

SERMON CI.

Oh, how love I thy law ! it is my meditation all the day.—VER. 97.

IN this psalm you have a perfect character of a regenerate man, what he is, and what he ought to be, in his meditations, his exercises, his affections ; and all this recommended to us from the frame of David's heart and example, and course of his way. Men of spiritual experience can best judge of these affections ; for 'as face answereth face in a glass,' so doth the heart of one believer to another.

In these words you have—(1.) His love asserted ; (2.) Demonstrated from the effect.

1. His love asserted, *oh, how love I thy law !*

2. Demonstrated from the effect of it, *it is my meditation all the day.*

This is an effect, for we are wont to muse upon what we love ; therefore David, loving the law of God, is always thinking of it.

First, For the assertion. Observe the matter asserted, and the vehemency of the assertion. The matter asserted is love to the law ; the vehemency of the assertion, '*Oh, how I love thy law !*' It is an admiration with an exclamation. David is not contented with a naked affirmation, '*I love thy law ;*' but useth a pathetical protestation of it, '*How love I thy law !*' The interrogation expresseth wonder, '*How I love thy law !*' And the exclamation, '*oh, how !*' that gives vent to strong affection, as if he had said, It is more than I am able to express. The *law* is taken for the whole scripture, as often in this psalm.

Secondly, For the demonstration of this affection, '*It is my meditation all the day ;*' that is, I do often meditate thereof, and can spend whole days therein. The words may signify frequency of such thoughts ; they were not such as did come now and then, but all the day his heart was working on holy things, as the blessed man is described, Ps. i. 2 ; that is, every day he is working something out of the word of God. Or, '*it is my meditation all the day,*' may note the depth and ponderousness of these thoughts ; his mind did not run out upon the law with flighty sallies, but he had such thoughts as were solid and serious, and did abide with him.

The points from hence are two :—

1. That God's people have a great love to his word ; yea, such a hearty affection as cannot easily be expressed.

2. They that love the word will be meditating therein continually, '*It is my meditation all the day.*'

Doct. 1. That God's people have a great love to his word ; yea, such a hearty affection as cannot easily be expressed.

I will evidence that by two considerations—(1.) The word deserves this love ; (2.) The saints are ready to yield it.

First, The word deserves it in respect of the author, the matter, and the use ; in all these respects is the word of God lovely.

First, For the author ; it is God's word, and they love it for the author's sake, the signification of his mind, as a letter from a beloved friend is very welcome to us. Aristotle, in his Rhetorics, mentioning the cause of delight, saith thus, They that love much, when they are

speaking of what they love, or when they hear anything of the party beloved, or receive anything from them, it is a mighty delight and pleasure to them. So it is in this spiritual love. The word is God's epistle and love-letter to our souls, therefore for his sake it is the more welcome to us. And upon this ground God complains of it that when he had 'written the great things of his law' to a people, they were neglected and slighted and 'counted a strange thing,' Hosea viii. 12. *I have written*; God is the author, whosoever is the penman. The scriptures are a writing from him to us. Now for us to be strangers to it, and little conversant about it, argues some contempt of God; as to slight a letter of a friend shows little esteem of the writer. The saints they put it into their bosoms, and it gains upon their hearts. Why? It is God's epistle, it is my best friend's letter. This is certain, love God and you love his law; for the author's sake it will be dear and precious to you.

Secondly, The saints have such a strong love to the word of God, because of the matter in it revealed, for it hath all the properties of a thing to be beloved; it is true, good, profound, and full of depth and mysteries. What would you desire in a doctrine to draw your hearts to it? Truth, goodness, and profoundness of knowledge.

1. If certainty of truth will draw love, it is be found in the holy scriptures, for they are vouched by God himself to be true: Ps. xix. 9, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' And the gospel is called 'the word of truth,' Eph. i. 13, 'After ye had received the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation;' and John xvii. 17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.' To improve these places thus. Truth is the good of the understanding, and without the knowledge of which we can have no tranquillity of mind. Now of all truths this is the chiefest; it is not human, natural, or inferior truth, but a supreme divine truth, ratified by God's authority, such as nature could never have found out; yea, such a truth as carries its own evidence with it, and shows how it comes from God, and discovers itself to be of God. As the sun is seen by its own beams, so the word of God needs no other testimony than itself to commend it to the consciences of men. Certainly it is such a truth as doth sufficiently evidence itself to be of God; all God's works discover their author, and carry about with them their own demonstration; not only his greater works, upon which he hath impressed most of his wisdom and power, but even his lesser works: every worm and pile of grass shows who made it. To an attentive and discerning eye, a man cannot look upon a worm, or consider a gnat or any contemptible creature, but he shall see this was made by a wise God. God hath left his stamp upon every one of his works, and certainly upon his word much more; for 'he hath magnified his word above all his name,' Ps. cxxxviii. 2. There is a more clear discovery of the goodness, wisdom, and power of God than can be in any of his works; for upon this he hath laid forth all the riches of his wisdom and goodness. Therefore, if there be in all creatures and works of God a self-evidencing light to discover their author, and that invisible Godhead and power by which they were made, certainly there is somewhat in the word of God to discover its author; because of this objective evidence which it hath in itself it is

more sure than an oracle or voice from heaven: 2 Peter i. 19, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy.' More sure than what? Than that voice which he heard from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' This was a confirmation indeed, you will think; and yet Peter, that heard that voice, telleth us that comparatively we have greater security from and by the word of God; not more sure in itself, but as it is given in evidence to us; so we have a more sure word of prophecy. A transient voice is more easily mistaken and forgotten than a standing authentic record; therefore we have a more sure ground to rest upon than ever hath been or can be given to sinners, subject to forgetfulness, jealousies, and mistakes. A voice from heaven speaking to us by name might more easily be suspected to be another's than the Lord's voice; as when God called Samuel, he suspected that it was the voice of Eli. Therefore an oracle cannot be so sure, safe, and self-evidencing as this word of God that he hath commended to us. For if God should speak to us still from heaven, how should we be able to distinguish it from delusion, or to know it was a voice from God? Might not Satan cause a voice to be heard in the air, and deceive us? Indeed the holy men of God that immediately received those voices and oracles were certified that it was of God, because there was some divine evidence which did accompany the revelation; and if there be the same impressions of God upon the written word, we have as much certainty as they; yea, more, as we view the whole revelation of God together, and more deliberately consider the character and signature of God that is stamped upon it. In short, the word when preached by Christ himself in person came in upon the hearts of men chiefly by this self-evidencing light; therefore it is said of Christ, Mat. vii. 29, that 'he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' His hearers were convinced of a sovereign majesty in his speech, proper to the divinity of his person; and when the officers were sent to apprehend him, there was such an evidence in his doctrine, that they cried out, 'Never man spake like this man,' John vii. 46. And still there is the same evidence in his doctrine written, for the voice could add nothing to it, and the writing can take nothing from it. The voice is but a circumstance, the word written not a dead letter, but can sufficiently evidence itself to be of God *de jure*; it hath the same power still, though *de facto* not always so received and so owned by the sons of men, but only by those that are enlightened by the Spirit to see this evidence. You find by daily experience every ingenious author leaves an image and impress of his own spirit, the mark of his genius upon every work that he doth. We can say of an exquisite painting, by some secret art in it, this is the hand of such a great master. Now, can it be imagined that God should put his hand to any work, and leave no signature or impress of it upon that work? It cannot be imagined, for it must be either because he could not, or he would not. That God could not, cannot be said without blasphemy. Can men show the wisdom and learning they have attained to in every work, and cannot God, who is the father of lights and the fountain of wisdom, insinuate such secret marks and notes of his wisdom and divine authority into that writing he took care should be penned for the use and comfort of the world, that it might be known

to be his? And that he would not, that cannot be believed neither. He that is so willing to 'show man what is good,' so willing to reveal himself to the reasonable creature, can we imagine he would so wholly conceal himself that there should be no stamp of himself upon that doctrine, to move our reverence and obedience, but receive it from the testimony of such a church? Therefore surely there is enough in the word to discover God to be the author. The apostles, when they went abroad to work faith, all the fruit that they expected from their preaching was from this self-evidencing light which was discovered in their doctrine; therefore doth the apostle say, 2 Cor. iv. 2, 'Not handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.' They did not commend themselves to the consciences of men merely by the miracles which they wrought, though that also was some seal of their commission, and that they were authorised and sent by God to preach those things to the world, but 'by the manifestation of the truth commending themselves to every man's conscience.' So the apostle reckons up many things, 'approving ourselves as the ministers of God by the word of truth,' 2 Cor. vi. 4. Therefore certainly there is somewhat in the truth delivered that will sufficiently make out itself to be of God. And when they render the reason why this word was not received, it was not for want of evidence, as if this truth could not sufficiently be known to be of God, but because men were blinded with their lusts and carnal affections; for so he saith, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4, 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,' &c. Which shows there is a light in the gospel by which it can discover itself, and if this light be hidden from the eyes of men, it is because their minds are blinded by their own lusts and carnal affections. Now, if the certainty of truth will draw affection, certainly those truths which are conveyed in the word of God should gain upon our hearts and draw affection. Why? Because these are sublime, supreme, and weighty truths, and come in with a great deal of evidence upon the hearts of men.

2. If goodness can gain the hearts and affections of men, the word of God is good as well as true. There is a double desire in man—a desire of truth and a desire of immortality; to know the truth, and to enjoy the chiefest good; the happiness of the intellect, of the understanding, that lies in the contemplation of truth; and the happiness of the will, in the enjoyment of good. In the state of innocency, this was represented by the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to suit these two capacities and desires that were in the heart of man: the tree of life, to suit his desires of happiness; and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to suit his desires of truth. Under the law, this is set forth by the candlestick and the table of shewbread; and in the gospel by the sacrament of baptism, which is called an enlightening—Heb. x. 32, 'After you were enlightened;' that is, after you were baptized—and the Lord's supper. Light and life are the two great things man looks after as a reasonable creature; to get more light, and then life, that he may enjoy God. Now, we are still at a loss for satisfaction of these desires until we meet with the word of God, where there is *primum verum*, the supreme truth, and *summum bonum*, the

chiefest good ; and therefore the directions of the word are called ‘ true laws ’ and ‘ good statutes,’ Neh. ix. 13: true laws, all words of truth, so to perfect the understandings of men ; and good laws, very suitable to their will and inclination, and so bear a full proportion with the desires of a reasonable creature. So 1 Tim. i. 15, ‘ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.’ The gospel is a faithful saying ; there is truth to perfect the understanding, and then worthy of the chiefest embraces of our wills and affections. As there is plain, certain, clear truth in the word of God, a satisfaction to the understanding in the view of truth, so there is also a full compliance with the motions of the will which the scripture offereth. Now two things there are the scriptures do reveal which are good for men, and cannot be found elsewhere, and all the world have been puzzled about them how to find them out :—(1.) Reconciliation with God ; (2.) Salvation, or eternal happiness.

[1.] Reconciliation with God : this is the grand inquiry of the guilty creature, Wherewith shall God be appeased, satisfied, and we reconciled to him, he being offended by our sin ? Micah vi. 8. How justice shall be satisfied, and men, that are obnoxious to the wrath of God, may come to have delightful communion with him, this is the great scruple that troubleth the creature, and all the false religions in the world were invented for the removing and assailing this doubt and scruple, and appeasing the hearts of men as to these fears of divine justice. Now, we can nowhere be satisfied but in the way of reconciliation and peace which is tendered by God himself to repenting sinners, through the mediation of Christ Jesus. Natural conscience will make us sensible of sin and wrath, and we have no ransom to pay it ; and all other creatures cannot help us, for they are debtors to God for all they have and can do. How then shall God be satisfied ? How shall we escape this vengeance ? This fear would have remained upon us to all eternity, but that we have relief from the word of God : 2 Cor. v. 19, ‘ God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses.’ There is more glory in these few words, and more of God discovered in them, than there is in all the world. Oh, what a deal of comfort, and what a foundation for the rejoicing of our faith, is there laid in this reconciliation in and by Christ Jesus our Lord ! That short sentence discovers more of God’s intentions and good-will to man than all the bounty of his providence in and by all the creatures put together. Here was a secret which could never enter into man’s heart, nor do we find a syllable of it written in any heathen book as to the way of it, how it shall be brought about ; a truth so incredible to flesh and blood, that the prophet, when he speaketh of this wonder, asketh, ‘ Who hath believed our report ?’ Isa. liii. 1 ; who hath believed that he should bear our sorrows, and be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, and that the chastisements of our peace should be upon him, and by his stripes we should be healed ? Here is the great secret God hath revealed to you in his word. This must needs be a secret in nature, for this was a work which merely proceeded from the free motion of God’s will ; and therefore, being not *opus nature divinæ*, but *opus liberi consilii*, that work which God did not do by any necessity of nature, but by the free motion of his own will,

will never be found out unless God will discover it himself; for how could any man divine what God purposed in his heart before he brought it to purpose, until he himself had revealed it? Therefore it is a good word, because it reveals reconciliation by Christ.

[2.] There is something more to draw our hearts to the word—that is, eternal salvation. We grope and feel about for an immortal good. Nature will give us some presages of a state after this world, some kind of guesses; and we are groping and feeling about for an eternal good, Acts xvii. 27. Man, who hath a soul that will not perish, must have some happiness that will last as long as his soul shall last; he would fain be eternally happy. Now, it is the word of God only reveals both the thing and the way to God; the thing itself, that there is such a state, and what it is: 2 Tim. i. 10, ‘Christ hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.’ It lay in darkness before, hidden under some guesses and representations to the old people of God, but now it is brought to light in the gospel. Heathens in their dark notions did stumble upon the immortality of the soul, which they did rather dream of than understand distinctly; but now all is open and clear, and God hath manifested to you that ‘there is a rest for the children of God,’ and a happiness after this life. And also God hath revealed the way how to seek it, and how to attain and get this eternal happiness; therefore the holy scriptures are said to be ‘able to make wise to salvation,’ 2 Tim. iii. 15: it doth direct you in this way; that is wisdom indeed, to be wise to salvation. To be able to turn and wind in the world, to be wise only in the present generation, as the children of this world are, it is folly rather than wisdom; as when children can set forth their toys, we do not look upon it as any piece of wisdom, but folly. Wisdom lies in fixing a right end, in a choice of fit means, and in a dexterous prosecution of those means for the attainment of this end. Now the holy scriptures make you wise to salvation—that is, to fix upon a right end, for they discover that there is a happiness that we may fix upon, and they direct us in the way; and then by mighty and potent methods of reasoning they quicken and awaken us to look after this business, that we may dexterously pursue it as the great care that lies upon us; therefore the children of God delight in the word, because this makes them wise to salvation. Here they have a perfect blessedness, and a powerful way of argumentation, and the soul is quickened to look after these great and everlasting hopes.

3. The doctrines of the word are profound truths: ‘Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore doth my soul keep them,’ Ps. cxix. 129. They are remote from vulgar and ordinary knowledge. The word of God is not only called ‘a doctrine according to godliness,’ 1 Tim. vi. 3, but a ‘mystery of godliness,’ 1 Tim. iii. 16. Since the fall there is a curiosity of knowledge, a desire whereby man not only seeks what is true and good, but what is rare and profound; we have no need to run to other books. True depth and true profoundness are to be found in the word of God. There are wonders in God’s law, if we had eyes to see them: Ps. cxix. 18, ‘Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law;’ things indeed so profound and so mysterious that the angels desire to pry into them, 1 Peter i. 12. Those spirits that live in the blessed vision and constant fruition of

God, yet they did find a depth of wisdom in salvation by Christ, such a ravishing mystery, that they curiously are taken up in the study of it, and they delight in the view of those things which are commended to us for our study: Eph. iii. 10, 'To the intent that now, unto the principalities in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.' God's word is a glass wherein those glorious creatures do, as in a mirror, behold his wisdom, and are in some sort bettered by it. The state of angels is a happy state, but it is finite, capable of being improved and bettered, and that by the doctrine of the holy scriptures. Well, then, such are the depths and various excellences of the word of God, that the saints know not how more pleasantly and contentedly to spend their thoughts and time than in the search and view of those truths, where such notable mysteries are revealed about the nature of God, creation, providence, the story of man's fall, redemption by Christ, the way to true happiness, and the like. Both the grounds of faith and rules of practice are all such as are above the pitch of human understanding; natural reason cannot find them out, and now they are revealed by God, the mind doth not fully apprehend them.

Thirdly, The use of scripture, the ends for which God hath appointed it, and the uses for which it was given.

1. To increase the knowledge of God. Now, the saints would know more of God, and better their notions of him; as Moses, his great request to God is, 'Tell me thy name;' when he learned that, 'Show me thy glory;' he would fain know more of God. So the saints would fain know more of God; therefore the word is dear and precious to them, because it discovers so much of God, Hosea vi. 3. This is their property, they 'follow on to know the Lord.' They do not content themselves with their first and infant notions, but aspire to know him more and more; for their love, fear, and trust, and all, doth depend upon the knowledge of God. If we had more knowledge of God, we should love him more and trust him more: Ps. ix. 10, 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' We know God but as men born blind know the fire; they know there is such a thing as fire, for they feel it warm them, but what it is they know not; so that there is a God we know, but what he is we know little, and indeed we can never search him out to perfection; a finite creature can never fully comprehend that which is infinite. The saints are following on to know the Lord; they desire to know more and more, and there is no such means to discover God to them as this way.

2. The use of the word is to convert the soul and to bring it home to God: Ps. xix. 7, 'The law of God is perfect, converting the soul.' There is the perfection of God's word, it is God's instrument for converting of souls, or turning of them back to him again. For conversion, take it in its whole latitude, compriseth this, to humble us, to cleanse us, to bind up our broken hearts. Because of all these uses, the children of God love his word. It serves—

[1.] To humble us for sin: Jer. xxiii. 29, 'Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' He appeals to it as things that we may find by experience, that the word of God is not only a hammer to break, but a fire to melt.

As a battered vessel, when it is to be new formed, must be melted, that it may be capable of this new form, so no such way to melt the heart, and make it capable of God's purpose, as the word of God; no such thing to break the heart, no such terrors and agonies like those the word works; and to melt the heart, to make it pliable to God's use, no such thing as the word of God to affect us for sin, for sin as it is a breach of God's law, or an offence to God.

[2.] It hath this use, to cleanse the heart. and subdue it to the obedience of Christ: Ps. cxix. 9, 'Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereunto according to thy word.' Young men, who more stubborn and boisterous than they, that are carried on with great strength and fervour in the very heat of their rebellion against God? Well, the word of God can cleanse the heart of a young man. As Plato saith of youth, that it is such a beast as will not easily come to hand. Now for cicurating and taming this beast, for the captivating those rebellious affections in youth, and cleansing and working out the filthiness that is in us, nothing like the word. And it is by these spiritual weapons that every thought is brought into captivity to Christ, 2 Cor. x.; and then, as it is obstinate, the power of the word breaks the force of our lusts.

[3.] For comforting and binding up the broken-hearted. Human wisdom and eloquence can do nothing to purpose this way; but when God by the word reveals to a man his righteousness, then 'his flesh shall come again as a child's, he shall return to the days of his youth,' Job xxxiii. 25. Though a man before did walk up and down as a ghost, was, as it were, a walking skeleton, and his marrow was sucked out of his bones by the terrors of the Lord that were upon him, yet when he hath God's word to show, under God's hand, for his pardon, this brings his comfort; his flesh shall revive, he shall return fresher than a child, and shall return to the days of his youth; his strength, joy, and comfort shall come again. Therefore, oh, how they love the law! because they have felt in their heart it must be God's word; for that which wounds must also heal.

3. To make us perfect as well as to begin the work: 2 Tim. iii. 17, it is said, 'The word of God is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works;' so that in this perfection there are three uses for which the word serves:—

[1.] For building up in faith, or increasing in internal grace. The word of God is not only for novices, but for grown persons, that there may be a continual dropping into the lamps, as it was in the vision of Zechariah: Acts xx. 32, 'I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.' It is not enough to lay a foundation, but there must be a building up. Now, what is that which builds us up? 'The word of his grace;' that is, God's blessing upon the reading and hearing the word; for the apostle speaks it when he was taking leave of the Ephesians: 'I commend you to God, and the word of his grace;' that is, the word of grace sent among them, by their ordinary officers continued to them, blessing the reading and hearing the word by their ordinary officers; there would be no need of Paul, the room should be supplied. Habits of grace must

still be maintained by fresh influences, and they always come into us by the word of God; therefore, after we are converted and born again, the word is useful, 'that we may grow thereby,' 2 Peter ii. 2.

