

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

by promise, and God's servants capacitated to receive mercy. There is an excellent cause, which is the benignity of God ; a sure conveyance, which is the promise of God ; and a prepared object, who are the servants of God.

1. The party giving is God himself: all good is to be referred to God as the author of it.

2. The benefit received is generally expressed, 'Thou hast dealt well.' Some translations out of the Hebrew, *bonum fecisti*—thou hast done good with thy servant ; the Septuagint, *χρηστότητα ἐποίησας μετὰ τοῦ δούλου σου*—thou hast made goodness to or with thy servant : out of them the vulgar, *bonitatem fecisti*. Some take this clause generally, whatever thou dost for thy servants is good ; they count it so, though it be never so contrary to the interest of the flesh : sickness is good, loss of friends is good, and so is poverty and loss of goods to a humble and thankful mind. But surely David speaketh here of some supply and deliverance wherein God had made good some promise to him. The Jewish rabbis understand it of his return to the kingdom, but most Christian writers understand it of some spiritual benefit, that good which God had done to him. If anything may be collected from the subsequent verses, it was certainly some spiritual good. The Septuagint repeats *χρηστότητα* twice, in this and the following verse, as if he acknowledged the benefit of that good judgment and knowledge of which there he beggeth an increase. It was in part given him already, and that learned by afflictions, in the third verse of this portion : 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have learned thy word.' Now then, go on to increase this work, this goodness which thou hast shown to thy servant.

3. The object, to 'thy servant.' It is an honourable comfortable style ; David delighteth in it. God is a bountiful and a gracious master, ready to do good to his servants, rewarding them with grace here, and crowning that grace with glory hereafter : Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'

Secondly, The manner how this is assured and brought about, 'According to thy word.' That word, which is the encouragement of our prayer, is the rule of God's proceedings. Some things are given by a common providence, other things are given us as servants of God, or according to the promises that are made us in the word.

*Doct. 1.* That God doth good to his servants.

*Doct. 2.* That the good which God hath done for us should be thankfully acknowledged.

*Doct. 3.* That in our thankful acknowledgments we should take notice of God's truth, as well as his benignity and goodness.

*Doct. 1.* That God doth good to his servants. David giveth us here his own experience, and every one that is a faithful servant of God may come in with the like acknowledgments ; for what proof God giveth of his goodness to any one of his servants, it is a pledge of that love, respect, and care that he beareth towards all the rest. Jacob acknowledgeth the same : Gen. xxxiii. 11, 'The Lord hath dealt graciously with me ;' that was his account of providence.

1. From the inclination of his own nature : Ps. cxix. 68, 'Thou

art good, and thou dost good.' The Psalmist concludeth this act from his nature. The sun doth not more naturally shine, nor fire more naturally burn, nor water more naturally flow, than acts of grace and goodness do naturally flow from God. If there be anything besides benefits in the world, the fault is not in God, but in us, who by sin provoke him to do otherwise.

2. The obligation of his promise; so this good cometh in as a reward, according to the law of his grace. He hath engaged himself by his promise to give us all good things: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;' Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10, 'Oh, fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.' Therefore it is said, Micah ii. 7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' The words 'saying good' is a doing good; when it is said, it may be accounted done, because of the certain performance of what is said.

3. The preparation of his people; his servants are capable. God is good, and doeth good, *modo non ponatur obex*, except we tie his hands and hinder our own mercies. There are certain laws of commerce between God and his creatures, so between God and man; he meeteth us with his blessings in the way of our duty: Amos vi. 12, 'Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plough there with oxen?' Some ground is incapable of being ploughed; some are morally incapable of having good done to or for them. But when the creature is in a capacity, God communicateth his goodness to them, dealeth with men as they deal with him: Ps. xviii. 25, 26, 'With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, with an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright, with the pure thou wilt show thyself pure, with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward;' so Ps. cxxv. 4, 'Do good to those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.' God is and will be gracious and bountiful to all those that continue faithful to him, and will never leave any degree of goodness unrewarded; the covenant shall not fail on his part.

Use 1. Let us be persuaded of this truth; it is one of the first things in religion, Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' Next unto his being, his bounty, or else our religion will be cold or none at all. Many conceive amiss of God, and draw an ill picture of him in their minds, as if he were hard to be pleased, always frowning. Did we look upon him as one that is good and willing to do good, we would have less backwardness to duty and weariness in his service. Satan drew off the hearts of our first parents from God by vain surmises, as if he were severe and envious: Gen. iii. 5, 'God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' This first battery was against the persuasion of God's goodness and kindness to man, which he endeavoureth to discredit. Yea, God's people may have the sense of his goodness strangely weakened. David is fain with violence to hold the conclusion which Satan would fain wrest out of his hands:

Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a pure heart.' Therefore we had need to fortify our hearts and forearm ourselves with strong consolations and arguments.

1. He doth good to his enemies, and therefore certainly he will much more to his servants: 'He is good to all;' Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.' The heathens had experience of it: Acts xiv. 17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' And will he be unkind to his servants, to whom he is engaged by promise? It cannot be.

2. Consider Christ's reasoning: Mat. vii. 11, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' God will not deal worse with his children than men do with theirs. We are natural and sinful parents: if we have any faith, or reason, or sense, we cannot gainsay this conclusion. A father will not be unnatural to his child; the most godless men will love their children, and seek their welfare, and do good unto them. Surely our heavenly Father will supply all our necessities, satisfy all our desires: he is more fatherly than all the fathers in the world can be; all the goodness in men is but as a drop to the ocean.

3. Consider, he never giveth his people any discouragement or just cause to complain of him: Micah vi. 3, 'O my people, what have I done unto thee? or wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me;' Jer. ii. 5, 'Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanities and become vain?' Why:—

[1.] His commands are not grievous: Mat. xi. 30, 'My yoke is easy and my burthen is light;' 1 John v. 3, 'His commandments are not grievous.' He prescribeth and commandeth nothing but for our good: Deut. vi. 24, 'And the Lord commandeth us to do all the statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.' That he may with honour perform and make good all that he hath promised: Gen. xviii. 19, 'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.' The obstructions removed, and grace flows out freely.

[2.] Trials sent by him are not above measure: 1 Cor. x. 13, 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to men; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it;' Isa. xxvii. 8, 'In measure when it shooteth forth wilt thou debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.' He dealeth with much discretion and moderation, not according to the greatness of his power or the heinousness of their sin, but observeth our strength, what we are able to bear.

[3.] His punishments are not above deservings: Ezra ix. 13,

‘Seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve ;’ Job xi. 6, ‘Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.’

[4.] He is not hard to be pleased, nor inexorable upon every failing : Mal. iii. 17, ‘And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.’ Many think God watcheth occasions to destroy them, or at least to molest and trouble them. No ; he passeth by many weaknesses, or else what would become of the best of his children ? pardoneth many sins, where the heart is sincere : 2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19, ‘The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the preparation of the sanctuary.’

4. If he doth not give them the good things of this world, he giveth them better in lieu of them. While they are here in this world they have those things not only that are good, but make them good, which cannot be said of all the things of this world ; they may easily make us worse, but they cannot make us better. He giveth them such things as tend to the enjoyment of the chiefest good, which is himself. As he is a good God, he pardoneth their sins : Ps. xxv. 7, ‘Remember not the sins of my youth, for thy goodness’ sake, O Lord ;’ that is one of the effects of his goodness to them. He directs them in the way of life : Ps. xxv. 8, ‘Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way.’ He beginneth, carrieth on, and completeth their salvation : 2 Thes. i. 11, ‘Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of his calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.’ Thus he giveth the best things, though he deny some common things, which are no arguments of his special favour ; and it is dangerous to have our eyes fastened upon other wants when we have these things, and to repine against God, who hath dealt graciously with us in the higher expressions of his love.

5. The evil things of this world, which are not good in themselves, he turneth to good : Rom. viii. 28, ‘All things shall work together for good to them that love God.’ He is able to bring light out of darkness, or give light in darkness, or turn darkness into light ; to give inward joy and comfort under all calamities, to support and sustain under all heavy pressures, and to deliver out of all distresses.

6. He doth give them so much of the good things of the world as is convenient for them : Ps. xxxiv. 9, ‘Oh, fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him ;’ Ps. lxxxiv. 11, ‘The Lord God is a sun and a shield ; the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.’ He giveth protection when it is necessary : Nahum i. 7, ‘The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth those that trust in him ;’ Ezra vi. 22, ‘The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him.’ He hath a great inclination to diffuse his benefits.

7. His doing good is chiefly in the world to come : John xii. 26, ‘If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be : if any man serve me, him will my Father

honour.' Here he is with them in troubles, there they shall be with him in glory ; here he can put marks of favour upon them, and distinguish between those that serve him and those that serve him not : Mal. iii. 17, ' They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him ;' there he will manifest his favour in the face of all the world.

*Use 2.* To persuade you to become the servants of God : you will have a good master if you be what you profess to be. Every Christian should say, as Paul did, Acts xxvii. 23, ' The God whose I am, and whom I serve.' He is God's, and serveth God. (1.) He is God's by creation, for he made him out of nothing : Ps. c. 3, ' Know ye that the Lord he is God ; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves ; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture ;' Col. i. 16, ' All things were created by him and for him.' By redemption ; 1 Cor. vi. 20, ' Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which is God's.' By covenant ; Isa. xlv. 5, ' One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel ;' Ezek. xvi. 8, ' I swear unto thee, and entered into covenant with thee, saith the Lord, and thou becamest mine ;' and so voluntarily he is God's. Wicked men are God's in right, but against their wills ; the godly are willingly God's. A man will never be hearty in his obedience and subjection till he look upon himself as God's. See an instance in the wicked, whose ungodliness and rebellion against God cometh from looking upon themselves as their own : Ps. xii. 4, ' Who have said, With our tongues will we prevail ; our lips are our own ; who is lord over us ?' Their time their own, wealth their own, interest their own, bodies their own, souls their own, and therefore think they may employ all these things as they please. On the other side, take an instance of self-denial. Why so careful to serve and glorify God ? Rom. xiv. 8, ' For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's ;' they have given up themselves to be employed at his command. (2.) Him they serve. How do they serve him ? (1st.) They must serve God with the spirit as well as the body : Rom. i. 9, ' God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son.' So Phil. iii. 3, ' We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit ;' Rom. xii. 11, ' Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord ;' Rom. vii. 6, ' That we should serve in newness of spirit.' When the heart is renewed, disposed, and fitted for his fear and service, there is an honest purpose and endeavour to serve him. (2d.) You must serve him faithfully, devoting yourselves to do his will, and to seek his glory. Your intention, trade, and study must be to honour God and please him, that if it be asked for whom are you at work ? for whom speaking or spending your time ? whose business are you doing ? you may answer, All is for God. If the pleasing of the flesh be their work or scope, they are said to serve their own bellies : Rom. xvi. 18, ' They that are such serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly.' (3d.) Cheerfully ; having so good a master, let us take pleasure in our work. Here is all good—good

master, good work, good wages. Certainly the more good any man findeth God to be, and the more good he himself hath received, the more good he ought to be : the goodness of God should melt us and awe us. There are two questions every one of you should put to yourselves, What hath God done for you ? and, What have you done for God ? When you thus serve God, you may plead it to God, as David, Ps. cxvi. 16, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant.' You may expect relief, and protection, and maintenance. Servants have their dole and portion from their masters' hands : Ps. cxxiii. 2, 'As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us.' He that doth God's will shall have his protection and blessing ; you have a sanctified interest in all that falleth to your share : 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23, 'Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' Lastly, God will now and then visibly put some marks of distinction on them : Mal. iii. 18, 'Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.' For a while their glory may be clouded, they may be hardly dealt with in the world, but God hath his times of presenting all things in their own colours ; but the chief time of manifestation is hereafter ; when the servants of Christ come to receive their full reward, then they find him to be a good master indeed : John xii. 26, 'If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.'

*Doct. 2.* That the good which God hath done for us should be thankfully acknowledged. We should not be always craving, always complaining ; there should be a mixture of thanksgiving : Col. iv. 6, 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving ;' together with the expression of our wants and desires, there must be thanksgiving for favours already received.

1. There is a time for all things, for confessing sin, for begging mercy, for thankful acknowledgments ; though in every address to God there should be somewhat of all these, yet at certain seasons one is predominant : in a time when God is offended, confession of sin ; in a time of great wants and straits, prayer ; in a time of great receivings, thanks. The times that pass over us bring upon us many changes ; every change of dispensation must be sanctified by a suitable duty. As no condition is so bad but a good man can find an occasion of praising God and trusting in him, so no condition so good but matter of humbling and self-abasing will arise ; yet there are special occasions that require the one or the other. *Opus diei in die suo.* James v. 13, 'Is any among you afflicted ? let him pray : is any merry ? let him sing psalms ;' Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble ; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'

2. It is a disingenuous spirit to ask mercy for supplying our wants or delivering us from troubles, and not acknowledge mercy when that supply or deliverance is received. Prayer is a work of necessity, but praise of mere duty. Self-love will put us upon prayer, but the love of God upon praise and thanksgiving ; we pray because we need God,

we praise because we love God, and have a sense of his goodness to us: Luke xvii. 15, 'One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.' Most turn back upon the mercy-seat, do not give glory to God when their turn is served.

3. It is for the glory and honour of God that his servants should speak good of his name. When they are always complaining, they bring an ill report upon the ways of God, like the spies that went to view the promised land; but it is a great invitation to others when we can tell them how good God hath been to us: Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' This doth draw in others to come and take share with us.

4. It is for our profit; the more thankful for mercies, the more they are increased upon us; as vapours return in showers, the sea putteth out of her fulness into the rivers, and they again refund into the sea the water received thence: Ps. lxvii. 5, 6, 'Let the people praise thee, O Lord; then shall the earth bring forth her increase.' When the springs are low, we pour in 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 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 do no more thrive in victory over corruption, or the increase of divers graces, because we do no more give thanks.

5. It prevents many sins. I shall name two:—

[1.] Hardness of heart. When we are not thankful for blessings, they prove an occasion to the flesh, and so our table is made a snare, Ps. lxxix. 22, and our welfare a trap. Men go on stupidly receiving blessings, but do not acknowledge the donor; but when we own God upon all occasions, the creature is sanctified, and the heart kept humble: 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5, 'Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer;' an acknowledgment from whom it cometh.

[2.] It suppresseth murmuring, and that fretting, quarrelling, impatient, and distrustful humour which often sheweth itself against God, even sometimes in our prayers and supplications. Nothing conduceth more to quiet our hearts in a dependence upon God for the future, and to allay our distrusts, discontents, and inquiet thoughts, than a holy exercise of thanksgiving: Phil. iv. 6, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.' Bless him for favours already received, and you will leave the burden of your care upon him for the future. God is where he was at first, and what he hath done he can do still.

*Use.* The use is, to press us to the serious and frequent discharge of this duty. It is a duty very necessary, very profitable, and very delightful; but usually we are backward, are not as careful to render thanks for the enjoyment of blessings as we are earnest and importunate in the want of them. It cometh to pass partly by the greediness of our desires, as a dog that swalloweth up every bit that is cast to him, and still looketh for more. *Vidisti aliquando canem*, saith



Seneca, *missa a domino frustra panis aut carnis aperto ore captantem, et quicquid excipit, protinus integrum devorat, et semper ad spem futuri hiat.* This is an emblem of us; we swallow whatever the bounty of God throws forth without thanks, and still we look for more, as if all the former mercies were nothing; therefore are warm in petitions, but cold, raw, and infrequent in gratulations. Partly when we have mercies, we know not their value by the enjoyment as much as by the want. *"Ὀφθαλμοὶ τι ἄγαν λαμπρὸν οὐχ ὁρῶσι,* saith Basil—a thing too near the eye cannot be seen, it darkeneth us with its splendour. God must set things at a distance to make us value them. Therefore we are more prone to complain than to give thanks. Partly from self-love; when our turn is served, we neglect God; as the raven returned to Noah no more, when there was floating carrion for it to feed upon, Gen. viii. 7. Wants try us more than blessings: Hosea v. 15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.' Our interest swayeth us more than our duty. Partly from a dark legal spirit, which will not own grace when it is near us, when Christians look altogether in the glass of the law, to exclude the comfort of the gospel, and to keep themselves under the rack of perplexing fears.

To remedy this—

1. Let us acknowledge God in all we do enjoy: Hosea ii. 8, 'She did not consider that I gave her corn, and oil, and flax.' We are unthankful to God and man, but more to God. Comforts that come from an invisible hand, we look upon them as things that fall out of course, and so do not praise the giver; therefore let us awaken our hearts to the remembrance of God. Whosoever be the next hand, it is by his providence; and there is reason he should be praised and owned. It is not he that brings the present, but he that sendeth it, that deserveth our thanks. Beasts will own their benefactor: Isa. i. 3, 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;' and if God be our benefactor, he must be owned and loved. If a man give us but a small sum, or a parcel of land, how do we court him or observe him! Less reason why God should look upon us, who is so high. A small remembrance from a great prince, no way obliged, who no way needeth me, to whom I can be no way profitable, is much valued; and will not I acknowledge God in his gifts? When you were in distress you acknowledged, he alone could send you help, and had high thoughts of the mercy; then what promises did you make? The mercy is the same now that it was then, therefore you should have the same apprehensions of it.

2. Let us not give thanks by the heap, but distinctly; acknowledge God's mercies in all cases. Particulars are most affective: let us come to an account for God, and recollect the passages of our lives, what he hath done for body and soul: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!' What he hath done for us before time, in time, and provided for us when time shall be no more; the beginning of this treaty with us, the progress of his work, the many failings we were guilty of, his patience in bearing with us, his goodness in hearing us, his giving, forgiving, keeping us from dangers, in dangers, and deliverances out of dangers. What supplies and supports we have had, what visits of love, warnings, awakenings of heart!

3. Let us trace the benefits we enjoy to the fountain of them, the love of God ; then we will say, Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 'I will praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and truth.' This is not only to drink of the stream, but of the fountain ; there the water is sweetest ; when we see all this coming from the special love of God to our souls. Otherwise God may give in anger : Hosea xiii. 11, 'I gave them a king in mine anger ;' as he gave the Israelites meat for their lusts : Isa. xxxviii. 17, 'Thou hast loved me from the grave ;' this commendeth all experiences, maketh us love God again.

4. Compare yourselves with others your betters, who would be glad of your leavings,—their nature, disposition, endowments better than yours, yet receive less from God. He hath not dealt so with any nation. Whence is all this to me ? John xiv. 22, 'Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world ?' Many would be glad of our relics.

5. Consider your unworthiness : 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, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ?' Pride is the cause of discontent. Where all is received freely, there is no cause of discontent : much of giving thanks if we have anything. When we look to desert, we may wonder more at what we have than what we want : if afflicted, destitute, kept low and bare, it is a wonder we are not in hell. All this is spoken because men are not thankful. We are eager till we have blessings, but when we have them, then barren in praises, unfruitful in obedience : like little children, forward to beg favours, but careless to acknowledge what they have received.

*Doct.* 3. That in our thankful acknowledgments we should take notice of God's truth, as well as his benignity and goodness. David owned the kindness as coming according to his word. So do the servants of God observe his accomplishing promises : Josh. xxiii. 14, 'And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth ; and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you ; all hath come to pass unto you, not one thing hath failed thereof.' So Solomon : 1 Kings viii. 56, 'Blessed be God that giveth rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised ; there hath not failed one word of all his good promise which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.' Thus Joshua and Solomon observe how his word was made good to a tittle, and in the rigour of the letter ; he hath not left undone anything, but accomplished all to the full. A great deal of benefit will come by it :—

1. For yourselves.

[1.] Your own faith will be confirmed by it, when you see that God is as good as his word, and bestoweth upon us the utmost that any promise of his giveth us to hope for : it is *dictum factum* with God ; he is no more liberal in word than in deed. Look, as it confirmeth our faith in the truth of the threatenings, when we are punished as our congregation hath heard, Hosea vii. 12,—they that would not believe their danger are made to feel it,—so our faith in the promise. God showeth what he will be to his servants, and after a little waiting they

find it to be so. Wait but a little while, and you shall find the effect of the promises: Ps. lvi. 8, 'In God I will praise his word, in the Lord I will praise his word;' that is, I have great cause to take notice of the promise; to a believer it is as good as performance: so Ps. xix. 9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.' Former experience begets confidence for the time to come: the Lord doth not deceive us with vain words. There is an effect in them; I shall find it; what God saith he doth.

[2.] Your comfort is increased; receiving things in a way of promise sweeteneth a blessing. It is good to see whence things come to us, from the bounty of common providence, or from the promises of the covenant. There is a providential right and a covenant right. Devils hold their beings by a providential right, but the saints their blessings by covenant. The promise is made to God's servants, and the mercy conveyed by the promise is sanctified: 1 Cor. iii. 23, 'All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's;' 1 Tim. iv. 3, they are to be 'received with thanksgiving of them that believe and know the truth.' Believers are called 'heirs of promise.' Some blessings the very nature of them sheweth whence they come; but in others, as the deliverances and comforts of this life, the tenure of them is more comfortable than the mercies themselves; to have them not only from God's hand but heart. Wicked men have them as their portion, you as helps to your better portion: *heirs of promise* is an honourable title and relation. Such blessings are from love, and for our good.

2. As to others, you will invite, encourage, and strengthen them in believing. You are witnesses of his fidelity: Ps. xviii. 30, 'As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried.' I can assure you I have found more than letters and syllables in a promise, it is a tried word; I can tell you what God hath done for my soul.

*Use.* Let us look to the accomplishment of these promises, and trust God the more for the future. Make much of promises: Heb. xi. 13, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.' They are sure declarations of the purposes of God. God's purposes are immutable, but promises declared lay an obligation upon him to keep them. Rejoice in them till performance cometh. Take heed of setting sense against them: Rom. iv. 18-21, 'Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be: and being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.' Naturally men are all for having before them. Take heed of haste: Ps. cxvi. 11, 'I said in my haste, All men are liars;' Ps. xxxi. 22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes.'

## SERMON LXXIV.

*Teach me good judgment and knowledge : for I have believed thy commandments.*—VER. 66.

THE man of God had acknowledged that God had done good for him ; now he beggeth the continuance of his goodness. God, that hath showed mercy, will show mercy. His treasure is not spent by giving, nor hath he the less for communicating to the creature. Man will say, I have given you already, why do you trouble me any more ? But God upbraideth no man ; the more frequent our suits are for grace, the more welcome we are : ‘Thou hast done good for thy servant ;’ and now again, ‘Teach me good judgment and knowledge : for I have believed thy commandments.’

