ready, God is ready. How ready is he, on the one hand, to receive you, and, on the other hand, to punish you ! The one quickens us by hope, and the other by fear. For the consideration which works upon hope, God is ready : Mat. xxii. 4, 5, ‘ Come to the wedding, all things are ready.’ He hath a Christ ready to receive you, a Spirit ready to sanctify and cure all your soul distempers ; he hath pardoning mercy to forgive all your sins, he hath power of grace to remedy all your distempers ; and will not you be ready ? Luke xv. 20, the prodigal said, ‘ I will go to my father.’ Mark his language, ‘ I will go ;’ the father *ran*. When we do but relent, and with brokenness of heart come and lie at the feet of God, love’s pace is very swift, and runs to snatch us out of the fire ; therefore will you not be ready to cast yourselves into the arms of his compassion ? Cant. ii. 8, Christ is represented as ‘ leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills.’ Christ thinks he can never be soon and early enough with a returning sinner, to revive a poor broken-hearted sinner ; therefore, if God be so ready, so should you. On the other side, to work upon your fear, if you delay, God is ready to punish you. The wrath of God hangs over your heads like a sharp sword by a slender thread, and will you sit still and keep your place ? ‘ The judge is at the door ;’ he is ready to judge, James v. 9. Are you ready to be judged ? God is ready to condemn, to execute, and are not you ready to implore mercy, to

seek the Lord's favour? ready to fall flat, and beg terms of grace in and through Christ Jesus? Rahab, when the Lord had by his messengers threatened destruction to Jericho, only Rahab's house was to be safe. She hanged out a scarlet thread ere the spies were departed, Josh. ii.; she did not delay till the army came and the city was surprised. When the Lord is marching against sinners with vengeance and fury, you cannot come soon enough to God to prevent it, Luke xiv. 32. That king that had twenty thousand marching against him, doth not stay till they were in his quarters, but while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desireth conditions of peace. God is ready to execute all his vengeance and curses of the law; therefore, while you may, seek conditions of peace. You have been spared long; it may be for the next sin you may pay for all. A thief that hath long escaped, when he is taken at length, all his villany is recompensed into his bosom; if he had not stolen the last time, he had escaped. God hath spared you hitherto; it may be upon the next sin he will strike you, and hold his hands no longer. If God now strike, in what a woful case would you be?

4. There was never any that came to God too soon; many have come too late, the foolish virgins are an instance. When they brought little children to Christ, Christ received them. There are none so little but the great God can form and fashion them into a temple for himself. Usually God chooseth his people from among the youth. There may be some converted in old age, but few; usually it is in our youth, or as soon as we come to our maturity. Reason thus: I may be too late, I cannot be too early; let me no longer dally with God.

Secondly, As to the particular duties which are pressed upon you, let me caution you and direct you.

1. By way of caution.

[1.] When you have any stirrings of heart, any anxious thoughts about your eternal condition, beware you do not believe the devil, that hereafter will be a more convenient season. I shall give directions suitable to the grand enemies of our salvation, the devil, the world, and the flesh. Now, do not believe the devil. This was Felix's case. Paul was reasoning of justice and temperance, graces that he was little acquainted withal, and Paul quickens all by a remembrance of judgment to come, and then Felix trembled. But how doth he put off this heart-work? Hereafter we shall have 'a more convenient season,' Acts xxiv. 25. Oh! never will it be better with you than now when the waters are stirred. Still there is something in the sinner's way when God hath any business for him. When young, we want wisdom; when old, we want strength; in the middle of business, we want leisure; in the midst of leisure, we are corrupted and want a heart. We are lazy, and then every molehill seems a mountain. Remember, if the devil can but get us to delay, he hath us fast enough. If he can but get us to put it off to-day, then to-morrow, then the next day, shall be as that. Austin, when he had conviction upon him, he prays from his conscience, Lord, mortify my lusts, but not yet. Satan's morrow will never come. There is no end of delays. He tells you of to-morrow and another season, but that season will never come.

[2.] Let not the world choke the word. It is notable the choking

the good seed which was scattered among thorns. Christ expounds it of the world. Now what of the world choketh it? Mat. xiii. 22, he instanceth in 'the cares of the world;' and Luke instanceth in 'the pleasures of this life;' he adds 'voluptuous living,' Luke viii. 14; and Mark hath it more generally, 'the cares of this life,' Mark iv. 19; 'and the lusts of other things choke the word.' The meaning of all those places is this: Many a man hath some beams of light darted into his bosom, and he begins to have serious and anxious thoughts of his eternal condition. Ay! but then the pleasures and cares of the world interpose, and they must be first served, and so the conviction is lost. Sometimes a man is full of business, and cannot attend to carrying on this work; at other times he is loath to forego his voluptuous course; there is some sport he must attend upon, and so the word is lost. When you have conviction upon you, you are under God's arrest; when you go and get out of the chains of conscience without God's leave, you break prison. All business must give way to your great business, and follow that close till you come to some issue: Mat. viii. 21, 'Follow me,' saith Christ. 'Suffer me first to go bury my father.' 'Nay,' saith Christ, 'let the dead bury the dead, but do thou follow me.' How specious soever the work be, we must call off our souls. Let not these beams of conviction which are darted into your bosom be quenched.

[3.] Consult not with the flesh, as a friend in the case, when your heart begins to work towards God: Gal. i. 16, 'Immediately I consulted not with flesh and blood.' It is notable the word signifies to lay down a burden, to lay down our cares and difficulties in a friend's bosom. When a man hath any trouble upon him he communicates it to his friend. Now, you have a burden upon you, you begin to be sensible you are in a wrong course, and must turn to God. Do not lay down your burdens in the flesh's bosom; they will tell you this is but a pang and melancholy qualm, and would furnish you with a great many seeming reasons to put it off, frivolous excuses, slothful pretences, carnal fears, and idle allegations; therefore consult not with the flesh as with a friend in the case.

[4.] Be not discouraged with tediousness and difficulty, which, upon a trial, you will find in the ways of God. Many that carry on their convictions to a resolution, and their good resolutions to some performance, when they find it to be a difficult and tedious business, a thing that is irksome to the flesh, they throw up all, and there is an end of the conviction that was upon them. A bullock at first yoking is most unruly until he be accustomed to it; so afterwards duty will be more sweet and easy: if you will but take Christ's yoke upon trial, you shall find it is a sweet yoke, Mat. xi. 29. And remember, difficulties in the service of God should rather excite than discourage. Will you serve God with that which cost you nothing? Will you think to go to heaven, and not enter in at the strait gate? Remember, this is one of our waymarks. Counterbalance difficulty with reward, and punishment and pains of duty with the pains of hell, the pleasure of sin with the reward of eternal life: urge your souls with the equity in Christ's ways, and the filthiness and turpitude in those sinful courses.

[5.] If you have discouragements from God, and he seems to withdraw or withhold his grace, remember he is not at your beck: if he gives nothing he oweth nothing. If he should not give present comfort, strength, and help, usually it may be so for your trial. We are never brought to a thorough obedience until we come to this resolution: Let God do what he will, I will do what he hath commanded; till we yield to God's sovereignty, and venture through his denials and the suspensions of his grace. As the woman of Canaan, he first answereth her not a word; when he answers, his speech is more discouraging than his silence, 'It is not meet to take the children's bread and give it to dogs.' She ventures through all these discouragements. Christ yields at length: 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt.' God will bring his creatures to such a thorough obedience. You may have no visits of his love, no beam of his grace; though you meet with a dumb oracle, and he seems to cast you off, and you have many fears, yet venture through with a holy obstinacy that you will not give over; as Job xiii. 15, 'Though he kill me, yet will I put my trust in him.' When you follow God with such an obstinacy of obedience, though he should appear never so contrary, yet we will encourage ourselves in waiting upon him. Thus be severe to your purpose.

## 2. For positive directions.

[1.] Observe the call of God. There are certain seasons when God more especially doth approach the heart of a sinner, when Christ knocks: Rev. iii. 20, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' How doth Christ knock? By the motions of his grace, when the word sets conscience awork. One time or other God meets with the heart of every man that lives under the gospel, so that his conscience tells him, I must be another man, or I am an undone man for ever. Then Christ knocks when conscience is thus set awork; when the waters are stirred, then is the time to put in for cure. Now observe this, that you may welcome the authority of his truth. To resist Christ in this work is a dangerous thing. For a woman to destroy the child in the womb is murder; so to resist Christ in this work that is going on towards the new birth is spiritual murder.

[2.] Be sure this work come to some effect. To stifle convictions, that is very dangerous. There is no iron so hard as that which hath been often heated and often quenched; so no hearts so hard as those that have had many convictions and have quenched them: 1 Thes. v. 19, 'Quench not the Spirit.' You have great qualms of conscience. Felix he trembles; ay! but it came to nothing. Many men's hearts are roused, but it does no good. A man that sleeps upon a bridge may dream that he is falling into the water, and so dream that he may shake every limb of him, and so shake and tremble that he may cry out in his sleep. Ay! but the man doth not awake, and rouse up that he may avoid the danger. So the word of God may work so far that they begin to fear they are even dropping into the pit; they have anxious thoughts about their eternal condition, but still they sleep till their security overcome their fear, and so this work comes to nothing. And therefore, be not contented to have some motions upon thy soul now and then, some involuntary impressions, but see what they come

to: Eph. v. 14, 'Awake, thou that sleepest,' &c. When Christ hath awakened thee, and thou beginnest to be startled in the sleep of thy security, rouse up thyself and be serious.

[3.] Actuate thy thoughts by a sound belief and application of eternity, that you may not lose your convictions. First by a belief, and then by an application. This is that which doth actuate and enliven all those truths that set on the work of God. First, by a belief of eternity. Surely there is good and evil, there is hope and fear, therefore there is heaven and hell. Say, there are two states, a state of nature and a state of grace; and these two states have respect to two covenants—a covenant of works, that worketh bondage, and binds me over to punishment, and a covenant of grace; and both these do issue themselves at length into heaven and hell. This is the great sum of our religion. And conscience and reason will tell me there is a world to come; there must be a time when God will deal more severely with sinners than he doth in the present life. Enliven your thoughts by strengthening your belief of eternity, for this is that which doth set home all the exhortations of his word, and which makes our thoughts serious. And then, secondly, by a serious application of these things to yourselves. If you would have these hopes, apply the offer of heaven to work upon your hope, and the commination of hell to work upon your fear. The offer of heaven: If I would be blessed in Christ, surely I must mend my course. Now, Acts iii. 26, 'He hath sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.' When there is an offer that comes in with power upon the heart, then Christ is sent to turn me from my sins, that I may be the inheritor of an everlasting blessing; and shall I not let go my sins? I have often flattered myself with this, Sure I am willing to be saved; but I cannot be saved if I live in my sins, otherwise I am no more willing to be saved than the devils, for they are willing to be saved from the wrath of God for ever. A creature is willing to be eased of his torment, and every one would have eternal life: Evermore give me this life. Now, let Christ do his work to turn you from your sins. So by working upon your fear: Here God hath threatened me with eternal damnation if I do not hearken. Now scourge thy soul with that smart question, Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation?' How shall I escape the damnation of hell if I turn back upon his offer, if I deal slightly with God in a business which so nearly concerns my soul?

[4.] Issue forth a practical decree for God in the soul. When the heart is backward, we have no remedy left but to decree for God. David makes a decree in the court of conscience: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord.' I said, I determined, I would go and lie at God's foot, and humble myself; so I said—set down a resolution which shall be like the laws of the Medes and Persians, never to be reversed—that thou wilt for this present and ever hereafter wait upon the means, and give way to the work of God upon thy soul; resolve that you will go and lie at God's feet, and say, 'Lord, turn me: I am as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke,' Jer. xxxi. 18. thou hast forbidden me to despair, and commanded thy creature to come to thee for grace—here I cast myself at the footstool of thy mercy; and

resolve you will keep up your endeavours in all the means of grace in hearing the word, prayer, &c. Though no sensible comfort comes, yet in obedience perform holy duties: 'At thy command,' says Peter, 'I will cast out the net,' Luke v. 5. Be diligent and frequent in waiting upon God, and look with more seriousness and earnestness of soul after the business of eternal life.

## SERMON LXIX.

*The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.*—VER. 61.

IN the words observe—

1. David's trial.

2. His constancy under that trial.

1. His trial is set forth by two things:—

[1.] The persons from whom it came, *the bands of the wicked*.

[2.] The evil done him, *have robbed me*.

[1.] The persons, 'The bands *הַבָּל* of the wicked.' *הַבָּל* signifieth a cord, and also a troop or company, not of soldiers only, but others: 1 Sam. x. 5, 'Thou shalt meet a company or troop of prophets;' it is the same word. Those that interpret it cords or ropes, understand it some one way, some another. Aben Ezra, the griefs and sorrows prepared for the wicked have taken hold of me, and parallels it with Ps. cxvi. 3, 'The sorrows of death compassed me, the pains of hell gat hold of me.' Others understand it of the snares the wicked laid for him. But the word is better translated by the Chaldee paraphrase, *catervæ*, the bands; in our old translation, 'The congregations of the wicked:' he meaneth the multitude of his enemies leaguings together against him.

[2.] The evil done him, they 'have robbed me.' A man may suffer in his name by slander, in his dwelling by his exile, in his liberty by imprisonment, in limbs or life by torture and execution, in his estate by fine and confiscation. Many are the troubles of the righteous; this last is here intended. There are the depredations of thieves and robbers, but they do not spoil for religion's sake, but the supply of their lusts; the plunderings of soldiers by the license of war, when laws cease, so men are robbed or have their goods taken from them by violence; or else it may be by pretence of law, by fine and confiscation, as it is said: Acts viii. 3, 'Saul made havoc of the churches, and entering into every house, haling men, committed them to prison;' Acts ix. 1, 'Saul, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, desires letters of the high priest, that if he found any of this way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.' At that time the favourers of the gospel suffered much rapine and spoil of goods. Applying it to David's case, some think it fulfilled when the Amalekites spoiled Ziklag, 1 Sam. xxx., and took the women captives, and the spoil of the city. Some understand it of the time when Absalom and his party rifled his house and defiled his concubines, 2 Sam. xv.