[2.] To direct our practice; that is one use the word serves for; so it is said, 2 Peter i. 19, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place;' in this state of ignorance wherein we are, for that is figured by those words, 'in a dark place.' Sure it is a great blessing to have a light shining to us that we may not wander, and fall into the snares wherewith we are encompassed. We are apt to forget and mistake our way; we are very forgetful, and our way is narrow, hardly found and hardly kept; and Satan is full of wiles and deceits, like an *ignis fatuus*, ready to lead us out of the way; therefore we had need have a sure guide and a sure light: Ps. cxix. 105, 'Thy word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths.' It is a light not only to our paths, for the choice of our general way, but for all our steps, to direct us in all our ways.

[3.] To comfort us in all conditions, under our crosses, confusions, and difficulties; we have all from the word of God: Ps. cxix. 50, 'This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me.' Oh! when a child of God is even dead, and hath many damps and discouragements upon his heart, when he goes to the word, there he hath quickening, reviving, and is encouraged to wait upon God again. All our discomfort comes from forgetting what God hath spoken in his word: Heb. xii. 5, 'Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children.' There is abundant consolation in the word, but we forget it, and do not carry it always in our mind, and then we lie under much dejection of heart; if we do not study it, discomfort will come upon us. In the word there is a remedy for every malady and an ease for every smart; and therefore this is that which makes it precious to the children of God.

Secondly, The saints readily yield this love to the word. Why?

1. Because their hearts are suited to the word. The word is every way suited to the sanctified nature, and the sanctified nature is suited to it; for that which is written in God's book is written over again upon their hearts by the finger of the Spirit. While we are in our natural state there is an enmity to the law of God: 'For we are not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be,' Rom. viii. 7. Ay! but when they come to be written upon the heart and mind, then our affections are suited to the word. Carnal men do not love the word. Why? Because it is contrary to them; as Micajah to Ahab, 'He prophesieth nothing but evil to me.' It only rubs their sores and discovers their spots to them, and that is grievous; and proud spirits think it to be a simple, plain doctrine. Worldly spirits love it not, for it draweth them off wholly to think of things to come; but they whose hearts are suited to it, they have a mighty love to it.

2. They have tasted the goodness of the word, therefore they love it: 2 Peter ii. 3, 'As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word.' Why? 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' if you have felt any benefit: Jer. xv. 16, 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of

mine heart.' When they come to taste, digest, and have experience of the benefit in comforting, changing, supporting their own hearts, then they love the word of God that hath been the instrument of it : James i. 18, 'He hath begotten us by the word of truth.' Then what follows? 'Be swift to hear.' If a man be begotten, if he hath felt the benefit of the word, then he will be taking all occasions to delight himself, and refresh his soul in the word of God, in reading, hearing, meditating, because he hath found sensible benefit.

Use 1. To shame and humble us that we are so cold in our love. It is an admirable and an incredible affection David here speaks. Consider who it was that speaks thus. David, he that was encumbered with the employments of a kingdom, he that had so many courtly pleasures, so many great businesses to divert and draw him aside ; yet all his employment could not withhold him from delighting himself in the word of God. It was David, that was a king, and mark how he doth express himself ; he doth not say, I endeavour to keep thy word, but 'I love thy word.' Nay, he saith more, he speaks of it as a thing he could not express, 'How I love thy law !' No great wonder that we cannot express the excellency of the word ; but that our affections, which are so finite, that these should not be expressed, this is wonderful. Then he speaks of it with exclamation too, 'Oh, how I love thy law !' and he speaks this to God. The Septuagint reads it, 'Lord, how have I loved thy law !' He makes God himself to be judge not only of the truth of his love (as Peter makes Christ the judge of the truth of his love : I have many failings, I have fallen foully of late ; but, 'Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest I love thee') but he makes God the judge of the strength of his love, 'Lord, how do I love thy law !' Have we anything answerable ? Heart should answer heart. Are there such affections wrought in us as David expresseth to be in himself ? This should shame us, for we have more reason, there is more of the word of God revealed to us, more of the counsel of God discovered, the canon of scripture being enlarged, more discovered than ever was to David, yet our affections so cold.

SERMON CII.

Oh, how love I thy law ! &c.—VER. 97.

I COME now to a second use, to press us to get this love. Take three arguments :—

1. This will wean us from sinful delights, that are apt to insinuate with us and take our hearts ; it will draw us off from carnal pastimes, curious studies, vain pamphlets : if you had this love, here would be your recreation in the word of God. *Castæ delicie mee sunt scripture tue*, saith Austin—here are my chaste delights, thy holy scripture, to be ruminating and meditating there. Here you will be employing your time and strength of your thoughts. There are two things mightily concern us—to make religion our business and recreation ;

our business in regard of the seriousness, and our recreation and delight in regard of the sweetness. Now, if you have a word from God, here will be your delight; you will be exercising yourselves contemplating the height, depth, and breadth of God's love in Christ Jesus, and turning over this blessed book: Job xxiii. 12, 'I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food.' Your very food for sustentation of your bodies will not be so sweet to you as the word of God for the comfort and refreshing of the soul. When the promises are as dry breasts and withered flowers, when men have little or no feeling of the power of it upon their hearts, no wonder they are besotted with the pleasures of sin. Men's minds must have some pleasure and oblectation, but their hearts are chained to carnal delights, so that they cannot mind the business of their souls.

2. Your hearts will be more stable and upright with God, more constant in the profession of godliness, when you come to love the word and love the truth for the truth's sake: 2 Thes. ii. 12, 'Because they received not the truth in the love of it, therefore God gave them up to strong delusions, that they might believe lies.' The Lord hath seen it fit ever to continue this dispensation in the course of his providence, to suffer seducing spirits to go forth to try how we have received the truth, whether only in the bare profession of it, or received it in the love of it. Many have received the truth in the light of it; that is, compelled by conscience, human tradition, current opinions, and custom of the country to profess it; but they do not love it, therefore they are easily carried away. There may be knowledge where there is not assent; there may be assent where there is not love; there may be some slight persuasion of the truth of evangelical doctrine, but if the heart be biassed with lust and sin, a man doth but lie open to temptations to apostasy. Therefore, until the heart be drawn out unto love to the truth it can never be stable with God.

3. This is that which will give you a clearer understanding in the mysteries of godliness. The more we love the word the more we study it, and the deeper insight and more spiritual discerning we have in the mysteries thereof. It is not acute parts, but strong affections to divine things, that maketh us to understand them in a spiritual manner. If a man hath acute parts, but yet hath vile affections and carnal passions, these will becloud the mind and fill us with prejudicate opinions, so that we cannot discern the mind of God in many cases, nor spiritually discern it in any. Men are darkened with their own lusts, their minds are darkened with carnal lusts; then 'in seeing they see not, in hearing they hear not;' they do not hear what they hear. Let me set it forth by this similitude. A blunt iron, if it be thoroughly heated in the fire, will sooner pierce through a thick board than a sharper tool that is cold; so in the order of the affections; when a man's heart is heated and warmed with love to divine things, then it pierceth through; he hath such a sight of divine things as they shall affect and change his heart more than he that hath great parts. It is not acuteness of parts, so much as entireness of affection, which gives us a spiritual discerning of the mysteries of godliness; for when the heart is wedded to carnal lusts, the judgment is corrupted and partial, but when we have an affection to holiness we shall sooner

discern the mind of God. Knowledge breeds love, and love increaseth knowledge, for it fortifieth and strengtheneth the other faculties of the soul, that they may be more ready in operation. Let this persuade you to get this love to the word of God.

Ay! but how shall we do to get this love?

Direct. 1. I told you before it is the fruit of regeneration; yet a little to quicken you hereunto, consider all the arguments which are brought. As whose word it is; it is God's word, and if you love God, will you not love the word of God? Surely your best affections are due to him, and if you bear any affections to him you will bear an affection to his word: Isa. xxvi. 8, 'Our desires are to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.' First to thee, and then to the remembrance of thy name; or, as it is in the original, to thy memorial. If you have desires to God, then you will love that blessed book wherein you shall read and hear of God, where God hath displayed his name to you. And then consider what benefits you have by the word. It serves—

1. To enlighten us and to direct us. This is our light in a dark place, and to guide us on all occasions. Solomon saith, Eccles. xi. 7, 'Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.' If light natural be so pleasant, what is light spiritual? And therefore the Psalmist compares the word of God to the sun, Ps. xix. First he speaks of the sun when he displayeth his beams upon the earth, then presently he comes to speak of the word of God. The world can no more be without the one than the other, without the word of God no more than without the sun; for as one doth revive the drooping plants, and cheer and refresh nature by his comfortable beams, so the word of God doth rejoice, refresh, and revive the hearts of God's people by its light and influence, Ps. xix. 7, 8. Oh! it is a comfort to have light to see our way. When men begin to have a conscience about heavenly things they will judge so. Paul and his companions in the great storm at sea, when they saw no sun for many days, and when they were afraid to fall upon rocks and shelves, with what longing did they expect to see the sun! So a poor bewildered soul doth experiment such another case, when his way is dark, and hath no direction from the word of God what course to take; but when he can get a little light from the testimonies of the Lord to guide him in his way, how sweet, refreshing, and reviving is this to his heart!

2. It serves to comfort us in all straits. The word of God is, as Basil saith, a common shop of medicaments, where there is a salve for every sore, and a remedy for every malady, a promise for every condition. God hath plentifully opened his good-will and heart to sinners; whatever the burden and distress be, still there is some remedy from the word of God. Look, as David, Ps. xlviii. 2, 3, bids them to view Zion on all sides, to see if there were anything wanting necessary for ornament and defence, so we may say of the word of God, Go round about, see if there be anything wanting for the comfort of a Christian. There are promises of wisdom to manage our business, James i. 5; promises of defence in the midst of all calamities, Heb. iii. 5; promises of sustentation and support in God's storehouse, blessings enough for every poor soul. Then the word of God serves to support and

strengthen us in our conflicts, either with sins or with afflictions, to strengthen us against corruptions, and quicken us to duties; the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, the choicest weapon in the spiritual warfare, Eph. vi. 18. Here a Christian fetcheth his all from hence. Therefore, if you would have these affections to the word, think what a great deal of benefit is to be had by it, light, comfort, and strength.

Direct. 2. Be in a capacity to love the word. If you would have this strong affection David speaks of, you must be renewed and reconciled.

1. Renewed, for this love is an affection proper to the new nature: Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the spirit do mind the things of the spirit.' It is in vain to think of any such love to God's word until we be renewed by God's grace. A man, as a man, may delight in the knowledge of the word; but to receive the word of God as the word of God, there must be somewhat of the divine nature, or you will not have such a relish and savour to spiritual things.

2. Be reconciled to God. A guilty creature, what comfort can he take in the word of God, where he can see nothing but his accusation and his doom? When he looks into it, it shows him his natural face. A natural man cannot delight in the word of God, for it only revives his fears, and offers to his mind a sense of his misery. Therefore God's witnesses are said to 'torment them that dwell on the earth,' Rev. xi. 10. God's word is a torment to them; to come to the word, and study the word of God, and consider his mind revealed therein, this nothing but increaseth fears. It is a vexation to them, when they would sleep securely, to have their consciences rubbing up and reviving their fears. Therefore they are not in a capacity to delight in the word of God.

Direct. 3. If you would delight in the word of God, you must get an esteem of spiritual enjoyments. Why are wicked men so greedily carried out after worldly comforts? These are the only things which they value. But until a man learns to value knowledge, and spiritual comforts, and subjection to God, and conversion of his heart to God, he will not love the word, which is the instrument of all these benefits. When he counts these as the greatest blessings, then his heart will be carried on to them, for the word only hath a subserviency to these things. Poor low creatures value themselves by plentifulness of worldly accommodations; they will not be so much longing after them. But when they value instruction above silver, and knowledge more than their gold, as Prov. viii. 10, when the heart is set upon spiritual things, then they love the word by which they might be made partakers of it.

Direct. 4. Let a man live in awe of the word, and make it his business to maintain communion with God; for this will show him the necessity of his word to comfort and to strengthen him upon all occasions. A lively Christian, that in good earnest minds his work, must have the word by him for his strength and support, as he that labours must have his meals, otherwise he will faint. Painted fire needs no fuel, and when we content ourselves with a loose and careless profession, then we will not so delight ourselves in God's book and in his statutes,

and run to those things for the support of our souls. But when we make it our business, then naturally we will be carried out in love to the word.

Use 3. For trial. Have we this love to God's word? God's people love his word exceedingly. There are many do not hate it, do not oppose it, or have some cold affections this way; but have you that order of affection which the children of God do express?

1. If you have a true love to the word of God, you will much exercise yourselves therein in reading, hearing, praying, conferring, and meditating; these will be constant exercises of your souls. You will be much in reading the word, as the eunuch returning from public worship was reading a portion of scripture, Acts viii. 28. It is good to see with our own eyes, and drink out of the fountain; not barely to attend upon deductions from the word, and discourses built thereupon, but to read the book itself; and if it seem dark, God will send you an interpreter. Then you will be delighted in hearing the word. Certainly the saints will take all meet occasions for this. If he hath begotten you by the word of truth, you will be swift to hear, James i. 19. They which have experimented the power of it, there needs not much ado to press them to come and wait upon the dispensation of the word: Ps. cxxii. 1, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go up unto the house of the Lord.' You should be glad of these occasions of hearing God's word. Look, as in heaven all our comforts and all grace comes in there by vision, by sight, so now it comes in here in the church by hearing. Hearing is the sense exercised in the church, and therefore God's children will be much in hearing the word. Then much in conferring of it; what a man delights in, he will be talking of, and so should you at home and abroad: Deut. vi. 7, 'Thou shalt be talking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' When you are at home you should be conferring of these holy things, and abroad seasoning your journey and business with gracious conference.

2. If you have this love to the word of God, you will delight to get it into your hearts. There is the great business of a Christian, that it may not only be in the Bible, but may be impressed on the heart, and expressed by a sincere, uniform, impartial obedience, when we study conformity thereto in heart and life. Hypocrites may delight in speculation, but a child of God is delighted in the obedience and in conformity to his word: Ps. cxix. 14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches.' Not only in the testimonies themselves, in the naked contemplation of these blessed truths, reconciliation with God, and the way to true happiness, but in the way and practice of these things. He that loves his rule will study an exact conformity thereunto. The love a child of God hath to the word differs from the love of a hypocrite or a temporary believer thus, by this similitude: in a rare piece of painting, an ordinary beholder takes a great deal of comfort when he seeth it or looks upon it, but this is nothing to that contentment which an artist takes in imitating and copying it out, in expressing it, when he can by his own pencil copy it out to the life; so that which a child of God delights in is when he

can copy out this word of God, get it into his heart, and hold it forth in his conversation, for the scripture speaks of both. Of the word got into the heart: James i. 21, 'Receive with meekness the ingrafted word;' when it is not only an external rule, but an ingrafted word. So Ps. xxxvii. 31, 'The law of God is in his heart,' and Ps. xl. 8, 'Thy law is in my heart.' Here is the great testimony of our love to God's law, when we strive to have it impressed on the heart and expressed in the conversation: Phil. iii. 16, 'Let us walk by the same rule.' This is a double contentment when it comes to that, not only to the view of truth, but when the heart is a ready transcript of the word of God, when these things are not only revealed to him, but revealed in him: Gal. i. 16, 'It pleased God to reveal his Son in me.' There is a revealing things to us and a revealing things in us. Now, when this is our business, that all this may be revealed in us, and we may be cast into the mould of this doctrine, then indeed do we love the law of God: Rom. vi. 17, 'Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you,' or 'whereto ye were delivered.'

3. They which love the word of God, love the whole word, even that which thwarts their natural desires, and discovers their sin to them. Paul saith, Rom. vii. 12, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.' What is the meaning of this disjunctive, the *law* and the *commandment*? By the commandment he means that particular law which had so strangely affected him, that had wrought such tragical effects upon his heart, made sin revive, disturbed him, discovered himself to himself; he loves that law which broke in upon his heart with so much power and evidence, and stirred up his affections. Carnal men love the comfortable part of the word, to be feasted with privileges; but that part which urgeth them to unpleasing duties, or discovers their sins, they love not: 1 Kings xxii. 8, 'He doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil;' therefore I will not hear him. Though he was a prophet of the Lord, and came with the word of the Lord, yet, He never prophesied good to me; that is, such things as did please him. Do you think that was the temper of that wicked king alone? No; it is the temper of every wicked man's heart: Amos v. 10, 'They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.' All wicked men have such a disposition; they hate that part of the word which doth stir up their fears, revive their doubts, and is contrary to their lusts. It is their general disposition: John iii. 20, 'Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.' They shun that part of the word whereby they might come to know themselves; either they could wish such things were not sins, or that they did not know them to be sins: 2 Peter iii. 5, 'For this they willingly are ignorant of.' A guilty soul hath a secret enmity to the word of God, being loath to read his own doom there, and be much occupied and employed in that which condemns and accuseth him; as a man that hath light ware is loath to come to the balance, or a man that hath counterfeit coin is loath to come to the touchstone; so they are loath to come too close and near the word of God, that their whole course may be discovered to themselves. None

but a pure sincere heart can have such a universal love to God's law.

4. If you love the word, you will ever love the word; for the same reasons that drew your heart at first continue still: Ps. cxix. 20, 'My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.' By *judgments* is meant the word of God, which is the rule of God's proceeding with sinners. It was not for a pang only that he had that strong and vehement affection, but it was a constant thing at all times, it was the ordinary frame of his heart. Many men have good affections for a while, but they abide not with them; for some have an adulterous affection only; they may love the word of God while it is new, for novelty sake: John v. 35, 'Ye rejoiced for a season in his light;' and Acts xvii. 20, they flocked about Paul, because he seemed to be a 'setter forth of new doctrine.' This is but carnal love, that is soon altered. Or else it may be they have some love to the word during some qualm of conscience, and they may find some savour in it when they have a little trouble upon them, as we desire strong water in a pang, not as a constant diet. When they are under some working of conscience, then they run to the word; but as soon as they can lick themselves whole again, they slight it, and their love to the word is gone. As their trouble wears off, so their affection is worn off. These are driven by fearing the word, and not by the love of it. For a great while men are carried on pleasingly in their love to the word, but when it grates hard, bears hard upon conscience, and meets with their lusts, then they go away in discontent; as Herod 'heard John gladly' for a while, Mark vi. 20, until his Herodias was touched, and then follows his darling sin again. Their love is to the word if carnal credit accompany it, as John was welcome to the Jews until he fell under Herod's displeasure. The stony ground received the word with much joy, 'until the sun arose with a burning heat,' Mat. xiii. There are certain times when it is a credit to be religious, and when the gospel is befriended in the world; then men will have some seeming affection, but it dies away. God's children love the word for its own sake, therefore they ever love it. They which love the truth for foreign reasons, because of novelty, merely out of present necessity, public countenance, because it is in fashion and repute, or because they thought the word would flatter them more in their sins than it doth, these do not love the word. Thus David's affection is asserted.

Secondly, We have David's assertion demonstrated, 'It is my meditation all the day.'

Doct. 2. They that love the word will be meditating therein continually.

There are two grounds for this—love causeth it, and love is increased by it.

1. Love causeth it. We are continually thinking of whatsoever we love. Rich men, that affect worldly things, are always thinking of gathering substance and increasing their worldly portion; as that man, Luke xii. 17, 18, was dialogising and discoursing with himself. Carnal lovers are thinking of that they love, and ambitious men are feasting their souls with imaginations and suppositions of worldly

greatness, pleasing themselves by framing images in their minds ; and warriors are thinking of battles and wars, and voluptuaries are thinking of sports and pastimes, and a child of God is thinking of holy things. Love causes the soul to be more where it loves than where it lives ; it is the best entertainment they can find for themselves to frame images of things loved in their minds.

2. As love begets meditation, so meditation cherishes love. Meditation is the life of all the means of grace, and that which makes them fruitful to our souls. What is the reason there is so much preaching and so little practice ? For want of meditation. Constant thoughts are operative. If a hen straggles out from her nest, she brings forth nothing, her eggs chill ; so when we do not sit abroad upon holy thoughts, if we content ourselves with some few transient thoughts and glances about divine things, and do not dwell upon them, the truth is suddenly put off, and doth no good. All actions require time and space for their operation ; if hastily slubbered over, they cool ; if we give them time and space we shall feel their effects. So if we hold truths in our mind, and dwell upon them, there will be an answerable impression ; but when they come like a flash of lightning, then they are gone, and we run them over cursorily. That truth may work there is required three things—sound belief, serious consideration, and close application : Job v. 27, ‘Lo, this we have searched it ; so it is, hear it, and know thou it for thy good.’

[1.] A sound belief, for it is reality that will work upon us. Affection is always according to the strength of the persuasion.

[2.] There must be application. Every kind of operation is by the touch. The nearer the touch the greater the virtue ; so the more close they are upon the heart, and touch, and concern us, the more they work upon us.