In the words observe—

1. The blessing asked, *Teach me good judgment and knowledge.*

2. The reason urged, *for I have believed thy commandments.*

I begin with the prayer or blessing asked, ‘Teach me good judgment and knowledge.’ Let us consider a little the different translations of this clause. The Septuagint hath three words *χρηστότητα, παιδείαν, καὶ γνῶσιν*, goodness, discipline, and knowledge ; others, *bonitatem gustus et scientie doce me*, teach me goodness of taste and knowledge ; Ainsworth, Vatablus, *bonitatem sensus*, learn me goodness of reason and knowledge. In the original Hebrew טוֹב טַעַם, the Hebrew word signifieth taste or savour, so it is translated Ps. xxxiv. 8, ‘Oh taste and see that the Lord is good.’ The word also signifieth behaviour, as Ps. xxxiv. title, ‘A Psalm of David when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech.’ For a man is tasted by his carriage, and some think it may mean goodness of inclination or manners. I think we fitly translate it judgment, it being coupled with a word that signifieth knowledge—taste, by a metaphor from the bodily sense, being applied to the mind ; as meats are discerned by the taste, so things by the judgment ; and so that which David beggeth here is a good or exact judgment, or the faculty of judging well.

*Doct.* That a judicious sound mind is a great blessing, and should earnestly be sought of God by all that would please him.

The man of God renewing this request so often, and his calling it here good judgment and knowledge, will warrant this observation, and sufficiently sheweth how good it is to have the mind illuminated and endowed with the true knowledge of things. In handling this point, I shall show—

1. What is the use of a sound mind.

2. Why this should be so often and earnestly asked.

First, What is the use of a sound mind ? There is a threefold act of judgment :—

1. To distinguish.

2. To determine.

3. To direct and order.

1. To distinguish and judge rightly of things that differ, that we may not mistake error for truth, and evil for good. So the apostle

maketh it the great work of judgment to discern between good and evil: Heb. v. 14, 'But strong meat belongeth to those that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and bad.' The things that are to be judged are true and false, right and wrong, necessary or indifferent, expedient or inexpedient, fit or unfit; for many things are lawful that are not expedient: 1 Cor. vi. 12, 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient,' as to time, place, persons. Well, then, judgment is a spirit of discerning truth from falsehood, good from evil, that we may approve what is good, and disallow the contrary. So the spiritual man judgeth all things, 1 Cor. ii. 15; that is, though he hath not an authoritative judgment, he hath a judgment of discretion; and if he did stir up this gift of discerning, he might more easily understand his duty, and how far he is concerned in point of conscience and in order to salvation. So 1 Cor. x. 15, 'I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say.' The spiritually wise, if they would awaken the gifts of grace received in regeneration by diligence and prayer and heedfulness of soul, might sooner come to a resolution of their doubts than they usually do. As bodily taste doth discern things savoury from unsavoury, profitable from noxious, so is judgment given us that we may distinguish between the poisons which the world offereth in a golden cup to impure souls, and that wholesome spiritual milk which we suck out of the breasts of scripture, between savoury food and hurtful diet, how neatly soever cooked. The soul's taste is more necessary than the body's, as the soul is the better part, and as our danger is greater, and errors there cost us dearer.

2. To determine and resolve, *practicum dictamen*. The taste of the soul is for God, that bindeth our duty upon us, when there is a decree issued forth in the soul, that after we know our duty there may be a resolvedness of mind never to swerve from it. First the distinguishing work proceedeth; there is a clear and distinct approbation of God; then the determining followeth; this is the *πρόθεσις καρδίας*, Acts xi. 23, 'The purpose of heart;' 2 Tim. iii. 10, 'Thou hast known fully my doctrine, manner of life,' *πρόθεσις*, purpose. The form of this decree and resolution you have in Ps. lxxiii. 28, 'But it is good for me to draw near to God.' This in the soul hath the authority of a principle. He that meaneth to be a thorough Christian must set the bent and bias and purpose of his heart strongly upon it: Ps. xxxix. 1, 'I said, I will take heed to my ways.' So Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I will confess mine iniquities.' These purposes have a powerful command upon the whole soul, to set it a-working whatever they purpose with this strong decree, how backward soever the heart be otherwise; they will excite and quicken us, and admit of no contradiction. It is our judgments lead us and guide and poise us. A man may have knowledge and learning, and play the fool if his judgment be not biassed: a man never taketh any course but his judgment telleth him it is best, and best for him all things considered. It is not men's knowledge leadeth them, but their judgments say to their wills, This is not for me; the other conduceth most to my profit, honour, or delight: but when the judgment is in some measure set towards God, then the man is for God.

3. To direct as well as to decree ; so good judgment and knowledge serveth for the right guiding of ourselves and all our affairs. Many are wise in generals that err in particulars, and have a knowledge of principles, but their affairs are under no conduct. Particulars are nearer to practice, and very learned men are deceived in particulars : Rom. ii. 20-22, ' An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law : thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself ? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal ? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery ? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege ? ' Therefore, besides the general rule, the knowledge of God's will, it is necessary to have the gift of discretion, when particulars are clothed with circumstances. There is an infinite variety of circumstances which require a deal of prudence to determine them. A man may easily discourse on general truths concerning God, ourselves, the state of the church, the privileges of Christianity ; but to direct them to particular cases, to govern our own hearts, and order our own ways, that is a harder thing : Hosea xiv. 9, ' Whoso is wise and prudent,' &c. ; Prov. viii. 12, ' I, wisdom, dwell with prudence.' To direct is harder than to determine or distinguish. It is easier to distinguish of good and evil in the general, to lay down conclusions upon the evidence of the goodness of the ways of God ; but to reduce our knowledge to practice in all cases, that is the great work of judgment, that we may know what becometh the time, the place, the company where we are, and may have that ordering of our conversation aright, Ps. l. 23 ; to know how to carry ourselves in all relations, business, civil, sacred, light, serious ; that we neither offend in excess nor defect ; that we judge what is due to the Creator, and what is to be allowed to the creature ; what is good, what is better, what is best of all ; that we know how to pay reverence to superiors, how most profitably to converse with equals, what compassion to inferiors, how to do good to them ; how to behave ourselves as husbands, wives, fathers, children. Wisdom maketh us profitable in our relations : 1 Peter iii. 7, ' Let husbands dwell with wives according to knowledge.' There is much prudence and wisdom required to know how to converse profitably and Christianly with all that we have to do with. In short, how to love our friends in God, and our enemies for God ; how to converse secretly with God, and to walk openly before men ; how to cherish the flesh that it may not be unserviceable, yet how to mortify it that it may not wax wanton against the spirit ; how to do all things in the fear of God, in meats, drinks, apparel, recreations ; when and how to pray, what time for our callings, what for worship ; when to speak, when to hold our peace ; when to praise, and when to reprove ; how to give, and how to take ; when to scatter, when to keep back or withhold ; and to order all things aright requireth a sound judgment, that we carry ourselves with that gravity and seriousness, that exactness and tenderness, that we may keep up the majesty of religion, and all the world may know that he is wise by whose counsel we are guided. But alas ! where this sound judgment and discretion is wanting, we shall soon offend and transgress the laws of piety, charity, justice, sobriety. Piety and god-

liness will not be orderly; we shall either be guilty of a profane neglect of that course of duty that is necessary to keep in the life of grace, or turn religion into a sour superstition and rigorous course of observances. Charity will not be orderly; we shall give to wastefulness, or withhold more than is meet, to the scandal or prejudice of the world towards religion. Not perform justice; we shall govern to God's dishonour, obey to his wrong, punish with too much severity, or forbear with too much lenity; our reproofs will be reproaches, our praises flattery. Sobriety will not be orderly; we shall deny ourselves our necessary comforts, or use them as an occasion to the flesh; either afflict the body and make ourselves unserviceable, or wrong the soul and burden and oppress it with vain delights. It short, even the higher acts of religion will degenerate; our fear will be turned into desperation, or our hope into presumption; our faith will be a light credulity, or our search after truth will turn into a flat scepticism or irresolution; our patience will be stupidity, or our constancy obstinacy; we shall either slight the hand of God, or faint under it; so that there is need of good judgment and knowledge to guide us in all our ways.

Secondly, Why this is so earnestly to be sought of God. The thing is evident from what is said already. But further—

1. Because this is a great defect in most Christians, who have many times good affections, but no prudence to guide and order them; they are indeed all affection, but no judgment; have a zeal, but without knowledge, Rom. x. 3. Zeal should be like fire, which is not only *fervidus*, but *lucidus*, hot, but bright. A blind horse may be full of mettle, but he is ever and anon stumbling. Oh! then, should we not earnestly seek of God good knowledge and judgment? The Spirit of God knoweth what is best for us. In the scriptures he hath indited prayers: Phil. i. 9, 'This I pray, that your love may abound more and more, in knowledge, and in all judgment;' that our love and zeal should have a proportionable measure of knowledge and judgment going along with it; and Col. i. 9, 'That ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;' and again, Col. iii. 16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom.' These places show that it is not enough to have warm affections, but we must have a clear and a sound mind.

2. The mischief which ariseth from this defect is so great to themselves, to others, and the church of God.

[1.] To themselves.

(1.) Without the distinguishing or discerning act of judgment, how apt are we to be misled and deceived! They that cannot distinguish meats will soon eat what is unwholesome; so, if we have not a judgment to approve things that are excellent, and disapprove the contrary, our fancies will deceive us, for they are taken with every slight appearance; as Eve was deceived by the fruit because it was fair to see to, Gen. iii. 6, with 2 Cor. xi. 3, 'For I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' Our affections will deceive us, for they judge by interest and profit, not duty and conscience. The affections are easily bribed by those bastard goods of pleasure, honour, and profit: 2 Cor. iv. 4, 'In whom the god of this

world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.' The consent of the world will deceive us, for they may conspire in error and rebellion against God, and are usually the opposite party against God: Rom. xii. 2, 'And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.' Good men may deceive us; true and faithful ministers may err both in doctrine and manners, as the old prophet seduced the young one to his own destruction: 1 Kings xiii. 18, 'He said unto him, I am a prophet also, and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him.' In what a woful plight, then, are Christians if they have not a judgment, and a test to taste<sup>1</sup> doctrines and try things, as the mouth tasteth meats! How easily shall we take good for evil and evil for good, condemning that which God approveth, and approving that which God condemneth!

(2.) Without the determining act of judgment, how fickle and irresolute shall we be, either in the profession or in the practice of godliness. Many men's religion lasts but for a pang; it cometh upon them now and then, it is not their constant frame and constitution. For want of this purpose and resolute peremptory decree for the profession of godliness, there is an uncertainty, levity, and wavering in religion: men take up opinions lightly, and leave them as lightly again. Light chaff is carried about with every wind: Eph. iv. 14, 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.' If we receive the truth upon the credit of men, we may be led off again, and we shall be ready to stagger when persecution cometh, especially if we see those men from whom we have learned the truth fall away; if we have not *ἰδίον στήριγμα*, a steadfastness of our own: 2 Peter iii. 17, 'Beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.' Men should have a steadfastness proper to themselves, not stand by the steadfastness of another, the examples of others, the countenance or applause of the world, or the opinion of good men; but convincing reason, by which their minds may be enlightened, and their judgments set for God. So for practice; we are off and on, unstable in all our ways, Why? Because we content ourselves with some good motions before we have brought our hearts to this conclusion, to choose God for our portion, and to cleave to him. All in haste they will be religious, but sudden imperfect motions may be easily laid aside, and given over by contrary persuasions; but when our hearts are fixed upon these holy purposes, then all contrary solicitations and oppositions will not break us or divert us. Satan hath small hopes to seduce or mislead a resolved Christian: loose and unengaged men lie open to him, and are ready to be entertained and employed by any new master.

(3.) Without the directing act of judgment, how easily shall we miscarry, and make religion a burden to ourselves, or else a scorn to the world! Want of judgment causeth different effects, not only in divers, but in the same person: sometimes a superstitious scrupulousness, at other times a profane negligence; sometimes making conscience

<sup>1</sup> Qu. 'a taste to test'?—ED.



of all things, then of nothing: as the one weareth off, the other succeedeth: as the devil cast the lunatic in the Gospel sometimes into the water, sometimes into the fire; either fearful of sin in everything they do, or bold to run into all sin without fear; whereas a truth judiciously understood would prevent either extreme. So again for want of judgment; sometimes men are transported by a fiery and indiscreet zeal, at other times settle into a cold indifferency, and all things come alike to them. The way to prevent both is to resolve upon evidence: 1 Thes. v. 21, 'Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.' Certainly the clearer our judgment is the more steadfast is our faith, the more vehement our love, the more sound our joy, the more constant our hope, the more calm our patience, the more earnest our pursuit of true happiness; otherwise we shall never carry it evenly between vain presumption and feigned reverence, between legal fear and rash hopes, uncomely dejections and a loose disregard of God. Wisdom is the faculty by which we apply that knowledge we have unto the end why we should have it.

[2.] It makes us troublesome to others, by preposterous carriage, rash censuring, needless intermeddling: Phil. i. 9, 10, 'And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;' our corruptions will otherwise break forth to the offence of others. An injudicious Christian increaseth the reproaches of the world, as if the servants of God were the troublers of Israel, by unseasonable reproofs, mistiming of duties, meddling with that which no ways appertaineth to him. All lawful things are not fit at all times, nor in all places, nor to be done by all persons. Much folly, indiscretion and rashness remaineth in the best, whereby they dishonour God, and bring religion into contempt.

[3.] They trouble the church of God; it hath suffered not only from the persecutions of enemies, but from the folly, rashness, and indiscretion of its friends. There are different degrees of light, some babes, some young men, some grown persons in Christ Jesus: 1 John ii. 13, 'I write unto you fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning; I write unto you young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one; I write unto you little children, because ye have known the Father.' Now, children have their fancies, and young men their passions, and old men their humours. When the one would prescribe to the other, they hurry all things into confusion: the injudicious generally seek to carry it, and would govern the world. In young ones, there are great affections but little knowledge and judgment; they have a great zeal, but little prudence to moderate it; and when this is joined with perverseness and contumacy, it is not easy to be said how much evil it bringeth to the church of God; as a fiery horse routeth the troop, and bringeth disorder into the army. The devil loveth to draw things into extremes, to set gift against gift, prudence against zeal, the youth of Christianity against age, and so to confound all things, and so to subvert the kingdom of Christ by that comely vanity which is the beauty of it. In the general, all overdoing in religion is undoing.

*Use.* The use is, let all this press us to seek this benefit of good judgment and knowledge. To this end—

1. Consider the value and necessity of it. Without it we cannot regularly comfort ourselves in the promises, but it will breed a carelessness and neglect of our duty; nor fulfil the commandments of God, but it will breed in us a self-confidence and disvaluing of the grace of God; nor reflect upon our sins, but we shall be swallowed up of immoderate sorrow; nor suffer for the truth, but we shall run into indiscreet reasoning and oppositions that will trouble all, and, it may be, subvert the interest of religion in the world; or else grow into a loose uncertainty, leaping from one opinion to another. This uncertainty cometh not so much, or not altogether, from vile affection, as want of information in religion, professing without light and evidence, having more of affection than principles. There is a twofold injudiciousness—total or partial. (1.) Total, when men are given up *εἰς νοὺν ἀδόκιμον*, into a reprobate sense, or an injudicious mind, Rom. i. 28: when utterly incapable of heavenly doctrine, or discerning the things of the Spirit. This is one of God's heaviest judgments. That is not the case of any of you, I hope. (2.) Partial, and that is in us all. Alas! we are ignorant of many things which we should know; at least, we have not that discretion and prudence which is necessary for directing our faith, tempering our zeal, ordering and regulating our practice, which is necessary to avoid evil, to do good, or to do good well. Or, if we have light, we have no sense or taste. Many never felt the bitterness of sin to purpose, of sweetness of righteousness; therefore we have need to cry to God, Lord, give me good taste and knowledge.

2. If you would have it, you must ask it of God. We can have no sound knowledge till God teach it us. By nature we are all blind, ignorant, vain; after grace received, though our ignorance be helped, it is not altogether cured; you must still fetch it from heaven by strong hand. Without his Spirit we cannot discern spiritual things: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;' that is, chiefly, the main things of the gospel, and universally all things, so far as conscience and obedience to God is concerned in them. It is the unction must teach us all things: 1 John ii. 20, 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things;' the things of God must be seen in the light of his own Spirit. The Spirit of God first giveth us the desire of these things, and then satisfieth us with them. It is the Spirit of God purifieth this desire, that it may be holy, as having a holy end, that we may avoid whatever is displeasing to God, and do whatever is pleasing in his sight; and that is the ready way to come to knowledge and sound judgment: John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth;' John iii. 21, 'He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.' Men that have a mind to maintain an opinion, or suffer an evil practice, are prejudiced and biassed by the idol that is in their hearts, and so do not see what may be seen, and what they seem to search after. Therefore David urgeth this as an argument

in the latter end of the text, 'I have believed thy commandments;' that is to say, Lord, I know this word is thine, and I am willing to practise all that thou requirest. The great thing that is to be aimed at about knowledge is, not only that we may know, and be able to jangle about questions, or that we may be known and esteemed for our knowledge, but that we may practise and walk circumspectly, and in evil days and times know what the will of the Lord is concerning us; to desire knowledge as those that know the weight and consequence of these things, as I shall show more fully hereafter. Those that would have good judgment and knowledge must be willing to understand their duty, and practise all that God requireth, that they may neither do things rashly, and without knowledge and deliberation, for then they are not good, how good soever they be in themselves: Prov. xix. 2, 'Also, that the soul be without knowledge is not good;' or doubtingly, after deliberation; for he that doubteth is in part condemned in his own mind: Rom. xiv. 23, 'And he that doubteth is damned if he eat.' We must have a clear warrant from God, or else all is naught, and will tend to evil. Then it is the Spirit of God satisfieth these desires, when we earnestly desire of him to be informed in the true and perfect way: John vi. 45, 'They shall be all taught of God.' He hath suited promises to the pure and earnest desire of knowledge. Then it is the Lord who sendeth means and blesseth means; as he sent Peter to Cornelius, Acts x., and Philip to the eunuch, Acts viii. All is at his disposal, and he will not fail the waiting soul; he hath made Christ to be wisdom for this very end and purpose, that he might guide us continually: 1 Cor. i. 30, 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.'

3. You must seek it in the word; that maketh us wise to salvation, and by the continual study of it we obtain wisdom and discretion; there we have the best and safest counsel: 'It maketh wise the simple,' Ps. xix. 7. No case can be put, so far as it concerneth conscience, but there you shall have satisfaction: Col. iii. 16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom.' You must not content yourselves with a cursory reading, but mark the end and scope of it, that you may be made completely wise, by frequent reading, hearing, meditation upon it, and conferring about it. There you find all things necessary to be believed and practised, therefore you must hear it with application, read it with meditation. (1.) Hear it with application. The Lord blesseth us in the use of instituted means; both light and flame are kept in by the breath of preaching. Where visions fail, the people perish, men grow brutish and wild. It is a dispute which is the sense of learning, the ear or the eye. By the eye we see things, but by reason of innate ignorance we must be taught how to judge of them: James i. 19, 'Wherefore, my brethren, let every man be swift to hear;' take all occasions. And we must still apply what we hear. *Nunquid ego talis?* Rom. viii. 31, 'What shall we then say to these things?' Job v. 27, 'Lo, this we have searched, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good;' Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' Return upon thine own heart. (2.) Reading scripture is every man's work who hath a soul

to be saved. Other writings, though good in their kind, will not leave such a lively impression upon the soul. All the moral sentences of Seneca and Plutarch do not come with such force upon the conscience as one saying of God's word. God's language hath a special energy; here must be your study and your delight: Ps. i. 2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night;' 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' These make you wise unto salvation. Your taste is not right when you relish and savour human writings, though never so good, more than the word of God. A draught of wine from the vessel is more fresh and lively; that conviction which doth immediately rise out of the word is more prevailing. We suspect the mixture of passion and private aims in the writings of others; but when conscience and the word are working together, we own it as coming from God himself. Besides, those that are studying, and reading, and meditating on the word have this sensible advantage, that they have promises, doctrines, examples of the word ready and familiar upon all occasions; others are weak and unsettled because they have not scriptures ready. In the whole work of grace you will find no weapon so effectual as the sword of the Spirit. Scriptures seasonably remembered and urged are a great relief to the soul. No diligence here can be too much. If you would not be unprofitable, sapless, indiscreet with others, weak and comfortless in yourselves, read the scriptures. We have *Sic scriptum est* against every temptation. Besides, you have the advantage to see with your own eyes the truth as it cometh immediately from God, before any art of man, or thoughts of their head pass upon it, and so can the better own God in what you find.

4. Long use and exercise doth much increase judgment, especially as it is sanctified by the Spirit of God. You get a habit of discerning, fixing, directing, guiding your ways: *διὰ τὴν ἔξω τὰ αἰσθητήρια γεγυμνασμένα ἔχοντες*, Heb. v. 14, 'Who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.' As men of full age, by long use and exercise of the senses of seeing, smelling, tasting, have acquired a more perfect knowledge to discern what food is good and wholesome and what is unwholesome, so by much attention, studying, and meditation, men who have exercised the intellectual faculty to find out the scope and meaning of the word of God do attain a more discerning faculty, and understand better the truth of the word, and can judge what doctrine is true and what false, and more easily apprehend higher points when taught unto them; they discern and know the differences of things to be understood. God's blessing doth accompany use and frequent exercise, and make it effectual to this end; by degrees we come to a solidness.

5. Sense and experience doth much increase judgment. When smarted for our folly, tasted the sweetness of conversing with God in Christ: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' *Optima demonstratio est a sensibus*. Col. i. 6, 'Which bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day you heard of it, and knew

the grace of God in truth.' God is not taught by experience, to whose knowledge all things are present, and at all times, and before all times; but we are. God is fain to teach us by briars and thorns, as Gideon taught the men of Succoth.

6. Avoid the enemies to it or hindrances of it. I shall name two:—

[1.] A passionate or wilful addictedness to any carnal things. Most men live by sense, will, and passion, whereby they enthrall that wisdom which they have, and keep it in unrighteousness. *Perit omne judicium cum res transit in affectum*—truth is a prisoner to their sinful passions and affections, rejecting all thoughts of their future happiness. A man cannot be wise to salvation, and passionately addicted to any temporal interest.

[2.] Pride; that maketh us either rash or presumptuous, either not using a due consideration, or not humble enough to subject our minds to it. Besides we cast off God's assistance: 'The humble and meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way,' Ps. xxv.

9. Men that lean on their own understandings reject him: Prov. iii. 5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.'

## SERMON LXXV.

*For I have believed thy commandments.*—VER. 66.

THIS latter clause may be considered absolutely or relatively; in itself, or as it containeth a reason of the foregoing petition.

*First, Absolutely.* These words deserve a little consideration, because believing is here suited with an unusual object. Had it been, *For I have believed thy promises*, or, *obeyed thy commandments*, the sense of the clause had been more obvious to every vulgar apprehension. To believe commandments sounds as harsh to a common ear as to see with the ear and hear with the eye. But for all this, the commandments are the object; and of them he saith not, *I have obeyed*, but *I have believed*. To take off the seeming asperity of the phrase, some interpreters conceive that *commandments* is put for the word in general; and so promises are included, yea, they think principally intended, those promises which encouraged him to hope for God's help in all necessary things, such as good judgment and knowledge are. But this interpretation would divert us from the weight and force of these significant words. Therefore—

1. Certainly there is a faith in the commandments, as well as in the promises, as I shall fully prove by and by.

2. The one is as necessary as the other; for as the promises are not esteemed, embraced, and improved, unless they are believed to be of God, so neither are the precepts; they do not sway the conscience as the other do, nor incline the affections, but as they are believed to be divine.