2. His constancy. No calamity had wrought upon him so far as to forsake God's truth, or go against his conscience in anything.

*Doct.* That no temporal loss which can accrue to us by the violence of evil men should make us forsake our duty to God.

1. That this temptation may be greater or less as it is circumstantiated. It is here represented by David by this word, the bands or the troops of the wicked, which implieth—

[1.] Their multitudes. One froward wicked man may do much harm in his neighbourhood, as there are some whom God reserveth as scourges to his people and goads and thorns to their sides; but when many rise up against us, the temptation is the greater: Ps. iii. 1, 'Lord, how are they increased which trouble me? many are they which rise up against me.' The sincere are but few themselves, and they have many enemies: 1 John v. 19, 'We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.' There was a whole world against a handful of Christians, but we must not 'follow a multitude to do evil.'

[2.] Their confederacy, 'The bands of the wicked:' Ps. lxxxiii. 5-7, 'They have consulted together with one consent, they are confederate against thee, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek.' Though the wicked be at enmity one with another, yet they will all agree to destroy the people of God.

[3.] These were set on mischief; for the bands of the wicked are spoken of here as a society opposite to that which is spoken of afterwards, ver. 63, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy commandments.' There are two seeds which have enmity one against another, 'the seed of the woman,' and 'the seed of the serpent,' Gen. iii. 15. The far greatest part of the world live an ungodly sensual life, and therefore cannot endure those that give an example of a holy self-denying life, John xv. 19; therefore the life of godliness is usually made matter of common hatred, scorn, and opposition, for the sensual and ungodly cannot endure the godly and the heavenly. The more exactly any man setteth himself to obey God, the more he crosseth the lusts and carnal interests of the wicked, and so the more he commonly suffereth in the world. The world is full of malice and prejudice against them; they slander them, oppress them, represent them under an odious character; and they often meet with disturbances from the assaults and injuries of wicked men.

[4.] The hurt they did him was spoiling and taking away the conveniences of the temporal life, they 'robbed me.' Though it go no further, yet to be deprived of those necessary and convenient comforts is matter of sorrow in itself. It goeth near to the hearts of worldlings to part with them, and therefore by this means they think to discourage the people of God; and many times God permitteth it that their lives, liberties, and estates shall be much in their power: Ps. xlv. 10, 'They that hate us spoil for themselves.' God leaveth them in their hands to dispose of them at their pleasure, which is a great and sharp temptation to his people. The Amalekites 'left no sustenance in Israel,' Judges vi. 4.

2. When a man is said to forsake his duty to God by such trials.

[1.] When he loseth his patience and meek submission to his will.

Thus the Lord tried Job by the Sabæans and Chaldæans, Job i. 15, 17, who 'took away his oxen, and camels, and all his stock;' yet Job meekly submitteth to the Lord's will: ver. 21, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' Not *ὁ Χαλδαῖος ἀφῆλato*, but Job eyeth God both in giving and taking: if he take, he gave before, or else we had it not to lose. When we look to instruments we are full of wrath: a bucket of water cast upon us enrageth us more than a soaking shower that cometh from heaven. Let us see God, without whom nothing cometh to pass.

[2.] When he loseth his comfort and confidence in God, for that is a sign we live upon the creature, and cannot trust God without the creature. Man knoweth how to put a cheat upon his own heart. When he hath all things at full, then he talketh of living by faith; as those women who 'would eat their own bread, and wear their apparel, only call us by thy name,' Isa. iv. 1. So they, though all their happiness be bound up with the creatures, yet have the wit to give God the name. Now God will take away the creature to see how we can live upon himself alone: 1 Sam. xxx. 6, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' He still maintained his hope in the Lord when all was gone, when the emptiers had emptied him.

[3.] When we desert the truth, or go against conscience in anything. David telleth us here, when 'the bands of the wicked,' &c.; that is, 'the congregations,' says the old translation, as decreeing an unjust sentence against him; or 'bands,' says the new, as appointed to attack him; or troops, when the wicked combined against him by troops. So the primitive Christians 'suffered the spoiling of their goods,' Heb. x. 34; the Jews endeavoured to make them poor and miserable, that they might forsake their Christianity. But we must, with Joseph, leave our coat to keep our conscience; and these trials, in short, should be but the exercise of our patience and hope, and we should be provoked to do nothing but what best becometh God's servants.

3. That we should not forsake our duty to God for temporal losses.

[1.] We entered upon the profession of Christianity on these terms: Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' Life, wealth, and honours must be forsaken: Luke xiv. 26, 'If any man come to 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.' Only relations and life are there mentioned, goods are not; but afterwards, ver. 33, 'He that forsaketh not all he hath,' *voto et præparatione animi*. Yet Christ may permit some to break through at a cheaper rate, but all must resolve on it, prepare for such a temptation. God hath not excepted it out of his covenant and dispensations; he may when he pleases suffer a righteous man to be stripped to the skin, therefore we must not except it out of our resignation. The wise merchant 'sold all,' Mat. xiii. 45, 46. When a man cometh to accept of Christ, there is a competition. Without this—

(1.) No true faith. True faith includes in it an election and choice or esteem and valuation of Christ, not only as good, but as more excellent, more necessary for us, more beneficial to us than all other things. It is *prælatio unius rei præ altera*, a preference of Christ above other

things : Phil. iii. 7-9, 'I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,' &c. Christ is apprehended as more necessary for the soul ; it cometh to him under an apprehension of a deep want, and with a broken-hearted sense of misery ; we are undone without him. We are not so though we want or lose the world ; God can repair us here, will at last save us without these things : Luke x. 42, 'But one thing is needful.' Christ is esteemed more excellent ; the rarest comforts of the world are but base things to his grace, but dung and dross in comparison ; not only uncertain, but vain and empty as to any real good : Job xxvii. 8, 'For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God taketh away his soul ?' Christ is more beneficial to a poor sinner ; in him alone true happiness is to be found ; therefore we must suffer anything rather than offend our Saviour : Rom. viii. 39, 'No creature is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

(2.) No true love. Religion without self-denial in one kind or another is Christianity of our own making, not of Christ's. We cull out the easy safe part of religion, and then we call this love to God and love to Christ. No ; the true Christian love is to love God above all. Now, one branch of loving God above all is to part with things near and dear to us when God calleth us so to do. We must be contented to be crucified to the world with our Lord and Master : Mat. x. 37, 'He that loveth father, or mother, or son, or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me.' An underling love Christ will not like or accept.

[2.] On this condition we possess and enjoy the good things of this world, namely, to part with them when God calleth us thereunto. We are not absolute owners, but tenants at will : Haggai ii. 8, 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.' The absolute disposal of the riches and wealth of the world belongeth unto God, who hath all these things, with the power to dispose of them as he pleaseth. Therefore he is to be eyed, acknowledged, and submitted unto in the ordering of our lot and portion : Hosea ii. 9, 'I will return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.' God still retaineth the dominion of the creatures in his own hand, and we have but the stewardship and dispensation of them : he will give and he will take away at his own pleasure. They are deposited in our hands as a trust, for which we are accountable ; therefore, if God demand, there should be an act of voluntary submission and subjection on our part. If we enjoy them as our own, by an original right exclusive of God, we are usurpers but not just possessors. We have indeed a subordinate right to prevent the encroachment of our fellow-creatures, but that is but such a right as a man hath in a trust, or a servant to his working tools. Surely God may dispose of his own as he will. If we give it for God's glory, or lay out our wealth in his service, God's right must be owned : 1 Chron. xxix. 14, 'For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.' If God take it away by immediate providence, it was his own : Job i. 21, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' If by men, if we lose anything for God, it is his own that we lose.

[3.] Our gain in Christ is more than our loss in the world, both here and hereafter. So his promise: Mark x. 29, 30, 'Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life.' Our religion promiseth us spiritual recompense in this world, and eternal in the other, but exempteth us not from persecutions. He that hath a heart to quit anything for Christ, shall have it abundantly recompensed in the world, with a reward much greater in value and worth than that which he hath forsaken, sometimes more and better in the same kind; as Job's estate was doubled, and Valentinian, that left the place of a tribune or captain of soldiers for his conscience, and got that of an emperor. If not this, he giveth them a greater portion of his Spirit and the graces thereof, more peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and this is a hundred-fold better than all that we lose. Now this we have with persecution: John xvi. 33, 'These things have I spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace; in the world you shall have tribulation.' But then, for the world to come, then all shall be abundantly made up to us in eternal life, when we shall reign with Christ in his heavenly kingdom. This is all in all to a Christian; that which is lost for God is not lost. Surely in heaven we shall have far better things than we lose here.

[4.] Because the wicked never overcome but when they foil us of our innocency, zeal, and courage. The victory of a Christian doth not consist in not suffering, or not fighting, but in keeping that which we fight for: a Christian is 'more than a conqueror,' Rom. viii. 37. *Scias hominem Christo deditum mori posse, vinci non posse.* He may lose goods, lose life, yet still he overcomes whilst he is faithful to his duty. Those that were 'as sheep appointed to the slaughter,' and 'killed all the day long,' they were oppressed and kept under, yet were 'more than conquerors.' The way to conquer is by patience and zeal, though we be trodden down and ruined; not by getting the best of opposite factions, but by keeping a good conscience, and patience, and contentedness in sufferings. If God be honoured, if the kingdom of Christ be advanced by our sufferings, we are victorious: Rev. xii. 11, 'They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death.' That is an overcoming indeed, to die in the quarrel, and be the more glorious conquerors. As long as a Christian keepeth the faith, whatever he loses in the contest he has the best of it: 2 Tim. iv. 7, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,' &c. Our victory is not to be measured by our prosperity and adversity, but our faithful adherence to God. Though the devil and his instruments get their will over our bodies and bodily interests, yet if he get not his will over our souls, we conquer, and not Satan. Christians have not only to do with men who strike at their worldly interests, but with Satan, who hath a spite at their souls: Eph. vi. 12, 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiri-

tual wickedness in high places.' God may give men a power over the bodily lives of his people, and all the interests thereof; the devil aimeth at the destruction of souls. He will let you enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, that deprive you of your delight in God and celestial pleasures. He can be content you shall have dignities and honours if they prove a snare to you; if he seeketh to bring you to trouble and poverty, it is to draw you from God.

[5.] Fainting argueth weakness, if not nullity of grace: Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faintest in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.' A zealous, constant mind will overcome all discouragements: 2 Tim. i. 7, 'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind.' Trees, well rooted, will abide the blasts of strong winds. It is hard to those that are guided by flesh and blood to overcome such temptations, but to the heavenly mind it is more easy.

*Use 1. Of information.*

1. That loss of goods for adhering to God's word by the violence and rapine of evil-minded men is one temptation we should prepare for: such trials may come. Such as mind to be constant must prepare themselves to quit their goods. We all study to shift off the cross, but none studieth to prepare for the cross. Profession goeth at too low a rate when people leap into it upon the impulsion of carnal motives, or some light conviction or approbation. God taketh his fan in his hand, and the chaff is distinguished from the solid grain. All love *ἀδάπανον εὐαγγέλιον*, a cheap gospel: the gospel will have many summer friends, gaudy butterflies, that fly abroad in the sunshine; but what cost are we content to be at for the gospel's sake?

2. That where men make conscience of their ways, they are not apt to be reduced by penalties, for they are guided by a higher principle than the interests of the flesh. Conscience looks to the obligation of duty, what we must do or not do; not to the course of our interests—not what is safe, but what is duty. Oh! but their sufferings may make them serious and wise, and so reflect upon their error, and change their mind. *Ans.* It rather puzzleth the case when a man is divided between his conscience and his interests. The unsound are blinded by their interests; but a gracious heart in a clear case is more resolute, in a doubtful is more afraid and full of hesitancy, lest he gratify the flesh, and so the case is more perplexed. Men sooner come to themselves and relinquish errors if interest be not in the case.

*Use 2.* To exhort us to keep a good conscience, and to be faithful with God, though our temporal interests should be endangered thereby. The conscience of our duty should more comfort us than the loss of temporal things should trouble our minds. But because this is not a by-point that I am now upon, nor a small thing that I press you to, but necessary for every candidate of eternity or true disciple of Jesus Christ, I must direct to get this constancy of mind.

1. I will show you what is necessary to it by way of disposition or qualification.

2. What is necessary to it by way of consideration.

1. By way of disposition.

[1.] There is required a lively faith concerning the world to come,

with some assurance of our interest therein. That faith is necessary to draw off the heart from the conveniences and comforts of this life appeareth by that, Heb. x. 34, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing of yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and a more enduring substance.' There is both faith implied, and also some assurance of our interest; they knew there was substance to be had in the other world. They that live by sense count present things only substance, but the world to come only fancy and shadows; but the gracious heart, on the contrary, looketh upon this world as 'a vain show,' Ps. xxxix. 6, the world to come to be only the enduring substance, or that true solid good which will make us everlastingly happy. And there is some assurance of our interest; they had this substance; that is, by virtue of God's promise they had a title and right to it, and some security for the full possession of it in due time, by the first fruits and earnest of the Spirit. This they knew in themselves; they discerned their own qualifications, and fulfilling the conditions of the promises; and the Spirit did in some measure testify to them that they were the sons of God; and from all this flowed their suffering of the loss of worldly goods, and their suffering of it joyfully.