[3.] There must be consideration : we must seriously revolve these things in our mind, and debate with ourselves ; as, for instance, what a strict and precise account we are to give at the day of judgment, the inexpressible pains of hell and ineffable joys of heaven. Generally we do not believe these things. If we were persuaded there is a heaven and hell, if we did think of them with application, and say, Soul, thou must one day go either to heaven or hell, thou must one day appear before God, and be put under a sentence of everlasting death, or receive a sentence of everlasting life ; if we did consider them with serious and with inculcative thoughts : Is it indeed so ? then let me consider what I must do ; this reasoning and debating, and whetting these truths upon the heart, would work upon us, and we should sooner see the fruit. As Elisha stretched himself often upon the Shunamite’s son, and kept stretching himself till the child began to wax warm and sneezed, and then he opened his eyes, so we should spread truth upon the heart till affection begin to quicken it.

Use 1. Reproof, and that of three sorts of persons :—

1. Those that go musing of vanity all the day, and never can find a thought for God, for Christ, for the covenant, or for the great truths of the word. They have thoughts and to spare for other things. Do those love the word of God, and never spend a thought about it ? Prov. vi. 21. If the word were bound upon us as a jewel and chain,

then when thou goest it would lead thee, when thou sleepest it would keep thee, and when thou awakest it would talk with thee. The word would ever be running upon our minds if we had any hearty affections to it. Christians, think with yourselves; have you thoughts for other things, and none for God, Christ, heaven, and everlasting glory? Would you count him to be a charitable man that should throw away his meat and drink into the kennel, rather than give to him that needs and asks it? So, would you count him to be a godly man, one that hath a sincere love to God, that hath thoughts he knows not what to do with, but casts them away upon every idle toy and base inconsiderable thing, and not a thought for God? to suffer his thoughts to run waste; yea, run riot in envious ripenings, or unclean glances, or revengeful or proud imaginations; that can have thoughts for such trifles, and never a thought for God, and forget him days without number? Jer. ii. 32. Have these affections to the word of God?

2. It reproves those persons to whom good thoughts are looked upon as a burden and melancholy interruption, and when they rush into their minds, are thrown out again like unwelcome guests. These seem to be described by those words, Rom. i. 28, 'They did not like to retain God in their knowledge;' when men like not to entertain thoughts of God. If they fasten upon our hearts we soon grow weary of them. Christians, to a gracious heart, one that loves God and his word, thoughts of God and holy things are very comfortable and sweet: Ps. civ. 34, 'My meditation of him shall be sweet.' But when they are so unwelcome, and seem so troublesome to your souls, have you a love to them? To be weary of the thoughts of God is to degenerate into devils; for it is part of the devils' torment to think of God: they believe and tremble; the more explicit thoughts they have of God, the more is their horror increased. If it be so with you, judge whether you have this affection.

3. Those that read and hear, but do not meditate in order to affection and practice. This duty must have its turn too. If you will ever manifest affection, and increase affection, you must take some time to meditate and season your thoughts: James i. 24, 'For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.' They lay aside thoughts of what they hear and read, and so go into their old course again. When you hear or read anything of the word of God, the greatest part of the task is yet behind; you are to meditate, to exercise your thoughts therein. When men hear and do not meditate, it is like the seed which fell upon the pathway: Mat. xiii., 'The fowls of the air came and picked it up.' When you do not labour to cover it, to get it into your heart by deep and ponderous thoughts, the devil comes and takes it away again, when you work it not into your souls. Bare hearing leaves but little impression, unless we debate and revolve it in our minds. 'God spake once, and I heard it twice,' saith Job. He had it not only at the first delivery, but at the rebound; he went it over again in his thoughts.

Use 2. Information. It informs us why we are so backward to meditate; it is for want of love: 'Oh, how love I thy law!' and then, 'It is my meditation all the day.' You think it is want of time, and want of parts and abilities. I tell you, it is want of love. It is but a

vain boasting, and the greatest hypocrisy, to say we love the law of God, and never exercise our minds therein; for where there is love it will command our thoughts; and if once you have found a heart, you will find time, abilities, and thoughts to bestow upon holy things. Love sets all the wheels of the soul awork; and therefore the great reason why meditation is so difficult is we have not such strength and such ardour of affections to the things of God. The difficulty doth not lie in the duty itself, but in the awkwardness of our hearts to the duty. You can muse upon other things, why not muse upon that which is holy?

Use 3. To press you to show love to the word of God this way by often meditating upon it; meditate upon the doctrines, promises, threatenings, man's misery, deliverance by Christ, necessity of regeneration, then of a holy life, the day of judgment. Fill the mind with such kind of thoughts, and continually dwell upon them. A good man should do so, and will do so. He should do so, Josh. i. 8; and he will do so, Ps. i. 2. Oh, do not begrudge a little time spent this way! for hereby we both evidence our love to the word and increase it.

But to quicken you hereunto:—

1. The more the heart is replenished with holy meditation, the less will it be pestered with worldly and carnal thoughts. The mind of man is restless, and cannot lie idle, therefore it is good to set it awork upon holy things. It will be working upon somewhat, and if you do not feed it with holy thoughts, what then? 'All the imaginations of the heart will be evil, only evil, and that continually,' Gen. vi. 5. These are the natural products and births of our spirits. And Mat. xv. 19, 'Out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts,' &c. When the heart is left to run loose, then we shall go musing of vanity and sin; therefore by frequent meditation this evil is prevented, because the mind is pre-occupied, and possessed already by better things; nay, the mind is seasoned, and vain and carnal thoughts grow distasteful to us when the heart is stored with good matter.

2. The more these thoughts abide with us, the more the heart is seasoned and fitted for all worldly comforts and affairs. It is hard to touch pitch and not be defiled, to go up and down with a serious heart in the midst of such temptations. Nothing makes you awful and serious so much as inuring your minds with holy thoughts, so that you may go about worldly businesses in a heavenly manner. God's children are sensible of this, therefore they make it their practice to begin the day with God: Ps. cxxxix. 18, 'When I awake, I am still with thee.' As soon as they are awake they are seasoning their minds with somewhat of God. And they not only begin with God, but take God along with them in all their comfort and business: Prov. xxiii. 17, 'They are in the fear of the Lord all the day long.' Why do vain thoughts haunt us in duty? Because it is our use to be vainly occupied. A carnal man goes about heavenly business with an earthly mind, and a godly man goes about earthly business with a heavenly mind. A carnal man's thoughts are so used to these things that he cannot take them off; but a godly man hath inured his mind to better thoughts.

3. Thoughts will inflame and enkindle your affections after heavenly

things. It is beating the steel upon the flint makes the sparks fly out. So by serious inculcative thoughts we beat out affections; these are the bellows to blow up the coals. It is a very deadening thing to be always musing on vanity: Cant. i. 3, 'Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.' When a box is broken, and the ointment poured out, when the name of God is taken in by serious thoughts, that stirs up affection.

4. By holy thoughts we do most resemble the purity and simplicity of God. We do not resemble God so much by speech and course of our actions as we do by our serious and holy thoughts, for his spiritual nature and being is best expressed by these operations of our own spirits. You can conceive of God as a spirit, always beholding himself, and loving himself; and so you come nearer as to the being of God, the more your thoughts are exercised and drawn out after holy things.

5. By these holy meditations the soul is present with God, and can solace itself with him. The apostle saith, We are absent from him in the body, but present with him by the spirit; present with him by the workings of our thoughts. This is the way to get into the company of the Spirit, to be with him, Ps. cxxxix. 18. How with him? By our thoughts, and by serious calling him to mind. God is not far from us, but we are far from him. God is not far from us in the effects of his power and goodness, but we are far from God, because our thoughts are so seldom set awork upon him. This is the way to solace ourselves with God, to be much in these holy things.

SERMON CIII.

Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me.—VER. 98.

IN the former verse you shall find the man of God had expressed his affections to the word, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' Now he renders the reason of his great affection, because he got wisdom thereby; a benefit of great value, as being the perfection of the reasonable nature, and a benefit highly esteemed in the world. Those which care not for the reality of wisdom yet affect a reputation of it: Job xi. 12, 'Vain man would be accounted wise, though he be born like the wild ass's colt;' though he be rude and brutish, yet he would fain be accounted wise. Knowledge was the great bait laid for our first parents; and so much of that desire is still left with us, that we had rather be accounted wicked than weak, and will sooner entitle ourselves to the guilt of a vice in morals than own any weakness in intellects. No man would be accounted a fool. Well, then, David's affection is justified; he might well say, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' because he got wisdom thereby, and such wisdom as carried him through all his trouble, though he had to do with crafty adversaries, as Doeg, Achitophel, and others,

that excelled for worldly policy; yet, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' For, 'through thy commandments,' &c.

In which words you have—

1. The benefit gotten by the word, *wisdom*.
2. The original author of this benefit, *thou*.
3. The means, *through thy commandments*.
4. The benefit amplified, by comparing it with the wisdom and craft of his enemies, the politicians of Saul's court, men advanced for their great wisdom and subtlety, Thou hast made me *wiser than mine enemies*.

5. The manner how he came to obtain this benefit, *for they are ever with me*.

Doct. That God, through his commands, doth make his people wiser than their enemies.

It is but David's experience resolved into a proposition. I shall—

1. Illustrate the point by explaining the circumstances of it.
2. Then prosecute it.

First, The benefit obtained is wisdom. Mark—

1. It is not craft, or wisdom to do evil—that is to be learned in the devil's school—but divine wisdom, such as is gotten by study and obedience of God's laws: Gen. iii. 1, 'The serpent was the subtlest of all the beasts in the field.' Satan's instruments are very acute in mischief, 'wise to do evil, but to do good have no knowledge,' Jer. iv. 22; cunning enough in a way of sin, but to seek in every point of duty; your souls must not enter into their secrets. This wisdom should rather be unlearned; better be fools and bunglers in a way of sin, than wise to do evil: 1 Cor. xiv. 22, 'Brethren, in malice by ye children, but in understanding be ye men;' and Rom. xvi. 19, 'I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.' Simplicity here is the best wisdom.

2. It is not worldly policy, or a dexterous sagacity in and about the concernments of this life. There are some which have 'the spirit of the world,' 1 Cor. ii. 12, and a genius or disposition of soul which wholly carrieth them out to riches, honours, and pleasures, and are notable in this kind of skill, in promoting their secular ends in these things. A child of God may be a fool to them for this kind of wisdom; for it is our Saviour's observation, Luke xvi. 8, 'The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.' Though David was wiser than his enemies, yet the children of this world are wiser in their generation, that is, as to carnal fetches and devices to accomplish their worldly purposes; in their generation, that is, about the course of their affairs. *Thus* David is not wiser than his enemies.

3. It is not great skill in arts and civil discipline. This is indeed a gift of God, but given promiscuously, sometimes to the good and sometimes to the bad; sometimes to the good, for Solomon could unravel all the secrets of nature, and dispute of everything from the cedar to the hyssop, 1 Kings iv. 23, 29–31; and sometimes to the bad, as the heathen philosophers, many of whom knew all things almost within the circuit of the world. Yet how little this wisdom is to be valued in regard of that wisdom which we get by God's commandments, God hath in some short shown, in that he hath suffered those books which

Solomon wrote concerning trees, plants, beasts, to be lost; whereas to this day the writings of the heathens are preserved, as Aristotle's book *De Animalibus*, &c. But now those books in which Solomon taught the fear of God and true wisdom, which is godliness, are, by the singular care of God's providence, conserved for our use and benefit. God hath herein shown that we might want those other books without the loss of true wisdom, but those books that indeed make us wise to salvation, these are kept. Learning is a glorious endowment indeed, but God would give us that gift by the writings of heathens; but grace, which is true wisdom, he would give us that by the holy scripture. A man may excel in learning, yet, after all the profound researches and inquiries of his high-flown reason into the mysteries of nature, he may be a very fool, and be damned for ever; for Paul saith of the philosophers: Rom. i. 22, 'Professing to be wise, they became fools;' since they had not the true knowledge of God and the way of salvation.

4. It is not a bare knowledge of God's will, but wisdom. Knowledge is one thing, and wisdom another: 'I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,' Prov. viii. 12. Many are knowing men, well skilled with notions, but they want prudence or practical direction for the governing of their hearts and ordering of their ways. In the scripture you shall find faith is not only opposed to ignorance, but to folly: Luke xxiv. 25, 'O ye fools, and slow of heart to believe.' Every natural man is a fool, Titus iii. 3, though never so notionally wise and skilled in the theory of divine knowledge: Prov. xiv. 8, 'The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way;' not to soar aloft in speculation, abstract from practice, and remote from spiritual influence, but to direct his course so as he may attain to the chiefest good; not only to know what is to be done, but to do what is to be known. Carnal men have great knowledge, and yet are spiritual fools for all that; they may lick the glass, and never taste the honey; or, like negroes, dig in mines of knowledge while others enjoy the gold; they may search out the mysteries of that religion which the godly man lives upon, dispute of heaven while others surprise it and take it by force; or, like the lark, soar high, but fall into the net of the fowler. A careful strict walking, that is the true wisdom; and thus we have stated the benefit.

Secondly, Here is the author of this benefit, which is God, '*Thou*, through thy commandments;' which I note, not only to show to whom we must go for this wisdom: 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God,' James i. 5; nor to show to whom we must ascribe the glory of it; if we get any benefit by the word, praise belongeth to God, who is 'the father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift,' James i. 17. All candles are lighted at his torch, and all the stars owe their brightness to this sun; to the father of lights we owe all the light, wisdom, and direction that we have. I say, not only for these ends do I note it, but to show the main and principal reason why a child of God is far more safe by his godly wisdom than his enemies by all their worldly policy. Why? God is of his side, counselling, directing, and instructing him what to do; whereas they are acted and influenced by Satan: Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just; the Lord shall laugh at him, for he seeth that his

day is coming.' The wicked plotteth against him, but there is a wise God that acts for him. He doth not say the just countermineth the wicked, and strains himself to match his enemy with policy and craft, but God watcheth for him. If it were only this policy against piety, it were not so much, but it is men's craft against God's wisdom: Prov. xxi. 30, 'There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.' These three words express the sum and height of all natural abilities: *wisdom* notes a quick apprehension; *understanding*, a wise foresight grounded upon experience; *counsel*, a designation of some rare artifice and device. Now neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel, none of these can stand against the Lord. God's children are sometimes dismayed when they consider the advantages of their enemies, their wisdom, learning, malice, experience. But here is their comfort, that they may set God against all these—God, who is the fountain of wisdom; for he is interested in their cause, his wisdom against their craft; and so, having the direction of the mighty counsellor, they are safe.

Thirdly, Here is the means, 'Through thy commandments,' or through the directions of the word. You will say, What can we learn from the word to match our enemies in policy? what wisdom will that teach us for our safety and preservation against the malice of our wicked enemies? There is our rule, and the more close and punctual we are in the observance of it, the more safe we are. A double wisdom we learn from the word of God, which is our security against the malice and craft of our enemies.

1. This wisdom we get by the commandment; it directs us how to keep in with God, which is our great wisdom; this is to stop danger at the fountain-head: Prov. xvi. 7, 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' The way to get peace and safety in evil times is not to comply with enemies, but to comply with God. All our danger lies in his anger, not in their wrath and rage; for God can bridle them or let them loose upon us as he sees good. He hath the hearts of all men in his hands as the rivers of water; the creature is but God's instrument, and wholly at his dispose. We have no need to fear the sword, if we do not fear him that wears the sword; nor need we fear the creature if we do not break with God. Many are troubled with the ill-will of men, or about the rage of men, and are full of fears when they meet with any opposition in their profession of godliness, and how soon men may be let loose upon them in time of danger, but look not to the cause of it, which is their offending God; therefore our chief wisdom is to serve him and study to please him. When a war is begun between two nations, the way to end it is not by a treaty with this or that private soldier, or to seek their favour, but to treat with those that employ them; so it is not to fawn and crouch and court the favour of men, but to be reconciled to God, and get him made a friend, then we need not fear man's enmity. Now this wisdom the word of God teacheth us, how to walk with all-pleasing before God, and then the creature cannot meddle with us without his leave. Another place is, Prov. x. 9, 'He that walketh uprightly walketh safely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.' There is no one seems to be more exposed to danger than he

that is sincere, that is, strictly severe to a godly purpose, that walks uprightly, that stands strictly and precisely upon his duty to God; and yet there is no man usually more safe. But he that turneth and windeth to avoid dangers, and runs to his shifts and studied arts to provide for his own security, usually is left in the mire, and comes off with some notable blemish; he is cast from God's protection. There are but two sorts of men in the world that usually do carry their purpose; they are either those that are perfectly honest throughout, without daubing and warping, or those that are perfectly dishonest, that wholly give up themselves to a course of fraud and sin, that are resolved to boggle at nothing, neither checks of conscience nor rules of honesty or equity will stop them; these, in judgment, are permitted to carry their purpose in worldly things. So the plain, downright, upright man, that will not for fear or favour step a jot out of God's way, but keeps close to God's direction, is the truest and most perfect politician in the world. They that are thus severe to their purpose will be found the wisest men at length, not only in the world to come, but in this world; for it is our warping and going out of God's way that causeth our trouble and confusion of thoughts.

2. The word teacheth us how to give the enemy no advantage and needless provocation. It is not enough to do good, but we must do it well, well timed and well ordered for every circumstance. Now God by his word teacheth his people so to do: Eccles. viii. 5, 6, 'Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment; therefore the misery of man is great upon him.' To open this: The case there spoken of is provoking rulers and men that have power in their hand. Now a man that desires to keep the commandments of God shall be taught to walk so circumspectly that he shall not needlessly provoke the wrath of men to his own ruin, nor draw down the displeasure of God upon his head. God will show him the season when to act and when to forbear, a right time and a right manner, when to oppose by way of reproof and admonition, and when to hold his peace; he will find the fit time for doing of every business which God hath stated, and the ignorance of this time costs a man a great deal of misery; for he goes on, 'To every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him.' When men are self-confident, or distempered with passion and prejudice, and consult not with God, they are carried on by headlong counsels, or moved with the impulsion of their own interest and corrupt affection into the mouth of danger. But he that makes conscience of his duty, and comes to the word of God without any private affection, he shall find time and judgment, those important circumstances, stated and determined, when to act and when not; they shall find a fair opportunity of providence either checking or leading them on to complete their resolutions. Many a good action miscarrieth for want of observing time and judgment, or consulting with God and his word about it; when to speak, when to hold our peace, to do or not do. Another scripture that speaks to this purpose, Eccles. vii. 16-18, Be not over-wise, over-foolish, over-just, over-wicked, that is the sum

of what is spoken there; 'But he that feareth the Lord shall come forth of them all.' A man may many times do a thing conscientiously and upon an opinion of duty, and thereby involve himself in trouble and danger when indeed there is no necessity so to do (that is it which Solomon means); therefore, to moderate zeal with prudence, that he may neither be remiss in his own interest nor passionately violent in the concernments of God; to preserve his heart from faulty and imprudent extremes, that we may sincerely keep unto duty, yet wisely decline danger. The word of God will teach us, if, in the fear of God, without being biassed and prepossessed with any corrupt aims, we come to take the direction of it, how to walk without offence. Well, then, you see this is the wisdom God teacheth those that give up themselves to the direction of the word; they are wiser than their enemies, and this is policy enough for a Christian. It teacheth us how to please God, and how to govern and order all our affairs, that we need not needlessly exasperate and provoke men to our own ruin. So that the word of God hath more wisdom to guide him than his enemies have subtle craft to ruin and ensnare him.

Fourthly, The manner how we come to receive this benefit by the word, in that clause, 'They are ever with me.' These words may be interpreted as implying frequency of meditation, or presentness of counsel and direction, the one as the fruit of the other.

1. Frequency of meditation, 'They are ever with me;' that is, often thought of by me, for my comfort and direction. A man that exerciseth himself in the commandments of God, there is his study and business. The king of Israel, for his comfort and direction, was to have the book of the law ever before him, Deut. xvii. ; and Josh. i. 8, 'Thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' 'They are ever with me,' the law is always in my eye and heart. It is not a slight looking into them that will give us this wisdom, but an intimate constant acquaintance, when we are much in studying out God's mind.

2. 'They are ever with me.' This may imply also that they should be a ready help. Such as derive their wisdom from without, they cannot have their counsellors always with them to give advice. But when a man hath gotten the word in his heart, he finds a ready help; he hath a seasonable word to direct him in all difficulties, in all straits, and in all temptations, to teach him what to do against the burden of the present exigence, to teach him what to do and what to hope for.

Having illustrated the words of the text, I now address myself to make good the proposition, that a child of God is wiser than his enemies. I shall do it in a twofold consideration:—

1. They are wiser in their general choice.

2. Wiser as to the particular controversy or enmity that is carried on against them by their enemies, as to those contests they have with their carnal enemies about the things of God; for I suppose these enemies here are not only such as had a private grudge, or carnal quarrels, but upon a public account; they have more wisdom by God to guide them than their enemies have craft to ruin them.