3. The faith of the one must be as lively as the other. As the promises are not believed with a lively faith unless they draw off

the heart from carnal vanities to seek that happiness which they offer to us, so the precepts are not believed rightly unless we be fully resolved to acquiesce in them as the only rule to guide us in the obtaining that happiness, and to adhere to them and obey them. As the king's laws are not kept as soon as they are believed to be the king's laws, unless also upon the consideration of his authority and power we subject ourselves to them, so this believing noteth a ready alacrity to hear God's voice and obey it, and to govern our hearts and actions according to his counsel and direction in the word.

*Doct.* That the commandments of God must be believed as well as his promises; or, The precepts of sanctity and holiness bind the conscience to obey God, as well as the promises bind us to trust in God.

1. What we must believe concerning the commandments.
2. The necessity of believing them if we would be happy.
3. The utility and profit.

1. What we must believe concerning the commandments.

[1.] That they have God for their author, that we may take our duty immediately out of his hand, that these commands are his commands. The expressions of his commanding and legislative will, whereby our duty is determined and bound upon us, that is a matter of faith, not a matter of sense. We were not present at the giving of the law as being past, but we ought to be affected with it as if we were present, or had heard the thunderings of Mount Sinai, or had them now delivered to us by oracle or immediate voice from heaven. God doth once for all give the world sensible and sufficient satisfaction, and then he requireth faith. See Heb. ii. 2-4, 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience obtained a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?' The apostle compareth the first promulgation of the law and the first publication of the gospel. After ages did not hear the sounding of the dreadful trumpet, nor see the flaming smoking mountain, were not conscious to all those circumstances of terror and majesty with which the law was given; yet it was λόγος βέβαιος, a steadfast word. God owned it in his providence: the punishment of transgressors is proof of God's authorising the doctrine. So we were not present when the miracles by which the gospel law was confirmed were wrought; yet there is a constant evidence that these things were once done; and God still owneth it in his providence, therefore we must receive the gospel law as the sovereign will and pleasure of our lawgiver, as if we had seen him in person doing these wonders, heard him with our own ears. It is not only those that were present at Mount Sinai that were bound, but all their posterity. God giveth arguments of sense once for all. This belief is the more required of us as to precepts and commandments, because they are more evident by natural light: Rom. ii. 14, 15, 'For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts.' There is

*veritas naturalis* and *veritas mystica*. Some objects of faith depend upon mere revelation, but the commands of the moral law are clearer than the doctrines of faith; they are of duties and things present, not of privileges to be enjoyed hereafter, such as the promises offer to us. Now, it is easier to be convinced of present duties than to be assured of some future things promised.

[2.] That these commandments be received with that reverence that becometh the sovereign will and pleasure of so great a lord and law-giver. It is the work of faith to acquaint us with the nature of God and his attributes, and work the sense of them into our hearts. The great governor of the world is invisible, and we do not see him that is invisible but by faith: Heb. xi. 27, 'By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.' It is *ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων*, 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1. Temporal potentates are before your eyes, their majesty may be seen, and their terrors and rewards are matter of sense. That there is an infinite, eternal, and all-wise Spirit, who made all things, and therefore hath right to command and give laws to all things, reason will in part tell us; but faith doth more assure the soul of it, and impresseth the dread and awe of God upon our souls, as if we did see him with bodily eyes. By faith we believe his being: Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is.' His power, so as to oppose it to things visible and sensible: Rom. iv. 21, 'Being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.' That there is no standing out against him who with one beck of his will can ruin us everlastingly, and throw the transgressor of his laws into eternal fire: a frown of his face is enough to undo us; he is not a God to be neglected, or dallied with, or provoked by the wilful breaking of his laws. He hath truly *potestatem vitæ et necis*—the power of life and death: James iv. 12, 'There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.' These considerations are best enforced by faith, without which our notions of these things are weak and languid. You are to charge the heart with God's authority, as you will answer it to him another day, not to neglect or despise the duty you owe to such a God. No terror comparable to his frowns, no comforts comparable to his promises or the sense of his favour.

[3.] That these laws are holy, just, and good: Rom. vii. 12, 'Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.' This is necessary, because, in believing the commandments, not only assent is required, but also consent to them, as the fittest laws we could be governed by: Rom. vii. 16, 'If, then, I do that which I would not, I consent to the law that it is good.' Consent is a mixed act of the judgment and will: they are not only to be known as God's laws, but owned and embraced, not only see a truth, but a worth in them. The mandatory part of the word hath its own loveliness and invitation; as the promises of pardon and eternal life suit with the hunger and thirst of conscience, and the natural desires of happiness; so the holiness and righteousness of God's laws suit with the natural notions of good and evil that are in man's heart. These laws were written upon man's heart at his first creation, and though somewhat blurred, we know the better how to read a defaced writing when we get another copy or

transcript to compare with it. Especially when the heart is renewed, when the Spirit hath wrought a suitableness, there must needs be a consenting and embracing: Heb. viii. 10, 'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.' There is a ready willing heart to obey them and conform to them in the regenerate, therefore an assent is not enough, but a consent; this is that they would choose and prefer before liberty; they acquiesce and are satisfied in their rule as the best rule for them to live by. But let us see the three attributes, *holy, just, and good*. (1.) They are holy laws, fit for God to give and man to receive. When we are convinced of this, it is a great help to bridle contrary inclinations, and to carry us on cheerfully in our work. They are fit for God to give, they become such a being as God is: his laws carry the express print and stamp of his own nature upon them. We may know how agreeable they are to the nature of God by supposing the monstrousness of the contrary. If he had forbidden us all love, and fear, and trust in himself, all respect and thanks to our creator, or bidden us to worship false gods, or change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to a corruptible man, as birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things, or that we should blaspheme his name continually, or despise his glory shining forth in the work of his hands, and that we should be disobedient to our parents, and pollute ourselves as the beasts with promiscuous lusts, and fill the world with adulteries, robberies, and thefts, or slander and revile one another, and leave the boat to the stream, give over ourselves to our passions, discontents, and the unruly lusts of our corrupt hearts; these are conceits so monstrous that, if the beasts were capable of having such thoughts transfused into them, they would abhor them, and would infer such a manifest disproportion in the soul as it would in the body to walk with our hands and do our work with our feet. And they are fit for man to receive if he would preserve the rectitude of his nature, live as such an understanding creature, keep reason in dominion, and free from being a slave to the appetites of the body. To be just, holy, temperate, humble, meek, chaste, doth not only concern the glory of God and the safety of the world, but the liberty of the reasonable nature, that man may act as a creature that hath a mind to know things that differ, and to keep him from that filthiness and pollution which would be a stain to him, and infringe the glory of his being. There is no middle thing; either a man must be a saint or a beast, either conform himself to God's will, and look after the interests of his soul, or lose the excellency of his nature, and become as the beasts that perish; either the beast must govern the man, or the man ride upon the beast, which he doth when he taketh God's counsel. (2.) Just, because it referreth to all God's precepts. I take it here not strictly but largely, how just it is for God to command, and how reasonable it is that we should obey the supreme being. His will is the reason of all things; and who should give laws to the world but the universal sovereign who made all things out of nothing? Whatsoever you are, you receive it from the Lord; and therefore, whatsoever a reasonable creature can do, you owe it to him: you are in continual dependence upon him, for 'in him you live, and move,



and have your being,' Acts xvii. 28. And he hath redeemed you, called you to life by Christ: 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, 'What, know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.' You owe all your time, and strength, and service unto him, and therefore you should still be doing his will and abounding in his work. (3.) He enjoineth nothing but what is good: Deut. v. 29, 'Oh, that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever;' Deut. vi. 24, 'And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.' God hath tempered his sovereignty towards the reasonable creature, and ruleth us not with a rod of iron, but with a sceptre of love: 'He draweth us with the cords of a man,' Hosea xi. 4; that is, with reasons and arguments taken from our own happiness. Man being a rational and free agent, he would lead and quicken us to our duty by the consideration of our own benefit; and when he might say only, Thus shall ye do; I am the Lord; yet he is pleased to exhort and persuade us not to forsake our own mercies, or to turn back upon our own happiness, and to propound rewards that we may be encouraged to seek after him in that way of duty which he hath prescribed to us. The reward is everlasting glory, with the mercies of this life in order to it: Heb. xi. 6, 'God is, and he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'

[4.] How indispensably obedience to his commandments is required of us. As long as the heart is left loose and arbitrary, such is the unruliness and self-willedness of man's nature, Rom. viii. 7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The carnalist will not be held to his duty, but leaves that which is honest for that which is pleasing, and is governed by his appetite rather than his reason; therefore faith hedgeth up his way, sheweth him 'that without holiness it is impossible to see God,' Heb. xii. 14; that there is no coming to the end unless we take the way; that there is no hope of exemption or excuse for the breaches of his law allowed but the plea of the gospel, which doth not evacuate but establish obedience to God's commands, requireth a renouncing of our former course, and a hearty resolution, 'to serve God in holiness and righteousness all our days,' Luke i. 74, 75. Our duty is the end of our deliverance. In the kingdom of grace we are not our own masters, or at liberty to do what we will. Christ came not only as a saviour, but as a lawgiver; he hath his laws to try our obedience: Heb. v. 9, 'And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.' He came not to lessen God's sovereignty or man's duty, but to put us into a greater capacity to serve God. He came to deliver us from the curse and indispensable rigours of the law upon every failing; not from our duty, nor that we might not serve God, but serve him without fear, with peace of conscience and joy of heart, and requireth such a degree of grace as is inconsistent with any predominant lust and affection.

[5.] That God loveth those that obey his law, and hateth those

that despise it, without respect of persons : Acts x. 35, ' In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him ; ' Ps. v. 5, ' Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity ; ' Prov. xi. 20, ' They that are of a froward heart are an abomination to the Lord, but such as are upright in their way are his delight. ' The more obedient, the more God loveth us ; the less obedient, the less God loveth us. Therefore, unless we love what God loveth, and hate what God hateth, do his commands carefully, and avoid the contrary, we cannot be acceptable with him, for God would not make a law in vain, but order his providence accordingly.

[6.] That one day we shall be called to an account for our conformity and inconformity to God's law. There are two parts of government—legislation and execution : the one belongeth to God as king, the other as judge. Laws are but a shadow, and the sanction a mockery, unless there shall be a day when those that are subject to them shall be called to an account and reckoning. His threatenings are not a vain scarecrow, nor his promises a golden dream ; therefore he will appoint a day when the truth of the one and the other shall be fully made good ; and therefore faith enliveneth the sense of God's authority with the remembrance of this day, when he will judge the world in righteousness.

## 2. The necessity.

[1.] The precepts are a part of the divine revelation : the object of faith is the whole word of God, and every part of divinely inspired truth is worthy of all belief and reverence. The word worketh not unless it be received as the word of God : 1 Thes. ii. 13, ' For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. ' Now we cannot receive the word as the word of God unless we receive all. There are the same reasons to receive one as the other ; therefore, if any part take good rooting, the whole is received. There may be a superficial affection to one part more than another ; but if there be a right faith, we receive all. It is the engrafted word that is effectual to the saving of our souls, James i. 21 ; if we would engraft the word, the precepts must stir up answerable affections as well as the promises. Every part must affect us, and stir up dispositions in us which that part is apt to produce. If the promises stir up joy and trust, the precepts must stir up love, fear, and obedience. The same word which calleth upon us to believe the free pardon of our sins, doth also call upon us to believe the commandments of God for the regulating and guiding of our hearts and ways.

[2.] It is such a part as hath a necessary connection with the promises, as without which they can do us no good ; therefore, if we mean to be happy, we must regard both ; the one is as necessary and fundamental to our happiness as the other. Our consent to God's covenant is required, not as if we were to debate and alter the terms at our pleasure, but that we may take it as God hath stated it, and bind our duty upon us by our consent to God's authority. We cannot prescribe conditions and laws of commerce between God and us, but only God alone. Man did not give the conditions, or treat about the making of them, what they should be, but is only bound to submit to what God

was pleased to offer and prescribe. We are not left free to model and bring down the terms to our own liking, to take hold of them, not to appoint them : Isa. lvi. 4, 'For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and do the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;' for though he condescendeth to treat with us, yet still he keepeth the place of a sovereign : and therefore, if we believe promises, and do not believe God's commandments, it is not God's covenant, but one of our own devising, when we take and leave, and part and mingle, and chop and change at our own pleasures. The covenant requireth a total, universal, unlimited resignation of ourselves to the will of God : 'I will be your God, you shall be my people.'

[3.] The gratitude that resulteth necessarily from faith, or believing the promises, will put us upon this ; it apprehendeth love, and leaveth the stamp of it upon the soul, and worketh by love, Gal. v. 6. Now, how are we to express our love to God ? Not in a fellow-like familiarity, but dutiful subjection to his laws : 1 John v. 3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments ; and his commandments are not grievous ;' and John xiv. 21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me ;' not by glavering respects, or a fond remembrance and esteem of his memory, Mat. vii. 11. If we live to God, not to the world, not to the flesh, if faith be lively, it will put us upon this : 2 Cor. v. 15, 'And that he died for all, that they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.'

[4.] Our trust in the promises is always commensurable to our fidelity in the commandments. Faith in the one is maintained by faithfulness in the other, and assurance of acceptance with God cannot be greater than our care of obedience. When love to the world and the flesh tempt us to omit any part of our duty, then do we weaken our confidence thereby, and sin will breed distrust if we be serious and mind our condition : 'The fruit of righteousness is peace ;' 1 John iii. 21, 'Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God ;' and Heb. vii. 2, 'Being by interpretation king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem, which is king of peace ;' and Christ saith, Mat. xi. 29, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Confidence and comfort follow grace, as heat doth fire ; and fears and doubts follow sin, as pain doth the pricking of a needle, or any sharp thing wherewith a man pierceth himself ; therefore, when sensual objects oversway us, and take us off from obedience to the command, they will also make us doubt of the mercy of God, as well as transgress our duty. We cannot trust him when we have offended freely and without restraint ; sin will breed shame and fear.

At present all sinners feel it not ; yet hereafter that sin that now weakeneth the faith we have in the commandments, will in time weaken the faith we have in the promises. Every part of our trust in God's declared will cometh to be tried one time or another : our confidence in God's mercy is not fully and directly assaulted till the hour of death, and the time of extraordinary trial. When the evil day cometh, then the consciousness of any one sin whereunto we have been indulgent, and of the delight and pleasure we took in transgressing God's com-

mandments, will be of force to withdraw our assent from God's mercies: 1 Cor. xv. 56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.'

[5.] Faith in the promises, if it be not a conceit and a vain dream, is not only an act enforced by our necessity, but done in obedience to God's will; therefore we believe because God hath commanded it: 1 John iii. 23, 'And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ;' John vi. 29, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' It sensibly appeareth many times, a poor soul hath no other motive or encouragement. It ventureth, notwithstanding all discouragements to the contrary, in the strength and sense of a command; as Peter, Luke v. 5, 'Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.' Now that which is done, if rightly done, merely in obedience to a command, cannot be the ground of disobedience in other things. We must not pick and choose. Certainly if we believe the promises on God's command, we will make conscience of other things commanded also; for he is truly obedient to no precept that doth not obey all enforced by the same authority.

### 3. The utility.

[1.] That we may begin with God, to yield up our wills absolutely to his will; it is upon a belief that this is his will concerning us; for his will concerning our duty is revealed in his precepts: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Micah vi. 8. Certainly an obedient creature desireth to know no more but what God will have him to do; and therefore it is needful we should believe what is God's will, that we may resolve upon his will: Rom. xii. 1, 2, 'I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.' The first thing that we do in grace is to arm ourselves with a resolution to obey God's will, though it be never so contrary to our own, or to the wills of men, or the course of the world's fashions: 1 Peter iv. 1, 2, 'Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.' Now, that this resolution may be made knowingly and with the greater strength, not only with the strength of inclination or our own resolved, renewed will, but in the sense of God's authority, a strong belief is necessary that this course of life is pleasing to God.

[2.] That we may hold on with God in an awe-ful, watchful, serious course of godliness, it is necessary that the belief of the commandments be deeply impressed upon us. Alas! otherwise we shall be off and on, forward and backward, according to the impulsion of our own inclinations and affections, and the sense of our interest in the world. Many of the commandments are crossing to our natural inclinations and corrupt humours, or contrary to our interests in the world, our profit, pleasure; and nothing will hold the heart to our duty but the con-

science of God's authority: This is the Lord's will, then the gracious soul submitteth: 1 Thes. iv. 3, 'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication;' and 1 Peter ii. 15, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' That is reason enough, and instead of all reasons, to a believer, to awe and charge his heart, that we may not shift and distinguish ourselves out of our duty, that we may shake off sloth and negligence, much more deceits, and fraudulency, and corrupt affections. Many shifts will be studied by a naughty heart that dispense with our credit, esteem, honour, preferment in the world for our loyalty to God. Nothing but a deep belief of the sovereignty of God and the sight of his will can be of sufficient power to the soul when such temptations arise, and our duties are so contrary to the inclinations of the flesh: Heb. xi. 8, 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went:' and ver. 17, 18, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son; of whom it is was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called;' Gen. xii. 3, 'In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.' Oh! how have believers need to bestir themselves upon such an occasion, and to remember no evil can be compared with God's wrath, no earthly good with his favour: that transitory delights are dearly bought if they endanger the soul to compass them: 'That the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!' Rom. viii. 18. The ordinary experience of believers in lesser temptations is enough to evince this, &c.

*Use. 1.* For reproof.

1. That men do so little revive the belief of God's commandments, hence sins of omission: James iv. 17, 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin;' of commission: Jer. viii. 6, 'I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.' Would men venture to break a known law if they did consider that it was the command of God that hath power to save and to destroy? Surely want of faith in the precepts is a great cause of their coldness in duty, boldness in sinning: Prov. xiii. 13, 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' Now any one would fear God's commandment if he did consider it in all its circumstances.

2. Those that would strongly believe the promises, but weakly believe that part of the word that requireth their duty from them, all for privileges, seldom reflect upon their own qualification: it is a good temper when both go together: Ps. cxix. 166, 'I have hoped for thy salvation, and have done thy commandments;' so Ps. cxlvii. 11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' But when asunder, all is naught. God's promises cannot comfort us if we be not of the number of them to whom they do belong; not only consider what God is, but what we are, and what is required of us—our qualification as well as his goodness, our duty as well as his mercy.

*Use 2.* To believe the commandments with a lively faith. We should be tender of disobeying God's law. The law may be considered as a covenant of works, or as a rule of life. As a covenant of works, so it is satisfied by Christ for those that have an interest in him, and serveth to quicken us to get this interest in him. As it is a rule of life, so in the new covenant we give up ourselves to God to walk according to the tenor of it; as Israel by a voluntary submission: *Exod. xix. 8*, 'All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.' So in the church of the New Testament we engage ourselves by a voluntary submission to walk according to the will of God, and confirm it by the sacraments, baptism, and the Lord's supper. Well, then, we are still to regard it as a binding rule, looking for grace to perform it. It is not only a rule given us for advice and direction, but for a strong obligation to urge and enforce us to our duty. So *Ps. xl. 8*, 'Thy law is in my heart; I delight to do thy will, O God.'

*Use 3.* Do we believe the commandments? Then—

1. We will not please ourselves with a naked trust in the promises, while we neglect our duty to God. That which God hath joined together no man must put asunder. The prophet saith, *Hosea x. 11*, 'Ephraim is an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn;' compared with *Deut. xxv. 4*, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.' We are addicted to our own ease, prize comforts, but loathe duty. Oh, make more conscience of obedience!

2. Their faith will be lively and operative, cause to keep God's charge and observe his commandments; otherwise it is but an opinion and a dead faith: *James ii. 20*, 'Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?' Many may discourse of the necessity of duty that have little sense of it; as the children in the furnace, the fire had no power over them, neither was one hair of their heads singed, nor their coats changed; not a lust mortified, no good by their strict notions.

3. They must be obeyed as God's commands, abstaining from evil because God forbiddeth it, practising that which is good because God commandeth it. *Notitia voluntatis*: *1 Thes. iv. 3*, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication;' *1 Thes. v. 8, 9*, 'But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation: for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ;' *1 Peter ii. 15*, 'For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.' Certainly no private respect, desire of our own pleasure and profit, should hinder us; but we must respect one command as well as another, otherwise our obedience is partial. *A quatenus ad omne valet consequentia*; if we believe the commandments, we must believe all. Where a disposition is allowed to break any one of God's laws, the heart is not right. God's sovereignty, once acknowledged, is alike potent to restrain every inclination to acts displeasing to God and contrary to our duty, one as well as another.

*Secondly*, The text may be considered relatively, with respect to the matter in hand; and so it may be conceived as a reason of asking, or as a reason of granting.

1. As a reason of asking.

[1.] It giveth a character of them that believe; they that believe God's commandments will desire to know them more, to be more accurate in knowing their duty, and the weight and consequence of it; —they are willing to practise all that it requireth, and so are willing to 'prove what is the acceptable will of the Lord:' Eph. v. 17, 'Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is;' they would not do anything doubtingly: Rom. iv. 23, 'He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin;' nor according to the wills of men: Gal. i. 10, 'For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.' They would avoid all appearance of evil: 1 Thes. v. 22, 'Occasions to evil;' Rom. xiii. 14, 'Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' They know the weight and consequence of these things.

[2.] It giveth us an intimation of the necessity of growth: none believe so much but they may believe more: 1 John v. 13, 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God;' and they may obey more, embrace the word more. David beggeth he may do so: always there is some new thing to be learned in the scripture.

[3.] That faith planted in the heart is nourished and increased by more knowledge and understanding: 2 Peter i. 5, 'Add to your faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge.' There is an implicit and an explicit faith; *oportet discentem credere*, swallowing pills, not chewing them.

2. As a reason of granting. Believing God's commandments is a disposition that hath a promise of more knowledge to be communicated.

[1.] God by one act of grace maketh way for another. First, he giveth this first favour of receiving the word by faith as divine, worthy to be believed and obeyed; then, to understand it and apprehend it more perfectly, discretion and judgment to go about duties wisely.

[2.] God giveth according to the creatures' receptions; they that are dutiful and docile and willing to comply with their duty already known, shall know more.

*Use.* The use is, if we expect more illumination, let us believe as much as is manifested already to us, with a mind to practise.

## SERMON LXXVI.

*Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.*—VER. 67.

In this verse you may observe two things:—

1. The evil of prosperity, *before I was afflicted I went astray.*

2. The good of adversity, *but now have I kept thy word.* Before wandering, but now attentive to his duty. Or, if you will, here is the necessity of afflictions and the utility of them.

1. The necessity, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray.' Some think that David in his own person representeth the wantonness and stubbornness of all mankind. If it should be so, yet the person in whom the instance is given is notable. If this was the disposition of the prophet and man of God, and he needed this discipline, we much more: if he could say it in truth of heart that he was made worse by his prosperity, we need always to be jealous of ourselves; and were it not for the scourge, we should forget our duty and the obedience we owe to God.