[2.] A sincere love to Christ is necessary, for then they will not quit his interest for what is most near and dear to them in the world: Rom. viii. 35, 'What shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Love there is not only taken passively, for the love wherewith Christ loveth us, but actively, for the love wherewith we love Christ. For the things mentioned there, 'tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword,' belong not to the latter; for tribulation is not wont to withdraw God from loving us, but us from loving God. It is we that are assaulted by tribulation, and not God nor Christ: it is our love which the temptation striketh at. A man that loveth Christ sincerely will be at some loss for him. Christ is rather held by the heart than by the head only. They that make a religion of their opinions will find no such effect, if they have a faith that never went deeper than their brains and their fancies, that reacheth not their heart, and doth not stir up their love to Christ, that will not enable them to hold out against temptations. Though men may sacrifice some of their weaker lusts and petty interests, yet they will not forsake all for his sake: he that loveth Christ will not leave him. Why doth a sinner deny himself for his lusts? he loveth them, and sacrifices his time, strength, estate, conscience. So a Christian that knoweth Christ hath loved him, and therefore loveth Christ again; he will not easily quit him and his truth. A bare belief is only in the head, which is but the entrance into the inwards of the soul; it is the heart which is Christ's castle and citadel. A superficial assent may let him go, but a faith which worketh by love produceth this close adherence. Well, if we would endure spoiling of our goods, it is our wisdom to consider what we love most, and can least part withal. Christ is infinitely to be valued, as more precious than all the wealth in the world.

[3.] A well-grounded resolution in the truth: 1 Thes. v. 21, 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.' When we take up the ways of God upon fashion, or half conviction, or probable reasons, and

do not resolve upon sound evidence, we are in danger to be shaken when it is a costly thing to be a sincere Christian ; but when conscience is soundly informed, then all things give way to conscience. If the wicked spoil us of our goods, they should not spoil us of our best treasure, which is a good conscience. Whatever power they have by God's permission over our outward estates, they have no power over our consciences ; that is the best friend or the worst enemy. No bird singeth so sweetly as the bird in our bosoms ; here heaven or hell is begun, and the solaces of the outward life are nothing to this.

[4.] A contempt of the world. Our earthly affections must be mortified, and that upon a twofold account :—

(1.) That we may freely part with them ; for if they be overvalued, our affliction will be according to the degree of our affection : Mark x. 22, ' He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions.' We cannot so freely resign them to God, and leave all for treasure in heaven.

(2.) That we may more entirely depend upon God : Heb. xiii. 5, ' Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have ; for he hath said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.' Till the heart be purged from carnal affections, the promises of God have little force and respect with us. A little satisfieth a contented and a weaned mind, and he can the better cast himself upon God's providence.

[5.] A sound belief of God's providence ; this hath a great influence upon a free parting with our estates for our conscience's sake : Heb. xi. 8, by faith Abraham left his country, kindred, possessions, and trusted himself blindfold with God's providence. This principle was made use of when the king was troubled about the hundred talents : 2 Chron. xxv. 9, saith the man of God, ' The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.' God's providence is enough for a gracious heart. Indeed it is hard to maintain such a faith in providence when exposed to great injuries. We are apt to doubt of it ; goodness seemeth to be neglected by him : Ps. lxxiii. 14, ' Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' Doth God know ? But a Christian must believe in hope against hope.

2. Remedies by way of consideration.

[1.] They cannot rob us of spiritual and eternal riches, of the fear of God, love of God ; treasures in heaven are out of their reach : Mat. vi. 19, 20, ' Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal ; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through or steal.' Your joy shall no man take from you,' John xvi. 22. Heavenly things can never be taken from their owners.

[2.] If they cannot take away our God and Christ, we shall be certainly happy. All things in the world depend on God and Christ : ' The favour of the Lord maketh rich,' Prov. x. 22 ; without his blessing nothing prospereth. All judgment is in the hands of Christ, John v. 22. He hath the government of the world, or dominion over all things which may conduce to help or hinder his people's happiness. Things are not left to their arbitrament or uncertain contin-

gency, but are under the government of a supreme providence, in the hand of him that loves us.

[3.] Tried friendship is most valuable: James i. 12, 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.'

[4.] If we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with him: Rom. viii. 17, 'If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.'

## SERMON LXX.

*At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee, because of thy righteous judgments.*—VER. 62.

IN these words observe three things:—

1. David's holy employment, or the duty promised, *giving thanks to God*.

2. His earnestness and fervency, implied in the time mentioned, *at midnight I will rise*; rather interrupt his sleep and rest than God should want his praise.

3. The cause or matter of his thanksgiving, *because of thy righteous judgments*, whereby he meaneth the dispensations of his providence in delivering the godly and punishing the wicked according to his word. Where observe—

1. The term by which these dispensations are expressed, *judgments*.

2. The adjunct, *righteous judgments*.

1. For the term, 'judgments,' they are so called partly because they are God's judicial acts belonging to his government of the world; partly because they are dispensed according to his word, the sentences of which are also called judgments. There are the judgments of his mouth and of his hand: Ps. cxix. 13, 'With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.'

2. The adjunct, 'righteous,' or the judgments of thy righteousness; so called because they are holy, just, and full of equity.

*Doct.* 1. One special duty wherein the people of God should be much exercised is thanksgiving.

*Doct.* 2. That, God's providence rightly considered, we shall in the worst times find much more cause to give thanks than to complain.

*Doct.* 3. That a heart deeply affected with God's providence will take all occasions to praise God and give thanks to his name, both in season and out of season.

*Doct.* 1. One special duty wherein the people of God should be much exercised is thanksgiving. This duty is often pressed upon us: Heb. xiii. 15, 'Let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, which is the fruit of our lips;' giving thanks unto his name. There are two words there used, praise and thanksgiving: generally taken, they are the same; strictly taken, thanksgiving differeth from praise. They agree that we use our voice in thanksgiving, as we do also in praise, for they are both said to be the fruit of our lips. What is in the prophet Hosea,



chap. xiv. 2, 'calves of our lips,' is in the Septuagint, 'the fruit of our lips;' and they both agree that they are a sacrifice offered to our supreme benefactor, or that they belong to the thank-offerings of the gospel. But they differ in that thanksgiving belongeth to benefits bestowed on ourselves or others; but in relation to us, praise to any excellency whatsoever. Thanksgiving may be in word or deed; praise in words only. Well, then, thanksgiving is a sensible acknowledgment of favours received, or an expression of our sense of them, by word and work, to the praise of the bestower. The object of it is the works of God as beneficial unto us, or to those who are related to us, or in whose good or ill we are concerned. As public persons, as magistrates: 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2, 'I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplication, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority.' Pastors of the church: 2 Cor. i. 11, 'You also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.' Or our kindred according to the flesh, or some bond of Christian duty: Rom. xii. 15, 'Rejoice with them that do rejoice.' Another place where this duty is enforced is Eph. v. 20, where we are bidden to 'give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;' where you see it is a duty of a universal and perpetual use, and one wherein the honour of God and Christ is much concerned. A third place is 1 Thes. v. 18, 'In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' See what reason he urgeth; the express will of God requiring this worship at our hands. We are to obey *intuitu voluntatis*. God's will is the fundamental reason of our obedience in every commandment; but here is a direct charge, now God hath made known the wonders of his love in Christ.

I shall prove to you that this is a necessary duty, a profitable duty, a pleasant and delightful duty.

1. The necessity of being much and often in thanksgiving will appear by these two considerations:—

[1.] Because God is continually beneficial to us, blessing and delivering his people every day, and by new mercies giveth us new matter of praise and thanksgiving: Ps. lxxviii. 19, 'Blessed be the God of our salvation, who loadeth us daily with his benefits, Selah.' He hath continually favoured us and preserved us, and poured his benefits upon us. The mercies of every day make way for songs which may sweeten our rest in the night; and his giving us rest by night, and preserving us in our sleep, when we could not help ourselves, giveth us songs in the morning. And all the day long we find new matter of praise: our whole work is divided between receiving and acknowledging.

[2.] Some mercies are so general and beneficial that they should never be forgotten, but remembered before God every day. Such as redemption by Christ: Ps. cxi. 4, 'He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered.' We must daily be blessing God for Jesus Christ: 2 Cor. ix. 15, 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.' I understand it of his grace by Christ. We should ever be thus blessing and praising him; for the keeping of his great works in memory is the foundation of all love and service to God.

2. It is a profitable duty. The usefulness of thanksgiving appeareth with respect to faith, love, and obedience.

[1.] With respect to faith. Faith and praise live and die together ; if there be faith, there will be praise ; and if there be praise, there will be faith. If faith, there will be praise, for faith is a bird that can sing in winter : Ps. lvi. 4, 'In God will I praise his word, in God have I put my trust ; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me ;' and ver. 10, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word.' His word is satisfaction enough to a gracious heart ; if they have his word, they can praise him beforehand, for the grounds of hope before they have enjoyment. As Abraham, when he had not a foot in the land of Canaan, yet built an altar and offered sacrifices of thanksgiving, because of God's grant and the future possession in his posterity, Gen. xiii. 18. Then, whether he punisheth or pitieth, we will praise him and glory in him. Faith entertaineth the promise before performance cometh, not only with confidence, but with delight and praise. The other part is, if praise, there will be faith ; that is, supposing the praise real, for it raiseth our faith to expect the like again, having received so much grace already. All God's praises are the believer's advantage, the mercy is many times given as a pledge of more mercy. In many cases *Deus donando debet*. If life, he will give food and bodily raiment. It holdeth good in spiritual things. If Christ, other things with Christ. One concession draweth another ; if he spares me, he will feed me, clothe me. The attributes from whence the mercy cometh is the pillar of the believer's confidence and hope. If such a good, then a fit object of trust. If I have found him a God hearing prayer, 'I will call upon him as long as I live,' Ps. cxvi. 2. Praise doth but provide matter of trust, and represent God to us as a storehouse of all good things, and a sure foundation for dependance.

[2.] The great respect it hath to love. Praise and thanksgiving is an act of love, and then it cherisheth and feedeth love. It is an act of love to God, for if we love God we will praise him. Prayer is a work of necessity, but praise a mere work of duty and respect to God. We would exalt him more in our own hearts and in the hearts of others : Ps. lxxi. 14, 'I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.' We pray because we need God, and we praise him because we love him. Self-love will put us upon prayer, but the love of God upon praise and thanksgiving ; then we return to give him the glory. Those that seek themselves will cry to him in their distress ; but those that love God cannot endure that he should be without his due honour. In heaven, when other graces and duties cease, which belong to this imperfect state, as faith and repentance cease, yet love remaineth ; and because love remaineth, praise remaineth, which is our great employment in the other world. So it feedeth and cherisheth love, for every benefit acknowledged is a new fuel to keep in the fire : Ps. xviii. 1, 'I will love thee, O Lord, my strength ;' Ps. cxvi. 1, 'I will love the Lord, who hath heard the voice of my supplications ;' Dent. xxx. 20, 'That thou mayest love the Lord, who is thy life, and the length of thy days.' The soul by praise is filled with a sense of the mercy and goodness of God, so that hereby he is made more amiable to us.

[3.] With respect to submission and obedience to his laws and providence.

(1.) His laws. 'The greatest bond of duty upon the fallen creature is gratitude. Now grateful we cannot be without a sensible and explicit acknowledgment of his goodness to us: the more frequent and serious in that, the more doth our love constrain us to devote ourselves to God: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' To live to him: 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.' And therefore praise and thanksgiving is a greater help to the spiritual life than we are usually aware of; for, working in us a sense of God's love, and an actual remembrance of his benefits (as it will do if rightly performed), it doth make us shy of sin, more careful and solicitous to do his will. Shall we offend so good a God? God's love to us is a love of bounty; our love to God is a love of duty, when we grudge not to live in subjection to him: 1 John v. 3, 'His commandments are not grievous.'

(2.) Submission to his providence. There is a querulous and sour spirit which is natural to us, always repining and murmuring at God's dealing, and wasting and vexing our spirits in heartless complaints. Now, this fretting, quarrelling, impatient humour, which often showeth itself against God even in our prayers and supplications, is quelled by nothing so much as by being frequent in praises and thanksgivings: Job i. 21, 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' It is an act of holy prudence in the saints, when they are under any trouble, to strain themselves to the quite contrary duty of what temptations and corruptions would drive them unto. When the temptation is laid to make us murmur and swell at God's dealings, we should on the contrary bless and give thanks. And therefore the Psalmist doth so frequently sing praises in the saddest condition. There is no perfect defeating the temptation but by studying matter of praise, and to set seriously about the duty. So Job ii. 10, 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' Shall we receive so many proofs of the love of God, and quarrel at a few afflictions that come from the same hand, and rebel against his providence when he bringeth on some needful trouble for our trial and exercise? and having tasted so much of his bounty and love, repine and fret at every change of dealing, though it be useful to purge out our corruptions, and promote our communion with God? Surely nothing can be extremely evil that cometh from this good hand. As we receive good things cheerfully and contentedly, so must we receive evil things submissively and patiently.

3. It is a most delightful work to remember the many thousand mercies God hath bestowed on the church, ourselves, and friends. To remember his gracious word and all the passages of his providence; is this burdensome to us? Ps. cxlvii. 1, 'Praise ye the Lord, for it is pleasant;' and Ps. cxxxv. 3, 'Sing praises unto his name, for it is pleasant.' Next to necessity, profit; next to profit, pleasure. No

necessity so great as spiritual necessity, because our eternal well-being or ill-being dependeth on it; and beggary is nothing to being found naked in the great day. No profit so great as spiritual; that is not to be measured by the good things of this world, or a little pelf, or the great mammon, which so many worship; but some spiritual and divine benefit, which tendeth to make us spiritually better, more like God, more capable of communion with him; that is true profit, it is an increase of faith, love, and obedience. So for pleasure and delight; that which truly exhilarateth the soul, begets upon us a solid impression of God's love, that is the true pleasure. Carnal pleasures are unwholesome for you, like luscious fruits, which make you sick. Nothing is so hard of digestion as carnal pleasures. This feedeth the flesh, warreth against the soul; but this holy delight that resulteth from the serious remembrance of God, and setting forth his excellences and benefits, is safe and healthful, and doth cheer us but not hurt us.