First, Supposing these enemies to be carnal men (for such are the enemies of God's people), they are wiser than their enemies in their general choice and course of life. To determine this, let us see what

is wisdom and what is folly. Saith Solomon, Eccles. vii. 25, 'I gave my heart to seek out wisdom, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.' Wisdom lies in three things—(1.) In fixing a right end; (2.) In the choice of apt and proper means; (3.) In the accurateness and diligence of our prosecution. And as to degrees of comparison, he is wiser than another that hath a better end, a better way, and is more dexterous and vigorous in pursuing the means that he may accomplish his ends. For instance, if we speak of worldly wisdom, the wisdom of the world is to fix the world for our scope: 'He that will be rich,' saith the apostle, and accordingly he that busieth himself with such means as will conduce to that purpose, that wholly gives up himself to worldly pursuits, and that with all his heart and vigour makes haste to be rich; this is the wisdom of the world: 'He shall not be innocent,' saith Solomon. Then there is heavenly wisdom when we make the enjoyment of God to be our scope, take the law of God for our rule, and make religion to be our business, avoiding evils, improving all occasions, sparing no cost nor trouble to compass such a holy end, that we may come to the enjoyment of the blessed God; this is spiritual wisdom. Then, among the children of God one is wiser than another as his intention is more fixed, as his means are more regular, or as his prosecution is more exact, uniform, and industrious. He that keeps close to his purpose of glorifying God and enjoying God, and he that understands more of his rule, he is the wiser man; and he that is more accurate and industrious, and with greater self-denial doth give himself up to God; as there are some that are more heavenly, more watchful, more diligent in the spiritual life than others. Well, then, if wisdom be to be determined by these things, the children of God, that are taught by the word of God, will be found to be wiser than their enemies and all carnal men.

1. They are wiser as they have a nobler end, even the great end for which they were created, which is the enjoyment of God. Surely the higher ends any man hath, the wiser he is. Now there is none higher than God, for that which is the chiefest good that should be our utmost end. There is nothing good in itself and for itself, but only God. When we have God, we need not consider what further good to get by him, for to get him is enough. To look at anything as good in itself, without looking further what it is good for, is to put it in the place of God. Of all other things besides God we may say, What doth it serve for? what use may I put it to? what am I the better for it? But now, beyond God there is nothing to be sought; food and raiment, that is for health; and health, that is for service; and service for the glory of God. Everything riseth higher and higher, till it terminate in God. Certainly he is a wise man that lives up to the highest end, and makes this his scope to enjoy God. Well, now, he is a wise man that doth not mind trifles, but doth promote his proper, necessary, and great interest. This is our proper, great, and necessary interest, to make God our friend and heaven our portion; beyond these there is nothing more, for God is the chiefest good. Let me pursue it by another medium. Certainly a higher end is to be preferred before a subordinate, a general good before a particular, that which will yield

all things, before that which will only yield us a limited or particular comfort. So he is the wiser man that chooseth God for his portion, for he that hath God 'shall inherit all things,' Rev. xxi. 7; and Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things shall be added;' that is a more universal good. Again, a profitable good is to be preferred before a pleasing. He that prefers a little pleasure before a solid good, you count him a fool; as Esau, that sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. And to part with all for a little temporal satisfaction, certainly that is a main folly. In short, a spiritual good is to be preferred before a corporal. Why? Because a man is more concerned as a soul than a body; therefore that wisdom that is only 'earthly, sensual, devilish,' as the wisdom is that is not from above, James iii. 15, this is all for the body or outward man; and he is called a fool that only provideth for his body, Luke xii. Why a fool? He had provided but for half his self, for the worser and more brutish part, and for that half but for a little while; therefore, 'Thou fool, this night,' &c. Then an eternal good should be preferred before a temporal. Man, that lives for ever, must have a happiness that lasts for ever. We live longer in the other world by far than here, therefore our care should be for that. Indeed, if a man did not live after death, and there were an end of him when he dies, it were the greatest wisdom to make the best use of his time here, to look no further than temporal things. Ay! but now to look after the world and neglect things to come is to be wise for the present, and be fools to all eternity. We cannot count that wisdom. Again, a necessary good is to be preferred before an arbitrary. Now 'one thing is necessary,' Luke x. 42. It is not necessary to be rich, to live in pleasure, to wallow in delights; within a while we shall not be a penny the better for these things. It is not necessary to have so great a plenty of worldly accommodations; it is not necessary to our happiness hereafter, nor to the comfort of our lives for the present to have so much here. Now, see who is the wiser man, he that looks no higher than to some subordinate end, or he that fixeth upon the last end? He that pitcheth upon some limited good, or he that pitcheth upon the most universal good that will yield him all things? He that pleaseth his fancy with toys, or he that looketh after a solid benefit? He that taketh care for his body, or he that minds his soul? He that mindeth that which is accessory or indifferent to his happiness, or he that mindeth that which is mainly necessary? He that looketh after a perishing vanity, or he that mindeth eternal happiness? Certainly if there be a God, and this God can do all things, and our happiness lies in the enjoyment of him, he is the wisest man that takes God for his portion, and makes it his business to keep in with him; and so doth a child of God. Thus wisdom is seen in fixing our aim.

2. Wisdom lies in the choice of apt and proper means, and that is, to take the word for his rule; first God for his portion, then the word for his rule. To presume of the end, without using the means, is folly; therefore, next to a good end and scope, there must be a good path. Now, that we might not grope blindfold, and wander up and down in fond superstitions, God hath given us his word to instruct us in all things which concern our duty and our danger, and to make us

every way wise to salvation, 2 Tim. iii. 15. If our happiness lies in the enjoyment of God, it is meet God should appoint the way how we should come to him. We should have been at a great loss if the Lord had given us grace to fix upon him as our end, if he had not given us a rule; we would not find out our way. But now God hath so exactly chalked it out, that 'a fool shall not err therein,' Isa. xxxv. 5; such plain directions as 'make wise the simple,' Ps. xix. 7; a plain rule, found out by the wisdom of God, and so stated for all, and peremptorily commanded to all, that the most simple that will give up themselves to God's direction they shall find it. Now who are wise? they that walk in the way of their own hearts, or they that will take God's direction in his word? those that will live according to the counsel of God's word, or those that will fashion their lives according to the course of this world, or according to the customs and examples of carnal men like themselves? Who is wiser? they that will inquire after the mind of God, who is wisdom itself, and can best judge of wisdom and folly? or they which shape their course according to the secular wisdom that prevails in the world, and which hath often failed in its end? Who the wiser man? he that hath taken God's counsel, and can never be deceived, or those that walk according to the course of this world, and find themselves wholly to be deceived? Ps. xlix. 13, 'This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings.' They will imitate that folly which hath been so fatal and so mischievous to others, and think themselves happy. Many carnal men when they died, they all-to-be-fooled themselves, and lamented it that they had taken no more care to please God, and walked no more closely with him; that they had been more busy about worldly things than they had been for their precious and immortal souls. Therefore surely the children of God are wiser than their opposites, that give up themselves to the vanity of carnal pursuits.

3. Wisdom lies in a vigorous prosecution of fit means to the best end, without which all is nothing. It is in vain to be sensible of our end and to be convinced of our way unless we mind to walk in it. Many carnal men will say that their happiness lies in the enjoyment of God, that the scriptures are the word of God, and his directions to attain that happiness; but their folly lies in this, that they have not a hearty consent to take this word for their rule, and give up themselves to the directions thereof: Prov. xvii. 16, 'Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?' that is, such means and such opportunities given them to be happy, but that is a price in the hands of a fool, his heart hangs off from the way; and therefore here is the great effect of wisdom, when we do with all our hearts give up ourselves to God, that he may take his own way with us to make us happy for ever. Wisdom lies in obedience: Deut. iv. 6, 7, 'Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom,' &c. The world will say it is a simple course to be so nice, scrupulous, and precise; but God tells you it is your wisdom; and they that keep his statutes are a wise and understanding people. The devil fills us with all kind of prejudices against religion. To such as love ease, he represents difficulty, and the yoke of Christ to be a tedious yoke. If they love honour, he tells them of reproaches and disgrace. If they affect

wisdom, he telleth them it is a low doctrine, beneath the sublimity of their parts and abilities. Now God assureth you this is your wisdom and understanding. So Job xxviii. 28, 'And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.' There is an inquiry there in that chapter where wisdom is to be found; and it is resolved that it is nowhere to be found but in a strict obedience; not in the knowledge of the secrets of nature, not in the crafts and policies of the world, not in the plots and contrivances of the wicked, not in dexterity to get wealth, but in keeping God's commandments with all preciseness and care. Briefly, this dexterous and effectual prosecution of the means which lead to our end lies in three things, and so accordingly we may know wisdom: all these are called wisdom in scripture.

[1.] In diligence and constant labour in the spiritual life. When a man makes religion his work, then he is a wise man, true to his end. There are a company of notional fools in the world that make religion their talk but do not make it their work, that can talk at as high a rate as others; they have a naked approbation of the things of God, but do not lie under the power and dominion of them: Eccles. x. 2, 'A wise man's heart is at his right hand.' A speech which seems to be contrary to the natural posture of the heart in the body, for the heart both of the one and the other is towards his left, but a wise man's heart is at his right hand. The right hand is that which is ready for action, so a wise man is ready and prepared to obey every good work. When men are diligent, serious, and hard at work for God, 'working out their salvation with fear and trembling,' then are they thoroughly wise.

[2.] It lies in circumspection and watchfulness, when we are very heedful lest we be turned out of the way, and that we do not anything that is contrary to the will of God; therefore it is said, Eph. v. 15, 'See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.' When is a man a fool and when a wise man? When we are careful in all things to practise according to our light, to walk exactly according to the rules of God's word; these are the only true wise, whatever the world thinks of them. The more circumspect men are the more the world counts them fools, crazy brains, and judge it to be a fond scrupulosity to expose themselves to scorning and trouble, for that which they call a nicety: but the less circumspect, the more foolish; and the more wary and more desirous to see God's word, this is wisdom. That is the reason why it is said, 'The fear of the Lord prolongeth days,' Prov. x. 27. When men once come to stand in awe of God, when they are afraid to do anything that may displease God, and look for a warrant and rule, and desire to know the mind of God in every action, these are wise men.

[3.] This wisdom lies in self-denial, or being at some cost or charge to compass our end. A godly man knows his end will recompense him sufficiently at last, the enjoyment of God will pay for all. It is a part of folly, not wisdom, to have great aims and designs, and loath to be at charges. He that will not be at the cost will never bring any weighty matter to pass. So he is called a wise merchant that sold all for the pearl of price, Mat. xiii. 46. Surely heaven is worth something; therefore, if you are called to despise the delights of the flesh, the honours

of the world, to part with them, to be dead to temporal interests, it seems the greatest folly in the world, but indeed it is the truest wisdom. Saith Lactantius, Usually wisdom dwells at the sign of folly. Why? Because all wisdom puts men upon some self-denial. Carnal men count it folly for a man to be dead to his conveniences and worldly concerns, and that upon the pursuit of invisible things that lie in another world: but this indeed is the greatest wisdom. There is no wisdom without some self-denial. Carnal men have a self-denial, a cursed one; none deny themselves so much as they; they part with heaven, Christ, peace, and serenity of conscience, all the hopes, all the comforts of the Spirit, merely to please the flesh and gratify their interest in the world; all is to compass the pleasure, profits, and honours of the world, and so to dig for iron with mattocks of gold, waste precious things to compass them that are vile and contemptible.

Well, then, let us see who are wise, they that are working out their salvation, or those that are pleasing the flesh? they that are wary and circumspect, and loath to break with God, or those that run blindfold upon the greatest dangers, and go 'like an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks'? Prov. vii. 22. Who are wise? those that sell all for the pearl of price, or those that part with their birthright, all their hopes in God, and present sense of his love, for a little temporal convenience?

Thus I have proved the first thing, namely, that the children of God are wiser than their enemies as to their general choice.

THE END OF VOL. VII.

SEVERAL SERMONS UPON THE CXIX. PSALM.

SERMON CIV.

Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me.—VER. 98.

I COME now to the second consideration, they are wiser than their enemies as to security against their attempts, and that enmity and opposition that they carry on against them; they are far more safe by walking under the covert of God's protection, than their enemies can possibly be, to have all manner of worldly advantages. I shall prove it by this argument, because they are more prepared and furnished as to all events. A godly wise man is careful to keep in with God; he is more prepared and furnished, can have a higher hope, more expectation of success, than others have; or if not, he is well enough provided for, though things fall out never so cross to his desires.

1. As to success. Who hath made wiser provision, think you, he that hath made God his friend, or he that is borne up with worldly props and dependences? they that are guided by the Spirit of God, or they that are guided by Satan? those that make it their business to walk with God step by step, or those that not only forsake him, but provoke him to his face? those that break with men and keep in with God, or those that break with God? Surely a child of God hath more security from piety than his enemies can have by secular policy, whereby they think to overreach and ruin him. The safety of a child of God lieth in two things—(1.) God is his friend; (2.) As long as God hath work for him to do, he will maintain him and bear him out in it.

[1.] God is his friend; and that must needs be a man's wisdom when he complies with the will of him upon whom he depends. All things do absolutely depend upon the providence of God; he hath wisdom, strength and dominion over all events. The wisdom of God is on his side, and therefore it is but the wisdom of men against him. If the difference only lay between men and men, the craft and policy of their enemies and their own craft and policy, the scales would soon break of their enemies' side, for they are wiser in their generation, Luke xvi. They have great abilities and great malice, which sharpens men's

understandings; they have a large conscience, and more liberty to do what they will; so that a child of God is gone if it were to oppose craft with craft; and usually they carry their matters more subtilly, laying hidden snares and profound counsels; whereas the children of God carry it simply and plainly. But then there is a wise God to act for a foolish people, and sometimes God may give his people great abilities; as Joseph was wiser than his brethren, Moses wiser than the Egyptians, Daniel than all the magicians of Babylon. But yet usually parts and secular wisdom are given to the enemies. Only a child of God hath this point of wisdom above the enemies, he taketh in with the wise God, which is the ready and compendious way to success; whereas secular wisdom takes a long way about, and must work through many mediums and subordinate causes before the intended effect can be brought about: Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13, 'The wicked plotteth against the just.' God is the other party: 'The Lord shall laugh at him; for he seeth that his day is coming.' He doth not say the just counterbalance the wicked, or strains his wit to match his enemy with craft, but God hath a providence and love, ever waking on his behalf; therefore it lies not between policy and piety, but between men's craft and God's wisdom. Then he hath the power of God on his side, and therefore he is wiser than his enemies, he is of the stronger side: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God all-sufficient; walk before me and be thou perfect.' All warping comes from doubting of God's all-sufficiency, evidenced by our carnal fear, and our distrustful care what shall become of us and how we shall do to live. Certainly, if God be able, we need not doubt, or run to indirect courses. Again, he hath him of his side who hath dominion over all events. Carnal policy is full of jealousies; they know not what will succeed, they have no sure bottom to stand upon; they are not sure of events, when their business is never so well laid. But now a child of God is wiser, and hath much the more comfortable course, as well as successful; he can do his duty, and leave the event to God. When a business is never so well and cunningly laid, yet God loves to dispose of events, and to 'take the wise in their own craft,' Job v. 12, 13. They are outwitted, and they outreach themselves, that so Christ may, as it were, get upon the devil's shoulders, and even be beholden to his enemies. Never are they such fools as when they seem to say things wisely against God and his people. Carnal wisdom is the greatest folly: it brought Moses to the flags, but Pharaoh to the bottom of the sea. The devil was the first fool of all the creation, and ever since his first attempts against his God he hath been playing the fool for these thousands of years. The tempting our first parents seemed a masterpiece of wit, but it was indeed the ruin of his kingdom. So in the attempts of wicked men against his people, God still disposeth of the event contrary to their aim.

[2.] As long as God hath work for him to do, he will maintain him and bear him out in the midst of all dangers; that is certain; as he did David in the very face of Saul. There is an invisible guard set upon plain-hearted and zealous Christians; every day they do, as it were, by their pleading against the corruptions of wicked men, exasperate them; they are in the secret of God's presence, and are kept none know how; none so nigh to dangers, yet none so free from them;

in the lion's mouth, yet preserved, as Christ lived in the midst of his enemies, yet they could not touch him till his hour was come, John xi. 8-10. Christ had work to do in Judea: 'Master,' say the disciples, 'the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again? And Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world; but if a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.' In the disciples' question is bewrayed the true genius of carnal fear. Oh, men say, why will you go run yourself into the mouth of danger? They think the discharge of duty will cost them their utter ruin: 'Master, the Jews sought to kill thee.' Now Christ's answer sheweth that men should not choose their way according to their apprehensions of danger and safety, but as God cleareth a call to them; he answers by a similitude taken from God's order in the course of nature. God made the day for work, and the night for rest and sleep; now as long as men have daylight they will not stumble, but if they set forth in the night, then they would stumble. The meaning is, as long as a man hath a clear call from God (for a call from God is compared to the day), and can say, This is a duty God hath put upon me, he hath daylight, he shall not stumble; though he doth come and go in the face and teeth of enemies on God's cause, and plead against their corruptions and base miscarriages, he shall not stumble. Indeed, when a man is in the dark, and knows not what God's mind is, then he is ever and anon stumbling. A Christian is to study his duty rather than his danger, and then leave the care of all events to God; he is in a safe course when he is in God's way, and shall not be interrupted till he have finished his work: Luke xiii. 31, 32, 'The Pharisees said unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee. And he said, Go tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' If he cast himself into troubles, he is sure they are not sinfully procured; but men that run on danger without a calling may meet with many a snare, or he that doth not observe his call meet with more difficulties than ever he thought of: 1 Peter iii. 13, 'And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?' The best way to eschew trouble is to adhere closely to what is right in the sight of God; he can allay their fury, putting convictions upon their conscience. A man would think to stand nicely upon terms of duty is to run in harm's way; and there are none so much harmed, maligned, and opposed in the world as those that follow that which is good, as those that will have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will reprove them rather; possibly they may hate and malign you if you keep to that which is good, but they cannot harm your consciences. God can allay the rage of men, by putting convictions upon their consciences, evidencing your sincerity; as the history saith, when the Arians persecuted the orthodox Christians, they durst not meddle with Paulinus out of reverence. Therefore who will harm you if you be followers of that which is good?

2. In case things succeed ill with him, and contrary to his expectation, yet they are wiser than their enemies can be, because they have provided for the worst. Carnal policy is but wisdom in opinion for a

time, not always, while they have matter to work upon in the world ; but these always, in prosperity and adversity.

[1.] Because he hath secured his great interest, which lies in the favour of God and in hopes of eternal life. God, by his commandment, hath taught him this wisdom, to make sure of the kingdom of God, and then a man is safe ; whatever happens, nothing can befall him that doth endanger his hopes, or endamage his interest in Christ ; if they kill him, they do but put him there where he would be ; he hath secured his great interest ; persecutors cannot reach the better part : Luke xii. 4, they ‘ kill the body, after that they can do no more.’ A good man, let them do what they can, can come to no hurt ; he is indeed like a die ; cast him high or low, still he falls upon his square ; he hath a bottom to stand upon, hopes to support him.

[2.] Because he hath fitted his spirit for all kind of conditions. A man that is to go a long journey must prepare for all weathers ; so a Christian must learn to be abased as well as to abound, Phil. iv. Now a mortified man hath the advantage of all the world ; a man that is dead to worldly interests hath the advantage of all others for doing and suffering for God, and in noble and generous actions. It is our affections that increase our afflictions, that make us so base and pusillanimous : 1 Cor. vii. 31, ‘ Rejoice as if you rejoiced not, weep as though ye wept not,’ If our hearts did not rejoice so much in the creature, if we were in a greater indifferency to worldly things, the loss and miscarriage of them would not surprise us with so great terror. A mortified man is wiser than other men, because he hath plucked out the root of all trouble, which is an inordinate affection ; and then let his condition be never so bad, he is fortified. Temperance makes way for patience : 2 Peter i. 6, ‘ Add to temperance, patience.’ Temperance, or a moderation in the enjoyment of all things, tends to patience in the loss of them. A man that possesseth them without love can lose them without grief. They may lessen his estate, but cannot lessen his comfort. Therefore this is the man that can ‘ pray always, rejoice evermore, in everything give thanks,’ for giving and taking, for the word of God hath taught him this holy weanedness from worldly things.