2. The utility and benefit of afflictions, 'But now have I kept thy word.' Keeping the law is a general word. The use of God's rod is to bring us home unto God, and the affliction driveth us to make better use of his word: it changeth us from vanity to seriousness, from error to truth, from stubbornness to teachfulness, from pride to modesty. It is commonly said, *παθήματα μαθήματα*; and the apostle telleth us that Jesus Christ himself learned obedience by the things which he suffered, Heb. v. 8; and here David was the better for the cross; so should we. Or rather, you may in the words observe three things:—

1. A confession of his wandering, 'I went astray.'

2. The course God took to reduce him to his duty, 'I was afflicted.'

3. The success or effect of that course, 'I have kept thy word.'

Theodoret expresseth this in three words, *ἡρρώσθησα, ἐτμήθην, ἐρρώσθην*—I was sick; I was cut, or let blood; I was well, or recovered my health again.

1. The one giveth us the cause of afflictions; they are for sin, 'I went astray;' wherein there is a secret acknowledgment of his guilt, that his sin was the cause of the chastisement God brought upon him.

2. The true notion and nature of affliction to the people of God. The cross changeth its nature, and is not *pœna*, a destructive punishment, but *remedium delinquentium*, a medicinal dispensation, and a means of our cure.

3. The end of them is obedience, or keeping God's word. The sum of the whole is, I was out of the way, but thy rod hath reduced me, and brought me into it again. Aben Ezra conceiveth that in this last clause he intimateth a desire of deliverance, because the rod had done its work; rather, I think he expresseth his frame and temper when he was delivered; and accordingly I shall make use of it by and by.

I might observe many points, but the doctrine from the whole verse is—

*Doct.* That the end of God's afflicting, is to reduce his afflicted and straying people into the right way.

I shall explain the point by these considerations.

1. That man is of a straying nature, apt to turn out of the way that leadeth to God and to true happiness. We are all so by nature: Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' Sheep, of all creatures, are exceeding subject to stray, if not tended and kept in the better, unable to keep out of error, and having erred, unable to return. This is the emblem by which the Holy Ghost would set forth the nature of mankind. But is it better with us after grace received? No; we are in part so still. The best of us, if left to



ourselves, how soon are we out of the right way? into what sad errors do we run ourselves? Ps. xix. 12, 'Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret sins.' Since grace, we all have our deviations; though our hearts be set to walk with God for the main, yet ever and anon we are swerving from our rule, transgressing our bounds, and neglecting our duty. Good David had cause to say, Ps. cxix. 176, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep: oh, seek thy servant!' We go astray not only out of ignorance, but out of perverseness of inclination: Jer. xiv. 10, 'Thus have they loved to wander; they have not restrained their feet.' We have hearts that love to wander; we love shift and change, though it be for the worse; and so will be making excursions into the ways of sin.

2. This straying humour is much increased and encouraged by prosperity, which, though it be good in itself, yet, so perverse are we by nature, that we are the worse for it. That the wicked are the worse for it, is clear: Isa. xxvi. 10, 'Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will they not learn righteousness.' The sunshine upon the dunghill will produce nothing but stinks, and the salt sea will turn all that falleth into it into salt water; the sweet dews of heaven, and the tribute of the rivers all becometh salt when it falleth into the sea. So wicked men convert all into their humour: neither God's mercies nor judgments will have any gracious and kindly work upon them: but, if it be well with them, they take the more liberty to live loosely and profanely: the fear of God, which is the great holdback from all wickedness, is lessened and quite lost in them when they see no change: Ps. lv. 19, 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' That little slavish fear which they have, which should keep them back from wandering, is then lost, and the more gently God dealeth with them, the more godless and secure they are. When they go on prosperously and undisturbedly, the more obdurate ever. But is it not so with the people of God also? Yes, verily. David, whose heart smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment when he was wandering in the wilderness, could plot the death of Uriah, his faithful servant, when he was at ease in his palace. We lose much tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against sin, much of that lively diligence that we should otherwise show forth in carrying on the spiritual life, when we are at ease, and all things go well with us. We are apt to indulge the flesh when we have so many baits to feed it; and to learn how to abound is the harder lesson of the two than to learn how to be abased, Phil. iv. 12; and therefore, did not God correct us, we should grow careless and negligent. The beginning of all obedience is the mortification of the flesh, which naturally we cannot endure. After we have submitted and subjected ourselves to God, the flesh will be seeking its prey, and be rebelling and waxing wanton against the spirit, till God snatch its allurements from us. Therefore the Lord by divers afflictions is fain to break us and bring us into order. We force him to humble us by poverty, or disgrace, or diseases, or by domestic crosses, or some inconveniency of the natural and animal life, which we value too much. Besides, our affections to heavenly things languish when all things succeed with us in this world according to our heart's desire; and this coldness and

remissness is not easily shaken off. Many are like the children of Reuben and Gad, Num. xxxii., who, when they found convenient pastures on this side Jordan, were content with it for their portion, without seeking aught in the land of promise. So their desires insensibly settle here, and have less respect to the good of the world to come.

3. When it is thus with us, God seeth fit to send afflictions. Much of the wisdom of God's providence is to be observed;—partly in the season of affliction, in what state and posture of soul it surpriseth us, when we are wandering, when we most need it, when our abuse of prosperity calleth aloud for it; when the sheep wander, the dog is let loose to fetch them in again. God suiteth his providence to our necessities: 1 Peter i. 6, 'For a season ye are in heaviness, if need be.' Alas! we often see that afflictions are highly necessary and seasonable, either to prevent a distemper that is growing upon us, or to reclaim us from some evil course in which we have wandered from God. Paul was in danger to be lifted up, and then God sendeth a thorn in the flesh. This discipline is very proper and necessary before the disease run on too far. Partly in the kind of affliction. All physic doth not work upon the same humour; divers lusts must have divers remedies. Pride, envy, covetousness, wantonness, emulation, have all their proper cures. All sins are referred to three impure fountains: 1 John ii. 16, 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.' From the lusts of the flesh do arise not only the gross acts of wantonness, fornication, adultery, gluttony, drunkenness, which the more brutish and base part of mankind are taken with, but an inordinate love of pleasures, vain company, and vain delights, carnal complacency, or flesh-pleasing, wherewith the refined part of the world are too often captivated and bewitched. The lust of the eyes, covetousness and worldly-mindedness, produce wretchedness, rapines, contentions, strife, or that immoderate desire of having or joining house to house, field to field, and building up ourselves one storey higher in the world. From pride of life cometh ambition, lofty conceit of ourselves, scorn and contempt of others, affectation of credit and repute in the world, pomp of having multitudes of servants, or greatness of train, fineness of apparel, and innumerable vanities. Now God, that he may meet with his servants when they are tripping in any kind, he sendeth out afflictions as his faithful messengers to stop them in their career, that the flesh may not sail and carry it away with a full and clear gale. Against the lusts of the flesh he sendeth sicknesses and diseases; against the lusts of the eyes, poverty and disappointments in our relations; against pride, disgraces and shame: and sometimes he varieth the dispensation, for his providence doth keep one tenor, and every cure will not fit every humour; all will not work alike upon all. He sendeth that affliction which is sure to work; he knoweth how to strike in the right vein: thus he cureth Paul's pride by a troublesome disease. None that study providence but may observe the wisdom of God in the kind of affliction, and how suitable it is to the work it is to do; for God doth all things in number, weight, and measure. Partly by the manner how it cometh upon us, by what instruments, and in what sort. How many make them-

selves miserable by an imagined cross ! and so, when all things without are well, their own humours and passions make them a burden to themselves, and when they are not wounded in point of honour, nor lessened and cut short in estate, nor assaulted in their health, nor their relations diminished and cut off, but are hedged round about with all temporal happiness, there seemeth to be no room or place for any affliction or trouble in their bosoms, yet, in the fulness of their sufficiency, God maketh them a terror and burden to themselves, either by their own fears or misconceit, or the false imagination of some loss or disgrace : God maketh them uncomfortable and full of disquiet ; and though they want nothing, yet they are not at ease, yea, more troubled than those that are called out to conflict with real, yea, the greatest evils. Haman is an instance : he was one of the princes of the kingdom of Persia, flowing in wealth and all manner of delights, in degree of dignity and honour next the king himself, and flourishing in the hope of a numerous and fair issue ; yet because Mordecai, a poor Jew, did not do him expected reverence, ‘All this availeth me nothing,’ Esther v. 19. So soon can God send a worm into the fairest gourd, and a dissatisfaction into the most flourishing estate in the world, that men shall have no rest night and day, especially if a spark of his wrath light into the conscience : Ps. xxxix. 11, ‘When thou with rebukes dost correct man for his iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth : surely every man is vanity, Selah.’ There is a secret moth that eateth up all their contentment ; they are under terror, discouragement, and want of peace : God teacheth them that nothing can be satisfactorily enjoyed apart from his blessed self : ‘A fire not blown shall consume them,’ Job xx. 26. Partly in the continuance of afflictions. God ordereth, taketh off, and layeth on afflictions at his own pleasure, and as he seeth it conducive to our profit. Variety of afflictions may meet together on the best and dearest of God’s children, there being in the best many corruptions both to be discovered and subdued, and many graces to be tried : 1 Peter i. 6, ‘Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations ;’ and James i. 2, ‘My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.’ One trouble worketh into the hands of another, and the succession of them is as necessary as the first stroke. We often force God to renew his corrections, *ab assuetis nulla fit passio*—things to which we are accustomed do not affect us ; therefore, under a general affliction there come in many special ones to rub up our sense, and make it work the better. Under public calamities we have a private one, and they come one in the neck of another like waves. When God hath begun he will make an end, and bring his discipline to some more comfortable and perfect issue. In all these things the wisdom of God is to be observed.

4. The affliction so sent hath a notable use to reduce us to a sense and care of our duty. This is often pressed in the scripture : ‘The fruit of all shall be to take away their sin.’ Afflictions are compared in scripture to fire that purgeth away our dross : 1 Peter i. 7, ‘Now for a season, if need be, ye are in manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth,

though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.' To the fan that driveth away the chaff: Mark iii. 12, 'Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' To a pruning-hook, that cutteth off the luxuriant branches, and maketh the others that remain the more fruitful: John xv. 2, 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit.' To physic, that purgeth away the sick matter: Isa. xxvii. 9, 'By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.' To ploughing and harrowing of the ground, that destroyeth the ill weeds, and fitteth it to receive the good seed: Jer. iv. 3, 'Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.' To the file that worketh off our rust, and the flail that maketh our husk fly off. So Heb. xii. 11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised therewith.' The affliction hath a necessary tendency to so comfortable an effect. But because generals do but beat the air, and do not so well fit themselves in the mind, I shall show you it is either the means of our first conversion, or subservient to the reformation of those that are converted.

[1.] It is a means of our first conversion. How many begin with God upon the occasion of afflictions! The time of sorrows is a time of loves. The hot furnace is Christ's workhouse, where he formeth the most excellent vessels of honour and praise for his own use. Manasseh, Paul, and the jailer in the Acts, were all chosen in the fire; as the Lord saith, Isa. xlviii. 10, 'I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction,' where God began to discover his choice by his working on their affections. All men are vessels capable of any form, therefore God puts them into the furnace. Most of us are taken in our month, as the ram that Abraham offered was caught in the thickets. When stout and stubborn sinners are broken with want and distress, then they come to themselves, and think of returning to their Father: Luke xv. 17, 18, 'And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father,' &c. Afflictions make us more serious; conscience is then apt to work. Before, we were guided by the wisdom of the flesh, and governed by our carnal appetite, never minded heavenly things, till God get us under, and then we bethink ourselves. Have you never known any instance in this kind? that whilst they were young, rich, strong, noble, all their humour was for vain pleasure, to-day hunting, to-morrow hawking, another day feasting, and then brawling, fighting, drinking, carousing, dancing; all the warnings of parents, the good counsel of tutors and governors, the grave exhortations of ministers and preachers, will do no good upon them; they are always wandering up and down from God and from themselves, cannot endure a thought of God, of death, of heaven, of hell, of judgment to come; but when God casts them once into some grievous disease, or some great trouble, they begin to come to themselves, and then they that would hear nothing,

understand nothing, despised all grave and gracious counsel given, as if it did not belong to them, scoffed at admonitions, thought the day lost in which they had not acted some sin or other, when the cross preacheth, and some grievous calamity is upon them, then conscience beginneth to work, and this bringeth to remembrance all that they have heard before, then they come to themselves, and would fain if they could come to Christ. Sharp affliction is a sound, powerful, rousing teacher : Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 'And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction, then he showeth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded.' Grace worketh in a powerful but yet in a moral way, congruously but forcibly, and by a fit accommodation of circumstances. One place more : Jer. xxxi. 18, 'Truly I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke : turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; for thou art the Lord my God.' Affliction awakeneth serious reflections upon our ways ; therefore take heed what ye do with the convictions that arise upon afflictions ; to slight them is dangerous. Nothing breedeth hardness of heart so much as the smothering of convictions. Iron often heated grows the harder. On the other side, see they do not degenerate into despair, either the raging despair which terrifieth, or the sottish despair which stupefieth : Jer. xviii. 12, 'They said, There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.' The middle between both is a holy sensibleness of our condition, which is a good preparation for the great duties of the gospel. The work of conversion is at first difficult and troublesome, but pass over this brunt, and all things will be sweet and easy : the bullock at first yoking is most unruly, and fire at the first kindling casts forth most smoke ; so when sin is revived it brings forth death : Rom. vii. 9, 'For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' But yet cherish the work till God speak peace upon sound terms.

[2.] It is a great help to those that are converted already. How many are reduced to a more serious, lively practice of godliness by their troubles ! We are rash, inconsiderate, inattentive to our duty, but the rod maketh us cautious and diligent. We follow the world, not the word of God ; the vanities thereof take us off from minding the promises or precepts of the word, till the affliction cometh. In short, there are none of us so tamed and subdued to God but that we need to be tamed more. We are all for carnal liberty ; there is a wantonness in us. We are high-minded, earthly-minded, till God come with his scourge to reclaim us. He chasteneth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness, Heb. xii. 10 ; some lust still needeth mortifying, or some grace needeth exercising ; our pride needs to be mortified, or our affections to be weaned from the world. The almond-tree is made more fruitful by driving nails into it, because that letteth out a noxious gum that hindereth its fruitfulness ; so when God would have you thrive more, he makes you feel the sharpness of affliction. You have heard Plutarch's story of Jason of Chærea, that had his imposthume let out by a casual wound. There is some corruption God would let out. We are apt to set up our rest here, and

therefore we need to be disturbed, to have the world crucified to us, Gal. vi. 14, that the cumber of the world may drive us to seek for rest where it is only to be found, and to humble us by outward defects, that we may look after inward abundance, that, by being poor in this world, we may be rich in faith, James ii. 5, and having nothing in the creature, we may possess all things in God, 2 Cor. vi. 10, and be enlarged inwardly as we are straitened outwardly; in short, that we may be oftener with God. God sent a tempest after Jonah. Absalom set Joab's barley-field on fire, and then he came to him, 2 Sam. xiv. 30. Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them;' Hosea v. 15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.' It were endless to run out in discourses of this nature.

5. The affliction of itself doth not work thus, but as sanctified and accompanied with the Spirit of God. If the affliction of itself and by itself would do it, it would do so always, but that we see by experience it doth not. In itself it is an evil and a pain that is the consequent and the fruit of sin, and so breedeth impatience, despair, murmuring, and blasphemy against God. As it is a legal curse, other fruit cannot be expected of it but reviving terrors of heart and repinings against the sovereignty of God. We see often the same affliction that maketh one humble, maketh another raging; the same poverty that maketh one full of dependence upon God, maketh another full of shifts and evil courses whereby to supply his want. No; it is understood of sanctified crosses, when grace goeth along with them to bless them to us: Jer. xxxi. 19, 'Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth;' after God had wrought a gracious change in him by his afflicting hand and Spirit working together. So Ps. xciv. 12, 'Blessed is he whom thou chastenest, and instructest out of thy law.' The rod must be expounded by the word, and both must be effectually applied by the Spirit. Grace is God's immediate creature and production; he useth subservient means and helps, sometimes the word, sometimes the rod, sometimes both; but neither doth anything without his Spirit.

6. This benefit, though gotten by sharp afflictions, should be owned, and thankfully acknowledged as a great testimony and expression of God's love to us. So doth David to the praise of God. It is a branch that belongeth to the thanksgiving mentioned ver. 65, 'Thou hast done well with thy servant, according to thy word;'—the first of this octonary. We are prejudiced against the cross out of a self-love, a mistaken self-love; we love ourselves more than we love God, and the ease of the body more than the welfare of the soul, and the world more than heaven, and our temporal pleasure and contentment more than our spiritual and eternal benefit; and therefore we cannot endure to hear of the cross, much more to bear it. Oh! this doth not become men; surely it doth not become Christians! Would you have your consolation here? Luke xvi.; your portion here? Ps. vii. Would you value yourselves by the flourishing of the outward man, or the renewing of the inward man? 2 Cor. iv. 16. Should we be so impatient of

the cross? Afflictions are bitter to present sense, but yet they are healthful to the soul: they are not so bitter in present feeling as they will be sweet in the after-fruits. Now, we are greatly unthankful to God, if the bitterness be not lessened and tempered by this fruit and profit. Consider, when are we most miserable? When we go astray, or when we are reduced into the right way? when we are engaged in a rebellion against God, or when brought into a sense of our duty? Hosea iv. 17, 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.' *Let him alone* is the heaviest judgment that can be laid upon a poor creature. Providence, conscience, ministry let him alone; the case is desperate, and we are incorrigible when we are left to our own ways. There needeth no more to make our case miserable and sad than to be suffered to go on in sin without let and restraint; there is no hope of such: God seemeth to cast them off, and to desert and leave them to their own lusts. It is evident he mindeth not their salvation, but leaveth them to the world, to be condemned with the world. Well, then, doth God do the elect any harm when he casts them into great troubles? If we use violence to a man that is ready to be drowned, and, in pulling him out of the waters, should break an arm or a leg, would he not be thankful? Yes, saith he, I can dispense with that, for you have saved my life. So may God's children bless his name. O blessed providence! I had been a witless fool, and gone on in a course of sin, if God had not awakened me. A philosopher could say that he never made better voyage than when he suffered shipwreck, because then he began to apply himself to the study of wisdom: surely a Christian should say, Blessed be God that he laid his chastenings upon me, and brought me to a serious heavenly mind: I should otherwise have been a carnal fool, as others are. Wicked men are left to their own swing. When the case of the sick is desperate, physicians let them alone, give them leave to take anything they have a mind unto. The apostle speaketh much to this purpose: Heb. xii. 6, 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' Sharp afflictions, which in their visible appearance seem tokens of God's hatred, are rather tokens of his love. There is a twofold love of God—*Amor benevolentie et complacentie*—the love of good-will, whereby the Lord out of the purposes of his own free grace doth regenerate us, and adopt us into his family; and having loved us, and made us amiable, he doth then delight in us. The text alleged may be expounded of either. Oh! then, why do not we more own God in our afflictions? If he use us a little hardly, it is not an argument of his hatred, but his love. Thou dardest not pray, Lord, let me have my worldly comforts, though they damn me; let me not be afflicted, though it will do me good. And if thou dardest not pray so, will you repine when God seeth this course necessary for us, and taketh away the fuel of our lusts? Is it not a good exchange to part with outward comforts for inward holiness? If he take away our quiet, and give us peace of conscience, our worldly goods, and give us true riches, have we cause to complain? If outward wants be recompensed with an abundance of inward grace, if we have less of the world that we may have more of God, a healthy soul in a sickly body, it is just matter of thanksgiving: 3 John 2, 'I wish, above all things, that thou

mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.' We can subscribe to this in the general ; all will affirm that afflictions are profitable, and that it is a good thing to be patient and submissive under them ; but when any cross cometh to knock at our door, we are loath to give it entrance ; and if it thrust in upon us, we fret and fume, and our souls sit uneasy, and all because we are addicted so unreasonably to the ease of the flesh, the quiet, happiness, and welfare of the carnal life, and have so little regard to life spiritual.

7. At the first coming of the affliction we do not see this benefit so well as in the review of the whole dispensation : ' Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now I have kept thy word.' So Heb. xii. 11, ' Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby.' There is a perfect opposition ; the root and the fruit are opposed—affliction and fruit of righteousness, the quality of the root, and the quality of the fruit : οὐ χαρὰς εἶναι ἀλλὰ λύπης, καρπὸν εἰρηνικόν, the appearance and the reality, δοκεῖ and ἀποδίδωσις. Then the season, πρὸς τὸ παρὸν and ὕστερον. God's physic must have time to work. At first it may not be so, or at least not appear ; for things are before they appear or can be observed for the present. We must tarry God's leisure, and be content with his blows, till we feel the benefit of them : it is first matter of faith, and then of feeling ; though we do not presently understand why everything is done, we must wait. The hand on the dial doth not seem to stir, yet it keeps its course ; while it is passing we see it not, but that it hath passed from one hour to another is evident. So is God's work with the soul ; and spiritual renovation and increase is not so sensible at the first though it be carried on *ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα*, day by day, 2 Cor. iv. 16, but in view of the whole it will appear. What are we the better ? Doth sin decay ? and what sin ? Do we find it otherwise with us than it was before ?

8. This profit is not only when the affliction is upon us, but after it is over the fruit of it must remain. Their qualms and pangs most have : Ps. lxxviii. 34–37, ' When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God : and they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues ; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.' Many have a little forced religion in their extremities, but it weareth off with their trouble. Sin is but suspended for a while, and the devil chained up ; they are very good under the rod, they are frightened to it ; but after the deliverance cometh, the more profane. It is true many may begin with God in their troubles, and their necessities drive them to the throne of grace ; and Christ had never heard of many, if fevers and palsies, and possessions and blindness, deafness and dumbness, had not brought them unto him, thanks to the disease. But if a course of godliness begins upon these occasions, and continues afterwards, God will accept it ; he is willing to receive us upon any terms. Men will say, You come to me in your extremity ; but he doth not upbraid us, provided we will come so as to abide with him, and will not turn the back upon him when our turn is



served. If you do so, take heed ; God hath other judgments to reach you : as John said, Mat. iii. 11, 12, ‘He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear ; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire : whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’ So that which cometh after is mightier than that which went before ; the last judgment is the heaviest : ‘The axe is laid to the root of the tree ; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire,’ Mat. iii. 10. He will not only lop off the branches, but strike at the root ; as the Sodomites that escaped the sword of Chedorlaomer perished by fire from heaven. The Israelites that were not drowned in the Red Sea, were stung to death by fiery serpents : ‘As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him ; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him,’ Amos v. 19. When you avoid one judgment, you may meet another, and find a stroke where you think yourselves most secure.