*Use.* Oh, then, let us be oftener in praising and giving thanks to God! Can you receive so much, and beg so much, and never think of a return or any expression of gratitude? Is there such a being as God, have you all your supplies from him, and will you not take some time to acknowledge what he hath done for your souls? Either you must deny his being, and then you are atheists; or you must deny his providence, and then you are epicureans, next door to atheism; or you must deny such a duty as praise and thanksgiving, and then you are anti-scripturists, for the scripture everywhere calleth for it at our hands; or else, if you neglect this duty, you live in flat contradiction to what you profess to believe, and then you are practical atheists, and practical epicureans, and practical anti-scripturists; and so your condemnation will be the greater, because you own the truth but deny the practice. I beseech you, therefore, to be often alone with God, and that in a way of thanksgiving, to increase your love, faith, and obedience, and delight in God. Shall I use arguments to you?

1. Have you received nothing from God? I put this question to you, because great is our unthankfulness, not only for common benefits, but also for special deliverances—the one not noted and observed, the other not improved. Humble persons will find matter of praise in very common benefits, but we forget even signal mercies. Therefore, I say, have you received nothing? Now, consider, is there no return due? You know the story, Luke xvii. 15–19, Christ healed ten lepers, and but one of them ‘returned and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down at his feet giving thanks, and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.’ All had received a like benefit, but one only returned, and he a Gentile and no Jew, to acknowledge the mercy. They were made whole by a miraculous providence, he was made whole by a more gracious dispensation: ‘Thy faith hath made thee whole;’ he was dismissed with a special blessing. God scattereth his benefits upon all mankind, but how few own the supreme benefactor! Surely a sensible heart seeth always new occasions of praising God, and some old occasions that must always be remembered,

always for life, and peace, and safety, and daily provision; and always for Christ, and the hopes of eternal life. Surely if we have the comfort, God should have the glory: Ps. xevi. 8, 'Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name, bring an offering, and come into his courts.' He that hath scattered his seed expecteth a crop from you.

2. How disingenuous is it to be always craving, and never giving thanks! It is contrary to his directions in the word; for he sheweth us there that all our prayers should be mingled with a thankful sense and acknowledgment of his mercies: Phil. iv. 6, 'In everything let your requests and supplications be made known with thanksgiving.' Do not come only in a complaining way: Col. iv. 2, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.' They are not holy requests unless we acknowledge what he hath done for us, as well as desire him to do more. Nothing more usual than to come in our necessities to seek help; but we do not return, when we have received help and relief, to give thanks. When our turn is served, we neglect God. Wants urge us more than blessings, our interest swayeth us more than duty. As a dog swalloweth every bit that is cast to him, and still looketh for more, we swallow whatever the bounty of God casteth out to us without thanks, and when we need again, we would have more, and though warm in petitions, yet cold, rare, infrequent in gratulations. It is not only against scripture, but against nature. Ethnics abhor the ungrateful, that were still receiving, but forgetting to give thanks. It is against justice to seek help of God, and when we have it to make no more mention of God than if we had it from ourselves. It is against truth; we make many promises in our affliction, but forget all when well at ease.

3. God either takes away or blasts the mercies which we are not thankful for. Sometimes he taketh them from us: Hosea ii. 8, 9, 'I will take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and I will recover my wool and flax.' Why? 'She doth not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and gave her silver and gold.' Where his kindness is not taken notice of, nor his hand seen and acknowledged, he will take his benefits to himself again. We know not the value of mercies so much by their worth as by their want; ὥσπερ ὀφθαλμοὶ τὸ ἄγαν λαμπρὸν οὐκ ὁρῶσι—a thing too near the eye cannot be seen. God must set things at a distance to make us value them. If he take them not away, yet many times he blasts them as to their natural use: Mal. ii. 2, 'And if you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; yea, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart.' The creature is a deaf-nut; when we come to crack it, we have not the natural blessing as to health, strength, and cheerfulness, Acts xiv. 17; or if food, yet not gladness of heart with it; or we have not the sanctified use, it is not a mercy that leadeth us to God. A thing is sanctified when it is *a bono in bonum*, if it cometh from God and leadeth us to God: 1 Cor. iii. 21–23, 'All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' You have a covenant right, a holy use.

4. Bless him for favours received, and you shall have more. Thanksgiving is the kindly way of petitioning, and the more thankful for mercies, the more they are increased upon us. Vapours drawn up from the earth return in showers to the earth again. The sea poureth out its fulness into the rivers, and all rivers return to the sea from whence they came: Ps. lxvii. 5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee: then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us.' When springs lie low, we pour a little water into the pump, not to enrich the fountain, but to bring up more for ourselves. It is not only true of outward increase, but of spiritual also: Col. ii. 7, 'Be ye rooted in the faith, and abound therein with thanksgiving.' If we give thanks for so much grace as we have already received, it is the way to increase our store. We thrive no more, get no more victory over our corruptions, because we do no more give thanks.

5. When God's common mercies are well observed or well improved, it fits us for acts of more special kindness. In the story of the lepers—Luke xvii. 19, 'Thy faith hath made thee whole,'—he met not only with a bodily cure, but a soul cure: Luke xvi. 11, 'If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?' When we suspect a vessel leaketh, we try it with water before we fill it with wine. You are upon your trial; be thankful for less, God will give you more. Means or directions:—

[1.] Heighten all the mercies you have by all the circumstances necessary to be considered. By the nature and kind of them: spiritual eternal blessings first; the greatest mercies deserve greatest acknowledgment: 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 in Christ'—Christ's spirit, pardon of sins, heaven, the way of salvation known, accepted, and the things of the world as subordinate helps. Luke x. 20, 'Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' Then consider your sense in the want of mercies; what high thoughts had you then of them? The mercies are the same when you have them and when you want them, only your apprehensions are greater. If affectionately begged they must be affectionately acknowledged, else you are a hypocrite either in the supplication or gratulation. Consider the person giving, God, so high and glorious. A small remembrance from a great prince, no way obliged, no way needing me, to whom I can be no way profitable, a small kindness melts us, a gift of a few pounds, a little parcel of land. Do I court him and observe him? There is less reason why God should abase himself to look upon us or concern himself in us: Ps. cxiii. 6, 'He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth.' We have all things from him. Consider the person receiving; so unworthy: Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant;' 2 Sam. vii. 18, 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?' Consider the season; our greatest extremity is God's opportunity: Gen. xxii. 14, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,' when the knife was at the throat of his son;

2 Cor. i. 9, 10, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust, that he will yet deliver us.' Consider the end and fruit of his mercy; it is to manifest his special love to us, and engage our hearts to himself: Isa. xxxviii. 17, 'Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption,' or 'thou hast loved me from the grave;' otherwise God may give things in anger. Consider the means by which he brought them about, when unlikely, unexpected in themselves, weak, insufficient. The greatest matters of providence hang many times upon small wires: a lie brought Joseph into prison, and a dream fetched him out, and he was advanced, and Jacob's family fed. Consider the number of his mercies: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!' The many failings pardoned, comforts received, dangers prevented, deliverances vouchsafed. How he began with us before all time, conducted us in time, and hath been preparing for us a happiness which we shall enjoy when time shall be no more.

[2.] Satisfy yourselves with no praise and thanksgiving but what leaveth the impression of real effects upon the soul; for God is not flattered with empty praises and a little verbal commendation. There is a twofold praising of God—by expressive declaration or by objective impression. Now, neither expression nor impression must be excluded. Some platonical divines explode and scoff at the verbal praise more than becometh their reverence to the word of God: Ps. l. 23, 'He that offereth praise glorifieth me.' But then the impression must be looked after too, that we be like that God whom we commend and extol, that we depend on him more, love him more fervently, serve him more cheerfully.

*Doct. 2.* That God's providence rightly considered, we shall find in the worst times much more cause to give thanks than to complain. I observe this because David was now under affliction. He had in the former verse complained that 'the bands of the wicked had robbed him,' yet even then would he give thanks to God.

1. Observe here, the matter of his thanksgiving was God's providence according to his word, seen in executing threatenings on the wicked, and performing his promises to the godly. God's word is one of the chiefest benefits bestowed on man, and therefore should be a subject of our praises. Now, when this is verified in his providence, and we see a faithful performance of those things in mercy to his servants, and in justice to his enemies, and the benefits and advantages of his law to them that are obedient, and the just punishment of the disobedient, and can discern not only a vein of righteousness but of truth in all God's dealings, this is a double benefit, which must be taken notice of, and acknowledged to God's praise. O Christians! how sweet is it to read his works by the light of the sanctuary, and to learn the interpretation of his providence from his Spirit by his word: Ps. lxxiii. 17, 'I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end;' by consulting the scriptures he see the end and close of them that walk not according to God's direction: his word and works do mutually explain one another. The sanctuary is the place where

God's people meet, where his word is taught, where we may have satisfaction concerning all his dealings.

2. That when any divine dispensation goeth cross to our affections, yea, our prayers and expectations, yet even then can faith bring meat out of the eater, and find many occasions of praise and thanksgiving to God; for nothing falleth out so cross but we may see the hand of God in it working for good.

[1.] Though we have not the blessing we seek and pray for, yet we give thanks because God hath been sometimes entreated, he hath showed himself a God hearing prayer, and is only delaying now until a more fit time wherein he may give us that which is sought: Ps. xliii. 5, 'Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' Now we are mourning, but he is our God, and we are not left without hope of a blessed issue. God, that hath been gracious, will be gracious again. He is our gracious father when we are under his sharpest corrections, a father when he striketh or frowneth; therefore we are not without hope that he will give us opportunities again of glorifying his name.

[2.] We bless God for continuing so long the mercies which he hath taken from us. Former experiences must not be forgotten: 'Ebenezer, hitherto the Lord hath helped us.' If he shall afflict us afterward, yet 'hitherto he hath helped us,' 1 Sam. vii. 12. If he take away life, it is a mercy that he spared it so long for his own service and glory; if liberty, that we had such a time of rest and intermission.

[3.] God is yet worthy of praise and thanksgiving for choicer mercies yet continued, notwithstanding all the afflictions laid upon us. That we have his Spirit supporting us under our trials, and enabling us to bear them: 1 Peter iv. 13, 14, 'Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. For if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth on you.' And that we have any peace of conscience: Rom. v. 1, 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' That the hope of eternal life is not diminished but increased by our afflictions: Rom. v. 4, 5, 'We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed: because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.' That many of our natural comforts are yet left, and God will supply us by ways best known to himself.

[4.] That evils and afflictions which light upon us for the gospel's sake, or righteousness' sake, and Christ's name's sake, are to be reckoned among our privileges, and deserve praise rather than complaint: Phil. i. 29, 'To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.' If it be a gift, it is matter of praise.

[5.] Take these evils in the worst notion, they are less than we have deserved: Ezra ix. 13, 'And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.' Babylon is not hell, and still that should be acknowledged.



[6.] That no evil hath befallen us but such as God can bring good out of them: Rom. viii. 28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' All things that befall a Christian are either good, or shall turn to good; either to good natural: Gen. i. 20, 'Ye thought evil, but God meant it for good;' or good spiritual: Ps. cxix. 75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me;' or good eternal: 2 Cor. iv. 17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

*Use 1.* For information, that God's righteous judgments are matter of praise and thanksgiving. An angel is brought in speaking, Rev. xvi. 5, 'Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.' Indeed, the formal object of thanksgiving and praise is some benefit: Ps. cxxxv. 3, 'Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good.' We praise God for his judgments, because they are just and right; we praise God for his mercies, not only because they are just and equal, but comfortable and beneficial to us, and so a double ground of thanksgiving.

*Use 2.* For reproof, that we make more noise of a little trouble than we do of a thousand benefits that remain with us. We fret and complain and manifest the impatiency of the flesh; like a great machine or carriage, if one pin be out of order, all stoppeth, or one member hurt, though all the rest of the body be sound; or as Haman, the favours of a great king, pleasures of a luxurious court, all this availeth him nothing as long as Mordecai was in the gate, Esther v. 13; notwithstanding his riches, honours, multitude of children, great offices, this damped all his joy: Mal. i. 2, 'I have loved you, saith the Lord; yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?' *Non quod habet numerat, &c.* Oh! let us check this complaining spirit; let us consider what is left, not what God hath taken away; what we may or shall have, not what we now want; what God is, and will be to his people, though we see little or nothing in the creature.

*Doct. 3.* That a heart deeply affected with God's providence will take all occasions to praise and give thanks.

1. It is certain that our whole life should be a real expression of thankfulness to God. The life of a Christian is a life of love and praise, a hymn to God: 1 Peter ii. 9, 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' Christianity is a confession; the visible acting of godliness is a part of this confession; we are all saved as confessors or martyrs. Now the confession is made both in word and deed.

2. There are special occasions of thanksgiving and praise to God, as the apostle bids Timothy preach: 2 Tim. iv. 2, *ἐνκαιρῶς ἀκαιρῶς*, 'in season, out of season,' meaning thereby that he should not only take ordinary occasions, but extraordinary; he should make an opportunity where he found none. So we should press Christians to praise God not only in solemn duties, when the saints meet together to praise, but extraordinarily redeem time for this blessed work; yea, interrupt our lawful sleep and repose, to find frequent vacancies for so necessary a duty as the lauding and magnifying of God's mercy.