[3.] He can look to the end of all things, not only to the present, but the future : Heb. xi. 1, ‘ Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’ He can see victories in a downfall ; and this is a wisdom proper to faith, to see the overthrow of the church’s enemies when they rise up and prosper. A natural man may look above his condition as long as he seeth any probability in second causes, but ‘ faith is the evidence of things not seen.’ When there is no probable way, then it can look above them. Reason usually is short-sighted, it ‘ cannot see afar off,’ 2 Peter i. 9 ; it cannot look beyond the cloud and veil of present discouragement. But now faith can see one contrary in another, see a good end in bad means, and those things that make against them to make for them ; and what in itself is hurtful, is altogether tempered by God’s hand, and to the greatest good, Rom. viii. 28 ; Ps. xxxvii. 37, 38, ‘ Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright ; for the end of that man is peace ; but the end of the wicked shall be cut off ;’ and Ps. lxxiii. 17, ‘ I went into

the sanctuary, and there I understood their end.' Those that are governed by sense, will, and passion, cannot be wise, for they do not see to the end; but he that lives by faith looks not to appearances, but seeth the end; therefore this man can bear up with hope and courage in the midst of all difficulties and troubles.

Use 1. Caution against two things—carnal fear and carnal policy.

1. Against carnal fear. Many are troubled when they consider the power and cunning of the enemies of God's people. Ay! but you need not be dismayed when you do, in the simplicity of your hearts, give up yourselves to the direction of God's word; you need not fear all their craft; when they are confounded and broken to pieces by their own devices, you shall stand firm. It seemeth to be the greatest folly in the world to keep at a distance from the rising side; in time it will be found to be the greatest wisdom. You think they carry their matters with a great deal of cunning, whilst they slight God and tread the unquestionable interests of Christ under foot, and that the cause of God will never get up again. Since they reject the word of God, what wisdom have they? Jer. viii. 9. When you fail, will you believe the word of God, or the doubtful face of outward things? Be sure once you are in God's way, and then you cannot miscarry finally. Will not Christ uphold the ministry in despite of the devil and evil men? Have we not the word of God to secure these hopes for us? Therefore what need we fear what wicked wretches attempt against us? Doth not God love righteousness? Will he not take vengeance? And in their highest prosperity, may not we see their downfall? Therefore why should we be afraid?

2. Then take heed of carnal policy; for we are made wiser than our enemies *through the commandment*. We must not oppose craft with craft, for so Satan will be too hard for us in the use of his own weapons. That is not wisdom to run to shifts, and to carnal and sinful devices. There is a wisdom that is necessary for the children of God: Mat. x. 16, 'I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be wise as serpents, simple as doves.' Ever it was so with God's people; they are sheep in the midst of wolves, destitute of all outward support: 'Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.' Carry yourselves prudently and holily in my service. That wisdom and knowledge which doth not agree with justice, but puts upon doing things that are unjust, that is craft, not wisdom. Now though Christ hath bid us be wise, yet he hath forbidden us to be crafty. When you run to carnal shifts, you think to be wiser than God. All the mischiefs of the present age have merely been occasioned by unbelief. We durst not trust God in his own way, but will run to carnal practices merely to prevent evil, and you see how we are entangled in all manner of confusion. Jeroboam would be wiser than God; God would have settled the kingdom upon him, but he ran to a way of his own, and that was his undoing. Take heed of this fleshly wisdom: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'Not in fleshly wisdom, but in simplicity and godly wisdom.' The more simple and plain a Christian walks according to the direct letter of the scripture, the more safe he is; but when he doth run to those baser courses, merely out of distrust to God, all things come to ruin. Carnal policy never succeeds well with the children of God; never did a Christian

thrive by carnal policy, or using carnal fetches for carnal ends ; God crosseth them. A man that will walk by the light of his own fire is sure to be led out of the way of peace and happiness. When they forsake the light of God's word and Spirit, and follow a false light, they run into sorrow and inconvenience ; and therefore weaker Christians are sometimes safer than those of stronger parts, that lean to their own understandings and trust to carnal policy.

Use 2. To prize the scriptures, because of this wisdom that is to be gotten in them. A very poor creature that walks in the fear of God is wise to avoid the chiefest danger, to secure the greatest interest, to avoid hell beneath, Prov. xv. 24 ; that wisdom hath escaped the greatest danger, the wrath of God, and made sure of heaven, Christ, and salvation, his great interest. He that gives up himself to be governed by God's word, though never so plain and simple, will be found to be the wisest in the issue : Ps. cxix. 24, 'Thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors.' When God's testimonies are the men of our counsel, this is that which will give true wisdom. All things in this world are mutable and uncertain, they continue not long ; we cannot foresee all changes, therefore a wise man may be mistaken sometimes, and do things he could wish were never done if he had consulted with God. Therefore now be wise ; this will tell you when to act and when to forbear, not to be over-wise nor over-foolish.

Use 3. To get this wisdom from the word of God that will make you wiser than your adversaries : Prov. iv. 7, 'Get wisdom, that is the principal thing, and with all thy gettings get understanding.' There are some maxims (if we would have this wisdom so as to be wiser than our enemies) and some graces.

First, Some maxims :—

1. Season the heart with this principle, that it concerns you to secure your interest in Christ rather than the world, Mat. vi. 34 ; Luke xiv. 26.

2. That we should not be solicitous about events so much as duty, or about dangers so much as sin, 1 Chron. xix. 13 ; 2 Tim. iv. 17, 18.

3. That in a way of duty it is better to depend upon Christ's care over us, without using any carnal reaches to secure ourselves, 1 Peter v. 7, iv. 19.

4. All that befalls the people of God is either good, or tends to good, Rom. viii. 28.

5. That when deliverance is more for our turn than bondage, yokes, and oppression, we shall be sure to have it. God hath engaged himself by covenant that 'he will withhold no good thing,' Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

6. Close adherence to God, and constancy in obedience, is the surest way to present ease and future deliverance, Ps. cxxxv. 3.

7. It is better to attend God's leisure than to get out of trouble by any carnal means of our own, Isa. xxxviii. 15.

8. No man can be a loser by God, though he suffers never so much for him, Rom. viii. 18 ; 2 Cor. iv. 17.

9. Then is our adversary wiser than we, when his opposition draws us to sin ; then and then only are we foiled by our adversary.

Secondly, There are some graces also make us wise.

1. To this wisdom faith is necessary. If we could but depend upon

God in a good, plain, and downright course, we would not run to shifts, nor change ourselves into all shapes and colours, cameleon-like (unless it be white); but you would support yourselves with this, that he would maintain you and bear you out.

2. Fear of God, which makes us tender of spirit, that we dare not offend God nor break a rule for all the world; he fears a commandment more than a thousand dangers: Prov. xiii. 13, 'He that fears the commandment shall be safe from fear of danger.' If a commandment stand in his way, he dares not go through; it is more than if all the terrors of the world stand in his way; he will endure all hazards rather than break through a command.

SERMON CV.

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.—VER. 99.

DAVID had spoken of his affection to the word of God, and then mentioned one special ground thereof, which was the wisdom that he got thereby; now this wisdom is amplified, by comparing it with the wisdom of others. Three sorts of men he mentioneth—enemies, teachers, ancients. The enemies excel in policy, teachers in doctrine, and ancients in counsel; and yet by the word was David made wiser than all these. Malice sharpens the wit of enemies, and teacheth them the arts of opposition; teachers are furnished with learning; but ancients, they grow wise by experience: yet David, by the study of the word, excelled all these. In the text we may observe two things:—

1. David's assertion concerning his profiting by the word of God, *I have more understanding than all my teachers.*

2. The reason, taken from his diligent use of the means, *for thy testimonies are my meditation.*

For the first of these, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers,' to clear the words:—

1. It is certain that he speaks not this of his extraordinary revelations as a prophet, but of that wisdom which he got by ordinary means. The holy men of God in the Old Testament, considered as prophets, so they had extraordinary visions and revelations. Now David speaks of that kind of knowledge got by the ordinary means, not those special revelations made to the prophets; for he renders the reason of it, 'Thy testimonies are my meditation.'

2. It is certain he speaks not this by way of boasting; for this is a psalm of instruction, not a history or narrative. Now the children of God would not commend their failings to the imitation of others, and this which David speaks is rendered as a reason of his respect; by the word he got wisdom above his teachers, enemies, and ancients.

Briefly, the intent and use of this assertion will be known by considering the quality of these teachers here mentioned. You may look upon them either—(1.) As faulty or defective in their duty; (2.) As

performing their duty. In both these notions David was wiser than they, or a man of a better understanding.

1. If you look upon them under a diminishing notion ; so some would understand it thus, that those which instructed him in human learning and civil discipline had not understanding as he that meditated in God's testimonies. If this were the sense, there is no boasting, but only comparing knowledge with knowledge, the knowledge of the word with the knowledge of ordinary sciences ; and it gives us this lesson, that the great sages of the world that do excel in secular wisdom are but fools to a child of God ; they know the secrets of nature, and he knows the God of nature ; they dispute about the chiefest good, and he enjoys it ; they know the use of natural things, and he knoweth the use of spiritual. This wisdom and skill in outward things, compared with the fear of God, is but vanity ; and the wisest man must 'become a fool that he may be wise' with this kind of wisdom, 1 Cor. iii. 18.

2. You may look upon them as corrupt and sinful. In those days of Saul, the teachers might be corrupt as well as other ranks and orders of men ; and then it only implies this, that God gives greater understanding to his people than to their corrupt guides : Luke xi. 52, 'Woe unto you lawyers ; for ye have taken away the key of knowledge : ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.' The expounders of the law were corrupt, and hindered others from entering into the kingdom of God. It is a great evil when the church of God is given up to such kind of guides. But now, in such a case, they that make conscience of God's ordinances, use private means with diligence, have more understanding than their teachers : Mat. xxiii. 2, 3, 'The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do ; but do not ye after their works ; for they say, and do not.' Though they were naught and corrupt themselves, yet if they bring God's message, it should not be slighted, because of the office and lawful authority with which they are invested, though not every way qualified for their station ; and in this sense a child of God may be wiser than his teachers.

3. We may look upon them as contenting themselves with the naked theory of God's law, without making conscience of practice ; that they were such kind of guides that never tasted themselves what they commended to others, or practised what they taught ; then 'I have more understanding than my teachers.' He that excels in practice hath the best understanding. Practical knowledge is to be preferred before speculative, as much as the end is to be preferred before the means ; the end is more noble than the means. Now speculative knowledge is the means to the end : Ps. cxi. 10, 'A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.' Not only know what is to be done, but do what is to be known. As for others, whatever light they seem to have, they have not wisdom and understanding : Jer. viii. 9, 'Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them ?' They were boasting of the knowledge of the law, yet there was no wisdom in them. A mean Christian, that fears God, is a man of more understanding than he that hath a great deal of head-light ; and in this sense may it be well said, the children of God are wiser than their

teachers. Many times those that are unlearned rise up and take heaven by violence, when others, by all their literal and speculative knowledge, are thrust down to hell.

Suppose it spoken no way in diminution to these teachers, but that they did their duty.

4. Some comment thus; that David had more understanding than all his teachers who taught him the first rudiments of religion, that he transcended them by far, by God's blessing, in making further progress in this kind of knowledge. If this were the sense, it would teach us not always to keep to our milk and to the first principles of religion, but to wade further and further into these mysteries, Heb. v. 12, 13. We should go on still, and grow up to a greater fulness in knowledge according as we have more means and advantages. But this is not the sense, for he saith, 'than all my teachers.' Why then, secondly, take it for his godly teachers that were every way qualified; and it is no new thing for a scholar to exceed his master, and Christians of a private station many times to excel those that are in office. Look, as in secular things among the heathens, Aristotle was wiser than Plato his master, and opposed him in many things, and therefore is called an ass's colt, that as soon as he was full with the dam's milk, he kicks her; he forgot that he was his father. We should, if we can, exceed our teachers, but not despise them; and Daniel, chap. i. 20, was wiser in civil arts than all his teachers, so also it is true as to holy things. Jesus Christ at twelve years of age puzzled the doctors. Eli brought up Samuel in the fear of God, but he proved wiser than Eli; Paul, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, Acts xxii. 3, proved a more notable instrument of God's glory; and Austin was taught by Ambrose, but grew afterwards more eminent than he. Thus David was wiser than his teachers, and yet they might be faithful and holy. Now he mentions this partly to commend the Lord's grace, 'Thou hast made me wiser than my teachers;' and partly to commend meditation in the word, the means by which he got it; not to boast of his own attainments, but to commend grace, and commend the means of grace to others.

What may we observe from this assertion of David, 'I am wiser than my teachers'?

Obs. 1. The freeness of God's grace in making a difference between men and men as to measures and degrees of knowledge: 1 Cor. iv. 7, 'Who made thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?' Some have more and some less understanding, and all is as God gives out. There is not only a difference between men and men as to their great distinction of election and reprobation, but within the sphere of election as to measures of grace. God manifests himself to some more than to others; they are admitted to this favour, to see more than others into the mind of God, though they have the same teacher, God's Spirit; the same rule and direction, God's word; the same principles of grace; yet they have greater measures of knowledge: the reasons lie in God's bosom and grace. Now this should be noted, that those which excel should be kept humble, as being more indebted to grace than others are, and surely none should be proud because more in debt; and that those who are excelled might submit, and be contented to be outshined: John iii. 30, 'He must

increase, but I must decrease.’ It should be a rejoicing to them that God is likely to be glorified more by others; especially teachers should rejoice that God should give such a blessing to the ministry, that they which seem to be under them should see more than they. When those two quarrelling pronouns, *meum et tuum*, mine and thine, have no more use, as in heaven, then we shall fully rejoice in one another’s gifts and graces, and what they enjoy it will be our comfort: as, in a choir of voices, one sings the treble, another the bass; they are refreshed, and every one delights not only in his own part and performance, but in the part of each other; all concurs to the harmony; so one hath this measure of grace, another another, and all concur to the glory of God.

Obs. 2. Not only the freeness of God’s grace in giving wisdom to one more than to another, but observe also the sovereignty of God’s distribution. The treasures of grace are at his free disposing, and he will not be tied to any order; he gives to every one that measure of understanding which he sees fit. Indeed his ordinary course is to bless the teachers of his people with an increase of knowledge, for he hath promised a more especial presence with the public gift than with private: Mat. xxviii. 20, ‘I am with you to the end of the world.’ Yet many times private believers excel their godly teachers in wisdom and piety. Wisdom is not so tied to the teachers but that God is free to the giving as much, nay, more, to those that are taught. Though the general course is, in the ordinary way, that teachers should know more than the taught, yet God sometimes doth work extraordinarily, to show his prerogative, and absolute sovereignty; and things revealed to babes may be hid from the wise and prudent, to show that it is at his disposing, to hide and manifest as he pleaseth.

Obs. 3. The equity and proportion that he observes in the dispensation of his sovereignty, for David ascribes it to God, but observes that this came to him as a blessing upon the use of means, ‘For thy testimonies are my meditation.’ God gives knowledge to whom he pleaseth, but those that meditate most thrive most.

There are three sorts of meditation—(1.) Of observation; (2.) Of study and search; (3.) Of consideration or inculcative application; and all these conduce to make us wise.

1. There is a meditation of observation, when a man compares the word and providence, and is still taking notice how such a promise is accomplished, such a threatening made good; this man will grow more wise and more understanding than others: Ps. cvii. 43, ‘Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.’ That is, he that is comparing the prediction and event, God’s proceedings either in justice or mercy according to his word, how he doth punish and reward his people, and what visible comments his works are upon his word, he hath a clearer discerning than others, and they will see more cause to adhere to God, and yield him more faithful obedience than others.

2. There is the meditation of study and search, they that are inquiring into the word of God to find out his mind: Eph. v. 17, ‘Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.’ They that exercise themselves in the word to find out his mind shall have more

of his blessing than those that rest in hearing and reading: 'For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear, shall more be given,' Mark iv. 24. It is spoken of measuring to God in ordinances; as we measure to God in the use of means, so the Lord will measure out to us in his blessing and the influences of his grace.

3. There is a meditation of consideration, when we consider that which we read and hear, how it may be for use and practice, and of what moment it is for our eternal weal or woe. The scripture calls it consideration: 2 Tim. ii. 7, 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things;' Ps. l. 22, 'Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' The more men consider things with application to their own soul, the more wise will they grow, and the more understanding in the things of God, and able to apply all for their own direction; he will see more than the teacher ever could express when he gives forth the general doctrine of faith and manners. But let any meditate upon it, and urge his own heart, and he shall find something the teacher thought not of; and this principally is the sense spoken of in this place. A man that urgeth his own heart with what is taught, when he hath a general doctrine applies it to his own soul, and reflects the light of it upon his own heart, meditates upon it by serious and inculcative thoughts, will ever find something either the teacher saw not, or seeing expressed not, see further into this truth than the teacher was aware of. The life and success of all means doth lie in this meditation.

Obs. 4. 'I have more understanding than my teachers.' We learn this, that private means is a duty, and meditation must be joined with public hearing. Many content themselves with public ordinances, but make no conscience of private means, as secret prayer, and debating with themselves by serious inculcative thoughts returning upon their own heart. Oh! make conscience of this private duty. You may prosper and thrive more in a way of grace. When the apostle laid down the privileges of a justified estate, Rom. viii. 31, he concludes, 'Now what shall we say to these things?' implying we should urge our own heart upon every general doctrine, or rouse up ourselves with such a smart question, Heb. ii. 3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?'

Obs. 5. We learn, again, that it is good to submit to God's institutions; though the persons employed in them be never so mean, yet if they be clothed with lawful authority, by a conscientious attending upon God's ordinance, we may get a great deal of wisdom more than the teacher ever had, as they set your thoughts awork. Surely, if teachers be corrupt, as they sit in Moses' chair, though they are corrupt, yet as far as they do God's message they are to be regarded. Certainly we are not to turn back upon one meaner gifted if godly, or be a discouragement to those that are weak, though they are not so able, and have not so strong a gift. God may make a mean teacher a means for the increasing of knowledge.

Obs. 6. We learn the glory of all profiting; it must not be given to the instruments, but to God, for the scholar may become wiser than the teacher; that is, God may give more grace by an instrument than the

instrument hath in himself, to show that all is of him, that it doth not lie in the teacher's gift. All profiting must be ascribed to God; therefore the glory of all must redound to him, to his grace: 1 Cor. xv. 10, 'By the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain: I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' If never so able, it is still from God.

Secondly, The reason, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.'

Point. That meditation is a great help towards gracious improvement. David grew in such a manner as that he did excel all his teachers, and he giveth this reason of it: 'For thy testimonies are my meditation.' The scripture calleth for this: 1 Tim. iv. 15, 'Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. So consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things;' and Ps. l. 22, 'Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver;' and Luke ii. 19, 'Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.' Here I might show—(1.) What this is; (2.) What a notable means this is for spiritual improvement and growth in knowledge; to debate things with himself, Who made him, and for what end he was made. But of this you may see at large, ver. 15.

SERMON CVI.

I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.—
VER. 100.

MAN is a rational being, and should close with things more or less as they do perfect and polish his understanding. Now among all the inventions of mankind to remedy the defects of nature, not one of them can compare with the means which God offers for curing of the blindness and darkness of the mind which is introduced by the fall. Man hath found out grammar to rectify his speech, rhetoric to adorn it and make it more cogent and powerful in persuasion, logic to revive reason, medicine or physick to preserve the health of the body, politics for government of human societies, and for ordering our converse with others in the world, economics for prudent ordering of families, ethics for the tempering of each man's spirit, that it may live under the dominion of natural reason. But mark, for commerce and communion with God, wherein our happiness lies, there all the inventions of man are very short, and only the word of God can guide us, and furnish us with this wisdom; and because of this is the word so desirous¹ and precious to the saints. 'Oh, how they love the law of God!' for it is their wisdom. Well, David having showed how it prevailed with his own heart, 'Oh, how I love thy law!' for thereby I get spiritual wisdom and understanding; to draw in other men to love and study the word, and to make this motive strong and pressing upon them, he doth compare the wisdom that men may get by the word

¹ That is, "desirable," or "desired."—Ed.

with other things that look like wisdom ; he compares it with the sagacity of enemies, the speculation and knowledge of the teacher, and the prudence we get by age and experience.

1. With the sagacity of enemies, whose wit was sharpened with their own malice. There he shows that a man that taketh counsel of the word to secure his great interest, by getting into the favour of God, and walketh by the plain rule of the word, without consulting with flesh and blood, hath the advantage of all other men, and will be found to be the wisest man at length. He compares this wisdom he got by the word with the speculations and knowledge of teachers. He that doth not content himself with the naked rules delivered by them, but labours with his own conscience to make them profitable to his own soul, he will see more by his own eyes as to the particular duties and concernments of the spiritual life than his teachers could ever direct him unto.

2. He compares it here in the text with the wisdom of the ancients, or men of long experience. By the elders or ancients may be meant either men of former times, or aged men of the same time.