*Use 1.* Let us consider these things, that we may profit by all the chastenings of the Lord. It is now a time of affliction, both as to public judgments and as to the private condition of many of the people of God. We have been long straying from God, from our duty, from one another ; it was high time for the Lord to take his rod in his hand, and to scourge us home again. Upon these three nations there is somewhat of God’s three great judgments—war, pestilence, and famine ; they are all dreadful. The pestilence is such a judgment as turneth populous cities into deserts and solitudes in a short time ; then one cannot help another : riches and honours profit nothing then, and friends and kinsfolks stand afar off : many die without any spiritual helps. In war, what destructions and slaughters, expense of blood and treasure ! In famine, you feel yourselves to die without a disease, know not where to have fuel to allay and feed the fire which nature hath kindled in your bodies. But, blessed be God, all these are in moderation. Pestilence doth not ragingly spread, the war is at a distance, the famine only a scarcity. Before God stirreth up all his wrath, he observeth what we do with these beginnings. Besides, the people of God are involved in a heap of miseries on all hands ; the oppressed, dejected party burdened with jealousies, and ready to be haled to prison and put under restraint. Holy men sometimes have personal afflictions added to the public calamities. Jeremiah was cast into the dungeon when the city was besieged. The chaff and grain both are threshed together, but the grain is, besides, ground in the mill and baked in the oven. Besides, who thinks of his strayings, and returning with a more serious resolution to his duty ? If we would profit by afflictions we must avoid both the faulty extremes : Heb. xii. 5, ‘My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.’ Slighting and fainting must be avoided.

1. Let us not slight them. When we bear them with a stupid senseless mind, surely that hindereth all profit. None can endure to have their anger despised, no more than their love : a father is displeased when his child slights his correction. That we may not slight it, let us consider:—

[1.] Their author, God. We think them fortuitous, from chance,

but they 'do not rise out of the dust,' Job v. 6. Whoever be the instruments, or whatever be the means, the wise God hath the whole ordering of it. He is the first cause; he is to be sought to, he is to be appeased, if we would stop evil at the fountain-head; for all creatures willingly or unwillingly obey him, and are subject to his empire and government: Amos iii. 6, 'Is there any evil in the city, and I have not done it, saith the Lord?' Isa. xlv. 7, 'I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things;' Job i. 21, 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.'

[2.] The meritorious cause is sin: Lam. iii. 39, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?' That first brought mischief into the world, and still continueth it. God never afflicts without a cause; either we need it, or we deserve it: Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.' We should search for the particular sins that provoke God to afflict us; for while we only speak of sin in general, we do but inveigh against a notion, and personate mourning; but those we can charge upon ourselves are most proper and powerful to break the heart.

[3.] The end is our repentance and amendment, to correct sin past, or prevent sin to come.

(1.) For correction, to make us more penitent for sin past. We being in a lower sphere of understanding, know things better by their effects than their nature: Jer. ii. 19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts.' Moral evil is represented to us by natural evil; pain sheweth what sin is.

(2.) For prevention of sin for time to come. The smart should make us cautious and watchful against sin: Josh. xxii. 17, 18, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed to this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord, but that ye must turn away this day from following the Lord? And it will be, seeing ye rebel to-day against the Lord, that to-morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.' Afflictions also should stir up in us heavenly thoughts, heavenly desires, and more lively diligence in the exercise of those graces which before lay dormant in us through our neglect. Only I must tell you, that sometimes the affliction may be merely for prevention, and may go before sin. God hath always a cause, but he doth not always suppose a fault in act, but sometimes in possibility; looking into thy actions or thy temper, what thou hast done, or wouldst do, to cure or prevent a distemper in thy spirit, as well as a disorder in thy conversation.

2. Let us not faint. When the afflictions sit close and near, then we are apt to fall into the other extreme, to be dejected out of measure. An over-sense worketh on our anger, and then it is fretting; or on our sorrow, and then it is fainting. The former is the worse of the two, for that is to set up an anti-providence, or a being displeased with God's government, a practical disowning of his greatness and justice.

All men will acknowledge God is great, yet what worm is there will submit to him any further than themselves please? We say we deserve nothing but evil from his hands, but yet are maddened like wild bulls in a net when the goad is in our sides. We say, Any other cross but this. We do not dislike trial, but this trial that is upon us. God thought this fittest for us: our murmuring will not ease our trouble, but increase and continue it. Certainly without submission troubles will do us no good: 'Patience worketh experience,' Rom. v. 4. Fainting, properly so taken, is when we look upon God's work through a false glass, and mis-expound his dispensation. God puts forth his hand, not to thrust us off, but pull us to himself: Hosea v. 15, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.' The very affliction giveth us hope that he will not let us go on securely in our sins. It is not our being afflicted and made miserable by trouble which God aimeth at: Lam. iii. 33, 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.' Nor is it that which we should chiefly be affected with under affliction. We should mind another lesson taught by it, which if we neglect, our sense of trouble will be but perplexing. It is to subdue sin, to make us more mindful of heavenly things, to have our hearts humbled. No affliction should be counted intolerable which helpeth to purge our sin. We evidence our love to sin if we are overmuch troubled at it, or peevishly quarrel with God. Fainting sheweth our weakness: Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.'

Use 2. Something concerning the profit of it: value it, observe it.

1. Value it. What do you count a profit or benefit, to flow in wealth, or excel in grace; to live in ease, or to be kept in a holy, heavenly, and humble frame? Heb. xii. 10, 'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' Not that we might have the pelf of this world, but that we might be partakers of his holiness. It is better to have holiness than to have health, wealth, and honour; the sanctification of an affliction is better than to have deliverance out of it. Deliverance taketh away *malum naturale*—some penal evil which God bringeth upon us; sanctification, *malum morale*—the greatest evil, which is sin. I am sure this is that which we should look after. Deliverance is God's work, the improvement of the trouble is our duty: do you mind your work, and God will not be wanting to do his part.

2. Observe it, and see how the rod worketh, what thoughts it begets in you, what resolutions it stirreth up, what solaces you run to, and seek after to this end.

[1.] In what temper and frame of heart you were when the affliction surprised you. Usually affliction treadeth upon the heels of some sin. If it be open, and in our practice, it discovereth itself; if secret, and in the frame of our hearts, it must be searched after. Usually it is some slightness and carelessness of spiritual and heavenly things; your hearts were grown in love with the world, you began to neglect your souls, grew more cold in the love of God, more formal in prayer, and indifferent as to your spiritual estate; you did not watch over your

hearts; therefore the holy and jealous God cometh and awakeneth you by his smarting scourge. The foregoing distemper observed, will help you to state your profit.

[2.] How that is cured by God's discipline, or what benefit you have gotten by it? You are more diligent in your duty, careful in your preparations for a better state. A Christian should be able to give an account of the methods by which God bringeth him to heaven. David could give an account, as here, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word;' and ver. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes;' not good that I should be, as accepting the punishment, but that I have been, as owning the profit.

## SERMON LXXVII.

*Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.*—VER. 68.

THE Psalmist in the first verse of this portion had expressed himself in a way of thankfulness to God for his goodness, ver. 65; then interrupteth his thanksgiving a little, and beggeth the continuance of the same goodness, ver. 66; and after that returneth again to show how this good came by means of affliction, ver. 67; and therefore once more praiseth God for his goodness, and reneweth his suit. God is ever good to his people, but most sensibly they have proof of it in their afflictions, when to appearance he seemeth to deal hardly with them; yet all that while he doth them good. Sanctification of afflictions is a greater mercy than deliverance out of them. We may learn our duty by the discipline of a smart rod: 'Thou dealest well with thy servant;' for, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I have kept thy word.' And then he falleth into thanksgiving and prayer again, 'Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.' Here is—

1. A compellation and confession of God's goodness, both in his nature and actions.

2. A petition for grace, *teach me thy statutes.*

First, The compellation used to God, 'Thou art good, and doest good.' Divers have been the glosses of interpreters upon these words. Aben Ezra, *Bonus es non petenti, et benefacis petenti*—thou art good to them that ask not, but surely dost good to them that ask. Others, thou art good in this world, dost good in the world to come. Others better, God is good of himself and doeth good to us. Goodness is communicative of itself; he is good, that noteth his nature and inclination; and he doeth good, that noteth his work, whereby he giveth proof of his goodness. *Unumquodque operatur secundum suam formam*—everything acteth according to its nature. So doth God; as is his being, so is his operation; he is good, and doeth good; the work must needs be answerable to the workman. The point is:—

*Doct.* It becometh all those that have to do with God to have a deep sense of his goodness.

1. What is God's goodness.

2. How it is manifested to us.

3. Why those that come to God should have a deep sense of it.

*First*, What is God's goodness? There is a threefold goodness ascribed by divines to God:—

1. His natural goodness, which is the natural perfection of his being.

2. His moral goodness, which is the moral perfection of his being.

3. His beneficial communicative goodness, called otherwise his benignity, which is of chief regard in this place. Besides the perfection and excellency of his nature, there is his will and self-propension to diffuse his benefits; the perfection of his nature is his natural and moral goodness, the other his bounty. All must be spoken to distinctly.

1. God is naturally good. There is such an absolute perfection in his nature and being, that nothing is wanting to it or defective in it, and nothing can be added to it to make it better. As Philo saith, *Ὁ ὄντως ὢν τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαθόν*—the first being must needs be the first good. As soon as we conceive there is a God, we presently conceive that he is good. In this sense it is said, Mark x. 18, 'Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, and that is God.' He is good of himself, good in himself, yea, good itself. There is none good above him, or besides him, or beyond him; it is all from him and in him, if it be good. He is primitively and originally good, *αὐτᾶγαθος*, good of himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature's good is a superadded quality; in him it is his essence. He is infinitely good; the creature's goodness is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean and sea, or gathering together of goodness. He cannot be better, he is *summum bonum*—the chiefest good; other things are good in subordination to him, and according to that use and proportion they bear to him. He is not good as the means, but as the end. Things good as the means are only good in order, proportion, measure, and respect; but God is absolutely good; beyond God, there is nothing to be sought or aimed at; if we enjoy him we enjoy all good to make us completely happy. He is eternally and immutably good, for he cannot be less good than he is; as there can be no addition made to him, so no subtraction, or ought taken from him.

2. God is morally good, that is, the fountain and pattern of all that virtuous goodness which is in the creatures. So Ps. xxv. 8, 'Good and upright is the Lord;' and Exod. xxxiii. 19, 'He said, I will make all my goodness go before thee, and proclaim my name.' As the creature hath a natural goodness of beauty, power, dominion, wisdom, so it hath a moral goodness of purity and holiness. Accordingly we must conceive in God his holiness, purity, veracity, justice, as his moral perfection and goodness, as his will is the supreme pattern and fountain of all these things in the creature.

3. God is communicatively and beneficially good; that implieth his bounty and beneficence, or his will and self-propension to diffuse his benefits. It may be explained by these considerations:—

[1.] That God hath in him whatsoever is useful and comfortable to us. That is one notion we apprehend him by, that he is 'God all-sufficient,' Gen. xvii. 1, or that he hath all things at command, to do

for us as our necessities shall require: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;' Gen. xv. 1, 'Fear not, Abraham; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.' The privative and positive part is expressed in both these places, whether we need life or comfort, or would be protected from all dangers, bodily or spiritual. Why should we seek good out of God? Riches, pleasures, honours might more happily be had if we could possess all things in God: Jer. ii. 13, 'My people have committed two great evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.' God is the fountain of all those things which are necessary to give us all good and defend us from all evil. *Possidet possidentem omnia:* 2 Cor. vi. 10, 'As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.'

[2.] That he hath a strong inclination to let out his fulness, and is ready to do good upon all occasions: 'Thou art good and dost good.' *BONUS est primum, et potissimum nomen Dei*, saith Damascene—the chiefest name by which we conceive of God is his goodness. By that we know him, for that we love him and make our addresses to him: we admire him for his other titles and attributes, but this doth first insinuate with us, and invite our respects to him. The first means by which the devil sought to loosen man from God was by weakening the conceit of his goodness; and the great ground of all our commerce with him is that God is a good God: Ps. c. 4, 5, 'Enter ye into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name; for the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting.' He presently inviteth the world to come to him, because he is good. As God is all-sufficient in himself, so he is communicative of his riches unto his creatures, and most of all to his own people. Goodness is communicative, it diffuseth itself, as the sun doth light, or as the fountain poureth out waters.

[3.] He is the fountain of all that good we have or are. We have nothing but what we have from God: James i. 17, 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights;' and Jer. ii. 13, he is called 'the fountain of living waters.' As rivers are supplied by the sea, so the gathering together of all goodness is in God. All candles are lighted at his torch; there is nothing in the creature but what is derived from him: 'Who hath given to him first, and it shall be recompensed to him again?' Rom. xi. 35, as the sun oweth nothing to the beam, but the beam oweth all to the sun, and the sea oweth nothing to the river, but the river oweth all to the sea.

[4.] There will a time come when he will be 'all in all,' 1 Cor. xv. 28, when God will immediately and in a fuller latitude communicate himself to his creatures, and there will need nothing beside himself to make us happy. Here we enjoy God, but not fully or immediately. We enjoy him in his creatures, but it is at the second or third hand; the creature interposeth between him and us: Hosea ii. 21, 22, 'And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord; I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.' In ordinances it is but a little strength and comfort that we get, such

as is consistent with pain and sorrow; it is not full, because it is not immediate. A pipe cannot convey the whole fountain, nor the ordinances the full of God in Christ, only a little supply either as we need, or are able to receive; but then God will be all in all, he will do his work by himself; the narrowness of the means shall not straiten him, nor the weakness of the vessel hinder him to express the full of his goodness in full perfection.

*Secondly*, How is his goodness manifested to us?

1. In our creation, in that he did raise us up out of nothing to be what we are, and form us after his own image. God made us, not that he might be happy, but liberal, that there might be creatures to whom to communicate himself; our beings and faculties and powers were the fruits of his mere goodness. When God made the world, then was it verified, 'He is good, and doeth good,' Gen. i.; for as the goodness of his nature inclined him to make it, so his work was good: after every day's work there cometh in his approbation, Behold it was good; and when he had made man, and set him in a well-furnished world, and compared all his works together, then they were 'very good,' ver. 31. That he still fashioneth us in the womb, and raiseth us into that comely shape in which we afterwards appear, it is all the effect of his goodness.

2. In our redemption; therein he commendeth his love and goodness in providing such a remedy for lost sinners. There is *φιλανθρωπία*—Titus iii. 4, 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared.' In creation he showed himself *φιλάγγελος*; in redemption, *φιλάνθρωπος*. God is brought nearer to us as subsisting in our nature: 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'Great is the mystery godliness, God manifested in the flesh.' And so God had greater advantages to communicate himself to us in a more glorious way by the Redeemer, that we might for ever live in the admiration of his love.

3. In daily providence; so the goodness of God is twofold:—

[1.] Common and general to all creatures, especially to mankind: Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all, his tender mercy is over all his works.' Upon all things and all persons he bestoweth many common blessings, as natural life, being, health, wealth, beauty, strength, and supplies necessary for them. There are none of God's creatures but taste of his bounty, and have sufficient proof that a good God made them and preserveth them. The young ravens: Ps. cxlvii. 9, 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry,' *ἐπιβάλλει τοὺς νεόττους ἡ κόραξ*. So the wicked: Mat. v. 45, 'He maketh his sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust;' Acts xiv. 17, 'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, *ἀγαθοποιῶν*, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' These common mercies argue a good God that giveth them, though not always a good people that receiveth them. This goodness of God sheweth itself daily and bountifully.

[2.] Special; God is good to all, but not to all alike. So he is good to his people, whom he blesseth with spiritual and saving benefits. So Lam. iii. 25, 'The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the

soul that seeketh him.' So Ps. lxxxvi. 5, 'For thou, O Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.' For this kind of goodness, a qualification is necessary in the receiver. Satan will tell you God is a good God, but he leaveth out this—to those that love and fear him, and wait upon him. This peculiar goodness yieldeth spiritual and saving blessings, such as pardoning of sins: Isa. lv. 7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon;' instruction in the ways of God in the text, 'Thou art good, and doest good: teach me thy statutes.' And, in short, all the means and helps that are necessary unto everlasting glory: 2 Thes. i. 11, 'Wherefore also we pray always for you, that God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.' Once more, to the objects of his peculiar love common blessings are given in love, and with an aim at our good: Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' So that the ordinary favours which others enjoy are sanctified to them. They are from love, and *in bonum*, for good. God is ready to help them onwards to their everlasting hopes, and that estate which they expect in the world to come, where, in the arms of God, they shall be blessed for evermore.

*Thirdly*, Why ought those that come to God to have a deep sense of this?

1. What is this deep sense?

[1.] It must be the fruit of faith, believing God's being and bounty, or else it will have no force and authority upon us: Heb. xi. 6, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' If we have but cold notions or dead opinions of the goodness of God, they will have little power on us. It is faith sets all things awork; there must be a sound belief of these things if we would practically improve them.

[2.] It must be the fruit of constant observation of the effects of his goodness vouchsafed to us, so that we may give our thanks and praise for all that good we do enjoy. Careless spirits are not sensible of the hand of providence, never take notice of good or evil; therefore the Psalmist saith, Ps. cvii. 8, 'Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!' He repeateth the same, ver. 15, 21, 31, and concludeth all ver. 43, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.' We are more backward to the observation of the goodness of God than we are to any duty; therefore doth the Psalmist stir up all sorts of persons to note the invisible hand of providence that reacheth out supplies to them: whether they have business by sea or by land, whether in sickness or in health, in all the varieties of the present life, he is still stirring them up to mind their mercies, and inviteth them by God's late favours to the praise and acknowledgment of his goodness, his communicating his goodness so freely to undeserving and ill-deserving persons, and following them with more and more mercies. There are none of us but have reasons enough and obligations enough lying upon us to make observations in



this kind; every experience and new proof should put us upon this acknowledgment. Certainly they are the wisest sort of men who do observe God's providence.

[3.] It is the fruit of deep and ponderous meditation. Glances never warm the heart; it is our serious and deliberate thoughts which affect us; therefore the children of God should be thinking of his goodness displayed in all his works, especially in redemption by Christ: Eph. iii. 18, 19, 'To comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of God which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.' To be ravished with love, affected with love, always thinking of love, speaking of love, expressing their sense of love, that is a work becoming saints. We should often meditate upon and set our minds awork upon this goodness by frequent and serious thoughts of it, for the strengthening of our faith and quickening of our love to God.

[4.] It is the fruit of inward and spiritual taste: 1 Peter ii. 3, 'If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' So Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.' Do not be content with hearsay, but get a taste; that is, an inward and experimental knowledge of the goodness of God in Christ, that we may know it, not only by guess and imagination, but by sense and feeling: the one half of it cannot be told you. *Optima demonstratio est a sensibus.*

2. Why we need to labour so much after a deep sense of this.

[1.] To check our natural legalism, and the dark and distrustful prejudices of our own hearts. There is a secret guiltiness in us that breedeth misgiving thoughts of God. We have many suspicious thoughts of him, being guilty creatures, because we only represent him to ourselves as a consuming fire, or as clothed with justice and vengeance, watching an opportunity of doing us harm, and shut out all thoughts of goodness and mercy; yet when he proclaimeth his name, he telleth Moses he would make his goodness pass before him. God is wonderfully good in his nature, and he delighteth in the communications of his goodness: nothing pleaseth him better than his word; the business of it is to represent him good. Mercy pleaseth him: Micah vii. 18, 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?' He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.' 'Mercy rejoiceth over judgment;' Ps. cxviii. 1, 'Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; because his mercy endureth for ever.' His works speak him good; there is no part of the world that we can set our eyes upon but it offereth matter of praise to God for his bounty to his creatures, especially to man: Ps. xxxiii. 5, 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord;' the whole earth is full of his goodness, and will you draw an ill picture of him in your minds, as if he were harsh and severe, and his service were intolerable? No; 'The Lord is good, and doth good.'

[2.] That we may justify God against the prejudices of the unbelieving world, and invite them from our own experience to make trial of God. So Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.' A report of a report signifieth little; what we have found ourselves we can confidently re-

commend to others. When we have felt his dealing with ourselves, we can entreat them to see what waiting upon God will come to ; let any man make the experiment, keep close to God in obedience and reliance, and he shall find him to be a gracious master ; others that have dark thoughts of God, like the spies, they bring an ill report upon his ways.

[3.] To humble the creature. We have not a right sight of God unless all created perfections vanish before him. The creatures are but some shadows, pictures, resemblances, or equivocal shapes of God. Whatever name they have of good, wise, strong, beautiful, true, or such like, it is but a borrowed speech from God, whose image they have ; and if the creature usurpeth its being as originally belonging to themselves, it is as if the picture should call itself a true and living man. ‘I am, and there is none beside me,’ holdeth true of God’s being, and all his perfections, natural or moral. The creatures may be good, or better, or best, compared among themselves ; but we are frail and nothing if compared with God : ‘There is none good but one, and that is God.’ That goodness which we have in participation from him will appear no goodness in comparison of him. ‘The heavens themselves are not clean in his sight :’ Job xxv. 5, 6, ‘Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not ; yea the stars are not pure in his sight : how much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm ?’ And elsewhere, Job iv. 18, ‘Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly’—mutability in the angelical nature. When Isaiah had seen God, and heard the angels cry out, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts,’ Isa. vi. 5, ‘Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ; and mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts.’ The consideration of his goodness obscureth all the glory and praise of the creature ; as when the sun is up the lustre of the stars is no more seen. When we compare ourselves with one another, one may be called bad, another good ; but with God no man is good. He is good, but we are evil ; he is heaven, but we are hell ; he is all perfection, we are all weakness. In respect of his goodness, nothing in us deserveth that name, as lesser light in the view of a greater is darkness. When Job had seen God, he could not look upon himself with any patience : Job xlii. 5, 6, ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee : wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.’ That is a true sight of God that abaseth and lesseneth all things besides God, not only in opinion, but in affection and estimation. Alas ! the best of us are scarce dark shadows of his goodness.

[4.] God’s goodness is the life of our faith and trust. So long as the goodness of God endureth for ever, we have no cause to be discouraged. If we want direction, in the text it is said, ‘Thou art good, and dost good ; teach me thy statutes.’ If we want support and deliverance, Nahum i. 7, ‘The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him.’ In every strait the people of God find him to be a good God. When we feel the burden of sin, and fear God’s wrath, Ps. lxxxvi. 5, ‘The Lord is good, and ready to forgive ; and plenteous in mercy to all them that call

upon him.' David, when his old sins troubled him, the sins of his youth, Ps. xxv. 7, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.' When his enemies consulted his ruin, Ps. li. 1, 'Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually.' They cannot take away the goodness of God from you, whatever they plot or purpose against you. Thus may faith triumph in all distresses upon the sense of the goodness of God. In the agonies of death, the goodness of God will be your support. *Non sic vixi ut pudeat me inter vos vivere; nec mori timeo, quia bonum habeo Dominum.* We have a good master, who will not see his servants unrewarded. The goodness of God, and his readiness to be gracious to every one that cometh to him, is the fountain of the saint's hope, strength, and consolation.