3. As for rising up at midnight, we can neither enforce it as a duty upon you, nor yet can we condemn it. It was an act of heroical zeal in David, who employed his time waking to the honour of God, which others spent in sleeping; and we read that Paul and Silas ‘sang praises at midnight,’ Acts xvi. 25, though then in the stocks, and they had been scourged the day before. And it is said, Job xxxv. 10, ‘None saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?’ that is, giveth matter of praise if we wake in the night. And David saith elsewhere, Ps. xlii. 8, ‘The Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me;’ day and night he would be filled with a sense of God’s love, and with songs of praise. Therefore we cannot condemn this, but must highly commend it. Let men praise God at any time, and the more they deny themselves to do it, the more commendable is the action; yet we cannot enforce it upon you as a necessary duty, as the Papists build their nocturnal devotions upon it. That which we disapprove in them is, that those hours instituted by men they make necessary; that they direct their prayers to saints and angels which should only be to God, that they might mingle them with superstitious ceremonies and observances; that they pray and sing in an unknown tongue without devotion, appropriating it to a certain sort of men, to clerks for their gain, with an opinion of merit. The primitive Christians had their *hymnos antelucanos*, but in persecution, their *ἀλεκτροφωνίας*, saith Clem. Alexandrinus; but what is this to superstitious night-services?

4. Though we cannot enforce the particular observance upon you, yet there are many notable lessons to be drawn from David’s practice.

[1.] The ardency of his devotion, or his earnest desire to praise God, ‘at midnight;’ then, when sleep doth most invade us, then he would rise up. His heart was so set upon the praising of God, and the sense of his righteous providence did so affect him, and urge him, or excite him to this duty, that he would not only employ himself in this work in the day-time, and so show his love to God, but he would rise out of his bed to worship God and celebrate his praise. That which hindereth the sleep of ordinary men is either the cares of this world, the impatient resentment of injuries, or the sting of an evil conscience: these keep others waking, but David was awaked by a desire to praise God; no hour is unseasonable to a gracious heart; he is expressing his affection to God when others take their rest. Thus we read of our Lord Christ, that he spent whole nights in prayer, Luke vi. 12. It is said of the glorified saints in heaven, that they praise God continually: Rev. vii. 17, ‘They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.’ Now, holy men, though much hindered by their bodily necessities, yet they will come as near as present frailty will permit; we oftentimes begin the day with some fervency of prayer and praise, but we faint ere even.

[2.] His sincerity, seen in his secrecy. David would profess his faith in God when he had no witness by him, at midnight, then no hazard of ostentation. It was a secret cheerfulness and delighting in God when alone; he could have no respect to the applause of men, but only to approve himself to God who seeth in secret. See Christ’s

direction, Mat. vi. 6, 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly;' his own practice: Mark i. 35, 'Rising early in the morning, he went into a desert to pray.' Both time and place implied secrecy.

[3.] We learn hence the preciousness of time. It was so to David. See how he spendeth the time of his life. We read of David, when he lay down at night, he 'watered his couch with his tears,' after the examination of his heart; Ps. cxix. 62; at midnight he rose to give thanks; in the morning he prevented the morning-watches, seven times a-day praising God, morning, noon, night. These are all acts of eminent piety. We should not content ourselves with so much grace as will merely serve to save us. Alas! we have much idle time hanging upon our hands; if we would give that to God it were well.

[4.] The value of godly exercises above our natural refreshings; the word is sweeter than appointed food: Job xxiii. 12, 'I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.' David preferreth his praises of God before his sleep and rest in the night. Surely this should shame us for our sensuality. We can dispense with other things for our vain pleasures; we have done as much for sin, for vain sports, broken our rest for sin. Some monsters of mankind turn night into day, and day into night for their drunkenness, gaming, vain sports, &c., and shall we not deny ourselves for God?

[5.] The reverence to be used in secret adoration. David did not only raise up his spirits to praise God, but rise up out of his bed to bow the knee to him. Secret duties should be performed with some solemnity, not slubbered over. Praise, a special act of adoration, requireth the worship of body and soul.

*Use.* Let David's example condemn our backwardness and sluggishness, who will not take those occasions which offer themselves. Mark, he gave thanks when we fret; at midnight he rose to do it with the more secrecy and fervency; this not to pray only, but to give thanks.

## SERMON LXXI.

*I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*—VER. 63.

IN this verse two things are observable:—

1. A description of the people of God; they are described by their principle, and by the course of their lives and actions, *fear* and *obedience*.

2. David's respect to them, *I am a companion of all them*.

More particularly:—

1. In the person speaking: the disparity of the persons is to be observed. David, who was a great prophet, yea, a king, yet saith, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee.' Christ himself called them his 'fellows:' Ps. xlv. 7, 'Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of

gladness above thy fellows; and therefore David might well say, 'I am a companion.'

2. David saith *of all them*. The universal particle is to be observed; not only some, but all: when any lighted upon him, or he upon any of them, they were welcome to him. How well would it be for the world if the great potentates of the earth would thus think, speak, and do: 'I am a companion of all them that fear thee.' Self-love reigneth in most men. We love the rich and despise the poor, and so 'have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in respect of persons,' James ii. 1; therefore this universality is to be regarded. 'Hearing of your faith and love to all the saints,' Eph. i. 15, to the mean, as well as the greatest. Meanness doth not take away church relations, 1 Cor. xi. 20. There are many differences in worldly respects between one child of God and another, yea, in spiritual gifts, some weaker, some stronger, but we must love all, for all are children of one Father, all owned by Christ, 'He is not ashamed to call them brethren,' Heb. ii. 11. This, I say, is observable, the disparity of the persons—on the one side David, on the other all the people of God.

*First*, Let us take notice of the description of the people of God. They are such as fear him and keep his precepts, that is, obey him conscientiously, out of reverence to his majesty and goodness, and due regard to his will delivered in his word. The same description is used: Acts x. 35, 'In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.' Note hence—

*Doct. 1.* The fear of God is the grand principle of obedience: Deut. v. 29, 'Oh, that there were such an heart within them, that they would fear me and keep my commandments always.' Here consider—

1. What is the fear of God.

2. What influence it hath upon obedience.

1. What is the fear of God? There is a twofold fear of God—servile and filial.

[1.] Servile, by which a man feareth God and hateth him, as a slave feareth his cruel master, whom he could wish dead, and himself rid of his service, and obeyeth by mere compulsion and constraint. Thus the wicked fear God because they have drawn an ill picture of him in their minds: Mat. xxv. 24, 25, 'I knew thou wast a hard man, and I was afraid.' They perform only a little unwilling and unpleasing service, and as little as they can, because of their ill conceit of God. So Adam feared God after his sin when he ran away from him, Gen. iii. 10. Yea, so the devils fear God, and rebel against him: James ii. 29, 'The devils also believe and tremble.' This fear hath torment in it to the creature, and hatred of God, because by the fear of his curse and the flames of hell he seeketh to drive them from sin.

[2.] Filial fear, as children fear to offend their dear parents; and thus the godly do so fear God, that they do also love him, and obey him, and cleave to him, and this preserveth us in our duty: Jer. xxxii. 40, 'I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.' This is a necessary frame of heart for all those that would observe and obey God. This fear is twofold:—

(1.) The fear of reverence.

(2.) The fear of caution.

(1.) The fear of reverence, when the soul is deeply possessed with a sense of God's majesty and goodness, that it dareth not offend him. His greatness and majesty hath an influence upon this fear. 'Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it?' Jer. v. 22. His goodness and mercy: Hosea iii. 5, 'They shall fear the Lord, and his goodness;' Jer. x. 6, 7, 'There is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might: who would not fear thee, O king of nations?' Both together engage us to live always as in his eye and presence, and in the obedience of his holy will, studying to please him in all things.

(2.) The fear of caution is also called the fear of God, when we carry on the business of salvation with all possible solicitude and care. For it is no easy thing to please God and save our souls: Phil. ii. 12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' In the time of our sojourning here we meet with many temptations; baits without are many, and the flesh within us is importunate to be pleased, and our account at the end of the journey is very exact: 1 Peter i. 17, 'And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' A false heart is apt to betray us, and the entertainments of sense to entice and corrupt us, and we are assaulted on every side, and salvation and eternal happiness is the thing in chase and pursuit; if we come short of it we are undone for ever: Heb. iv. 1, 'Having a promise of rest left with us, let us fear lest we come short of it.' There is no mending errors in the other world; there we shall be convinced of our mistakes to our confusion, but not to our conversion and salvation.

2. The influence it hath upon keeping God's precepts.

[1.] In general, this is one demonstration of it, that the most eminent servants of God have been commended for their fear of God: Job, chap. i. 1, is said to be 'a man perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil.' He had a true godliness, or a filial awe of God, which kept him from sin, and the temptations whereby it might insinuate itself into his soul. So Obadiah, Ahab's steward, is described to be a man 'that feared God greatly,' 1 Kings xviii. 3; and of one Hananiah it is said, Neh. vii. 2, that 'he feared God greatly, above many others.' Men are more holy as the fear of God doth more prevail in their hearts, their tenderness both in avoiding and repenting of sin increaseth according as they entertain the awe and fear of God in their hearts, and here is the rise and fountain of all circumspect walking. As the stream is dried up that wanteth a fountain, so godliness ceaseth as the fear of God abateth.

[2.] More particularly.

(1.) It is the great pull-back and constant preservative of the soul against sin, as the beasts are contained in their subjection and obedience to man by the fear that is upon them: Gen. vii. 2, 'The dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, that they shall not hurt you;' so the fear of God is upon us: Exod. xx. 20, 'God is come to prove you, that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.'

Joseph is an instance : Gen. xxxix. 9, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Abraham could promise himself little security in a place where no fear of God was: Gen. xx. 11, 'I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife's sake.' Therefore, Prov. xxiii. 17, 'Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.'

(2.) It is the great excitement to obedience.

(1st.) Duties of religion will not reverently and seriously be performed unless there be a deep awe of God upon our souls: 'God will be sanctified in all that draw nigh unto him,' Lev. x. 3. Now, what is it to sanctify God in our hearts, but to fear his majesty and greatness and goodness? Isa. viii. 13, 'Sanctify the Lord God of hosts in your hearts, and make him your fear.' Therefore David desireth God to call in his straggling thoughts and scattered affections: Ps. lxxxvi. 11, 'Unite my heart to the fear of thy name;' so the serious worshippers are described to be those that 'desire to fear his name,' Neh. i. 11.

(2d.) Duties towards men will not be regarded in all times and places, unless the fear of God bear rule in our hearts; as servants, when their masters are absent, neglect their work: Col. iii. 22, 'Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.' A Christian is alike everywhere, because God is alike everywhere. He that feareth God needeth no other theatre than his own conscience, nor other spectators than God and his holy angels. So to hinder us from contriving mischief in secret, when others are not aware of it: Lev. xix. 14, 'Thou shalt not curse the deaf man, nor lay a stumbling-block before the blind, but shalt fear the Lord thy God.' The deaf hear not, the blind seeth not; but God seeth and heareth, and that is enough to a gracious heart to bridle us when it is in our power to hurt others; as Joseph assureth his brethren he would be just to them, 'for I fear God,' Gen. xlii. 18. Nehemiah did not convert the public treasures to his private use: Neh. v. 15, 'So did not I, for I fear God.' This grace, when it is hazardous to be faithful to men, makes us to slight the danger: Exod. i. 17, 'The midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them;' that kept them from obeying that cruel edict, to their own hazard. Neither hope of gain nor fear of loss can prevail where men fear God.

(3d.) It breedeth zeal and diligence in the great and general business of our salvation, and maketh us more careful to approve ourselves unto God in our whole course, that we may be accepted of him: 2 Cor. vii. 1, 'Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' God is a great God, and will not be put off with anything, or served with a little religiousness by the by, but with more than ordinary care and zeal and diligence. Now, what inclineth us to this but the fear of God, or a reverence of his majesty and goodness? So Phil. ii. 12, let us 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling.' Salvation is not to be looked after between sleeping and waking; no, it requireth our greatest attention, as having a sense of the weightiness of the work upon our hearts.

*Use.* The use is to press us to two things:—

1. To fear God.

2. To keep his precepts if we would come under the character of his people.

1. To fear God. Be not prejudiced against this grace ; it is generally looked upon as a left-handed grace.

[1.] It is not contrary to our blessedness : Prov. xxviii. 14, 'Blessed is he that feareth always.' It doth not infringe the happiness of our lives to be always in God's company, mindful of our duty to him. The angels in heaven always behold the face of our heavenly Father, and in that vision their supreme happiness consists. There is a fear of angels and a fear of devils. The angels ever fear and reverence God, the devils believe and tremble : the angels' fear is reverence, the devils' fear is torment. God doth not require that we should always perplex ourselves with terrors and scruples—that were a torture, not a blessedness ; but God hath required that we should always have a deep sense of his majesty and goodness impressed upon our hearts. In heaven this fear will not cease ; it is an essential respect due from the creature to the Creator ; and as we shall love him, so fear him always ; and if a godly man were put to his choice, he would not be without this fear of God. To live always in an admiration of his excellent majesty, a thankful sense of his goodness, and a regard to his eye and presence, this is our happiness.

[2.] It is not contrary to our comfort and joy in the Lord. Fear to offend God, and joy in his favour may well stand together : Ps. ii. 10, 'Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.' There is a sweet mixture in a gracious heart of holy awe and seriousness, with a delightful sense of God's goodness : these graces may easily be combined and brought to kiss one another : Ps. cxii. 1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments.' When we do most carefully abstain from what displeaseth him, we have most sense of his love, and do most cheerfully practise what he requireth of us. All other pleasures and delights are but May-games and toys to that of a strict obedience, which giveth the soul a continual feast : Acts ix. 31, 'They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.' None have such a comfortable life as they who are most careful to avoid sin. We need this mixture : we should grow slight and secure without fear, and slavish without comfort : there must be fear to weaken the security of the flesh, and joy of faith to revive the soul.