[1.] Men of former times: Heb. xi. 2, 'By it the ancients or elders obtained a good report;' that is, the holy patriarchs of their time. If this be meant of men in former times, then *thou hast made me wiser than the ancients* recommends this observation to us, viz., the church of God is growing always, and one age sees more than another. A dwarf upon a giant's shoulders may see further than he. The ancients had their measures of light, so hath the present age: Joel ii. 28-30, 'In the latter days'—meaning the times of the gospel, all that efflux of time which was between Christ's ascension and his second coming, is called 'the latter days'—'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions,' &c. The knowledge which younger ones shall get under the New Testament is expressed by visions, dreams, and prophecy. These three were the ways of God's revealing himself to the old prophets; therefore it implies that those very truths which the prophets and holy men of God had by visions, dreams, and prophecies, by such extraordinary ways of revelation, will then be commonly known by preaching and catechising and other means of instruction in the church of God: and thus, 'I have more understanding than the ancients.' Succeeding ages may see more into the mind of God; therefore antiquity should not sway against truth, and former ages should not prescribe to succeeding, which grow up to a further latitude and increase in knowledge.

[2.] Rather let us take it, 'I have more understanding than the ancients;' that is, than many old men of the same age. They that are slow and dull of conceit, yet by long use they grow wise; and having smarted often, they learn by their own harms to become circumspect. But here is the excellency of the word, that it made a young man wiser than those that are men of age and experience. Youths well studied in God's law may exceed men of great experience and knowledge in arts and sciences. True zeal and piety, and the defects of his age and want of experiences, are recompensed by the

exactness of his rule that he takes to guide him ; if he will but wholly subject and give up himself to the directions of this rule, he will not need much experience ; he hath enough to guide him : ‘ I understand more than the ancients : because I keep thy precepts.’ In which words you have—

1. The benefit that we get by God’s precepts, that is *understanding*.

2. This benefit is amplified by comparing it with the understanding that is gotten by age and experience, *I understand more than the ancients*.

3. The manner of obtaining this more excellent benefit, by a diligent heed and practice, ‘ I understand more than the ancients.’ Why ? *Because I keep thy precepts*. So that from hence three points are to be observed :—

1. That understanding gotten by the precepts of the word is better than understanding gotten by long experience. I observe this, because David doth not speak this so much to commend his own proficiency, as to set forth the exactness of our rule and goodness of the word of God ; therefore this point lies couched here.

2. That young ones may sometimes have more of spiritual wisdom than those that are ancient. I observe that, because David instanceth in his own person, though young, that he exceeded many, not only of his equals, but of his seniors.

3. The way to increase in spiritual understanding is to be studious in practical holiness. I observe this, because the reason rendered was his own diligent practice, ‘ I understand more than the ancients.’ Why ? ‘ Because I keep thy precepts.’

Doct. 1. That understanding gotten by the precepts of the word is better than understanding gotten by long experience. It is better in four regards :—

1. It is more exact. Our experience reacheth but to a few things, but the word of God reacheth to all cases that concern true happiness. The word is the result of God’s wisdom, who is the Ancient of days, therefore exceeds the wisdom of the ancients, or experience of any man, or all men. God is more ancient than they, sees all things that have been, are, and shall be, at one view and sight ; and therefore, if he will give us a rule, certainly that is more than all our experience. Experience will show us the evils of this world, and give us some rules to escape it ; but the word of God tells us of evils in the next, and that with more persuasiveness and evidence than if one came from the dead, and had been wallowing in those devouring flames that had been kindled in the other world, Luke xvi. 30, 31. There is more exactness and completeness in this rule than possibly can be in experience : 2 Tim. iii. 17, ‘ The word 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.’ By the man of God is meant the teacher ; the prophets are called men of God, and the public teacher is the man of God. If there be enough to furnish the teacher to every good work, surely there is enough to furnish the practiser. There is enough to furnish the man of God, who is to consult not only for his own private necessity, but the necessities of others.

2. As it is a more exact, so a more sure way of learning wisdom, whereas experience is more uncertain. Many have much experience, yet have not a heart to see and to gather wisdom from what they feel: Dent. xxix. 2, 3, 'Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt. Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.' They saw it, that is, had experience of it, yet not a heart to improve it: Ps. xlix. 13, 'This their way is their folly, yet their posterity approve their sayings.' The father gets an estate; when gotten, he thinks to enjoy it; God takes him off; their posterity live by their carnal maxims, and do not profit by their experience. Though they stand upon the graves of many that made a great bustle in the world to compass their worldly ends, yet they are never the wiser for all this. Therefore it is a great advantage to have a stated fixed rule to our hands, to have a rule of wisdom and principles given us by God himself, wherewith to steer and guide our course.

3. It is a safer and cheap way of learning, to learn by rule, than to come home by Weeping Cross, and to learn wisdom by our own smart. Experience is too expensive a way; and if we had nothing else to guide us, into how many thousand miseries should we run! how would a man's life be exposed to inevitable hazards and soul-dangers! And if by chance he should get out of the snare (which is uncertain), yet the taint of former practices will remain in him a long time; therefore it is God's mercy he will teach us by precept rather than by experience; that he doth not teach us, as Gideon taught the men of Succoth, by briars and thorns, but that we may learn wisdom at a cheaper rate. If we were only to know (as God saith of his people, Jer. ii. 19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee') when we had smarted for it, this were an expensive costly way; but if we will hearken to God's precepts, all this smart and trouble and bitterness of affliction may be saved. Therefore the precepts of God are better.

4. The way by age and experience is a long way, and so for a long time all a man's younger age must needs be miserable and foolish. Now here you may come betimes to be wise, by studying the word of God: Prov. i. 22, 'How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and ye fools hate knowledge?' It concerns a man not only to be wise at length, but to be wise betimes. The foolish virgins were wise too late, but never any were wise too soon. Therefore surely that is better which will make us wise betimes, as soon as we come to be exposed to dangers. In these respects he that applies himself to God's precepts will get more wisdom than he that gets wisdom by age and experience; he hath it in a shorter way, a safer way, a less expensive way, and in a more certain and exacter way.

Use 1. To reprove the folly of men that will not take God's directions, but will be trying experiments at their own cost; as Solomon gave out his heart to a critical search, he would find where happiness and comfort was, and at length was forced to come home by Weeping Cross, to the fear of God and keeping of his commandments. This is the whole of man, he had tried pleasure, profit, and all things. The prodigal would be running out of his father's house, and we all would

be trying, because we will not take God's word. God hath given his word here to man, we need not search elsewhere; and it is a thousand to one that, when you are trying, that ever you recover yourselves out of the snare. Here or there a man returns; I found them, saith Solomon, but there are very few; and therefore, as the prophet saith, Jer. xxxi. 32, 'How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?' Why do you compass about? There is a shorter way to true happiness, if we had a heart to take it. Oh, but we must have our swing and our scope, and then come home by shame and sorrow: Mat. xi. 28, 'Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' Mark, they that come to Christ, come not only laden with their sins, but weary with vain pursuits. But this is the fashion of man, to be running about, to be wearying himself, and contract weariness and thirst, as the prophet speaks, Jer. ii. 13.

Use 2. To recommend the study of the word. O Christians! God hath provided for us better than the heathens, who were forced to hunt up and down to find a spark of wisdom here and there; it is all brought home, and suited to your hands in the word of God; there is more wisdom to be gotten there for the guiding of your affairs and course of life in order to true happiness than by age and long experience you can possibly reach. Two ways doth this appear:—

1. Because the word doth sufficiently instruct us in our duty: Prov. ii. 9, 'Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.' Then! when? When you give up yourselves to God's direction, and take the law from his mouth, and walk in the way that is pointed out by his word and Spirit; you shall have enough to direct you in all your ways.

2. It doth warn us of all our dangers. It doth not only in the general call upon us 'to watch,' Mat. xiii. 37, and 'walk circumspectly,' Eph. v. 15, but it discovers all those deceits particularly whereby we may be surprised, diverted, and turned out of the way. There are snares in prosperity, snares in adversity; temptations you meet with in praying, trading, eating, drinking, in your public undertakings, and in your private converse; it shows your danger in all your ways, before you feel the smart of them. Therefore give up yourselves to God's direction, reading, hearing, meditating, believing, and practising; read, hear it often, then the deceits of Satan will be laid open, and the snares of your own hearts. Christians! an exact rule is of little use if you do not consult it: Gal. vi. 16, 'Peace and mercy be upon all them that walk according to this rule;' that order their conversations exactly. The word signifies, that try their work as a carpenter doth by his square; they examine their actions by the word of God, what they are now a-doing, therefore consult with it often; then meditate of it, ponder it seriously: 2 Tim. ii. 7, 'Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.' If we would have understanding by the word, there must be consideration. Man hath a discursive faculty to debate things with himself. Why! this is my duty. What would become of me if I step out of God's way? Here is danger and a snare; what if I should run into it now it is laid before me? And then believe it surely: Heb. iv. 2, 'The word profited not, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' Believe

God upon his word without making trial. You hear much of living by sense and by faith; living by faith is when we bear up upon the bare word of God, and encourage ourselves in the Lord; but living by sense is a trying whether it be so or no; as they that will not believe hell shall feel hell, and they that will not believe the word of God shall smart for it: Heb. xi. 7, 'Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark.' It may be there were no preparations to the accomplishment of the curse and judgment; the word threatened, it is a thing not seen, yet he prepared an ark. When a man is walking in an unjust course, all things prosper for a-while, the misery the word threatens is unseen. Ay! but if you would grow wiser by the word than men can by experience, you must look to the end of things: Ps. lxxiii. 17, 'I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end.' And then practise it diligently. A young practiser hath more understanding than an ancient notionalist: Ps. cxi. 10, 'A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.' It is not they that are able to speak of things, and savour what the word requires, but they that do what they hear and discourse of. Gregory saith, we know no more than we practise, and we practise as we know; these two always go together. The word doth us no good unless there be a ready obedience; therefore this is wisdom, when we give up ourselves to God's direction, whatever it cost us in the world.

Doct. 2. That young ones may have many times more of this wisdom than those that are ancient.

Divers instances there are. Joseph was very young, sold into Egypt about seventeen years of age; and when he was in Egypt, Ps. cv. 22, 'He taught his senators wisdom,' speaking of the senators of Egypt. With how much modesty did he carry himself when his mistress laid that snare! Isaac was young, and permitted himself to be offered to God as a sacrifice. Samuel was wise betimes: 1 Sam. ii. 26, it is said, 'The child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men.' From his infancy he was dedicated to God, and God gives him wisdom to walk so that he was in favour with God and men; yea, God reveals himself to Samuel when he did not to Eli. David, when he was but fifteen years of age, fought with the lion and bear; and somewhat after that with Goliath, when he was a ruddy youth. Josiah, when he was but eight years old, administered the kingdom; before he was twelve, sets upon serious reformation. Jeremiah was sanctified from the womb, Jer. i. 5; and John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb, Luke i. 35. In the 32d of Job, the ancients, Job's friends, are spoken of pleading their cause; wise young Elihu brings wiser words and better arguments than those that came to comfort Job. Solomon asked wisdom of God when he was young. Daniel and his companions, those four children as they are called: Dan. i. 17, 18, it is said, 'The Lord filled them with wisdom above all the ancient Chaldeans.' And Timothy, the apostle speaks of his youth, and bids him 'flee youthful lusts;' he was young, yet very knowing, and set over the church of God. Our Lord Jesus at twelve years old puzzled the doctors. In ecclesiastical stories we read of one who at fifteen years of age died with great constancy for religion in the midst of sundry tor-

tures. Ignatius pleads the cause of the bishop when he was but a very youth, but a man powerful in doctrine and of great wisdom; and therefore he saith, he would have them not look to his appearing youth, but to the age of his mind, to his wisdom before God. And he saith, there are many that have nothing to show for their age but wrinkles and grey hairs. So there are many young ones in whom there is an excellent spirit; and in all ages there are instances given of youth of whom it may be said that they are wise beyond their years.

For the reasons, why many times young ones may have more wisdom than those that are aged: God doth so—

1. That he might show the freedom and sovereignty of his grace. He is not bound to years, nor to the ordinary course of nature, but can work according to his own pleasure, and give a greater measure of knowledge and understanding to those that are young, and otherwise green, than he will to those that are of great age and more experience in the world. You have this reason rendered: Job xxxii. 7–9, ‘I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.’ There is the course: ‘But there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged understand judgment.’ Though all men have reason and a spirit, yet the Spirit of God is a wind that blows where he lists. Those that exceed others in time, may come behind them in grace. He gives a greater measure many times of grace and knowledge, to show his freedom and sovereignty.

2. Sometimes to manifest the power of his grace, both in the person that is endued with it, and the power of his grace upon others. As to the person himself in whom this wisdom is found, when they are young, the Lord doth show he can subdue them by his Spirit, and make their prejudices vanish, enlarge their understanding, and overrule their heart: 1 John ii. 14, ‘I write to you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.’ In that slippery age, when lusts are boisterous, temptations most violent, and they usually uncircumspect and headstrong, and give up themselves to an ungoverned license, yet then can God subdue their hearts, and make them stand out against the snares of the devil. And then with respect to others, when by the foolish he will confound the wisdom of the wise, and blast the pride of man, and cast down all conceit in external privileges, and give young ones a more excellent spirit than the aged, as the apostle intimates such a thing, 1 Cor. i. 26, ‘Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.’ And our Lord: Mat. xi. 25, 26, ‘Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.’ Usually God will do so, when he will punish the unfaithfulness of those that are in public place and office: ‘The law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancient.’ God will not take the usual way and course, but will give his Spirit and graces of his Spirit to them, and deny it to those that should be builders.

Now what use shall we make of this? There may be an abuse of such a point as this, and there may be a very good use.

To prevent the abuse—

1. This is not to be taken so but that there should be reverence shown to the aged, Job xxxii. 4–6. Elihu had waited till Job's friends had spoken, because they were elder than he. It is an abuse of men of a proud persuasion of their own knowledge and learning to despise the aged, especially when they also have a competent measure of the same spirit. The scripture speaks of 'Paul the aged;' certainly there is a reverence due to grey hairs. And it argues a great disorder when the staff of government is broken, and the established order is overturned; when 'a child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient,' Isa. iii. 5, and young men shall peak up to the despising of their elders, Deut. xxviii.

2. This is not to be applied so as to prejudice the general case of consulting with the ancients, which was Rehoboam's sin. Though God sometimes giveth wisdom to young men, yet the usual course is that, Job xxxii. 7, 'I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.' Certainly those that are old they are freer from passions, bettered by use and experience, and long continuance in study, have more advantages to add to their knowledge; therefore usually, though the bodily eyes be dim, the understanding may be most clear and sharp.

Use 2. The use in general is twofold—that young men should not be discouraged nor despised.

1. Not discouraged. We use to say Youth for strength and age for wisdom: but if they apply their hearts to religion and the study of God's will, and with knowledge join practice, they may profit, and so as they may be a means to shame those that are elder, while they come behind them in many gracious endowments. They are not to be discouraged, as if it were too soon for them to enter into a strict course, or grow eminent therein; for God may glorify himself in their sobriety, temperance, chastity, zeal, courage, and the setting their strong and eager spirits against sin is a mighty honour to God: Ps. viii. 2, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies,' &c. The graces of God in young ones do mightily turn to the praise of his glorious grace, and God is admired in them, and it is an honour and comfort to you also: Eph. i. 12, 'In Christ before me:' it is a just upbraiding to elder people that lie longer in sin.

2. Nor yet should youth be despised: 1 Tim. iv. 12, 'Let no man despise thy youth.' God's gifts should not be despised in any, nor stir up rancour. God may speak by them as he spoke by Samuel, and to Samuel when he spoke not to old Eli.

Having premised this, let me come to apply it particularly, though briefly. It conduceth then—

1. To the encouragement of youth to betake themselves to the ways of God. Oh, consider! let us begin with God betimes; do not spend your youth in vanity, but in a serious mortified course. This is your sharp and active time, when your spirits are fresh: therefore, if your watch is set right now, you may understand more than the ancients.

Give up your hearts to a religious course ; let not the devil feast upon the flower of your youth, and God be put off with the fragments and scraps of Satan's table. While you are young take in with God ; it is a great honour to God, and it will be an honour and an advantage to you. Mat. xxi. 15, 16, when the children cry 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' and the Pharisees reproved him for it, Christ approves of it, saying, 'Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?' When young ones take kindly, it is a great blessing. Therefore is judgment hanging over this nation, that youth is so degenerated ; whereas formerly they were addicted to religion, now they are addicted to all manner of lusts and vanity. Then it would be an honour and comfort to you ; the sooner we begin with God, the more we glorify God, and the more praise to God : Eph. i. 12, 'That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.' They that get into Christ above¹ others, they glorify grace above others : Rom. xvi. 7, 'They were in Christ before me.' He that first gets into Christ, he hath the advantage of others ; seniority in grace is a preferment, as well as in nature. And then it is a great advantage : Eccles. xii. 1, 'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' When we begin betimes with God, we have more opportunity of serving and enjoying God than others have. A man should 'bear the yoke in his youth,' Lam. iii. If the bent of our inclinations were set right in our youth, it would prevent much, and hinder the growth of sin. Though a man cannot plant grace in his heart—that is the Lord's own work—yet it keeps sin in, and prevents inveterate custom, for they will grow upon us ; and therefore it makes for the encouragement of you that they should sooner begin with God.

2. It makes for the encouragement of those that have the education of youth ; as masters of families, parents, and the like. Do not say it is too soon for them to learn ; no age is too soon for God : 2 Tim. iii. 15, 'Thou hast from thy infancy learned the scriptures.' When we suck in religion with our milk, it is a great advantage ; those things we keep with us that we learn young : Prov. xxii. 6, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' When the new vessel is seasoned with this precious liquor, it will keep the taste ; tender twigs are bent this way when they are as wax, capable of any impression.

Use 3. Caution for young ones. If young men should obtain this benefit, to grow wiser than the ancients, notwithstanding this, yet they should learn to show reverence to the aged, Job xxxii. 4–6 ; and then to ascribe it to God. Saith he, ver. 8, 'There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.' It is not the sharpness of our wit, but the inspiration of his grace ; he is the author of all this wisdom that is wrought in us.

Use 4. To humble the aged, that have not made conscience of their time and ways, and therefore are more blockish than many children : Isa. lxv. 20, 'There shall be no more an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days ;' old men that are ignorant of the mysteries of faith, after they have long sat under the word of God, and

¹ Qu. 'before' ?—ED.

had many advantages to improve their youth: Heb. v. 12, 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.' In this sense God is said to take away the understanding of the aged; that is, by a just judgment for their unfruitfulness and unprofitableness under the means of grace. They that are much younger than you are wise in comparison of you, when they excel you for ripeness in wisdom, for solidness and settledness in manners, in a course of godliness. Those old men that draw near to the grave before they have considered either the end wherefore they came into the world, or the state into which they shall be translated when they go out of it, those are children of one hundred years old, that have nothing to reckon age by, but wrinkles and grey hairs.

Doct. 3. That the way to increase in spiritual understanding is to be studious in practical holiness.

The word, that will give you understanding, will keep you out of all snares, sufficiently direct you to true happiness. But how shall we get it? Refer it to practice; practise what you know, and you shall know more: it must needs be so:—

1. Because these are such as have God's promise: John vii. 17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' They that make conscience of their ways, season their course in the fear of God, that take God's direction with them, God will tell them, they shall know what doctrine is of God.

2. They have a greater clearness of mind and understanding, therefore must needs discern holy things. Why? Because they are freed from the clouds of lust and passion, which do insensibly blind and make them stay in generals: Mat. v. 8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Saith Nazianzen, Where there is purity there is brightness; where there is a pure heart, there is a great deal more clearness in the understanding. Reason and fancy are dark, unless a man have a command over his passions and affections; over his passions, of anger, fear, grief; and over his affections, of love and joy, and appetite towards sensual delights; unless he be able to govern these things, he will never truly discern the mind of God for the seasoning his course in living a holy life. That of the apostle is notable, 2 Peter i. 5, 'Add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance.' Unless they be able to govern their affections in the use of worldly delights, pleasures, and profits, they will never have this practical knowledge; and therefore the only way to know divine things, as Nazianzen well observes, is conscientiously to keep the commandments of God.' If you would know the will of God, do not spend your time in heaping up notions, but framing your heart to obedience, governing your affections by the fear of God, and suiting your hearts to the word of God. Alas! those that seek knowledge out of ambition, curiosity, and vain ostentation, and lie under the power of vile affections, get but very little true spiritual light; they may have the understanding of teachers, but not the understanding to season them, and guide them in their communion with God.

3. The more we practise, the more religion is exemplified and made sensible, so that we come to understand more of the sweetness of it ; and, on the other hand, the more of difficulty is in it when there is nothing but bare notions and naked apprehensions. 'There we have a double advantage, an exact rule, and more experience of the sweetness of religion : Prov. iii. 17, 'All her ways are ways of pleasantness.' When we practise what we know, then we come to know the sweetness of entertaining communion with the Lord ; and they know more of the difficulty of religion, they know where their hearts are more averse, and more in danger : whereas others that soar aloft in notions, and idle and lofty speculations, have not this experience.