[5.] The goodness of God is the great motive and invitation to repentance: Rom. ii. 4, 'Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' How so? God is good, but not to those that continue in their sins: Ps. lxxviii. 19-21, 'Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation, Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death: but God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.' If goodness be despised, it will be turned into fury. How great soever the riches of the Lord's bounty and grace offered in Christ are, yet an impenitent sinner will not escape unpunished. God is good; oh! come, try, and see how good he will be to you, if you will turn and submit to him. There is hope offered, and goodness hath waited to save you; so that now you may seek his favour with hope to speed. While he sits upon the throne of grace, and alloweth the plea of the new covenant, do not stand off against mercies. God hath laid out the riches of his gracious goodness upon a design to save lost sinners; and will you turn back upon him, and despise all his goodness provided for you in Christ? In point of gratitude, the least kindness done men melteth them as coals of fire. The borrower is servant to the lender. God hath not only lent us, but given us all that we have; therefore it should break our hearts with sorrow and remorse that we should offend a God so good, so bountiful, so merciful. The odiousness of sin doth most appear in the unkindness of it; that infinite goodness hath been abused, and infinite goodness despised, and that you are willing to lose your part in infinite goodness, rather than not satisfy some base lust, or look after some trifling vanity. Saul wept at the thoughts of David's kindness, 1 Sam. xxiv. 16. Every man will condemn the wrongs done to one that hath done us no evil, but much good; and will you sin against God, who is so good in himself, so good to all his creatures, and so good to you, and waiteth to be better and more gracious; and return evil for all his good, and requite his love with nothing but unkindness and provocation? Oh, be ashamed of all these things! What heart is that that can offend, and so willingly offend, so good a God! Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God' (there is argument and endear-

ment enough in that) 'that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service,' that ye consecrate, dedicate yourselves to his glory, address yourselves cheerfully to his service. Let the soul be warmed into an earnest resolution to please him for the future, lest you make goodness your enemy, and justice take up the quarrel of abused grace.

[6.] The goodness of God is the great argument to move us to love God. If he be good, he is worthy to be loved, and that with a superlative love; for God is both the object and the measure of love. A less good should be loved less, and a greater good more. All that is not God is but a finite and limited good, and must be loved accordingly. God only is infinite and eternal, and therefore he is to be loved of all, and above all, with our chiefest and most worthy love, by preferring his glory above all things that are dear to us, and being content for his sake to part with all that we have in the world. But if any lower thing prevail with us, we prefer it before God, and so condemn his goodness in comparison of it. If the object of love be good, none so properly deserveth our love as God. For (1.) He is originally good, the fountain of all good; therefore if we leave God for the deceitful vanities of this present life, we leave 'the fountain of living waters,' for a 'broken cistern,' Jer. ii. 13. The creatures are but dry pits and broken cisterns. (2.) He is *summum bonum*, the chiefest good. Other things, what good they have, they have it from him; therefore it is infinitely better and greater in him than in them; all the good that is in the creature is but a spark of what is in God. If we find any good there, it is not to detain our affections, but to lead us to the greater good, not to hold us from him, but to lead us to him, as the streams lead to the fountain, and the steps of a ladder are not to stand still upon, but that we may ascend higher. There is goodness in the creature, but mixed with imperfection; the good is to draw to him, the imperfection to drive us off from the creature. (3.) He is infinitely good. Other things may busy us and vex us, but they cannot satisfy us; this alone sufficeth for health, wealth, peace, protection, grace, glory. Necessities that are not satisfied in God are but fancies, and the desires that are hurried out after them, apart from God, are not to be satisfied, but mortified. If we have not enough in God, it is not the default of our portion, but the distemper of our hearts. In choosing God for our portion, one hath not the less because another enjoyeth it with him: here is a sharing without division, and a partaking without the prejudice of copartners. We straiten others in worldly things so much as we are enlarged ourselves; finite things cannot be divided, but they must be lessened; they are not large enough to be parted; but every one possesseth all that is good in God who hath God for his portion; as the same speech may be heard of all, and yet no man heareth the less because others hear it with him, or as no man hath the less light because the sun shineth on more than himself: the Lord is all in all; 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. Many a fair stream is drawn dry by being dispersed into several channels, but that which is infinite will suffice all. (4.) He is

eternally good : Ps. lxxiii. 26, 'God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' The good things of this life are perishing and of a short continuance ; we leave other good things when we come to take full possession of God. At death wicked men perceive their error, when the good they have chosen cometh to be taken from them ; but a man that hath chosen God then entereth into the full possession of him ; that which others shun, he longeth for, waiting for that time when the creature shall cease, and God shall be all in all. Oh ! let all these things persuade us to love God, and so to love him that our hearts may be drawn off from other things. Let us love him because of the goodness and amiableness of his nature, because of his bounty in our creation, redemption, and daily providence, and because he will be our God for ever.

[7.] God's goodness is our consolation and support in all afflictions. God is a gracious father, and all that he doth is acts of grace and goodness ; even the sharpest of his administrations are absolutely the best for us : Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Truly God is good to Israel ;' all his work is good ; as in the six days, so in constant providence, it is either good or it will turn to good : Rom. viii. 28, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' God may change our condition, yet he doth not change his affection to us ; he is all good, and doth that which we shall find good at length.

[8.] It is the ground of prayer ; if we lack any good thing, he hath it, and is ready to communicate it. The goodness of God, as it doth stir up desire in us, so hope ; as it stirreth a desire to communicate of his fulness, so a hope that surely the good God will hear us. He is not sparing of what he can do for us : James i. 5, 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' Our wants send us to the promises, and the promises to God.

*Use 1.* To press us to imitate our heavenly Father ; you should be good and do good, as he is good and doth good ; for every disposition in God should leave an answerable character and impression upon their souls that profess themselves to be made partakers of a divine nature ; therefore it should be our great care and study to be as good and do as much good as we possibly can. He is one like God that is good and doth good ; therefore still be doing good to all, especially to the household of faith : Gal. vi. 10, 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith ;' with Mat. v. 44, 45, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust ;' Luke vi. 35, 'But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again : and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest ; for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil ;' 2 Peter i. 7, 'Add to godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity.' Not doing good to our own party, or those of our friendship, but to all. So generally all good is to be done, as well as that of bounty and benefi-

cence : Luke vi. 45, 'A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things ;' and it is said of Barnabas, Acts xi. 24, 'He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.' A good man is always seeking to make others good, as fire turneth all things about it into fire. The title signifies one not only of a mild disposition, but of a holy, heavenly heart, that maketh it his business to honour God. So Joseph of Arimathea is said to be 'a good man, and a just ;' this is to be like God.

*Use 2.* Direction to you in the business of the Lord's supper : God is good, and doeth good.

1. Here you come to remember his goodness to you in Christ. Now the goodness of God should never be thought on, or commemorated, but your hearts should be raised in the wonder and admiration of it : Ps. xxxi. 19, 'Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee ; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee !' and Ps. xxxvi. 7, 'How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God ! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.' This should be delightful work to you, and not gone about with dead and careless hearts. We cannot express ourselves many times ; strong passions do not easily get a vent ; little things may be greated by us, but great things indeed strike us dumb. However, our hearts should be deeply affected and possessed with this ; we should be full of such admiring thoughts.

2. We come for a more intimate and renewed taste. By taste, I mean spiritual sense, to have 'the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given to us,' Rom. v. 5. We come to the feast of the soul that our hungry consciences may taste of the fatness of God's house, Ps. lxxv. 4 ; that our thirsty souls may drink of the rivers of his pleasure, Ps. xvi. 11 ; to have some pledge of the joys of heaven, if not to ravishment and sensible reviving, yet such as may put us out of relish with carnal vanities ; some gracious experiences that may make us long for more, and go away lauding God.

3. To stir up our love to God as the most lovely and suitable object to our souls ; in him is nothing but good. God is goodness itself : he is one that has deserved your love, and will satisfy and reward your love. All the good we have in an ordinance it is from him, and to lead up our souls to him. Our business now is to 'love God, who loved us first,' 1 John iv. 19 ; to love him by devoting ourselves to him, and to consecrate our all to his service.

4. To desire more communion with him, and to long after the blessed fruition of him, when God shall be all in all, not only be chief, but all, when we shall perfectly enjoy the infinite God, when the chiefest good will give us the greatest blessings, and an infinite eternal God will give us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The word, sacraments, and prayer convey but little to you in comparison of that, when God is object and means, and all things. The soul is then all for Christ, and Christ all for the soul. Your whole employment is to love him, live upon him. Here we give away some of our love, some of our thoughts and affections, on other things ; Christ, is crowded, hath not room to lay forth the glory of his grace ; but there is full scope to do it.

## SERMON LXXVIII.

*Teach me thy statutes.*—VER. 68.

SECONDLY, we come to David's petition, 'Teach me thy statutes;' which I shall be brief in, because it doth often occur in the verses of this psalm. David's petition is to understand the word that he might keep it. Teaching bringeth us under the power of what is taught, and increaseth sanctification both in heart and life, as well as illumination or information.

*Doct.* One chief thing which they that believe and have a sufficient apprehension of God's goodness should seek of him in this world, is understanding the way of salvation.

This request is enforced out of the former title and compellation.

1. Because the saving knowledge of his will is one principal effect of his bounty and beneficence. As he showeth love to man above other creatures, in that he gave him such a life as was light, John i. 4—that is, had reason and understanding joined with it—so to his people above other men, that he hath given them a saving knowledge of the way of salvation since sin: Ps. xxv. 8, 'Good and upright is the Lord; he will teach sinners the way.' It is a great discovery of God's goodness that he will teach sinners, a favour not vouchsafed to the fallen angels: it is more than if he gave us the wealth of the whole world; that will not conduce to such a high use and purpose as this. More of his good will and special love is seen in this, to teach us the way how to enjoy him. Eternal life is begun by this saving knowledge: John xvii. 3, 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.'

2. This is one principal way whereby we show our sense of God's goodness. That is a true apprehension of God's goodness which giveth us confidence and hope of the saving fruits of it, when, the oftener we think of it, the more of sanctification we seek to draw from this fountain of goodness. That is an idle speculation that doth not beget trust, an empty praise, a mere compliment that doth not produce a real confidence in God, that he will give us spiritual blessings when we heartily desire them. True knowledge of God's name breedeth trust: Ps. ix. 10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee;' and more particularly for this kind of benefit. It is a general encouragement: Mat. vii. 11, 'If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' But it is limited to the Spirit: Luke xi. 13, 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Spirit to them that ask it?' Without this faith there is no commerce with God.

3. It is an argument of the good temper of our souls not to serve our carnal turns, but promote the welfare of our souls, when we would enjoy and improve the goodness of God to get this benefit.

[1.] They are affected according to the value of the thing. Of all the fruits of God's goodness which a holy man would crave for himself

and challenge for his portion, this he thinketh fittest to be sought—sanctifying grace to understand and keep the law. If this be not the only, yet it is the chiefest benefit which they desire in the world. For other things, let God deal with them as he will; but they value this among the greatest things which God bestoweth on mankind. Observe here how much the spirit of God's children differeth from the spirit of the world; they account God hath dealt well with them when he bestoweth upon them wealth and honour: Ps. iv. 6, 'Who will show us any good?' but the other desire grace to know God's will, and to serve and please him: there is the thing they desire and seek after, as suiting their temper and constitution of soul. A man is known by his desires, as the temper of his body by his pulse.

[2.] They would not willingly sin against God, either out of ignorance or perverse affections; therefore, if God will direct them and assist them in the work of obedience, their great care and trouble is over. It is a good sign that a man hath a simple, honest spirit, when there is rooted in his heart a fear to offend God, and a care to please him. He may err in many things, but God accepts him as long as seeking knowledge in order to obedience, Eph. v. 15–17. All that God requireth, both for matter and manner, is, that we would not comply with sin; seeing the time is evil and full of snares, we should not be unwise in point of duty.

[3.] They have a holy jealousy of themselves. David desired to use every condition well, whether he were in prosperity or trouble. The context speaketh of afflictions that were sanctified; but a new condition might bring on a new alteration in the soul. Prosperity would make him forget God, and trouble overwhelm him, if God did not teach him. In what state soever we be, we must desire to be taught of God, otherwise we shall fail: Phil. iv. 11, 12, 'For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content: I know how to be abased, and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed.' Unless the Lord guide us, we shall be as Ephraim was, 'a cake not turned,' Hosea vii. 8, baked but on one side, quite dough and raw on the other side; fail in the next condition, though passed over one well.

[4.] A sense of the creature's mutability. Comparing it with the former verse, I observe, that though he kept God's commandments, yet he craveth further grace, and desireth that he may be still taught, because he knew not all that he might know, and was ready to err both in practice and judgment: and this must teach us to desire God's guidance and direction, not only when we have erred, but when we do well. Many, when they have smarted for their errors, will desire God to teach them; but David kept this continual dependence upon God for daily grace, both for turning away of evil, and also for doing good: Prov. iii. 5, 6, '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;' which we are to follow in our places and callings. We are apt to ascribe too much to our present frame and resolutions. God must still be called to for his counsel and blessing in every business.

[5.] An evangelical frame. He pleadeth not merit, appealeth not



to justice, but to God's grace and goodness. This should be the special groundwork of our prayers. 'The Lord doth all 'to the praise of his glorious grace,' Eph. i. 7; and he will not have that glory infringed, either in part or in whole. The Spirit of God is very tender of it in scripture, and we should be very tender of it in our addresses to God, that all conceits of our own worth be laid aside, and that we wholly fly to God's goodness and mercy. The whole work of sanctification, from its first step to its last period, is all of grace, all must be ascribed to God's free goodness.

[6.] The will of God revealed in scripture is a subject that is never perfectly known. While we are in the way to glory there is always some new thing to be learned of it and from it, even by those that are the greatest proficient in the knowledge of it; and therefore we must be still scholars in this school, and when we have learned never so much we must still be learning more. This is continued, lasting work, for David is ever and anon at his old request, 'Lord, teach me thy statutes;' and not without reason, since it is not sufficient to know God's will in some few great and weighty actions of our lives, but in all, whether of greater or lesser concerns. And when we know generals, yet we are so apt to err in particular cases, and since the commandment of God is so exceeding broad, Ps. cxix. 96. Every day we may see more into it, and may be more fully informed of the mind of God. We every day see more in a promise than we did before, in a precept than we did before; therefore the apostle saith, 1 Cor. viii. 2, 'And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.'

*Use.* Here is a pattern and precedent for us; especially now we have engaged our souls to God, let us seek this directive grace. It implieth pardon, and that maketh way for joy and comfort; for God teacheth pardoned sinners. A sure light and direction prevents many troubles of spirit and anxious doubts. It is a pledge and assurance of our getting home to God; those whom God guideth are sure to be safe in the issue.

1. It sheweth what should be the matter of our prayers. David beggeth not to increase him in riches and honours, nor to flow in temporal delights. No; if God would show himself a good God to him, he desireth it may be in giving him the spirit of understanding, and some increase of holiness; this he would take as the principal sign of God's favour and grace to him. The world generally imploreth God's goodness to another end; they think they are dealt liberally with when every man hath his lust satisfied: they pray from the intemperateness of the flesh; but David professeth it was enough to him if he might find God answering him in that one thing which most others neglect and pass by in their prayers, or, if they mention it, it is for fashion's sake, and to comport with the usual way of praying. But because there is great deceit, and we often pray for what we have no mind to have granted, let us see if this be our temper.

[1.] We must discover it in our thanksgiving and blessing God for this gift, though he denieth us other which make a fair show in the world: Mat. xi. 25-27, 'At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast

hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.' Christ showeth that the mystery of grace is at God's disposing, who manifests it as he seeth good; that if he hath cut us short in other things, and been liberal to us in this, we should not only be contented, but highly thankful; and how contemptible soever we be in the world, yet it is matter of praise and thanksgiving in that God hath bestowed his grace and love to us according to his will and pleasure.

[2.] By our patience and contentedness in the want and loss of other things for this thing's sake; want, if God's providence be so; loss, if occasioned by our adherence to truth. 'Want: we have no reason to envy carnal men: Ps. xvii. 14, 15, 'From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. But as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' We have no reason to repine; our present condition of entertaining communion with God in a practice of holiness countervaileth all their happiness, especially our future hopes to increase in knowledge and abound in the work of the Lord; and to own and stand up for a hated and despised truth will bring more comfort to our souls than all the pleasure the wicked have in their sensual delights. Are they the happy men that go on in opposition against the ways of God? Prov. iii. 31-33, 'Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways: for the froward is an abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blessing the habitation of the just.' They are not happier than the godly; it is a greater happiness to know more of God's mind than anything they enjoy: John xv. 15, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I call you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.'

[3.] By our constancy in prayer, and earnest supplication to know more of the mind of God. They will not be put off with other things. God gave the Spirit to the rest of the apostles, but he gave the purse to the son of perdition. Men may have a fit of devotion in their prayers, but their general course is not answerable: Mat. vi. 33, 'First seek the kingdom of God.' If we seek it in good earnest we shall show it in our conversation and demeanour: Prov. iv. 7, 'Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding.' This must be the chiefest thing that beareth sway in our endeavours, that we may know more of God's mind in following our suits incessantly, we must not be put off; though God giveth other things, you must not cease your importunity. Lord, I expect something else from thy goodness; see Ps. cxix. 132, 133, 'Look upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do to them that fear thy name. Order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity

have dominion over me ;' and Ps. xxvii. 7, ' Hear me, O God, when I cry with my voice ; have mercy upon me, and answer me ; ' if we do not suffer this desire to languish and die, but still it be recommended to God daily. My business is rightly to understand and perfectly to do thy will ; this is my one and great request, which I will ever and ever urge. I cannot give over this prayer till thou beest all in all, and showest me the utmost of thy bounty. We desire many things, but we are soon put out of the humour ; as children, that seem passionately and pettishly to desire a thing, but by presenting other things to them they are diverted and stilled ; but it is not so with God's people. As Naomi said of Boaz, Ruth iii. 18, ' For the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day ; ' so a child of God will not be satisfied till his desire be in some measure accomplished.

2. In what manner we should pray.

[1.] With earnestness. Slight prayers bespeak their own denial : Prov. ii. 1-5, ' My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee ; so that thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding ; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding ; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures ; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.'

[2.] With confidence : he is wont to do it for you. Ask nothing contrary to his nature. We should come with a confidence of speeding ; there is in him a propensity and inclination to help us. What would ye do to a hunger-bitten child if he cometh to you for a knife or an apple ? You would deny him them, but not meat to satisfy his hunger. If for bread to play with, or meat when he hath enough, you would deny him, not gratify his fancy : if he come to be taught his book, you would readily hear him. So when we come not for temporal things, but spiritual comforts, when spiritual comforts are not asked out of course, and for form's sake, yea, not only for comforts, but necessary grace to do his will, surely it cannot be that he should cast off them that love him, and would fain be conformed to his will, that come humbly, and long, and pray, and seek for his grace.

[3.] That this confidence must be evangelical. He sets before his eyes God's goodness, or readiness to be gracious to all that call upon him ; so that all the hope we have to prevail should not be taken from anything in us, but something in God himself. We must expect and ask blessings from God, for God, and because of God's sake. It is not for any good we deserve, or have done, or can do, that God taketh care of his weak foolish children, but for the glory of his name, his grace and constant goodness. God is our fountain, our reasons are his goodness, our end his glory. This is the true way of addressing ourselves to God, deprecating sins for which he may harden us, and remembering his mercies on which we ground our hope. So doth David : Ps. xxv. 5, 6, ' Lead me in thy truth, teach me ; for thou art the God of my salvation ; on thee do I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, thy loving-kindnesses and thy mercies ; for they have been ever of old.' His eternal love is assigned as the cause of all : Ps. xxiii. 3, ' He leadeth us in paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.'

3. What should be the grounds and impelling principle of prayer.

[1.] A strong bent to please God, and that all your affections and actions may be ordered so as to be acceptable in his sight. Those that stand in awe of God are loath to offend him; they may expect direction and light in all difficult cases: Ps. xxv. 12, 'What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose;' ver. 14, 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.'

[2.] A desire to enjoy him; for these things are valuable as they lead us to God. Our solid joy lieth not in outward things, but in our communion with God: Ps. cxxxix. 24, 'Lead me in the way everlasting;' and Ps. lxxiii. 24, 'Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to thy glory.' Their business is to be happy hereafter, and well guided here, that they may attain that happiness. Now there is an inseparable connection between our walking in the time of this life, and receiving into heaven after this life; and he that is resolved to walk by the rule of God's direction, may promise himself to be received into glory after his journey is ended. So Ps. xliii. 3, 'Send out thy light and thy truth to lead me to thy holy hill.' They would fain take the nearest way to heaven, and follow God's counsel in all things. We have his word continually to guide us in this way, but we need also the assistance of his Spirit. The promised rest is much in their eye, and doth mightily prevail with him: they would have God to be their guide here, that he may be their rest hereafter.

## SERMON LXXIX.

*It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*—VER. 71.

THE context speaketh of afflictions by occasion of persecutions. The proud had forged a lie against him, and involved him in many troubles, when in the meantime 'their heart was as fat as grease.' They wallowed in ease and pleasure, but David kept right with God; and yet his afflictions do not cease. God doth not presently take away opposition, because of our proud, unhumbed, unmortified spirits, though we hold fast our integrity for the main: therefore he comforteth himself in his spiritual protection under the affliction, though the affliction was not removed: 'It is good,' &c.

In the words there is—

1. An assertion, *it is good for me that I have been afflicted.*

2. The reason, *that I might learn thy statutes.* Or, here is a general truth explained by a particular instance. In the general, he saith it is good, and then what good he got by it.

*Doct.* That affliction, all things considered, is rather good than evil.

The assertion is a paradox to vulgar sense and the ears of the common sort of men. How few are there in the world that will grant that it is good to be afflicted! Yea, the children of God can scarcely subscribe to the truth of it till the affliction be over. While they are

under it they feel the smart, but do not presently discern the benefit; but in the review they find God hath ordered it with much wisdom and faithfulness; and in the issue they say, as David doth, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' Carnal sense is not easily persuaded, but the new nature prevaieth at length, and then they readily subscribe to the truth of it.

The word is clear on this point: Job v. 17, 'Behold, happy is the man whom the Lord correcteth.' The first word, *behold*, summoneth our attention and observation. What is the matter? As those that are before Joseph cried, *Abreck*, 'bow the knee,' Gen. xli. 43, to show some eminent person was at hand, so this *behold* calleth for reverence and admiration; there is some strange truth to ensue and follow. Happiness in the lowest notion, it includeth a freedom from misery; and yet the scripture pronounces the man happy whom the Lord correcteth. There have been among the heathens many opinions about happiness. Two hundred and eighty-eight Austin reckoneth up; but none ever placed it in correction, in sickness, disgrace, exile, captivity, loss of friends, much less in God's correction, who is our supreme judge, to whom we ultimately appeal when others wrong us. And yet the corrected man, and the man corrected by the Lord, is happy, though not with a consummate happiness; he hath not the happiness of his country, but he hath the happiness of the way. The man is kept by the way, that he may come to his country. His afflictions take nothing from him but his sin. Therefore his solid happiness remaineth not infringed, rather the more secured. So Ps. xciv. 12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of thy law.' To be chastened of God for what we have done amiss, and by that means to be reduced to the sense and practice of our duty, is one of the greatest blessings on this side heaven that can light upon us. It is an evidence of God's tender care over us, and that he will not lose us, and suffer us to perish with the unbelieving and sinful world.