[3.] It is not contrary to courage and holy boldness, by which we should bear up under troubles and dangers. There is a spirit of fear opposite to a sound mind, 2 Tim. i. 7, when men are ashamed of the gospel, or afraid of the persecutions which accompany it : *πνεῦμα δουλείας*, a cowardly spirit, a worldly fear of adversities, and dangers, losses, reproaches. So we are commanded, 'Fear not their fear, but sanctify the Lord God of hosts in your hearts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread,' Isa. viii. 12, 13. No ; this is the fear of the world ; but I press to the fear of the Lord : Luke xii. 4, 5, 'Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do ; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear : fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ; yea, I say

unto you, fear him.' This is the best cure of the fear of the world, as one nail driveth out another. The fear to offend God inflameth our courage, and doth not abate it.

[4.] It is not contrary to the grace of the gospel. No; it is the fruit of it: Ps. cxxx. 4, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' The heart is shy of a condemning God, but closeth with and adhereth to a pardoning God; and nothing breedeth this fear to offend so much as a tender sense of the Lord's goodness in Christ.

2. It presseth us to keep his precepts; that is the only evidence that the fear of God is rooted in our hearts. The heart must be prepared to keep all; they are all equally good, and they are all equally necessary; not one of them is in vain; and they are all joined together, like rings in a chain, and we are not sincere till we regard all: Ps. cxix. 6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.' The judgment must approve all: Ps. cxix. 128, 'Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.' The will must be set and fixed in a serious purpose to keep all, making conscience of the least as well as the greatest, the difficult as well as the easy: Heb. xiii. 18, 'I trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly.' Earnest endeavours must be used to grow up to a more exact conformity to all: Phil. iii. 14, 'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Some corruption may remain after all our endeavours, but none must be reserved or cherished in the heart: Ps. lxi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart.' There will be a secret love to some sins more than others, but it must not be indulged, but checked and striven against, and prayed against: Ps. cxix. 133, 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' And this praying and striving must produce some effect, that in some measure it may be said of us what was said of Zachary and Elizabeth: Luke i. 6, 'They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' And we must increase and grow in this more and more: Col. i. 11, 'Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness;' and 1 Thes. iv. 1, 'As ye have received of us how to walk, and to please God, so do you abound more and more.' The entertaining of some bosom sin, which we are loath to part withal, darkeneth our whole comfort.

*Secondly*, David's professed respect to these sort of men, 'I am a companion of them that fear thee,' of *them*, and of *all them*.

*Doct. 2.* That we should associate ourselves and keep communion with those who are truly gracious. Consider—

1. In what sense we are to be companions of them that fear the Lord.

2. Why it must be so, or the reasons.

1. In what sense may David or any other be said to be a companion of those that fear the Lord, or what it importeth.

[1.] We must join with them, or be engaged in the profession of the same faith and obedience unto God. The faith of all Christians is a 'common faith,' and their salvation a 'common salvation' to them all: Titus i. 4, 'Titus, my own son, after the common faith;' Jude 3,



'I gave diligence to write to you of the common salvation.' The communion with the saints which we believe in the Creed is in the first and chiefest place a communion in faith and charity, and this kind of communion all the members and parties of the catholic church have one with another. They are all quickened by the same Spirit, live by the same faith, wait for the hope of the same glory, and so they are companions in the same religion.

[2.] As many as cohabit and live in a convenient nearness must often meet together to join in the same worship; for God hath instituted the assemblies of the faithful that we may openly and with mutual consent worship God in Christ, in prayer, thanksgiving, praises, word, sacraments, &c.; and the assembling of ourselves for these ends must not be forsaken for negligence or fear: Heb. x. 25, 'Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhort one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.' Now in this sense we are companions of those that fear God, as we join in worship with them: Ps. xlii. 4, 'I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude of them that kept holy-day.' To make one in the public assemblies and societies of the godly, whereby God may be publicly honoured, and souls converted, comforted, and saved, is to be a companion of them that fear God and keep his precepts.

[3.] To love them, and prize them, and converse with them intimately upon all occasions, that by this society ye may excite one another to further proficiency in obedience. This is to be a companion with them that fear God: so the prophet kept company with those good men that he had described, that he himself might be confirmed by them, and that he might aid and confirm them. David said, Ps. xvi. 2, 3, 'My goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the saints on the earth, and the excellent, in whom is all my delight,' that is, his love and kindness was towards the godly, esteeming them more excellent and precious, how mean soever in condition, above the ungodly world, how great soever their rank and quality be, and taking pleasure in their society; them he valued, and them he esteemed above all the greatest men in the world, and in them was all his joy and delight. So Ps. xv. 4, 'In whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.' Mark these two opposite expressions, 'the excellent of the earth,' and 'a vile person.' Thus it is to look on things, not with the eye of sense, but faith and grace. So Paul longed to see the Romans, to be comforted by the mutual faith of him and them, Rom. i. 12. Well, then, to be a companion is to love tenderly, to prize and esteem one another for the grace of God which is in them, desiring one another's good, especially spiritual: 'Rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and mourning with them that mourn,' Rom. xii. 15; praying for one another, giving thanks for one another, preventing the evil, endeavouring the good of one another, by counsel, help, and mutual assistance. So that, 'I am a companion,' is that I contract a friendship with them that fear God.

[4.] To be a companion with them is to own them in all conditions, and to take part and lot with them: Rev. i. 9, 'I, John, who am a brother and companion in tribulation, and the kingdom and patience

of Jesus Christ.' We must have a fellowship with them not only in their privileges, but in their sufferings; not only companions in the kingdom, but companions in the tribulation and patience of Jesus Christ. So Heb. x. 33, 'Partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of those that were so used;' in the one was their passion, in the other their compassion, in that they not only suffered themselves, but owned their brethren when they suffered, and did receive them, and comfort them, and stand by them; so near is the union, and so dear and tender is the affection, of Christian brethren among themselves. So it is said of Moses, Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' Alas! there are many summer friends to the gospel, painted butterflies, who are gone as soon as the sunshine of prosperity is gone. Brethren do almost forget that they are brethren, stand aloof, and are loath to own the afflicted.

## 2. Reasons why David was a companion of all the saints.

[1.] Our relation enforceth it: all that are in the church are of one kindred and lineage, descended from one common father, animated by one common spirit, and knit together in the profession of one common faith in Christ, and therefore must be companions one to another. As natural relation enforceth natural love, so Christian relation Christian love. To make this evident, let me tell you men may be considered in a twofold respect—as men, or as Christians and believers; and so there is a twofold love due to them, *ἀγάπη*, and *φιλαδελφία*—2 Peter i. 7, 'Brotherly kindness and charity.' Our common neighbour hath the same nature that we have, and is of the same stock, for all come of one blood; besides our particular relation to them, either natural by kindred, consanguinity, or affinity, or political as members of the same kingdom, or other various respects of benefit, vicinity, or familiarity. As Christians and believers; this is common to all of them that they have spiritual kindred, as they are partakers of the same divine nature, or image of God, 2 Peter i. 4, which they have from the same stock and original, Christ, the second Adam: 1 Cor. xv. 45, 'The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit;' and as they make but one family, Eph. iii. 15, 'Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named;' only this difference there is between Christ and Adam—we derive our original from Adam by the succession of many intervening generations; we are not his immediate children, as Cain and Abel were; but every believer doth immediately derive his life from Christ, hath it at the next hand; and besides this, there is an immediate communion by which every believer is joined to one another. There are several particular respects which do vary the degree of Christian love,—as men are public and private persons; some in remote churches, others in the same congregation; some excel in grace, others of a lower rank; some more, some less useful in advancing the kingdom of Christ. Thus you see the parallel between both these loves; Christian charity supposeth natural love as the foundation of it, for grace is built upon nature, but also it sublimateth it, and raiseth it to a higher degree of excellency than nature could reach; for the light of the gospel doth not abolish the light of

nature, but perfecteth it, as the reasonable soul compriseth the vegetative and sensitive. We have other objects, see clearer arguments and reasons for love: Gal. vi. 10, 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially them who are of the household of faith;' 2 Peter i. 7, 'And add to godliness brotherly-kindness, to brotherly-kindness charity.'

[2.] The new nature inclineth us to it, and this love floweth from an inward propension and cordial inclination, needing no other outward allurements and provocation to procure it: 1 John v. 1, 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.' The same love that inclineth us to love God inclineth us to love the brethren also: 1 John iv. 9, 'As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I should write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.' God's teaching is by effectual impression, or inclining the heart: it must needs be so, because all believers live in the communion of the same Spirit. As some philosophers say there is an *anima mundi* which holdeth all the parts of it together, so there is a spirit of communion which uniteth all the members of Christ's mystical body, and inclineth them one to another.

[3.] Gratitude to Christ maketh us to prize all that belong to him, and to own them, and to be companions with them in all conditions: 1 John iii. 16-18, 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth;' 1 John iv. 11, 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.' God loved us greatly, sent his own Son to die for us; now, how shall we express our thankfulness but by a dear and tender love to those who are Christ's? As David, when Jonathan was dead, inquired, 'Is there none of Jonathan's posterity to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake?' and at length he found lame Mephibosheth; so, is there none upon earth to whom we may show kindness for Christ's sake, who is now in heaven? Yes; there are the saints. Now these should be dear and precious to us, and we should be companions with them in all conditions.

[4.] Because of the profit and utility redounding. A true friend is valuable in secular matters, much more a spiritual friend: Prov. xxvii. 17, 'As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend.' When a man is dull, his friend puts an edge upon him; he is a mighty support and stay to us: Prov. xvii. 17, 'A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity;' Prov. xxvii. 9, 'The perfume of an ointment rejoiceth the soul, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel;' and in some cases he telleth us, 'A friend is better than a brother.' Now, if an ordinary true friend be so valuable, what is a Christian friend? A holy, heavenly, faithful friend is one of the greatest treasures upon earth; therefore we should seek out such and associate with them.

*Use.* Let us see, then, whom we make our companions; let us avoid

evil company lest we be defiled by them, and frequent good company that we may be mutually comforted and quickened: 'I am a companion of them that fear thee.' Interpreters suppose it was spoken in opposition to the bands of the wicked mentioned ver. 61. If they unite, so should we. This, then, is our business, the rejecting of evil company, and the choice of good companions. To enforce this, take these considerations:—

1. Friendship is necessary, because man is ζῶον πολιτικόν, a sociable creature. Man was not made to live alone, but in company with others, and for mutual society and fellowship; and they that fly all company and live to and by themselves are counted inhuman: Eccles. iv. 9–12, there the benefit of society is set forth, 'Two are better than one; for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; he hath not another to lift him up again: if two lie together they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? and if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him.' Thus far Solomon. The Egyptians in their hieroglyphics expressed the unprofitableness of a solitary man by a single millstone, which alone grindeth no meal, but with its fellow is very serviceable for that purpose. The Lord appointed mankind to live in society, that they might be mutually helpful to one another: he never made them to live in deserts, as wild beasts love to go alone, but as the tame, in flocks and herds. The Lord hath given variety of gifts to the sons of men,—to all some, but to none all,—that one might stand in need of another, and make use of one another; and the subordination of one gift to another is the great instrument of upholding the world. Man is weak, and needeth society; for every man is insufficient to himself, and wants the help of others: and man is inclined by the bent of his nature; we have a certain desire to dwell together and live in society.

2. Though man affects society, yet in our company we may use choice, and the good must converse with the good, for these reasons:—

[1.] Because like will sort with like. Friendship is very much founded in suitableness, and maintained by it: *idem velle et nolle, est amicitia*. The godly will have special love to the godly, and they that fear God will be a companion of those that fear him; they are more dear and precious to them than others; as a wicked man easily smelleth out a fit companion: Ps. l. 18, 'When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.' Like will to like, and therefore the godly should be dear and precious to one another. Every man's company wherein he delighteth sheweth what manner of man he is himself. The fowls of heaven flock together according to their several kinds. Ye shall not see doves flocking with the ravens, nor divers kinds intermixed. Every man is known by his company. They that delight in drinking, love swilling and drunken companions; in gaming, love such as make no conscience of their time; in hunting, love such as are addicted to such exercise; in arms, love men of a soldierly and military spirit; they that delight in books love scholars and persons of a philosophical breeding. That which every man is taken withal he loveth to do it with his friend; so certainly they that love and fear God delight in those that love him and fear him, and their company is a refreshing to one another.

[2.] If they be not like, intimacy and converse will make them like: every man is wrought upon by his company. We imitate those whom we love, and with whom we often converse: Prov. xiii. 20, 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.' As a man that walketh in the sunshine is tanned insensibly, and as Moses' face shined by conversing with God, ere we are aware we adopt their manners and customs, and get a tincture from them. So Prov. xxii. 24, 25, 'Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways and get a snare to thy soul.' A man would think that of all sins, wrath and anger should not be propagated by company, the motions and furies of it are so uncomely to a beholder; yet secretly a liking of the person breedeth a liking of his ways, and a man getteth such a frame of spirit as those have whom he hath chosen for his companions. This should be the more regarded by us, because we are sooner made evil by evil company than good by good company: 1 Cor. xv. 33, 'Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners;' evil words or *ὁμιλίαι κακαί*, evil converses, corrupt good manners. We convey a disease to others, but not our health. Oh, how careful should we be of our friendship, that we may converse with such as may go before us as examples of piety, and provoke us by their strictness, heavenly-mindedness, mortification, and self-denial, to more love to God, zeal for his glory, and care of our salvation! Especially doth this concern the young, who, by their weakness of judgment, the vehemency of their affections, and want of experience, may be easily drawn into a snare.