4. They that practise, study things with more affection than others, mightily help the understanding. The more piety and zeal any man hath, the more will the Lord bless his studies. Paul profited in the Jewish religion above many of his equals. Why ? Gal. i. 14, 'Being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of my fathers.' A man that hath a zeal in anything will profit more than others ; so he that hath a zeal for the things of God profits above others. A blunt iron, if red hot, will pierce through an inch board sooner than a cold tool, though never so sharp ; so those that have blunt parts in comparison of others, yet if they have zeal and good affections, they will pierce deep into the mysteries of religion ; they that have sharper parts, want the fire of zeal.

5. The more fruitful any grace is, the more doth it abound with us ; and therefore when your knowledge is fruitful you will find it increased by laying out your talents : Col. i. 10, 'Be fruitful in every good work, always increasing in the knowledge of God.' First he presseth knowledge in order to practice, then he presseth practice in order to knowledge. Saving knowledge is the cause of practice, and it is the effect of it.

Use 1. Learn how much practice exceeds speculation, and whereby a man's understanding is to be valued. Who is to be accounted a spiritual understanding man ? Not he that hath finer notions, but he that is most skilful, and 'ready to every good work.' Do not content yourselves with a few fine opinions well dressed and curiously set forth, for all this is nothing to practice. It must needs be so, for practice is the end of knowledge. Now the end is always more worthy than the means ; all the means have their loveliness from their end, and all the means have their order and measure from their end ; that is, we must so use the means that we may come to such an end. Well, then, knowledge is worthy for practice sake, and only to be sought after in order to practice ; not to soar aloft, but we are to be wise to sobriety ; nor as wanton fancies, such as affect conceits of wit, and empty frothy notions ; all should be suited to practice.

Use 2. Again, I might apply it, how ill they do that sever knowledge and a good conscience. When the age grew more knowing they were less moral in Seneca's time ; as it was so with them, so it is with Christianity many times. It was the saying of one, When I compare former times with ours, times of ignorance, darkness, superstition, they had more zeal, we have more light ; where there was less knowledge there was more practice. Now we have notions like a carbuncle,

which seems at a distance to be all fire, though it is quite cold; so we seem to have high floating notions concerning godliness; the head is stored with these, but hearts empty of grace, hands idle, less circumspect, more careless and loose, fruitless in good works. It shows us the cause why many, that have great dexterity in wit and excellent gifts in other things, yet are very stupid and blockish in the things of God. There is now a decay of gifts and knowledge. Why? Because professors do not refer all to practice; and then ungodliness and less practice provokes the Lord to withdraw the light. God punished the heathens with spiritual blindness, because they did not improve their knowledge; and we may justly fear it may prove so with us, who are all head, little heart; much in speculations, little, very little in practical holiness.

SERMON CVII.

I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word—VER. 101.

THE great work of a fast-day is to put away the evil of our doings; as when a fire is kindled in a house, and begins to rage and burn fiercer, it concerns those that would stop the fury of it to remove the combustible matter. The fire of God's wrath hath been kindled amongst us, and is not yet quenched. I suppose none of you doubt your business is to remove the combustible matter, to put away your sins; this scripture will be of some use to you to that purpose.

David had spoken of that wisdom which he had got by the word of God above enemies, teachers, ancients. It was not such a wisdom as consisted in speculation, but practice; not only such as did enable him to talk high, and set his tongue awork. No; it was such as did enable him to do things worthy of God, as did set his feet awork. Our feet are slow and heavy in God's ways, but very swift to that which is evil; and therefore herein did David's wisdom consist, to bridle himself, to refrain his feet, that he might not run headlong into all manner of evil; and not only so, but that he might be also more ready to that which is good: 'I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.' Where—

1. We have David's practice, *I have refrained my feet from every evil way.*

2. His end or motive, *that I might keep thy word*; that he might be exact and punctual with God in a course of obedience.

1. In his practice. You may note the seriousness of it, 'I refrained my feet.' By the feet are meant the affections: Eccles. v. 1, 'Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God.' Our affections, which are the vigorous bent of the soul, do engage us to practise, therefore fitly resembled by the feet, by which we walk to any place that we do desire, so that 'I refrained my feet;' the meaning is, I keep a close and strict hand over my affections, that they might not lead me to sin. Then you may note the extent of it. He doth not only say, 'I refrained from evil,' but universally, 'from every evil way.'

But how could David say this in truth of heart, because of his offence in the matter of Uriah? *Ans.* This was the usual frame and temper of his soul, and the course of his life; and such kind of assertions concerning the saints are to be interpreted *voce¹ et conatu, licet non semper eventu*. This was his errand and drift, his purpose and endeavour, his usual course, though he had his failings.

2. What was his motive and end in this? 'That I might keep thy word;' that I might be exact and punctual with God in a course of obedience, and adhere to his word uniformly, universally, impartially.

Doct. He that would keep the word must refrain his feet; that is, stand at a great distance in heart and practice from all sin.

For the illustration of the point observe—

1. A Christian must do both; he must stand at a distance from sin, and he must keep the word. There is a negative and an affirmative part in every commandment, precepts and prohibitions; we need both the bridle and the spur; the bridle, to refrain the feet from sin; and the spur, to quicken us to walk closely with God, according to the direction of his holy word. A simple abstinence from sin, without exercising ourselves unto godliness, will not serve the turn: Ps. xxxiv. 15, 'Depart from evil, and do good.' So Ps. xxxvii. 27. There is a double principle in every renewed man, flesh and spirit, Gal. v. 17; and his work is to restrain the one, to keep in the flesh that would fain break out, and range abroad in unseemly actions; and to encourage and put forth the other, the spirit in its necessary operation, with vigour and life. There is a double estate laid before us, heaven and hell; therefore we are not only to forbear sin, which is walking to hell, but we must walk worthy of God in all well-pleasing, and be fruitful in good works, which is our way to heaven, Eph. ii. 10, 'Forbearing evil, and doing good.' The Pharisee's religion ran upon negatives: 'I am not an adulterer, an extortioner,' &c., Luke xviii. 11. Many are not vicious rather than godly, they keep themselves in a middle lukewarm estate; and though they be not defiled with foul sins, yet do not set themselves seriously to serve the Lord.

2. Both must be done with the whole man, or regarded both in heart and practice. It is not enough to leave off evil, but to hate it, nor to do good, but we must do it with a love and an affection. Compare three places: Isa. i. 16, 'Cease to do evil, learn to do well;' Amos v. 15, 'Hate the evil, love the good.' And it is expressed with a further emphasis, Rom. xii. 9, 'Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good.' These places compared together will show that the outward act is not only to be regarded, but the frame of the heart. There should not only be an abstinence from the act of sin, but mortifying of the love of it; for there are many that outwardly forbear sin, but yet do not inwardly hate it. On the other side, we are not only to do good, but there must be a love to good; for many may externally do good when the heart abhors it. And on the other side, if there be a love to good, God passeth by many failings; it should not be a bare hatred, or a cold love, but such as hath life and vehemency in it, abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good—the soul of Jonathan cleaved to David—it must be a knitting love. There is Haman's refraining, Esther v. 10, and David's refraining. It is said

¹ Qu. 'voto'?—ED.

Haman refrained himself, when his heart boiled with rancour and malice against Mordecai; and there is David's refraining in the text, 'I refrained my heart from every evil way.' His heart is engaged, when the heart cleaves to him, not easily to separate.

3. Both are regarded, and both with the whole man. Now the one is required in order to the other; we must refrain from evil that we may do good, and do good that we may refrain from evil; mortification and vivification do mutually help each other. The more lively grace is the more sin droopeth, the more lively sin is the more is the new nature oppressed. Without refraining our feet from evil there is no doing of good, for vivification is increased according to the degree of mortification: 1 Peter ii. 24, 'That we, being dead to sin, might be alive to righteousness.' As long as we are alive to sin, active and delighting in the commission thereof, we are dead to righteousness. But now, as the love and life of sin is weakened in our hearts, so is grace introduced, and we are quickened and carried on with more strength in holy duties; the strength and fervour of the soul is diverted, and runs in another channel; the same affections that are carried out to sin, the same current and stream of soul that ran out towards ourselves, then is carried in a way of grace, the same affections, but carried out to other objects. And so on the other side, wherever there is an affection to good, there will be a cordial detestation to evil; the affection to the one will awaken and increase the hatred of the other; for still the soul draws that way which our affections carry them.

4. As the one must be done in order to the other, so our care in the first place must be to avoid evil, or to stand at a distance from every known sin. He begins with that as necessary to the other; first, 'I refrained my feet,' and then, 'that I might keep thy law;' he was to be more exact in a course of obedience. In planting of grace God keeps this method, he roots up the weeds, and then plants us wholly with a right seed, and so far as we are active under God in the work, we first 'put off the old man with his deceitful lusts,' and then, 'put on the new man,' Eph. iv. 22. We put off the rags of sin before we put on the garments of salvation. The plants of righteousness will not thrive in an unhumbled, proud, impenitent heart; therefore God's first work is the destruction of sin, and then the introduction of grace. The heart is purified for faith, as well as purified by faith. First, It must be purified for faith, that being the work of the Spirit of God; for John v. 44, 'How can ye believe that seek honour one of another?' As long as any fleshly lust remains unmortified, be it ambition, vain-glory, affecting honour, reputation, esteem in the world, the heart is not purified. Secondly, The heart is purified by faith, Acts xv. 9; more and more this corruption is wrought out. And then the heart is purified for fear: 'I will give a new heart,' Jer. xxxii. 40. And then purified by fear, as Job feared God, Job i. 1. So the heart is purified for love and by love; for love: Deut. xxx. 6, 'And the Lord will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul.' A believer is to be considered in the act of conversion and in the state of conversion; in the act of conversion, so first we turn from evil by a sound remorse: true grace is first planted, first purified for grace, then puri-

fied by grace : Job feared God, then eschewed evil. Preparing grace is implanted in us, then it hath an exercise upon us for the weakening of sin more and more.

5. Keeping at a distance from evil ; it must be as it is evil and contrary to the holy nature and will of God. I observe this, because David did not refrain his feet from evil upon any foreign and accidental reasons, for fear of men, or any sinister and by respect, but merely out of tender love and respect to the law of God, to testify his obedience to him : ‘I refrained my feet from every evil way.’ And what was his motive? ‘That I might keep thy word.’ A child of God hates sin, as it is contrary to his drift and purpose. If we do not love good for good’s sake, it is not good we love, but some other thing that cleaves to it, the temporal benefit that we think will come thereby. So if we do not hate evil as evil, but because of the loss and detriment that attends the practice of it, it is not sin that we hate, but inconveniences. As Austin saith of the eternal reward, *There are many non peccare metuent, sed ardere*—they are not afraid to sin, but are afraid to be damned. So a natural conscience may upon foreign and accidental reasons stand aloof from sin, as a dog may forbear a morsel for fear of the cudgel ; convinced men may forbear sin out of horror of conscience, and not out of any serious dislike of heart against it. Briefly, there is custom, education, penalty of law, infamy, shame of the world, difficulty of compassing sin, shame in practising. These are but accidental reasons, these may make us refrain, they may breed a casual dislike, but not a natural hatred ; for a gracious refraining must be upon a religious reason. David gives an account, not only of his practice, but his motive : ‘I refrained my feet from every evil way.’ And why? ‘That I might keep thy word.’

6. This refraining must be from every sinful course. The grace of justification will teach this, and the grace of sanctification ; the grace of justification, that pardoneth all sin, will teach us to deny all, Titus ii. 12 ; and the grace of sanctification will teach us to deny not one, but all, for that introduceth a settled hatred against sin in the soul. Now hatred is *πρὸς τὰ γένη*, to the whole kind ; he that hates one sin as sin, hates all sin, as Haman thought scorn to lay his hands upon Mordecai alone, but sought to destroy all the seed of the Jews, Esther iii. 6. So this hatred is universally carried out against all sin. Indeed they do not mortify any sin that do not mortify every sin ; one lust remaining unmortified keeps the devil’s interest afoot in the soul. Pharaoh, when the Israelites would have gone, would fain have a pawn of their return, their flocks, their herds, or their children, that they might be sure to come back again. So Satan, if a man be touched in conscience, and will bethink himself, and look after religion, if he can get but a pawn, a corner of the heart, one sin, he knows his interest is still kept. Herod did many things, but he had his Herodias, and that held him fast and sure to Satan. The young man had a sense of eternal life upon him, Mat. xix. 22, and he did many things, ‘All these have I kept from my youth,’ but he was worldly. There are certain tender parts in the soul that are loath to be touched ; but now if we would be sincere with God, we must refrain from every evil way. Any one man entertained besides the husband, it breaks the marriage covenant ; any

one sin allowed in the soul, be it never so small, it forfeits our privileges by grace.

But now, because particulars are more effective, and do strike upon the soul with the more smart blow than generals, briefly consider :—

1. We must refrain from every evil way ; not only notorious sins, but those that are plausible and of more reputation in the world, that are not so rank in the nostrils of men, and expose us to such disgrace and dishonour. There are open sins that are found hateful, that have a turpitude in them, and bring shame : Gal. v. 19, *ἔργα τῆς σαρκὸς*, ‘the works of the flesh are manifest ;’ such as murder, adultery, gross oppression, these are rank weeds of an ill savour, that stink in nature’s nostrils, and are accompanied with shame and disgrace. To refrain from these is little thanks, Luke xviii. 11. The Pharisee wipes his hand of these, ‘I am not an adulterer,’ &c. Ay! but he was proud, censorious, and covetous. There are pride, censoriousness, covetousness, and worldliness, cloaked sins that are not of such disgrace in the world, all these should be hated by you. Many times those sins that are *majoris infamie*, of greater infamy, are not always *majoris reatus*, they do not leave the greatest guilt upon you. Unbelief is not infamous in the world, neglect of the gospel of grace, want of love to Christ Jesus, these are great sins : and therefore you must not only abstain from notorious sins, but those which are more plausible, and are not of such ill fame in the world.

2. You must abstain from sins outward and inward, Isa. lv. 7. The sinner must not only forsake his way, but his thought ; by his way is meant his outward course and practice, but he must make conscience of his thoughts, and secret workings of heart. Practices may be overruled by by-ends, but thoughts and desires, these are the genuine immediate motions and issues of the soul, that do come immediately out of the fountain, and are restrained only by grace.

3. Sins profitable and pleasant, as well as those that have no such allurements and blandishment in them. There are many sins that have nothing of allurements in them, that are entertained only upon sin’s account and evil custom, as rash swearing, blasphemy, malice and the like ; but there other sins that allure and entice the soul by the promise of profit and pleasure, those two bastard goods that do make us often quit the good of honesty and duty. Now, you are to ‘deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts,’ Titus ii. 12 ; worldly lusts, whatever would endanger the soul, all inordinate inclinations that carry you out to these things of pleasing the flesh and gratifying worldly interests.

4. In refraining the feet from every evil way, that is, from sins against either table, Rom. i. 18. Mark, God hath owned both tables, not only revealed his wrath against ungodliness, breaches of the first table ; but against unrighteousness, breaches of the second table. Many indeed will not be unjust, intemperate, unkind to their neighbours ; ay! but they express no affection to God by worshipping him in their hearts, by faith, fear, and love, or in their houses by constant prayer morning and evening, and secret and familiar in closet converses with God ; they are guilty of ungodliness though not of unrighteousness. And there are many that would be much in worship, in praying, fasting, and hearing, but they forget their neighbours ; they are unrighteous,

they do not make conscience in their dealings with men, and in the duties of their relations are unfaithful, many times to the great dishonour of God; they do things heathens would boggle at.

5. There are great sins and small sins. Many make not conscience of small offences, count these venial. Certainly he that would have a tender regard to God's law, no sin should seem little to him that is an offence to the great God. It is Satan's custom by small sins to draw us to greater, as the little sticks do set the great ones on fire, and a wisp of straw enkindles a block of wood; and by small sins we are enticed by Satan. The least sin allowed of is of a deadly and dangerous consequence: Mat. v. 19, 'Whosoever shall break the least of these commandments, and teach men so.' It is treason to coin a penny as well as a pound. To break the least of God's commandments, to make no conscience of them, because it is a small thing, argues a naughty heart. Bodkins may wound and stab as well as swords. Look, as we read of the prophet, he was devoured of lions, so we read of Herod, he was eaten up by lice. Small sins may be a very great mischief to the soul. Little sins are often the mother of great sins, and the grandmother of great punishments and of plagues from God; and therefore these lesser sins we must refrain from: 'I kept myself from every evil way.'

6. We must not commit anything that is evil out of a good intention, if it be an evil, but stand at a distance from it. Do not turn aside to any crooked path upon any pretence soever. Some have a good action but a bad aim. Now these do, as it were, make God serve the devil; they do the action which God hath required, but their aim is that which gratifies Satan. There are others that have a good aim but a bad action. These make the devil serve God, as if God could not provide for his own glory well enough without their sin. Therefore, if it be an evil way, refrain it, though you think you may bring good out of it. Saul would be offering sacrifice, an unwarrantable action for him to invade the priestly office, 1 Sam. xiii. 13, 14. He was loath to go to battle until he had sacrificed, and would not tarry till Samuel came. What then? See what Samuel saith, 'Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God which he commanded thee.' Here was a good aim, but a bad action, and you see how severe judgment fell upon him. I say, he forfeited his kingdom by doing an undue action, though for a good end. Uzzah he put forth his hand to stay the ark, which was an undue circumstance; he had a good aim in it, that the ark of God might not be shaken, that it might not fall and be shattered in pieces, and the mysteries of their religion prostituted: 2 Sam. vi. 7, 'And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error, and he died.' Many think to bear out themselves by good intentions that are drawn into an evil way; they hope to bring things to a better pass. It is dangerous to step out of God's way; God's ends can best be brought about by God's way. The judgments of the Lord upon these nations have been mainly for unwarrantable actions upon good intentions; and though usually we have committed one sin to help another, yet there hath been a pretence of a good intention, a good aim.

7. We are not only to avoid such sins as seem to lie remote from our temper and course of our business and interest, but our own special sins; those sins which suit better with our condition, constitution, calling, employment: Ps. xviii. 23, 'I was upright before thee, and kept myself from mine iniquity.' Every man hath his iniquity; as every man hath his particular temper, so he hath his particular sins, and if he belong to God he hath his particular graces. The saints have their particular graces; Timothy for abstinence and temperance, Job for patience, Abraham for faith, therefore styled the father of the faithful; Moses was eminent for meekness. So there are particular sins; men are passionate, worldly, voluptuous, ambitious, and as the channel is cut, so corrupt nature finds a vent and passage: Isa. liii. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.' We are all out of the way, but every man hath a particular way of sin. Look, as in the natural body, every man hath all the faculties of a man, yet some this faculty more vigorous and lively than other, some for memory, judgment, invention, quickness of wit, so it is as to particular sins. Now these should be most resisted and most opposed by us. The scripture requires of us, Mat. v. 19, 'To cut off our right hand, and pluck out our right eye;' these, if they be not watched, will run into scandal; our particular sins make us dishonour God, dishonour our profession, and become a reproach to the gospel. It is notable, when our Saviour dissuaded from giving scandal, Mat. xviii. 8, 9, he revives those sentences of cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye. These sins will make you a dishonour to the gospel if you do not watch over them.

8. There are the sins of the times wherein we live, *vitium seculi*. Indeed it is hard to keep our ground in a great flood; when a stream is strong it is ready to carry us away; but he that would be punctual with God should keep from the sins of the times. Peter dissembled with the Jews, and the godly Jews fell a-dissembling of their religion, insomuch that Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation, Gal. ii. 13. When sin seems to be authorised by a general practice, it concerns you to stand at a distance, to have nothing to do there. Noah was an upright man, feared God, and served him in a corrupt age, Gen. vi. 9. They are dead fishes that are carried away with the stream. We are not to walk *κατὰ τὴν αἰῶνα*, 'according to the course of this world,' Eph. ii. 2, but 'to walk according to the rule,' Gal. vi. 16. In many ages there are certain sins, until light disprove them, and the Lord clears up his will, that men run into, and are carried away by violence of the stream, while the stream runs that way in their age. But this will be no excuse, you are to be upright, and not carried away by *vitium seculi*, the evil way of the times.