The truth lieth clearly in the scripture; but to reconcile it with our prejudices—

1. I shall show by what measure we are to determine good and evil.
2. Prove that affliction is good.

First, For the measure.

1. This good is not to be determined by our fancies and conceits, but by the wisdom of God; for God knoweth better what is good for us than we do for ourselves, and foreseeth all things by one infinite act of understanding, but we judge according to present appearance; therefore all is to be left to God's disposal, and his divine choice is to be preferred before our foolish fancies, and what he sendeth and permitteth to fall out is fitter for us than anything else. Could we once assuredly be persuaded of this, a Christian would be completely fortified, and fitted not only for a patient but a cheerful entertainment of all that is or shall come upon him. Besides, he is a God of bowels, and loveth us dearly, better than we do ourselves; and therefore we should be satisfied with his dispensations whatever they are, whether according to or against our will. The shepherd must choose the pastures for the sheep, whether lean or fat, bare or full grown; the

child is not to be governed by his own fancy, but the father's discretion; nor the sick man by his own appetite, but the physician's skill. It is expedient sometimes that God should make his people sad and displease them for their advantage: John xvi. 6, 7, 'Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts: nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away.' We are too much addicted to our own conceits: Christ's dealing is expedient and useful when yet it is very unsatisfactory to us: he is to be judge of what is good for us, his going or tarrying, not we ourselves, who are short-sighted and distempered with passions, whose requests many times are but ravings, and ask of God we know not what, as the two brethren, Mat. xx. 22, and seek our bane as a blessing, as children would play with a knife that would cut and wound them, pray ourselves into a mischief and a snare. It were the greatest misery if God should carve out our condition according to our own fancy and desires. Peter said, Mat. xvii. 4, 'Master, it is good for us to be here;' he was well pleased to be upon Mount Tabor, but little thought what service God had to do for him elsewhere, how much poor souls needed him and the other apostles' help. We would always be in the mount with God, enjoy our comforts to the full, even to surfeit; but God knows that is not good for us. His pleasure should satisfy us though we do not see the reason of it. So Jer. xxiv. 5, God speaketh of the basket of good figs (whereby were represented the best of the people) whom I have sent into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. What can there be seemingly more contrary to their good than a hard and an afflicted lot out of their own country? Yet God, that foresaw all things, knew it was for their good; worse evils would befall the place where they had been. So to be kept under, to have no service for the present, no hopes to rise again for the future, and to be laden with all manner of prejudices and reproaches, this is for good. We think not so, but God knoweth it is so, most for his glory and our benefit. So the selling of Joseph into Egypt, Gen. i. 20, 'God meant it to good.' Alas! what good to have the poor young man sold as a slave, to be cast into prison for his chastity and continency, and exposed to all manner of difficulties! But alas! many had perished if he had not been sent thither. So God taketh away many beloved comforts from us; he meaneth it for good. We think it is all against us; no, it is for us. So Ps. xxxiv. 10, 'They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.' Many times they want food and raiment, want liberty, at least in some degree; they may want many things that are comfortable; though they have things sparingly, though they have of the meanest, yet they have that which is good for them. So Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 'No good thing will he withhold.' He may keep us low and bare, feed us *cibo extemporalì*, as Lactantius; but that is good for us. If it were good for us to have larger revenues and incomes, we should not want them. The true and absolute ground of all submission is to think that which God sendeth is good, be it prosperity or adversity, the having or wanting children, or other comforts.

2. The next measure is this, that good is to be determined by its respect to the chief good or true happiness. Now, what is our chief happiness but the enjoyment of God? Our happiness doth not consist in

outward comforts, riches, health, honour, civil liberty, or comfortable relations, as husband, wife, children ; but in our relation to and acceptance with God. Other things are but additional appendages to our happiness, Mat. vi. 33. Affliction taketh nothing from our essential solid happiness, rather helpeth us in the enjoyment of it, as it increaseth grace and holiness, and so we enjoy God more surely. That is good that sets us nearer to God, and that is evil which separateth us from him ; therefore sin is evil, because it maketh an estrangement between us and God, Isa. lix. 2 ; but affliction is good, because many times it maketh us the more earnestly to seek after him : Hosea v. 15, 'In their afflictions they will seek me right early.' Therefore every condition is good or evil as it sets farther off or draws us nearer to God ; that is good that tendeth to make us better, more like unto God, capable of communion with him, conduceth to our everlasting happiness. So 'It is good that a man bear the yoke from his youth,' Lam. iii. 27, that he be trained up under the cross, in a constant obedience to God and subjection to him, and so be fitted to entertain communion with him. If afflictions conduce to this end, they are good, for then they help us to enjoy the chief good.

3. That good is not always the good of the flesh, or the good of outward prosperity ; and therefore the good of our condition is not to be determined by the interest of the flesh, but the welfare of our souls. If God should bestow upon us so much of the good of the outward and animal life as we desire, we could not be said to be in a good condition if he should deny us good spiritual. We should lose one half of the blessings of the covenant by doting upon and falling in love with the rest : the flesh is importunate to be pleased, but God will not serve our carnal turns. We are more concerned as a soul than a body : Heb. xii. 10, 'He verily for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.' Certain it is God will chasten us for our profit. What do we call profit ? The good things of this world, the great mammon which so many worship ? If we call it so, God will not ; he meaneth to impart to us spiritual and divine benefit, which is a participation of his own holiness. And truly the people of God, if they be in their right temper, value themselves not by their outward enjoyments, but their inward, by their improvement of grace, not the enjoyment of worldly comforts : 2 Cor. iv. 16, 'For this cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day.' A discerning Christian puts more value upon holiness wrought by affliction than upon all his comforts. So that though affliction be evil in itself, it is good as sanctified.

4. A particular good must give way to a general good, and our personal benefit to the advancement of Christ's kingdom. The good of the church must be preferred before our personal contentment. Paul could want the glory of heaven for a while, if his continuance in the flesh were needful for the saints : Phil. i. 24, 'To abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' We must not so desire good to ourselves as to hinder the good of others. All elements will act contrary to their particular, for the conservation of the universe. That may be good for the glory of God which is not good for our personal contentment and ease. Now the glory of God is our greatest interest ; if

it be for the glory of God that I should be in pain, bereft of my comforts, my sanctified subjection to the will of God must say it is good. John xii. 27, 28, there you have expressed the innocent inclination of Christ's human nature, 'Father, save me from this hour;' and the overruling sense of his duty, or the obligation of his office, 'But for this cause came I to this hour.' We are often tossed and tumbled between inclination of nature and conscience of duty; but in a gracious heart the sense of our duty and the desire of glorifying God should prevail above the desire of our own comfort, ease, safety, and welfare. Nature would be rid of trouble, but grace submits all our interests to God's honour, which should be dearer to us than anything else.

5. This good is not to be determined by present feeling, but by the judgment of faith. Affliction for the present is not pleasant to natural sense, nor for the present is the fruit evident to spiritual sense, but it is good because in the issue it turneth to good: Rom. viii. 28, 'All things work together for good.' While God is striking we feel the grief, and the cross is tedious, but when we see the end, we acknowledge it is good to be afflicted: Heb. xii. 11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; but afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness.' A good present is the cause of joy, and an evil present is the cause of sorrow; but there are two terms of abatement: the sorrow is from the present sense, and the conceit of the sufferer. When we are but newly under the affliction, we feel the smart, but do not presently find the benefit; but within a while, especially in the review, it is good for me; it is matter of faith under the affliction, it is matter of sense after it. Good physic must have time to work. That which is not good may be good; though it be not good in its nature, it is good in its seasonable use, and though for the present we see it not, we shall see it. Therefore good is not to be determined by feeling, but by faith. The rod is a sore thing for the present, but the bitter root will yield sweet fruit. If we come to a person under the cross, and ask him, What! is it good to feel the lashes of God's correcting hand, to be kept poor and sickly, exercised with losses and reproaches, to part with friends and relations, to lose a beloved child? sense will complain. But this poor creature, after he hath been exercised and mortified, and gotten some renewed evidences of God's favour, ask him then is it good to be afflicted? Oh, yes! I had else been vain, neglectful of God, wanted such an experience of the Lord's grace. Faith should determine the case when we feel it not.

Secondly, That according to these measures you will find it good to be afflicted.

1. It is good as it is *minus malum*, it keepeth us from greater evils. Afflictions to the righteous are either cures of or preservatives from spiritual evils, which would occasion greater troubles and crosses. They prevent sin: 2 Cor. xii. 7, 'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelation, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.' They purge out sin: Isa. xxvii. 9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged out.' We are apt to abuse prosperity to self-confidence: Ps. xxx. 6, 7, 'In my prosperity I said,



I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong.' And luxury: Deut. xxxii. 15, 'But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked; thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God that made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation.' The godly have evil natures as well as others, which cannot be beaten down but by afflictions. We are froward in our relations. Hagar was proud in Abraham's house, Gen. xvi. 4, her mistress was despised in her eyes; but very humble in the desert, Gen. xxi. 16. David's heart was tender and smote him when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment, 1 Sam. xxiv. 5; but how stupid and senseless was he when he lived at ease in Jerusalem! 2 Sam. xii. His conscience was benumbed till Nathan roused him. Before we are chastened we are rebellious, frail, fickle, mutable, apt to degenerate without this continual discipline: we are very negligent and drowsy till the rod awakeneth us. God's children have strange failings and negligences, and sometimes are guilty of more heinous sins. It is a great curse for a man to be left to his own ways: Hosea iv. 17, 'Let him alone;' so Ps. lxxxi. 12, 'I gave them up to their own hearts' lust.' Men must needs perish when left to themselves, without this wholesome, profitable discipline of the cross.

2. It is good, because the evil in it is counterpoised by a more abundant good. It is evil as it doth deprive us of our natural comforts, pleasure, gain, honour; but it is good as these may be recompensed with better pleasures, richer gain, and greater honour. There is more pleasure in holiness than there can be pain and trouble in affliction: Heb. xii. 11, 'No affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous, but afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.' More gain than affliction can bring loss: Heb. xii. 10, 'But he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' More honour than affliction can bring shame, surely then it is good. There is a threefold profit we get by affliction:—

[1.] The time of affliction is a serious thinking time: Eccles. vii. 14, 'In the day of adversity consider;' 1 Kings viii. 47, 'Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive.' We have more liberty to retire into ourselves, being freed from the attractive allurements of worldly vanities and the delights of the flesh. Adversity maketh men serious; the prodigal came to himself when he began to be in want, Luke xv. 17. Sad objects make a deep impression upon our souls; they help us to consider our own ways and God's righteous dealings, that we may behave ourselves wisely and suitably to the dispensation: Micah vi. 9, 'The man of wisdom will hear the rod.'

[2.] It is a special hearing time; in the text, 'That I might learn thy statutes;' and it is said of Christ, Heb. v. 8, that 'He learned obedience from the things that he suffered;' he did experimentally understand what obedience was in hard and difficult cases, and so could the better pity poor sinners in affliction: we have an experimental knowledge of that of which we had but a notional knowledge before. We come by experience to see how false and changeable the world is, how comfortable an interest in God is, what a burden sin is, what sweetness there is in the promises, what a reality in the word. Luther said, *Qui tribulantur*, &c. The afflicted see more in the scrip-

ture than others do; the secure and fortunate read them as they do Ovid's verses. Certainly when the soul is humble, and when we are refined and raised above the degrees of sense, we are more tractable and teachable, our understandings are clearer, our affections more melting. Our spiritual learning is a blessing that cannot be valued. If God write his law upon our hearts by his stripes on our backs, so light a trouble should not be grudged at.

[3.] It is an awakening, quickening time.

(1.) Some are awakened out of the sleep of death, and are first wrought upon by afflictions. This is one powerful means to bring in souls to God, and to open their ears to discipline. God began with them in their afflictions, and the time of their sorrows was the time of loves. The hot furnace is Christ's workhouse, the most excellent vessels of honour and praise have been formed there: Isa. xlviii. 10, 'I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.' Manasses, Paul, the jailer, were all chosen in the fire; God puts them into the furnace, and chooseth them there, melts them, and stamps them with the image of Christ. The hog's trough was a good school to the prodigal. Well, then, doth God do you any harm by affliction when he saves you by it? If we use violence to a man that is ready to be drowned, and in pulling him out of the waters should break an arm or a leg, would he not be thankful? If you have broken my arm, you have saved my life. So God's children: It is good that I had such an affliction, felt the sharpness of such a cross. Oh, blessed providence! I had been a witless fool, and gone on still in a course of sin and vanity, if God had not awakened me.

(2.) It quickeneth others to be more careful of their duty, more watchful against sin, and doth exercise and improve us in heavenly virtues and graces of spirit, which lay dormant in us through neglect, since pleasing objects, which deaden the heart, are removed. Even God's best children, when they have gotten a carnal pillow under their heads, are apt to sleep; their prayers are dead; thoughts of heaven cold, or none; little zeal for God or delight in him: Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord, in trouble they have visited thee; they pour out a prayer when thy chastening is upon them;' Hosea v. 15, 'In their afflictions they will seek me early.' Because they do not stir up themselves, God stirreth them up by a smart rod. The husbandman pruneth the vine, lest it run out into leaves; the baits of the flesh must be taken from us, that our gust and relish of heavenly things may be recovered.

Use 1. The use is to caution us against our murmurings and taxing of God's providence. How few are there that give him thanks for his seasonable discipline, and observe God's faithfulness and the benefit they have by afflictions, but rather murmur, repine, and fret through impatience! If it be good to be afflicted, let us accept of it, for good is matter of choice: Lev. xxvi. 41, 'If their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity.' Now all affliction on this side hell is good, as it is a lesser evil; *hic ure, hic seca*, if God will cut here, burn here, lance here, as a surgeon, that we may not be destroyed for ever; corrected, that we may not be condemned, 1 Cor. xi. 32. It is good, as it is a means to good; for the end putteth a loveliness also upon the means, though things in

themselves be harsh and sour. We must not consider what things are in themselves, but what they are in their reduction, tendency, and final use. So all things are yours, crosses, deaths, 1 Cor. iii. 18; all their crosses, yea, sometimes their sins and snares, by God's overruling. We lose the benefit of our affliction by our murmurings, repinings, faintings, carnal sorrows and fears; an impatient distrustful mind spoileth the working of God: 'Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience.' It is not the bare affliction worketh, but the affliction meekly borne. Let us not misconstrue God's present way of dealing with us. There may be a seeming harshness in some of his dealings, but yet, all things considered, you will find them full of mercy and truth. Murmuring is a disorder in the affections, misinterpreting in the understanding, to prevent it.

1. Consider you must not interpret the covenant by God's providence, but God's providence by his covenant. Certain it is that all new covenant dispensations are mercy and truth, Ps. xxv. 10, our crosses not excepted; by them God is pursuing his covenant and eternal purpose concerning our salvation. There is sometimes a seeming contradiction between his promises and his providences, word and works; his voice is sweet like Jacob's, but his hand rough like Esau's. Go unto the sanctuary, and God will help you to reconcile things, Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17; otherwise the difficulty will be too hard for you. The children of God, that have suspected or displeased him, have always found themselves in error, Isa. xlix. 14, 15. His promise is the light side, his providence the dark side of the cloud: Ps. lxxvii. 19, 'Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the deep waters, and thy footsteps are not known.' We cannot trace him, nor find out the reason of everything that God doeth; only, in the general, that 'he doeth all things well,' Mark vii. 37; nay, what is best.

2. We must distinguish between a part of God's work and the end of it. We cannot understand God's providence till he hath done his work. He is an impatient spectator that cannot tarry till the last act, wherein all errors are reconciled: John xiii. 7, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know.' No wonder if we are much in the dark, if we look only to present sense and present appearance. Then his purposes are hidden from us; he bringeth one contrary out of another, light out of darkness, meat out of the eater. God knoweth what he is a-doing with you, when you know not: Jer. xxix. 11, 'I know my thoughts, to give you an expected end.' When we view providences by pieces, we know not God's mind; for the present we see him (it may be) rending and tearing all things; therefore let us not judge of God's work by the beginnings, till all work together. Our present state may be very sad and uncomfortable, and yet God is designing the choicest mercies to us: Ps. xxxi. 22, 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee;' Ps. cxvi. 11, 'I said in my haste, All men are liars.' Haste never speaketh well of God nor his promises, nor maketh any good comment upon his dealings.

3. We must distinguish between that which is really best for us, and what we judge best for us: Deut. viii. 15, 16, 'Who led thee through

that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee out water out of the rock of flint; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not; that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at the latter end.' Other diet is more wholesome for our souls than that which our sick appetite craveth. It is best with us many times when we are weakest: 2 Cor. xii. 10, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' Worst when strongest: 2 Chron. xxvi. 16, 'When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his own destruction.' Lot chose Sodom, a fair and pleasant situation, but you know what inconveniences he met with there. Many times the buffetings of Satan are better for us than a condition free from temptation; so is poverty, emptiness, better than fulness, loss of friends than enjoyment of them.

*Use 2.* For information.

1. By what note we may know whether God chastens us in anger, yea or nay; whether our crosses be curses. The cross that maketh thee better cometh with a blessing. It is not the sharpness of the affliction we should look to, but the improvement of it. The bitter waters may be made sweet by experiences of grace; if we are made more godly, wise, religious, it is a good cross; but if it leave us as careless and stupid, or no better than we were before, that cross is but a preparation to another; if it hath only stirred up our impatience, done us no good, God will follow his stroke, and heat his furnace hotter.

2. It informeth us that it is our duty not only to be good in afflictions, but we must be good after afflictions. David, when escaped, saith, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' Wicked men are somewhat good in afflictions, but as soon as they are delivered they return to their old sins; as metals are melted while they are in the furnace, but when they are taken out, they return to their natural hardness; but the godly are better afterwards.

3. That every condition is as the heart is. Afflictions are good if we have the grace to make a good use of them. Look, as the good blessings of God by our corruption are abused to wantonness, and so made hurtful to us, so crosses, that are evil in themselves, when sanctified are good. All things are sanctified to us when we are sanctified to God. Other things that would be snares prove helps and encouragements, are great furtherances. The creature is another thing to the saints; if they are advanced, their hearts are enlarged to God; if afflicted, they grow more humble, watchful, serious. All things work together for the worst to the wicked. If God make Saul a king, Judas an apostle, Balaam a prophet, their preferment shall be their ruin. Haman's honour, Ahithophel's wit, and Herod's applause turned to their hurt—if in prosperity, they condemn God; if in adversity, deny and blaspheme him: Prov. i. 32, 'For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.' As the salt sea turneth all into salt water, so a man is in the constitution of his soul; all things are converted to that use.

*Use 3.* To persuade us to make this acknowledgment, that affliction is good. There needs many graces before we can thus determine.

1. Faith. It is not present, but it must be believed, hoped, and

waited for. It is not fit all should be done in a day, and as early as we would; in the Lord's time the fruit will appear. The word doth not work by and by, so not the rod. Faith can see good in that in which sense only can find smart: Phil. i. 19, 'I know this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ;' and 'We know that all things shall work together for good,' Rom. viii. 28. Though it doth not appear, yet we know.

2. Love. The children of God, out of their love to God and present submission to God, do count whatsoever he doth to be good: Ps. lxxiii. 1, 'Yet God is good to Israel.' Though he seemeth to deal with his people hardly, yet love pronounceth the dispensation to be good; it can see a great deal of love in pain, and smart, and chastenings. I have read once and again of such a rabbi, that, when told of an affliction, would say, This is good, because it cometh from God.

3. Spiritual wisdom and choice to esteem things according to their intrinsic worth. A high value of holiness, profiting in sanctification, is more than enough to recompense all the trouble we are put to in learning it. This will make us yield to be lessened in our worldly comforts for the increase of spiritual grace: as Paul would cheerfully part with his health that he might have more experience of Christ: 2 Cor. xii. 10, 'I will take pleasure in infirmities, necessities, and distresses, for Christ's sake.' Surely the loss of outward things should trouble us the less, and we should be the sooner satisfied in God's dispensation, if he will take away our earthly comforts, and make us more mindful of that which is heavenly; if by an aching head God will give you a better heart, by the death of friends promote the life of grace.

4. Diligence and heedfulness—(1.) To observe afflictions; (2.) To improve them.

[1.] To observe what falleth out, from what hand it cometh, to what issue it tendeth; otherwise, if we observe it not, how can we acknowledge it, give God the glory of his wisdom and goodness? In heaven, when we shall know as we are known, it will be a great part of our landing of God to look back on his providence conducting us through troubles, as it is pleasant for travellers in their inn to discourse of the deepness and danger of the ways. And now, when we rather are known than know, Gal. iv. 9, it is useful and comfortable to take notice of God's dealing with us. Oh, what a deal of wisdom, faithfulness, and truth may we see in the conduct of his providence! Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands;' Ps. cxix. 75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' What necessity of his chastisement to prevent our pride, security, negligence! with what wisdom was our cross chosen! how did God strike in the right vein! you were running on apace in some neglect of God till he awakened you. This observation will help us to love God, who is vigilant and careful of our welfare. It will allay all the hard thoughts that we have of the seeming severity of his dispensations.

[2.] Diligence to improve it for the bringing about of this good. We must not be idle spectators, but active under God; we must more

stir up ourselves, and exercise ourselves to godliness. The affliction of itself is a dead thing ; there must be help : Phil. i. 19, ' For I know this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ ; ' 2 Cor. i. 11, ' Ye also helping together by prayer for us. ' It is not the nature of the cross, nor the power of inherent grace, without the actual influence of the Spirit, that makes troubles profitable. We must excite ourselves also, for the saints are not only passive objects, but active instruments of providence. We are not merely to be passive : Heb. xii. 11, ' It yieldeth the pleasant fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. ' God exerciseth us with the rod, and we must exercise ourselves under the rod. We are engaged to use all holy means to this end, searching, praying, rousing up ourselves, learning our proper lessons ; then we will come and make our acknowledgment, ' It is good for me that I have been afflicted. '

### SERMON LXXX.

*The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.*—VER. 72.

THESE words may be conceived as a reason of what was said in the foregoing verse. David hath told us there that it was good for him that he was afflicted, because of the benefit obtained by his afflictions ; he had learned God's statutes, knew more of his duty, and had a heart to keep closer to it. Now this gain was more to him than his loss by affliction ; for he doth not value his happiness by his temporal interests so much as by his thriving in godliness. All the wealth in the world was not so much to him as the spiritual benefit which he got by his sore troubles ; for ' the law of thy mouth, ' &c.

The text is a profession of his respect to the word, a profession which containeth in it the very spirit of godliness, a speech that becometh only such a man's mouth as David was, one that is sincerely godly. Many will be ready to make this profession, but other things do not suit ; the profession of their mouths is contradicted by the disposition of their hearts, and the course and tenor of their lives. Observe here two things :—

1. The things compared.

2. The value and preference of the one above the other.

[1.] The things compared. On the one side there is *the law of God's mouth* ; on the other, *thousands of gold and silver*.

[2.] The value and preference of the one above the other, *it is better to me*, it is better in itself. There was reason for his esteem and choice. Many will say it is better in itself, but David saith it is better *to me*. Let us explain these circumstances as they are laid.