[3.] Our love to God should put us upon loving his people and making them our intimates; for religion influenceth all things, our relations, common employments, friendships, and converses; it is a smart question that of the prophet, 2 Chron. xix. 2, 'Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?' Surely a gracious heart cannot take them into his bosom. He loveth all with a love of good-will, as seeking their good, but not with a love of complacency, as delighting in them. Our neighbour must be loved as ourselves; our natural neighbour as a natural self, with a love of benevolence; and our spiritual neighbour as our spiritual self, with a love of complacency. In opposition to complacency we may hate our sinful neighbour, as we must ourselves: 'The wicked is an abomination to the righteous,' Prov. xxix. 26. The hatred of abomination is opposite to the love of complacency, as *odium inimicitiae* to *amor benevolentiae*. So David saith, Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22, 'Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies;' I cannot cry up a confederacy with them. They that have a kindness for God will be thus affected.

3. There is a threefold friendship—sinful, civil, and religious.

[1.] Sinful, when men agree in evil, as drunkards with drunkards, or robbers with robbers: Prov. i. 14, 'Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse.' When men conspire against the truth and interest of Christ in the world, or league themselves against his people, as Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek, Ps. lxxxiii. 3, divided in interests, but united in hatred; as Herod and Pilate against Christ. This is

*unitas contra unitatem*, as Austin, or *consortium factionis*, a bond of iniquity, or confederacy in evil. Again—

[2.] There is a civil friendship, built on natural pleasure and profit, when men converse together for trade or other civil ends. Thus men are at liberty to choose their company as their interests and course of their employments lead them. The apostle saith, a man must go out of the world if he should altogether abstain from the company of the wicked: 1 Cor. v. 9, 10, ‘I wrote to you in an epistle not to company with fornicators; yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world.’ But—

[3.] There is religious friendship, which is built on virtue and grace, and is called ‘the unity of the Spirit:’ Eph. vi. 3, ‘Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ Now this is the firmest bond of all. Sinful societies are soon dissolved; drunkards and profane fellows, though they seem to unite and hold together, yet upon every cross word they fall out and break; and civil friendship, which is built on pleasure and profit, cannot be so firm as that which is built on honesty and godliness. This is among the good and holy, who are not so changeable as the bad and carnal, and the ground of it is more lasting. This is *amicitia per se*, the other *per accidens*, from constitution of soul and likeness of spirits. The good we seek may be possessed without envy; the friends do not straiten and intrench upon one another. Self-love and envy soon breaketh our friendship, but these seek the good of another as much as their own delight in the graces of one another.

[4.] In religious friendship we owe a love to all that fear God: Acts iv. 32, ‘The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.’ Love is called *σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος*, ‘the bond of perfectness,’ Col. iii. 14. All things are bound together by a holy society, and preserved by it.’ There is in love a desire of union and fellowship with those whom we love: 1 Sam. xviii. 1, ‘Jonathan’s soul was knit to the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul;’ and the apostle biddeth all Christians to be ‘knit together in brotherly love,’ Col. ii. 2; without this they are as a besom unbound, they fall all to pieces.

[5.] Though there must be a friendship to all, yet some are to be chosen for our intimacy. Our Lord Christ had Peter, James, and John, Mat. xvii. 1; Mat. xxvi. 37, ‘He took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee.’ When he raised Jairus’ daughter, ‘he suffered none to go in but Peter, James, and John,’ Luke viii. 51, *ἐκλέκτων ἐκλεκτότεροι*. This may be because of suitableness, or special inclination, or their excellency of grace, *sicut se habet simpliciter ad simpliciter, ita magis ad magis*.

[6.] Our converse with these must be improved to the use of edifying, to do one another good by reproof, advice, counsel: Lev. xix. 17, ‘Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; thou shalt in anywise reprove him, and not suffer sin to be upon him.’ This is kindness to his soul: Rom. i. 11, ‘I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established.’

## SERMON LXXII.

*The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy : teach me thy statutes.—*

VER. 64.

IN this verse I observe—

1. David's petition, *teach me thy statutes.*

2. The argument or consideration which encourageth him to ask it of God, *the earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy.* The sum and substance of this verse will be comprised in these five propositions:—

1. That saving knowledge is a benefit that must be asked of God.

2. That this benefit cannot be too often or sufficiently enough asked; it is his continual request.

3. In asking we are encouraged by the bounty or mercy of God.

4. That God is merciful all his creatures declare.

5. That his goodness to all creatures should confirm us in hoping for saving grace or spiritual good things.

*Prop.* 1. That saving knowledge is a benefit that must be asked of God, for three reasons:—

1. God is the proper author of it.

2. It is a singular favour where he bestoweth it.

3. Prayer is the appointed means to obtain it.

1. God is the proper author of it. The fountain of wisdom is not in man himself, but God giveth it to whom he pleaseth. We were at first endowed by him with a reasonable soul and faculty of understanding: John i. 4, 'In him was life, and this life was the light of man.' All life is of God, especially that life which is light. The reasonable soul and the natural faculty of understanding cometh from him, and if it be disordered, as it is by sin, it must be by him restored and rectified; it is all God's gift. Now man is fallen from that light of life wherein he was created, his Maker must be his mender, he must go to 'the Father of lights' to have his light cleared, James i. 17, and his understanding freed from those mistakes and errors wherewith it was obscured. All knowledge is from God, much more saving grace or a sound knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel. Many scriptures speak to this: Job xxxii. 8, 'There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding.' Though the dial be right set, yet it showeth not the time of the day except the sun shineth; so the spirit of man will grope and fumble in the clearest cases without a divine irradiation. God enlighteneth the mind, directeth the judgment, giveth understanding what to do or say. So he challengeth it as his prerogative: Job xxxviii. 26, 'Who hath put wisdom into the inward parts, or given understanding unto the heart?' The exercise of the outward senses is from God, who gives the seeing eye, the hearing ear, much more the right exercise of the internal faculties; an understanding heart is much more from the Lord: Prov. ii. 6, 'The Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding;' Dan. ii. 21, 'He giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.' Certainly all true wisdom is from above: James iii. 17, 'The wisdom that is from above is first pure,'

&c. He distinguisheth there between the wisdom that is not from above and that which is from above. Man hath so much wisdom yet left as to cater for the body and the concerns of the bodily life (called 'thine own wisdom,' Prov. xxiii. 4); therefore he saith, ver. 15, 'This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.' But for wisdom that concerneth the other world and our everlasting concerns, that is of God, that is from above; the wisdom that is exercised in pure, peaceable, fruitful, self-denying obedience. All that have any of this wisdom should acknowledge God, and all that would have it should depend upon him, and run to the fountain where enough is to be had. Man's wit is but borrowed, and he holdeth it of God. *Vitia etiam sine magistro discuntur*—he needeth no teacher in what is evil and carnal, but in what is holy and spiritual he needeth it.

2. It is a singular favour to them on whom God bestoweth this heavenly wisdom, and so puts a difference between them and others. It is a greater sign of friendship and respect to them than if God had given them all the world: Mark xiii. 11, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others it is not given.' This is no common benefit, but a favour which God reserveth for his peculiar people; so John xv. 15, 'I have called you friends, for all things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.' That is the highest argument of friendship, not to give you wealth, and honour, and greatness, but to give you an enlightened mind and a renewed heart. God may give honour and greatness and a worldly estate in judgment, as beasts fatted for destruction may be put into large pastures; but he doth not teach his statutes in judgment; it is a favour, though he useth a sharper discipline in teaching: Ps. xlv. 12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest him out of thy law.' If God will teach his child not only by the word but by the rod, and useth a sharp discipline to instruct in the lesson of Christianity, it is a greater favour than if God did let him alone, and suffer him to perish with the wicked in his wrath. The prosperity of wicked men is so far from being a felicity to them, that it is rather the greatest judgment; and to be punished and rebuked by God for all that we do amiss, and thereby to be reduced to the sense and practice of our duty, is indeed the greatest favour and mercy of God, and so the most valuable felicity and evidence of God's tender care over us. So Prov. iii. 31, 32, 'Envy not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, and his secret is with the righteous.' You are depressed and kept bare and low, but your adversaries flourish and grow insolent; you cannot therefore say, God hateth you, or loveth them. If the Lord hath given you the saving knowledge of himself and his Christ, and only given them worldly happiness, it is a great token of his love to you and hatred to them, that you need not envy them, for you are dignified with the higher privilege.

3. Prayer is the appointed means to obtain it. There are other means by which God conveyeth this heavenly wisdom, as by study and search. Dig for wisdom as for silver, and for understanding as hid treasures, Prov. ii. 4. Dig in the mines of knowledge: attend upon



the word which is able to make us wise unto salvation: Mark iv. 24, 'Take heed what or how ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given.' But all are sanctified by prayer: Prov. ii. 3, 'Cry for knowledge, and lift up thy voice for understanding.' *Bene orasse est bene studuisse*, saith Luther; so to pray well is to hear aright. God giveth understanding by the ministry of the word, but he will be sought unto and acknowledged in the gift, otherwise we make an idol of our own understanding: Prov. iii. 5, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.' Let us not make a God of our own wisdom; do not seek it in the means without prayer to the Lord. Let us not study without prayer, nor you hear without prayer, nor go about any business in your general and particular callings without prayer.

*Prop. 2.* This benefit cannot be too often nor too sufficiently asked of God.

1. Because of our want. We never know so much but we may know more of God's mind, and know it better and to better purpose. To know things as we ought to know them is the great gift: 1 Cor. viii. 2, 'If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know;' that we may be more sanctified, more prudent, and orderly in governing our hearts and lives, that we may know things seasonably when they concern us in any special business and temptation: Prov. xxviii. 26, 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; but he that walketh wisely shall be delivered;' that is, he that followeth his own conceit soon falleth into a snare; he that maketh his bosom his oracle, and his own wit his counsel, thinks himself wise enough without daily seeking to God to order his own business, never succeedeth well, but plungeth himself into manifold inconveniences.

2. From God's manner of giving; he is not weary and tired with constant supplicants: James i. 5, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' The throne of grace lieth always open; the oftener we frequent it, the more welcome. We frown upon one that often troubleth us with his suits, but it is not so with God; we may beg and beg again.

3. The value of the benefit itself. Saving knowledge, or the light of the Spirit, keepeth alive the work of grace in our hearts. Habitual graces will soon wither and decay without a continual influence. The increase of sanctification cometh into the soul by the increase of saving knowledge: 2 Peter i. 2, 'Grace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord.' The more we grow thriving in knowledge, the more we grow in grace, and the heart and life is more engaged. As we learn somewhat more of God in Christ, our awe and love to him is increased: Eph. iv. 20, 21, 'Ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that you have heard him, and been taught of him as the truth is in Jesus;' that is, if ye are taught and instructed by Christ himself in the truth. It is not every sort of hearing Christ or knowledge which will do us good. Many learn him and know him who abuse that knowledge which they have of him; but if he effec-

tually teach us by his Spirit, then our knowledge is practical and operative; we will practise what we know, be careful to please God in all things.

4. From the temper of a gracious heart: a taste of this knowledge will make us desire a further supply, that we may be taught more, and the soul may be more sanctified; therefore doth David deal with God for the increase of saving knowledge. We are contented with a little taste of heavenly doctrine, but holy men are not so. Show me thy mind, let me see thy glory: Hosea vi. 3, 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.' They are for growth as well as truth; they experimentally know how good God is, and the more they know him the more they see their ignorance, and that there is more behind to be known of him. Before they had but a flying report of him, now they are acquainted with him, and have a nearer inspection into his ways, and this is but little in comparison of what they desire. We are bidden, 2 Peter iii. 18, to 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Present measures do not satisfy them; they must grow in knowledge, as grow in grace, more love to Christ, more delight in his ways.

*Prop. 3.* In asking any spiritual gift we are encouraged by the bounty and mercy of God. David signifieth both.

1. His bounty or benignity, or that free inclination which is in God to do good to his creatures.

2. His mercy respects the creature as affected with any misery. Mercy properly is a proneness to succour and relieve a man in misery notwithstanding sin. Now the larger thoughts of mercy, the more hope; partly because we have no plea of merit, and therefore mercy is the fountain of all the good which cometh to us from God. We cannot come to him as a debtor, and therefore we must come to him as a free benefactor. Wherewith can we oblige God? We have nothing to give to him but what is his own already, and was first received from him: 'All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee,' 1 Chron. xxix. 14; we pay the great governor of the world out of his own exchequer. The apostle maketh the challenge, Rom. xi. 35, 'Who hath given him first, and it shall be recompensed to him?' The sun oweth nothing to the beam, but the beam all to the sun; the fountain oweth nothing to the stream, but the stream hath all from the fountain: so we have all from God, can bring nothing to him which was not his before, and came from him. Partly because there is a contrary merit, an ill-deserving upon us, for which he might deny us any further mercies: Ps. xxv. 8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; and therefore he will teach sinners in the way;' if the sinner be weary of his wandering, and would be directed of the Lord for the time to come, God is upright, he will not mislead us; and he is good, will readily lead us in a right path. Sin shall not obstruct our mercies, and therefore must not keep the penitent supplicant back from confidence to be heard in his prayer, when he would be directed in the ready way to happiness. If you would fain be reduced to a good life after all your straying, humbly lay yourselves at God's feet: 1 Kings xx. 31, 'We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and

ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel ; peradventure he will save thy life.' If God were most tenacious, we have cause to beat his ears continually with our suits and supplications, such is our want ; but he is good, and ready to guide poor creatures ; nay, he is merciful ; and former sins shall be no obstruction to us, if at length we are willing to return to our duty.