[1.] The things compared.

(1.) On the one side there is ' the law of God's mouth ; ' it is God's own word, and we should be as sure of it as if we had heard him utter and pronounce it with his own mouth, or had received it immedi-

ately by oracle from him. And indeed that is one way to raise this esteem: 1 Thes. ii. 13, 'Receiving it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which worketh effectually in you that believe.' In the word we must consider two things—the authority of it, and the ministry of it. If we consider the authority of it, so it cometh from God's mouth; if we consider the ministry of it, so it cometh by man's mouth, for he speaketh to us by men: 2 Peter i. 21, 'Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' If we look to the ministry only, and not to the authority, we are in danger to slight it; certainly shall not profit by it. Many do so, as Samuel thought Eli called him, when it was the Lord, 1 Sam. iii. 7, 8; but when we consider who is the author of it, then it calleth for our reverence and regard.

(2.) On the other side, 'thousands of gold and silver.' Where wealth is set out—(1.) By the species and kind of it—gold and silver; gold for hoarding and portage, silver for present commerce. (2.) The quantity, 'thousands,' that is, thousands of pieces, as that addition is used, Ps. lxxviii. 30, 'They shall submit themselves with pieces of silver,' or talents, as the Chaldee paraphrase expoundeth it. 'Money answereth all things,' Eccles. x. 19. It can command all things in the world, as the great instrument of commerce.

[2.] The value and preference of the one above the other, 'it is better,' and it is 'better to me.' It is better in itself, that noteth the intrinsic worth of the word; it is better to me, that implieth his own esteem and choice. To say, in the general only, It is better, implieth but a speculative approbation, which may be in carnal men: Rom. ii. 18, 'And approve the things that are more excellent;' but to say, It is better to me, implieth a practical esteem, which is proper only to the regenerate. It is more dear, precious, and sweet to them than the greatest treasure. Could we have such a holy affection to the word, and say also, To me, and to me, we should thrive more in a course of godliness; for a man is carried on powerfully by his choice and esteem, his actions are governed and determined by it.

*Doct.* The word of God is dearer to a gracious heart than all the riches in the world.

Let me bring proofs: Ps. xix. 10, 'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold.' So speaking of spiritual wisdom, which is only to be had by the word of God, he saith, Prov. iii. 14, 'That the merchandise thereof is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.' So Prov. viii. 11, 'For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things which are to be desired are not to be compared with it.' These expressions are frequently used, because the greatest part of mankind are miserably bewitched with the desire of riches; but God's children are otherwise affected, they have a better treasure.

Let me prove two things:—

1. That the word of God, and the benefit we get by it, is better than thousands of gold and silver.

2. That the children of God do so esteem it. Both must be proved; the one to show the worth and excellency of the word, the other to show the gracious disposition of the hearts of God's children. There

is no question but that if these things were well weighed, the law of God's mouth, and thousands of gold and silver, we should find there is a great inequality between them ; but all men have not a judgment to choose that which is most worthy. Many take glass beads for jewels, and prefer toys and trifles before a solid good. Gold and silver draw the hearts of all men to them, and their affections blind their judgment ; and then, though the weights be equal, if the balances be not equal, wrong will be done. We do not weigh things with an equal balance, but consider them with a prejudiced mind, and a heart biassed and prepossessed with worldly inclinations.

*First*, then, for the things themselves ; surely gold and silver, which is digged out of the bowels of the earth, is not worthy to be compared with the law that cometh out of the mouth of God. If you compare the nature, use, and duration of these benefits that you have by the one and the other, you will see a vast difference.

1. The nature. The notion of riches is abundance of valuable things. Now there are true riches and counterfeit riches, which have but the resemblance and show. The true riches is spoken of Luke xvi. 11, and is opposed to that mammon and pelf which the world doteth upon. Grace giveth us the true riches and wealth. It is good to state what are the true riches and the false. The more abundance of truly valuable things a man hath, the more he hath of true riches. A child counteth himself rich when he hath a great many pins and points and cherry-stones, for those suit his childish age and fancy. A worldly man counteth himself rich when he hath gold and silver in great store by him, or lands and heritages, or bills and bonds ; but a child of God counteth himself rich when he hath God for his portion, Christ to his redeemer, and the Spirit for his guide, sanctifier, and comforter ; which is as much above a carnal man's estate in the world as a carnal man's estate is above a child's toys and trifles, yea, infinitely more. Well, then, surely the word of God will make us rich, because it revealeth God to be our God, according to our necessity and capacity : Ps. xvi. 5, 6, 'The Lord is my portion : I have a goodly heritage ;' and it revealeth unsearchable riches of grace in Christ, Eph. ii. 1, iii. 8, pardon of sins, and life eternal. They that have Christ want nothing, but are completely happy. So for the Spirit ; what are all the riches of the world to those treasures of knowledge, comfort, and holiness which we have by the Spirit ! What is in one evangelist, 'He will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him,' Luke xi. 13, is in another, Mat. vii. 11, 'He will give good things to them that ask him.' The Spirit is instead of all good things, so that the word is able to enrich a man more than all the wealth of the world can. It giveth us abundance, and abundance of better things ; so that a man is not absolutely poor that wants gold and silver, but he that wants the benefits which the word of God offereth and conveyeth to us. Gold and silver are but one sort of riches, and but the lowest and meanest sort. You do not count a man poor if he have lands, though he hath not ready-money ; much less is a man poor if he hath gold, though he hath not silver. So a Christian is not poor if he hath God and Christ and the Spirit, though he say, with the apostle Peter, 'Silver and gold have I none,' Acts iii. 6.



Angels are not poor though they have not flocks and herds and yearly revenues; they have an excellency suitable to their natures. So a Christian is not poor while he possesseth him who possesseth all things. But that I may not seem only to say that the treasures of grace are the true riches, I shall prove it by two arguments:—

[1.] That is the true riches which can buy and purchase all other things, but all other things cannot buy and purchase it. Now all the riches in the world cannot buy and purchase those benefits which the word offereth to us. They cannot purchase the favour of God; 'For what hope hath the hypocrite, if he hath gained, when God comes to take away his soul?' Job xvii. 8. Many a carnal wretch doth not make a saving bargain of it; but be it so, he looketh for worldly gain and hath it. What will this stead him when God puts the bond of the old covenant in suit, and demandeth his soul from him? He is loath to resign it, but God will have it: 'What can he give in exchange for his soul?' Money cannot purchase the grace of the Redeemer: 1 Peter i. 18, 'Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things;' and Ps. xlix. 6–8, 'The redemption of the soul is precious.' Men would, if they could, give a thousand worlds for the pardon of their sin, when they come to receive the fruit of it; but all will not do: the wrath of God must be appeased, and the justice of God satisfied, by another kind of ransom. They cannot purchase the grace of the Spirit. Simon Magus would give money for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but Peter said to him, 'Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money,' Acts viii. 20. His request was base and carnal; yet thus far it yieldeth a testimony to the truth in hand, that he thought the gift of the Holy Ghost better than money, or else he would not have offered his money for it; yea, the lowest and far less necessary gift than his sanctifying, guiding, and comforting work. Well, then, all other things cannot purchase these benefits. But, on the other side, these benefits procure all other things. Grace giveth us an advantage in worldly things above others, for certainly 'Man doth not live by bread only,' Mat. iv., and his life doth not lie in worldly abundance: the natural, much more the sanctified and comfortable, use of the creatures dependeth on the favour of God and his fatherly care and providence, which is assured to the heirs of promise: Mat. vi. 33, 'First seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and these things shall be added;' 1 Tim. iv. 8, 'Godliness hath the promise of this life and that which is to come;' Prov. iii. 15, 16, 'Wealth is not to be compared with wisdom; because 'in her right hand is length of days, and in her left hand riches and honour.' A child of God that is obedient to the word hath more advantage for the world than a wicked man hath: he hath a promise which the other hath not, a warrant to cast his care upon God; he gets more by the want of worldly things than a wicked man by the possession of them, for his want is sanctified, and worketh for good.

[2.] The world cannot recompense and supply the want of that grace we get by the word, but this can easily supply the want of the world. The worth and value of things is known by this, what we can least want. Now there is no earthly thing but may be so supplied

as that its want should be better to us than its enjoyment. Sickness may be better to us than health, because of experiences of grace, 2 Cor. xii. 10. Poverty may be better than wealth, because we may be rich in grace, James i. 9; so James ii. 5; so 1 Tim. vi. 6, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.' Slender provision with a contented heart is much better than a great deal more wealth. Godliness can supply the room of wealth, but wealth cannot supply the room of godliness. If the want of wealth helps us to an increase of grace and communion with God, it helpeth us to that which is of higher and greater value than the enjoyment of wealth could afford. But now, on the other side, the world will not give us a recompense for the want of godliness: Mat. xvi. 26, 'What is a man profited if he shall gain the world and lose his soul?' What shall be given to the party for that loss? His soul is lost, not in a natural sense, but in a legal sense, forfeited to God's justice. We may please ourselves in our carnal choice for a while, but death bloweth away all our vain conceits: Jer. xvii. 11, 'At his latter end he shall be a fool.' He was a fool before all his lifetime, but now in the judgment and conviction of his own conscience. His conscience shall rave at him, O fool, madman! to hazard the love of Christ for worldly things. These things cannot be recompensed by any other. What poor rewards can the world yield you for the loss of Christ and heaven! Alas! then, you lose your treasure, and have nothing to comfort you but rattles and baubles, which will no more comfort us than fine flowers will a man going to execution. Thus in the nature of riches.

2. Let us come to the use and end of these things, the use of the law of God's mouth, and the use of wealth. The use of wealth is to support and maintain the present life and the bodily state during our pilgrimage and passage through the world; but the use of the word is to guide and direct us in the way to the blessedness of the world to come. The world supplieth our bodily necessities; 'But the law of God is perfect, converting the soul,' Ps. xix. 7. It discovereth a man's soul-misery and remedy, as it directeth to Christ, and enforceth our obedience to God, and prescribeth a universal adherence to him and dependence on him. Our souls are fallen off from God by sin into a most doleful state. and have no other way of recovery than is prescribed in this blessed word of God. There are three uses of the word of God, and they do all commend and endear it to our respects:—

[1.] It is the great means to sanctify and convey a divine principle and nature in us; it is not only the rule, but the seed of the new life: 1 Peter i. 23, 'He hath begotten us, not by corruptible, but incorruptible seed,' &c.; James i. 18, 'He hath begotten us by the word of truth;' 2 Peter i. 4, 'To us are given great and precious promises, that we might be made partakers of the divine nature;' John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.' All this is said of the word: it is the means to sanctify us, the immortal seed, the beginning of the new life, the divine nature to make us live after a godlike manner; therefore it is 'better than thousands of gold and silver.' A child of God findeth a greater treasure in one chapter of the Bible than worldly men in all their lands and honours and large

revenues. A poor Christian meeteth with more true gain in a sermon than others can in their trades while they live. God begetteth him at first by the word of truth, and giveth him there the supply of the Spirit; therefore 'be swift to hear,' much in reading, and meditation day and night. Oh! there is the true treasure, the pearl of price; there their souls become acquainted with God.

[2.] It directeth us and keepeth us from being carried away with every deceit of sin: Ps. cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a light unto my path, and a lamp unto my feet.' Here are directions for all cases: here is a general direction, it is a light to our path; and sheweth us what to do in particular actions, it is a lamp to our feet. So ver. 133, 'Order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.' It is the word prevents the reign of any one sin. To have a sure rule to walk by in the midst of so many snares and temptations is a greater favour than to enjoy the greatest affluence of worldly felicity.

[3.] It supporteth us in all our afflictions and extremities. All the wealth in the world composed and put together cannot yield us that true contentment and satisfaction which the word of God doth to the obedient soul. Wealth cannot allay a grieved mind nor appease a wounded conscience. The word directeth us where we may find rest for our souls: Jer. vi. 16, 'Go ask for the good old way, and you shall find rest for your souls.' We lose ourselves in a maze of uncertainties till we come to the word of God: Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' Here is ease for the great wound and maim of nature. The great maim of nature is sin. Now where shall we have a plaster for this sore, but only in the word of God? So for particular afflictions: Rom. xv. 4, 'That ye, through the patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.' Comfort is the strengthening of the mind, or the fortifying the mind when it is vexed and weakened with doubts, fears, and sorrows: 'I had fainted in my affliction unless thy word had quickened me,' Ps. cxix. 50. The comforts of the world appear and vanish in a moment, cannot firmly stay and revive the heart; every blast of temptation scattereth them. Philosophy and natural reason cannot give us true ground of comfort: that was it they aimed at, how to fortify the soul and keep it quiet notwithstanding troubles in the flesh; but as they never understood the true ground of misery, which is sin, so neither the true ground of comfort, which is Christ. That which man offereth cannot come with such power and authority upon the conscience as that which God offereth, and bare reason cannot have such an efficacy as divine testimony and the law of God's mouth. This moonlight rotteth before it ripeneth fruits; but the word acquainteth us with Christ, who is the foundation of comfort; with the Spirit, who is the efficient cause of comfort; with the promise of heaven, which is the true matter of comfort; with faith, the great instrument to receive it.

3. Let us look to the duration. There is a vanity and uncertainty in all these outward things; they soon take the wing, and leave us in sorrow. If they continue with us till death, then they have done all their work. Wealth may bring you to the grave, but it can stead you no further; then wealth is gone, but horror doth continue: Luke

xvi. 24, 'Son, in thy lifetime thou enjoyedst thy good things.' These good things are only commensurate with life. Sometimes they do not last so long; but when we must leave the world, and launch out to those unknown regions, Job xxvii. 8, how miserable shall we be! Worldly comforts will fail us when we have most need of them, as Jonah's gourd when the sun scorched him. So in the hour of death, what will bags of gold do then? But now, on the other side, wisdom is better than gold and silver, because 'with her are durable riches and righteousness,' Prov. viii. 18, 19: therefore 'my fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver.' If a man would labour for anything, labour for that which is eternal, John vi. 27. No treasure can be compared to eternal life, and this the word assureth us of.

*Secondly,* Let us now come to examine why the children of God value it so.

1. Because they are enlightened by the Spirit, when others have their eyes dazzled with external splendour, and their judgment corrupted by their senses. It is not ignorance undoes the world so much as want of spiritual prudence. Spiritual and heavenly things can only be seen in the light of the Spirit, without which we can neither discern the truth or worth of them in order to choice: 1 Cor. ii. 14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit:' and therefore, till we have this illuminating and sanctifying light of the Spirit, we shall not make a good choice for ourselves. Eph. i. 17, 18, the apostle prayeth, 'That the Lord would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' That saving knowledge of divine mysteries which causeth us to prefer and choose them above other things comes from the Spirit of wisdom and revelation; otherwise, in seeing we see not. There is a perfect contradiction many times between speculative and practical knowledge. The common wisdom and knowledge of divine mysteries is a gift that cometh from the Spirit, much more the spiritual discerning.

2. They are affected with their true necessities. Our real necessities are the necessities of the soul. Bodily wants are more urging and pressing upon us, but these are more dangerous; therefore gold and silver, which supplieth our bodily necessities, is not so welcome to them as the law of God's mouth, which provideth a remedy for their soul-defects. How to be justified, how sanctified, is more than what shall we eat and drink, and wherewith shall we be clothed. Usually soul-necessities are overlooked: we regard them not, or conceit we are well already: Rev. iii. 17, 'Thou thoughtest thou wast rich, and increased with goods, and hadst need of nothing;' and then we have no relish for the offered remedy. The word of God is the offered remedy to repair our collapsed state. The gospel is not only true, but worthy to be embraced, 1 Tim. i. 15; but who will embrace it but the sensible sinner? for it is offered as a remedy to the sick and deliverance to the captive: it is not enough to see the excellency of things, but we must see our necessity of them. There are two hindrances that prejudice our salvation—either the necessity and excel-

lency of the gospel is not considered, or the truth and reality of it is not believed.

3. They measure all things with respect not to this world but the world to come. It is a high point of religion to do all things and regard all things for eternal ends: 2 Cor. iv. 18, 'Looking not to things seen, that are temporal, but to the things which are not seen, which are eternal;' making this our scope, and doing all to this end. Gold and silver are the most valuable things in the world: what cannot gold and silver buy in this world? But there is another world, and believers look to things unseen. Within a while it will not be a pin to choose whether we have enjoyed much or little of this world's good things; but much will lie upon this, whether we have obeyed God, and glorified God, and accepted of Christ. The use of gold and silver ceaseth in the world to come: these things are not current in Canaan, nor accounted of in our heavenly country; therefore money should be a vile thing instead of grace. We can carry away none of these things with us when we die, Eccles. v. 15; and surely that which hath no power to free us from death, to comfort us in death, or go with us into another world after death, is no happiness or solid tranquillity.

4. They have had trial and experience of the word, what a comfort and support it hath been to them: 1 Peter ii. 2, 3, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' There is an appetite followeth the new nature, and makes us desire spiritual food: Phil. i. 9, 10, 'And this I pray, that ye may abound in all knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may approve the things that are excellent.' When the Spirit giveth us a taste of the goodness of those things offered in the word of God, a taste of divine truth in our souls, when we find these comforts verified in us, then we come to approve the things that are excellent above all other things: Ps. cxix. 11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.' We never know the worth of the word till we come to make trial of it by practice and experience. The pleasure of the word we find in practice, and the comfort and support of it in deep afflictions. It is not so with the world; try it, and loathe it; it is more in fancy than fruition, because the imperfections which formerly lay hid are discovered; but the more intimately acquainted with the word of God, the more we prize it; we see there is more to be gained there than in all the world besides.

*Use 1.* To reprove and disprove those that prefer gold and silver before the word of God. This is done by four sorts:—

1. This is grossly done by those that revolt from the profession of the truth for the world's sake: 2 Tim. iv. 10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced the present world;' that betray the cause of religion, as Judas sold his master for thirty pieces of silver; or by those who will transgress for a small hire. The devil needeth not offer great things to them, when they will accept of less with thanks; for two pence or three pence gain will profane the Sabbath or wrong their neighbour. Is the law of God's mouth dearer to them than gold and silver? Surely no. They may flatter themselves with love to the word, but when they can violate it for a trifle, for a pair of shoes, it is

a sign that a little gain gotten by iniquity of traffic is sweeter to them than all the comforts of the promise.

2. It is done by them that will not forsake anything for the word's sake but when they are put upon an apparent trial. Here is gold and silver, and there the law of God's mouth; what will you do? obey God, or comply with your interests? You show your love by leaving the one rather than the other; as Moses 'counted the reproach of Christ better treasure than the riches of Egypt,' Heb. xi. 26. Christ's worst is better than the world's best. The Thessalonians showed their love when they received the word in much affliction; but when you decline duty, and are loath to hazard your interests, it is evident what you prefer. To some this may be a daily temptation: If I should be conscientious in my calling, I should be poor; keep touch and honesty in all things, it would turn to my loss. How many are discouraged from the ways of God, and discharging a good conscience, by inconveniency!

3. This is also in part done by them who turn back upon the word and ordinances of God for gain's sake, and fix their residence there, where they can neither enjoy God nor his people, nor the comfort of his ordinances; as merchants who remove for traffic, and settle their abode there where the true religion is not professed, it may be, suppressed with extreme rigour; especially when they send youth thither, and novices and persons not grounded in the faith. This is like turning a child loose among a company of contagious persons, or setting an empty pitcher to crack before the fire. Commerce and traffic with infidels or persons of a false religion is lawful; but to make our constant residence where there is no liberty for reading and hearing the word of God, no liberty of worship and ordinances, cannot be excused from sin. You make religion to stoop to gain. I will not urge so high and heroical an instance as Moses: Heb. xi. 25, 'Choosing rather to suffer afflictions with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;' but of a Jew since the time of their degeneration. I have once and again read of one Rabbi Joseph, who, being allured with the hope and call to a place of great gain, to teach Hebrew where there was no synagogue, is said to have brought forth this scripture for his answer and excuse, 'The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.' Let us Christians remember it, and consider the pertinency of it.

4. It is more refinedly done by them who by earthly things are drawn off from the pursuit of heavenly, and are night and day cumbered with much serving, and never take time to refresh their souls with the pleasure of the word; like Martha, cumbered about many things, while Mary sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word, Luke x. *Felix domus*, saith Bernard, *ubi Martha queritur de Maria*—it is a happy house where Martha complaineth of Mary. But alas! in most places it is otherwise; religion is encroached upon, all remembrance of God and meditation of his word is jostled out of doors by the cares of the world.

Use 2. To press us to make this profession seriously, heartily.

1. When we have wealth this profession should be made to draw off the heart from it to better things. When our store is increased, our hearts are apt to be enchanted with the love of these things: Ps. lxii. 10, 'If riches increase, set not your hearts upon them.' Our hearts

are very apt to be set upon the world ; but we must remember this is not the true treasure ; there are other manner of riches that we should look after—to be rich towards God, lest I be a carnal fool, Luke xii. 21. Complacency in a worldly portion is a sure sign of a worldly heart, more than greedy desire.

2. When we want wealth we should make this profession to induce us to contentment. The good disciples had the Spirit ; to Judas, as the bad one, he gave the purse. If you have spiritual wisdom and knowledge, you have that which is most excellent : James ii. 5, ‘ God hath chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith.’

3. When we lose wealth for righteousness’ sake, we have that which is better. The knowledge of a hated truth is better than to shine with the oppressor : Prov. iii. 31, 32, ‘ Envy not the oppressor, nor choose any of his ways : for the froward is an abomination to the Lord ; but his secret is with the righteous.’ You have your losses exchanged for a greater good.

*Use 3. Of trial.* Let us examine ourselves and see what esteem and account we have of the word of God. If any say that we are all ready to profess that we esteem the word of God more than all riches, then let us bring it off from words to deeds. Do you prefer obedience before gain ? do you seek after spiritual wisdom more than gain ? Prov. iv. 7, ‘ Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom ; and with all thy getting, get understanding.’ Is this your main business, to be wise to salvation ? How many afflict and torment themselves to get silver and gold, but how few to understand and embrace God’s law ! How little doth this esteem of the word control contrary desires and affections !

## SERMON LXXXI.

*Thine hands have made me and fashioned me : give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.*—VER. 73.

IN these words we have two things :—

1. The man of God’s argument, *thy hands have made me and fashioned me.*

2. His request, *give me understanding to keep thy commandments.*

1. For his argument. He pleadeth as God’s creature. Man is God’s immediate workmanship, both as to his body and his soul. Some apply the words, ‘ Thy hands have made me,’ to the creation of the soul ; and the other words, ‘ and fashioned me,’ to the creation of the body ; but we need not be so accurate. Both imply that he was wholly the work of God’s hand, a mere creature of his framing, and a creature exactly made ; so made that he was also fashioned, ‘ fearfully and wonderfully made,’ Ps. cxxxix. 14. The structure of man’s body darts a reverence and awe of God into the consciences of beholders ; and he saith in the 15th verse, ‘ I was curiously wrought ;’ the Vulgar reads it *acupictus*—painted as with a needle. Man’s body is a curious piece of embroidery, that is to be seen in the bones, veins, and arteries, that