*Prop. 4.* The universal experience of the world possesseth all men's minds with this apprehension, that God is a merciful God : 'The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy ;' the world and everything therein sets forth his goodness to us. The same is said in other places : Ps. xxxiii. 5, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.' If earth, what is heaven ? Ps. cxlv. 9, 'His tender mercy is over all his works.'

1. Let us see that every creature is a monument and witness of God's mercy and goodness. Things animate and inanimate, the heavens and earth, and all things contained therein, declare that there is a powerful, wise, and good God. There is no part of the world that we can set our eyes upon but it speaketh praise to God, and the thoughts of his bounty to the creatures, especially to man ; for all things were either subjected to man's dominion, or created for his use and benefit. If we look to the heavens, all serveth for the use and benefit of mankind : Ps. viii. 3, 4, 'When I consider thy heavens. the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou are mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him ?' The lowest heaven affordeth us breath, winds, rain ; the middle or second heaven affordeth us heat, light, influence ; and the third heaven an eternal habitation, if we serve God. In earth, all the things daily in our view speak to God's praise, if we had the leisure to hear them : these creatures and works of his that are daily in our view represent him as a merciful God. This is the lesson which is most legible in them, whether we sit at home in our houses or go abroad, and consider land or water. Go to the animate creatures, the beasts of the field : Ps. xxxvi. 6, 'Thou preservest man and beast ;' Job xii. 7, 8, 'But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee ; and the fowls of the air shall declare unto thee : or speak to the earth and it shall teach thee ; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this ?' His providence reacheth to an innumerable multitude of creatures, giving them life and motion, and sustaining them, and relieving their necessities, and doth largely bestow his blessing upon them according to their nature and condition. And this goodness of God shineth forth in all his creatures ; not only in what he doth to them themselves, but in what he doth about them for man's sake. They were defiled with man's sin, and therefore he might in justice have abolished them, or made them useless to man, or instruments of his grief ; but they are continued for our comfort, that we might live in a well-furnished world. Now, come to man himself, good, bad, wicked, godly : 'His sun shineth, his rain filleth on the evil and good, just and unjust,' Mat. v. 44. Great mercy is still continued to the fallen creature, even to the impenitent : Acts xiv. 17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven,

and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' What was God's witness? Ἀγαθοποιῶν, he doth good; much patience is used, men's lives continued while they sin, and means vouchsafed for their reclaiming; food, raiment, friends, habitations, health, ease, liberty afforded to them, and all to show that we have to do with a most merciful God, who is willing to be reconciled to the sinning creature. Go to the godly, and what is all their experience but a constant course of mercy? David's admiration declares it: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18, 'How precious are thy thoughts to me, O Lord! how great is the sum of them! if I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.' He was in a maze when he thought of the various dispensations of God's providence; there was no getting out. The Lord filleth up his servants' lives with great and various mercies, even in their warfare and pilgrimage here in this world; abundance of invaluable mercies, that if we do but consider what we do receive, we must needs be confirmed in this truth by our own senses. Everything is a mercy to a vessel of mercy.

2. Wherein God expresseth his mercy to them in creation and providence.

[1.] In creating them. It was great mercy that, being infinitely perfect in himself from all eternity, and so not needing anything, he took the creatures out of nothing, which therefore could merit nothing, and communicated his goodness to them: 'For thy pleasure they are and were created,' Rev. iv. 11.

[2.] In preserving and continuing them so long as he seeth good. The heavens continue according to his ordinance; the beasts, and fowls, and fishes continue according to his pleasure: all the living creatures need many things for their daily sustentation which their Creator abundantly supplieth to them, and therefore the whole earth is full of his mercy. One creature the scripture taketh notice of: Luke xii. 24, 'Consider the ravens, for God feedeth them;' and again, Job xxxvii. 41, 'He feedeth the young ravens when they cry and wander for lack of meat;' and Ps. cxlvii. 9, 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.' Why is the raven made such an instance of providence above other fowls, or other living creatures? Some say it is animal *sibi rapacissimum*; others, other things, τοὺς νεώττους ἐπιβάλλει, casts its young out of the nest as soon as they are able to fly, and put to hard shifts for themselves. All this sheweth his mercy, how ready he is to supply the miserable.

*Prop. 5.* His goodness to all the creatures should confirm his people in hoping for saving grace or spiritual good things. Why, all the business will be to show you the force of this argument, and that it is a prop to faith.

1. We may reason from the less to the greater. Our Lord hath taught us so for food and clothing: Mat. vi. 28-30, 'And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' For fowls and lilies, they have no arts of

tilling, spinning, are not of such account with God as mankind, as his people. So for protection: Mat. x. 29-31, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows.' The reasoning is good; if he hath mercy for kites, he hath also for children, who are not only in a higher rank of creatures, but in a renewed state, and reconciled to him by Christ, become his friends and children, whom he tendeth as the apple of his eye; much more when they come for spiritual benefits pleasing to the Lord: 1 Kings iii. 9, 10, 'Give, therefore, thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.' Now all these amount to a strong probability, if not a certainty. It is a mistake to think that faith only goeth upon certainties. No; sometimes it is mightily encouraged by probabilities. These must not be left out; for if I want any spiritual blessing, is it not a great encouragement to remember God's merciful nature shining forth in all his works? If kind to his creatures, will he not be kind to me? If he causeth his sun to shine upon the wicked, will he not lift up the light of his countenance upon my soul? If his rain fall upon their fields, will he not let the dew of his grace fall upon my barren heart? Though the argument be not absolutely and infallibly conclusive, yet here is such a concurrence of probabilities that we should go and try what he will do for our souls.

2. They in their rank have their supplies, and we in our rank have our supplies; therefore his kindness to all creatures should encourage new creatures to expect their help from him; for God doth good to all his creatures according to their necessity and capacity; his giving them supplies convenient for them is a pawn of God's pleasure to bestow upon his servants greater gifts than these. All things that look to God have necessities provided for them according to the condition of their nature; and therefore, if you have another nature, and besides the good things of this life do need the good things which belong to the life to come, he will give us gifts and graces as he giveth them their food; for these are as necessary for this kind of life as food for that. As they in their rank find mercy, so we in ours; his general goodness confirmeth us in expecting these more special favours; for as there is a general benignity to all creatures, so there is a special to his children: Ps. xxxvi. 6, 7, 'Thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O Lord! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.' His common kindness and his special love are often compared together; they agree in this, that both come from a good God. Therefore the argument holdeth strong, if good to all creatures, then good to new creatures. Why should we think that he would not show his goodness to us also? Again, they agree in this, that in doing good God doth not consider the worthiness of the creature, but his own goodness and self-inclination to preserve what he hath made; as he did not disdain to give life to the meanest creatures, so he doth not disdain to preserve them. As they had their life from him at first, so they have their life still in him, the poorest

worm not excepted : not a worm, not a gnat, not a fly but tastes of God's bounty. God disdaineth not to look after the most abject things. So the plea of unworthiness lieth not in bar against the new creature, for necessary supplies God giveth out of his own goodness. Now, they differ in the kinds of the mercy,—one common, the other saving ; and the special subjects of them,—one is to all creatures, the other is to God's peculiar people ; and in the manner of conveyance,—the one floweth in the channel of common providence, the other is conveyed to us by the golden pipe of the Mediator. Well, then, the creatures have their mercies, and wicked men their mercies, that they prize and value ; and the people of God have also what they prize and esteem.

3. God doth good to every one according to their necessity and capacity. He doth not give meat to the trees, nor stones to the beasts, but provideth food and nourishment convenient for them ; so to his people, according to their condition of nature and special capacity. The general capacity is the condition of their natures, the special capacity is want or earnest desire. If we extremely need or earnestly desire these blessings, then we may reason from God's general goodness to all the creatures to that special act of goodness which we expect from him. Pray, mark how God's general goodness is expressed, Ps. cxlv. 15, 16, 'The eyes of all things wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season: thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' He keepeth a constant eye of providence, and if the desire be great, he doth not frustrate the natural expectation of hungry creatures, but giveth them that sort of food which is fit for them. Now God expecteth the same from new creatures: if necessity and vehement desire meet, he promises supply: 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it,' Ps. lxxxi. 10; and Ps. cxlv. 19, 'The Lord will fulfil the desire of them that fear him, he also will hear their cry, and will save them.' The beasts mourn and cry in their kind ; we pray and cry in our kind : needy desires will be heard. He is in a capacity to receive spiritual blessings who is sensible of their necessity for the happiness of his immortal soul, and doth prize and value them, and earnestly desire them. The man of God was under a necessity, for he apprehended himself miserable, and at a loss without it ; for he desired no other mercy. A gracious heart cannot be satisfied with low things. Be thus affected, and then this argument will be of use to you.

*Use 1.* For reproof. Since God is so merciful, how much are they to blame—

1. Who render themselves incapable of the benefit of mercy by impenitence persisted in against the means of grace! They slight his common mercy, and cut off themselves from his saving mercy. Abused goodness will be destructive: Rom. ii. 4, 5, 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.'

2. The stupid and senseless, which do not take notice of the mercy of God which shineth forth in all the creatures! A man can turn his eye nowhere but in every place and quarter of the world he shall see plain testimonies of God's mercy. But alas! how much of this is lost

and passed over for want of observation ! Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib ; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' All this goodness was left in the earth to invite our minds and hearts to God ; therefore, as the bee sucketh honey out of every flower, so should we still dwell on the thoughts of God's goodness, represented to us in everything we see and feel.

3. That think of God's mercy with extenuating and diminishing thoughts, and do not raise their hopes and confidence by a serious reflection upon that ample discovery which he hath made of it in all his works ! If God be good to all his creatures, why should we be left out of the number ? Surely God will not be backward to those that earnestly desire his grace ; therefore those that deject themselves, that say, God will not hear me, or regard my prayers, are to be condemned.

*Use 2.* Information, the lively light of the Spirit is a special mercy, Our misery lieth in the ignorance of God and the transgression of his law ; our happiness in being enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. It is God's great gift : Jer. xxiv. 7, 'I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord ; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God ; for they shall return unto me with all their heart.'

*Use 3.* To exhort you to cherish in your souls good thoughts of God, and the fulness and largeness of his bounty and mercy. The devil seeks to weaken our opinion of God's goodness ; he thought to possess our first parents with this conceit, that God was envious, so as to draw them away from God. It will be of use to you :—

1. In all afflictive providences. Those who are poor and destitute, or in prison and banishment, or bereft of children, or oppressed with guilty fears, or assaulted with any other calamity : Job xiii. 15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him ;' still he is a good God. Here is the glory of faith, to believe him as a gracious father when we feel him as an enemy. Satan will be sure to put in upon these occasions—to tell you that God is an enemy, harsh, severe, implacable in his dealings, one that regardeth you not in your misery, that giveth you no rest nor respite in your troubles ; if he did not hate you, how could he deal thus with you ? and so striketh a terror into the minds of men, that they are afraid of nothing so much as of God, and of coming to him by Christ. No ; 'God is love,' a father when he frowneth as well as when he smileth : Heb. xii. 10, 'He verily chastiseth us for our profit ;' and 'we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.' And in reason should it not be so ? Did your parents hate you because they were careful of your breeding, and sometimes corrected you for your faults ? There is more of compassion than passion in his severest strokes. He hath the bowels of a mother, but yet the wisdom of a father. His love must not be exercised to the prejudice of his other attributes. He that pulleth you out of a deep gulf, though he breaketh your arm in pulling you out, doth not he love you ? God is love, and the giver of all good things.

2. It is a great motive to repentance. As the prodigal thought of his father, so should we return : Jer. iii. 12, 'Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you ;

for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.' Come, lie at his feet, see what mine infinite love will do for you : 1 Kings xx. 31, 'We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings.' When you first begin with God, this is an argument and ground of comfort, much more when you renew your repentance. Hard thoughts of God keep us off from him, but his loving and merciful nature inviteth us to him.

3. It sweetens the duties of holiness : 1 John v. 3, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments ; and his commandments are not grievous.' This makes our resistance of sin more serious : Ezra ix. 13, 'Seeing thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserved, should we again break thy commandments ?'

4. To quicken and enliven your prayers for grace. You have to do with a merciful God : Ps. cxlv. 19, 'He will fulfil the desires of them that fear him ; he also will hear their cry, and will save them.'

### SERMON LXXIII.

*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.—*  
VER. 65.

THE addresses that are made to God in this psalm are mostly prayers ; while we are in the world we are compassed about with divers necessities and wants, but yet there is an intermixture of thanksgivings. We must not always be complaining, but sometimes giving of thanks. David was often exercised with various calamities ; but as soon as he got rid of any danger, or obtained any deliverance, he is ready with his thanks and praises. Blessed will that time be when our mournings are altogether turned into triumphs, and our complaints into thanksgivings. But now here in the world gratulation should not wholly be shut out, but find a room in our addresses to God, as well as acknowledgments of sin and supplications for grace. None have to do with God but they find him bountiful, and there is no reason but present mercies should be acknowledged. In this verse you have the working of a thankful soul, sensible of the benefits already obtained in prayer, and making hearty acknowledgment of them to God : 'Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.' Observe—

1. An acknowledgment of some benefit bestowed, *thou hast dealt well with thy servant.*

2. The way in which it was bestowed, *according to thy word.*

First, An acknowledgment of some benefit bestowed. In it observe :—

1. The party giving, *thou, O Lord.*

2. The act of bounty, generally expressed, *thou hast dealt well.*

3. The party receiving, *with thy servant.*

The fountain of all that we have is the goodness and fidelity of God ; the promise is the channel and pipe by which it is conveyed to us, and the object is God's servant. When all these concur, how sweet is it ! A good God is ready to show us mercy, and this mercy assured to us