9. We are not only to refrain our feet from evil, but from all the occasions and appearances of evil; and not to stand so much as within the scent of a temptation; as crows and ravens, when they are beaten away from the carrion, will stand within the scent. We are to stand at a great distance from all that seems to tend to sin, not only from evil, but the appearance of it, 1 Thes. v. 22. Sin should be so hateful to us, that the very picture of it should be abhorred. Many times some sins are the occasion of others, as covetousness is occasioned by

distrust, there certainly we are to avoid occasions as well as sins themselves. Ay! but if the thing be lawful, and we know our weakness, we should not easily ride into the devil's quarters, and run into the mouth of temptation. Look, as Solomon in that particular sin adviseth the young man, Prov. v. 8, 'Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house.' He would not have the young man venture upon the occasion. And God's strictness to the Nazarite is very notable, Num. vi. 3, 4, as he was to drink no wine or strong drink, so no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, nor drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried; and afterwards he was not so much as to eat either the husk or kernel of the grape. Thus God would have us stand at a distance. This was a typical figure, to show at how great a distance we should stand from sin, and refrain ourselves from all evil; as the apostle saith, 'Hate the garments spotted with the flesh,' Jude 23, an allusion to those that touched an unclean thing. Rushing upon snares and occasions of evil, we hazard the surprisal of our souls. As Cæsar said of his wife, *Oportet Cæsaris uxorem non solum castam esse*, &c.—she should not only be chaste, but free from all suspicion; so God will have his people to be void of suspicion, and to be clear and innocent from all kind of transgressions. Thus you see how we are to refrain from every evil way.

The reasons of this are two—(1.) Because sins will weaken our graces; (2.) They will weaken our comfort; both which are necessary to the keeping of God's law. Therefore, if we would keep the law, and be punctual and close with God in a course of obedience, we must stand at a great distance in heart and practice from all sin.

1. Sins will weaken our graces. There are several graces necessary to the keeping of God's law, as faith, fear, love, hope. You know, at conversion God puts a vital principle into us, that is diversified and called by these several names. These graces are planted in us as principles of operation, and as these decay, our acts of obedience will be more or less; a sickly faith can produce but weak operations; as if the root wither and decay, the branches will not long flourish. So when our fear and reverence of God is lessened, as it is by every act of sin, the spiritual life will not be carried on with that exactness and care. So when our love waxeth cold, we will not be so diligent and serious, for these are the principles of operations, Rev. iii. 3. When they left their first love, they left their first works. If there be a decay and diminution of our graces, then there will be an intercession of acts and operations; these graces will suffer a shrewd loss; they are qualities, and therefore capable of increase and remission, being more or less. As love may wax cold, Mat. xxiv. 26; fear may be greater or less; so faith; though there be some seed of grace, remains to preserve the interest of the soul, yet things may be ready to die and faint. How do they decay? By sins. Gal. v. 17. These things are contrary—flesh and spirit; that is, always warring upon one another and weakening one another; and here lies the Christian's advantage, to observe which is up and which is down. By every act of deliberate sin the flesh is strengthened and grace weakened; these are up and down in a renewed heart; therefore it is good to see which

prevails, that you may not weaken your strength. If you gratify the flesh, you hearten your enemy, and strengthen your clog, and so grace languisheth.

2. It weakens our comfort. Comfort is necessary to make us lively and cheerful in God's service. The Lord knows we drive on heavily when we have not that peace of conscience, serenity of mind, and want the comforts of God's Spirit. The more our hearts are enlarged the more we run the way of God's commandments, Ps. cxix. 32. What is an enlarged heart? Chiefly by joy and comfort; it is joy that enlargeth the heart. Now sin weakens this joy, this comfort which is our strength. When Adam sinned, his soul was filled with horror, Gen. iii. 10; and David, when he had been tampering with sin, lost his comfort: Ps. li. 8, 'Make me to hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice;' and ver. 12, 'Restore to me the joy of thy salvation.' He that pricks himself with a needle or sharp thing must needs feel pain; so whosoever gives way to sin certainly will have trouble of soul, confusion, grief, fear, sorrow, and loseth his sense of salvation for a time, and sins away his peace. Always the more exact our walking, the more is our peace of conscience: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience,' &c. Well, then, if we would be punctual with God, we see how much it concerns us to stand at a distance from every evil way.

Use 1. To show how far they are from a course of obedience that live under a full power of their sins. Never think you seek after that which is good while your evil scent remains with you, and your former evils are in life and strength to this very day. All those that wallow in brutish sins of drunkenness and adultery, so those that are guilty of common swearing, Sabbath-breaking, and such like gross sins, these have good thoughts of themselves, they have sincerity towards God; but such have a spot that is not the spot of God's people. Twice there is a caution interposed that such should not be deceived, 1 Cor. vi. 9; Eph. vi. 6. You will say, Where lies the danger of any deceit? The worst are apt to deceive their own hearts. There is a world of these deceivings in the hearts of men; the best of saints have fallen into as great sins. They think these are but petty slips and human infirmities, and God's patience will suffer all; grace will pardon all at length, and no man is perfect; therefore they have some hopes to even those that are drunkards, adulterers, and abusers of themselves with mankind; though their sins be as Sodom, those that fall into the grossest sins; they are apt to be deceived. Be not deceived; these things are not consistent with grace.

2. It shows how far they are from the temper of God's children that are not punctual with God in a course of obedience, that hate one kind of evil, not another. Many hate prodigality, yet not covetousness; hate covetousness, and are given up to sensuality; hate an epicure, and such a one as squanders away his estate, think as evil of him as can be, but not hard hearts, such as shut up their bowels, and do no good in their places; and some hate sensuality, but not pride, but cherish that; there is some sweet bit under his tongue, as Zophar speaks, Job xx. 12. Christians! though we can subdue no sin as we should, yet we are to resist every sin, and especially to bend all the force and strength of

your souls against your sins, that sin which is most apt to prevail with you : this is a sign of uprightness, Ps. xviii. 23. And therefore, if you would know whether you have given up yourselves to walk with God, to keep his word, what labouring hath there been with your own hearts? what pains have you taken to set against your own sins? are you most jealous of it, pray most against it, often turn the edge of the word upon it? are you observing the decays, or do you keep it under the tongue? Reason with yourselves upon the world to come; is it reserved corruption or remaining corruption? Have you never been dealing with your hearts to suppress such a corrupt inclination as you have been often foiled with?

Use 2. To press those that would be exact with God, to stand at a distance in heart and practice from every known sin; whatever urging and solicitations you have within yourselves, though it would break out, yet have you refrained. To this end let me commend two graces and two duties. The two graces are love to God and his word, and fear to God and his word.

For the graces:—

1. A love to God, a love to the word of God. A love to God: Ps. xevii. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' It is as natural and as kindly to the new nature to hate the chiefest evil, as it is to love the chiefest good. Do you talk of love and communion with God, and never exercise yourselves in refraining your feet from every evil way? Certainly if you have any love to God, you will hate that which God hates; for *idem velle et nolle*, to will and nill the same things, that is true friendship; therefore if God be your friend, you will hate as he hates, that which makes a breach between you and God, and makes you grow shy of God, and lose your familiarity with him. As love to God, so love to his word: Ps. cxix. 113, 'I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.' Certainly if a man hath a love to the law, he will not only hate sin in practice, but vain thoughts, what tends to breaking the law in his thoughts, any lesser contrariety, contradiction, or defiance of God's law; for our hatred is engaged by love. Well, get this love, set it a-work, improve it by reason (for every affection is fed by discourses of the mind). All sins are set a-work by some discourse, so graces are set a-work by discoursings of our minds. Now set this love a-work. Oh! shall I, that have tasted so much of the love of God, or that do pretend to love God and Christ, and enjoy communion with him, yield to follow sin? Ezra ix. 13, 'What! after such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandment?' When God hath delivered us, not only out of Babylon, but, you may say, out of hell, how should we set love a-work? The great instance of God's love was the giving his Son: 1 John iv. 9, 10, 'Herein is love,' &c. Now, then, if God hate and resist sin, reason and argue from this love: What! shall God give his Son for me, and I not spare a lust for God? When God did not stand upon his Son, that was so dear and precious to him, shall I stand upon my sin? What! shall Christ die for me, to ransom me from hell? is this my kindness to my friend? Cyprian brings in Satan pleading thus, as vaunting against Christ: I never spilt one drop of blood, my back was never mangled with whips and scourges, I never had a heaven to bestow upon them;

yet among all thy beneficiaries, show me any so busy, painful, diligent, exact in thy service, as these are in mine. Thou hast shed thy blood, and endured a painful and an accursed death for them ; yet they are not so dutiful to thee as to me. You see whereto this tends ; and shall Christ do so much for us, and we not deny our lusts for him ? Surely if we have any sense of the love of Christ Jesus, it will work this hatred, this abhorrency and refraining ourselves from every evil way. Thus set love a-work.

2. Another grace is a fear of God and his word. A fear of God : Prov. viii. 13, 'The fear of the Lord is to depart from evil ;' Job i. 1, 'Job feared God, and eschewed evil.' Surely a fear of God will make you refrain yourselves from every evil way. And not only so, but a fear of his word, that is useful : Prov. xiii. 12, 'He that feareth a commandment shall be rewarded.' It is not said he that fears a judgment, but he that fears a commandment. If the word stands in his way, it is more than if all the inconveniences in the world stand in his way. This also should be improved by holy reasoning and discourse. You may reason as Joseph : 'The Lord seeth me, and 'how can I do this wickedness and sin against God ?' Gen. xxxix. 9. Shall I break the Lord's laws before his face ? What ! when my heavenly father hath forbidden me ? The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab, Jer. xxxiv. 5, 6, they were afraid to drink wine when the prophet brought pots before them. No, we dare not ; our father hath commanded us the contrary. Their father was dead, and could not take cognisance of their actions, to call them to account for breaking the rule of the institution ; but there was an awe upon them. But our Father's eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth. Therefore when you are tempted to sin and folly, say, I dare not ; God hath commanded me in his word to the contrary. Set fear a-work ; here is a commandment stands in my way ; the great God he sees all things, and will one day call us to an account.

The two duties into which these graces do run and issue themselves are watchfulness and resistance. Watchfulness ; we are poor creatures, in the midst of snares, very easily may miscarry, partly through our constitution ; there is flesh as well as spirit, and the flesh doth always stir, and not lie idle. Old sins, that seemed to be laid asleep, may easily waken again. The devil suits the bait to the season and affections we are under, as angels furnish their hook with a proper bait. Oh ! saith Bernard, here are fears, there snares ; that which pleases is apt to tempt me, that which frightens is apt to terrify me. What should a poor creature do ? Be watchful, stand upon your guard, that you be not surprised by the craft of Satan, that you may not swallow the hook when he sets the bait to your appetite. And then powerful resistance of evil, that sin may not prevail, and we more and more drawn off from God. Do not yield a little ; smaller sins make way for greater ; when the gap is once open, it is wider and wider ; if sin be not stifled at first, it will increase.

SERMON CVIII.

I have not departed from thy judgments : for thou hast taught me.—
VER. 102.

IN the former verse he had spoken of his vigilancy against evil, as the result of that wisdom which he got by the word ; now he speaketh of his constant adherence to God's direction. Here you may take notice of two things—(1.) David's exactness and constancy in obedience, *I have not departed from thy judgments.* (2.) The reason of it, *for thou hast taught me.*

Branch 1. By *misphalim, judgments*, is meant God's law, for thereby he will judge the world. And the word *departed not* intimateth both his exactness and constancy ; his exactness, that he did not go an hair's-breadth from his direction : Deut. v. 32, 'Ye shall observe to do what the Lord your God hath commanded you : ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.' And his constancy is employed in it ; for then we are said to depart from God and his law when we fall off from him in judgment and practice, Jer. xxxii. 40.

Branch 2. God's institution and continual instincts. The Septuagint, ἐνομοθέτησάς με ; and thence the vulgar, *Legem posuisti mihi*—thou hast given me that law ; and so the reason would be drawn from God's authority ; but rather it is meant of his internal illumination and constant direction. Observe—

1. A man that would show love to the word must show it by a constant and exact adherence to the directions thereof, whatever temptations he meet with to the contrary. David produceth this as one evidence of that affection in the first verse of this section or part : 'Oh, how I love thy law !' I shall show you—

1. What temptations there are to the contrary.

2. What reason there is to be exact and constant.

First, What temptations to the contrary.

1. From the natural instability of our own hearts ; nothing is so changeable as man. We have certain heats for the present, but we soon cool again ; and when temptations arise, are carried off from God, and that exactness and care that we were wont to show in our obedience to him. What was said of Reuben is true of every man in some degree, Gen. xlix. 4, 'Unstable as water.' It is carried hither and thither, in various and uncertain motions. So are we up and down, off and on, ebbing and flowing, not steadfast in any good frame ; sometimes seen to have strong motions towards God and holiness, but anon grow cold and careless, or as a bird is now upon the top of a tree, by and by upon the under branches, and then upon the ground. Such a different posture or spirit may every one observe in himself, and sometimes in the same duty. God is always the same, and so are his ways ; they have the same loveliness which they had before, but we are not always the same. The rock standeth where it did, but the waters flow to and again. The least blast of a temptation maketh us break off our course. Now this natural levity of spirit is a great hindrance to us. We do not always see with the same eyes, nor have we the

same degree of affection. 'You did run well, who hindered you?' Gal. v. 7. There may be a ready forwardness, and yet a great defection afterwards. This uncertainty is not only at first, before we are settled by grace, or have any sound acquaintance with God's ways. Then it is most, James i. 8. But after conversion it remaineth with us in part. Those measures of affection and zeal which we once obtained are not constant with us, but suffer some notable decay, and our edge is often taken off and blunted. Especially our first love is not of long standing, and our after-carriage not answerable to our promising beginnings. Now, there is no satisfying reason for this change, why we should make a halt, and grow remiss and lag in the profession of godliness, and leave off our first works; nothing but our changeableness of spirit.

2. From the furious oppositions and malice of Satan and his instruments.

[1.] Satan pursueth after men that would cleave to God's ways, as Pharaoh did after the Israelites; either to bring them back again, or to weary them and vex them, and make their present course uncomfortable to them. Now, the violent assault of multiplied temptations is apt to make us stagger and depart from that good course that we have propounded to ourselves; as the Israelites were running back to Egypt because of the inconveniences of the wilderness. But it should not be so; a Christian should stand his ground, 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith; knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world,' 1 Peter v. 9. They that make conscience of their duty, and are most set to serve and honour God, must reckon upon the hottest battle, and sorest conflict from Satan, to hinder or discourage them therein: he watcheth all advantages, and is still in action against them. Now this should not shake us, or loosen our adherence to the truths of the gospel; for so it is with every one that goeth to heaven: he must be watching, praying, striving. Yielding is not the way to be quiet, but resisting; if you yield to him in the least, he will carry you farther and farther, till he hath left thee under a stupefied or terrified conscience: stupefied till thou hast lost all thy tenderness. A stone at the top of a hill, when it beginneth to roll down, ceaseth not till it come to the bottom. Thou thinkest it is but yielding a little, and so by degrees art carried on, till thou hast sinned away all thy profession, and all principles of conscience, by the secret witchery of his temptations: and of the other side, terrified, till thy peace, comfort, and sweet sense of God's love be gone; and thou brought under the black horrors of a dreadful despair. Therefore a stout and peremptory resistance is the only means of safety. Consider, your case is not singular, your lot is no harder than the rest of God's children therefore do not depart from God.

[2.] Satan's instruments may rage against us, and yet we must not depart: Ps. xlv. 17, 18, 'All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant: our heart is not turned back, neither hath our steps declined from thy way.' All this! What? Scorn, disgrace, bloody, cruel, reprov'd, maligned, butchered, yet steadfast with God in the profession of the

faith. Hazards and troubles are no excuse; this is but a time to show our love to God, our duty to God is the same still.

3. From the example of others, especially who are of esteem for godliness. Example hath a mighty force upon men. Man is a ductile creature; like sheep, they run for company; not what we ought to do, but what others do. There are three reasons—of natural corruption, the flesh, the devil. But first, example of others: Eph. ii. 2, ‘In time past ye walked according to the course of this world.’ The universal corrupt course and custom of those among whom we live is a great snare. To follow a multitude to do evil is a strong excitement, but no sufficient excuse, especially of good men. They that are gracious may stagger strangely in reeling times, and be overtaken with dangerous mistakes. Now their sins authorise others, and draw them into the snare: Gal. ii. 12, ‘Carried away with their dissimulation.’ A strong stream or current impetuously doth carry all things away with it. They take all for current that they do, without examining their actions, and so run away from the rule by their errors.

4. From the providence of God, which may seem to be against those that are exact right, or the sure way pointed out to us in his word, two ways:—

[1.] In the manifold disappointments as to his favouring a good cause; their endeavours blasted, many troubles befall them. God’s people are often put to trials by God himself, to try the sincerity of their love. Blind Bartimeus rebuked by the disciples: Mark x. 48, ‘Many charged him that he should hold his peace, but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.’ And so Christ to the woman of Canaan, Mat. xv. 22–27, puts her off. And are not we put to such trials in these latter times? When we own him, God seemeth to put us off; providence appeareth with a doubtful face. They that take to the better part may be reduced to great straits; therefore sometimes it may ‘happen to the righteous according to the work of the wicked, and to the wicked according to the work of the righteous,’ Eccles. viii. 4. So variously doth God dispense external good and evil, and may seem to frown upon those that are faithful now; yet we should not depart from his judgments: Job xiii. 14, ‘Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him.’ We should wrestle through many disappointments here, or hereafter God will not own us.

[2.] By giving success to a wrong party, that layeth claim to him, to his favour in an evil way, and interpret when his providence seems to be an approbation of an evil course. It is a great temptation. God’s choicest servants have been staggered by it; yet it is but a temptation: Ps. l. 21, ‘I kept silence, and thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.’ God may hold his hand, though they strangely transform him in their thoughts, and entitle their actions to his patronage. God trieth you: Deut. xiii. 2, 3, ‘The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul.’ God’s word is so clear and satisfactory, that by a righteous judgment he may permit it, to try our steadfastness and obedience, not as chaff, but as solid grain. But must we not regard providences? Yes, but not interpret them against the word, but with it. It is comfortable to see the word

backed with a providence, Rom. ii. 18; Heb. ii. 2; and Hosea vii. 12; when the word is made good, and they feel that which they would not believe. Not interpret it against the word. Providence is never against the word; it is an exact comment upon it, if we had eyes to see it; and when we see it altogether we shall find it so. But now we view it by pieces, and so mistake: Rom. viii. 28, 'For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to purpose;' Ps. lxxiii. 17, 'Until I went into the sanctuary, then understood I their ends.' When we look to the end of things, all hazards are over.

Secondly, The reasons why we must be exact and constant, notwithstanding these temptations. I will name but two, implied in the two words of the text, 'Thy judgments'—(1.) It is God's word; (2.) God's word is judgment.

1. It is God's direction, who cannot deceive or be deceived; you may venture your soul's temporal and eternal estate, and all upon it, upon God's bare word; for it is impossible for him to lie in his promises, Heb. vi. 18, or to be deceived in his directions. The word of the Lord is a pure rule: 1 John ii. 27, 'The unction teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lie.' There is no erring while we walk by this direction, the Spirit of God teaching us by his word; and indeed this is the effect of that great faith, to believe God upon his bare word, to believe what he hath spoken is true, and to act accordingly. If this were rooted in our hearts, we should not be so unstable, so easily foiled by Satan, discouraged by the oppositions of evil men, or live by example, but by rule, and would interpret the providence of God to the advantage, and not the prejudice of obedience: 'Whom resist, steadfast in the faith,' 1 Peter v. 9. Adhere to the truth of the word: I know here is my direction, and in the issue will be my safety and happiness. But either we do not believe this is God's word, or do not urge the heart with God's authority and veracity, and therefore we are up and down. But now, when we determine this is God's word, and so receive it, 1 Thes. ii. 13, '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.' And then it is my rule; whatever it cost me. There you urge the heart with the authority of God, Mat. xvi. 24: a resolute giving up ourselves to God's direction, and to receive the law from his mouth. And it is a certain rule, whatever cross accidents fall out, it should be received with such certainty and absolute authority as nothing should move us. So assured of it, 'that if an angel should preach any other doctrine, let him be accursed,' Gal. i. 8; 2 Tim. iii. 16; and 2 Peter i. 2. When it is believed to be the Lord's mind, it is a sure ground for faith to rest upon; it is not a doctrine found out by the wit of man, no private invention of others, but God's inspiration. God hath wisdom to direct me the safest way, and goodness and faithfulness enough not to mislead me: 'Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way,' Ps. xxv. 8. It is not the devices of their heads that wrote it, but the public mind of God. And saith the apostle, 'Knowing this first;' this is the first and supreme principle: he had said, ver. 19, that we should consult with the word for direction and comfort before we can get any saving light or true comfort.

2. It is judgments. Every man's doom is contained in the word, and if you can but stay a little, you shall see it verified by sensible and plain experiences. Do but wait and observe how God maketh good his promises, and accomplisheth his threatenings, and you will see no cause to depart; you will find you have done right in the issue, and that close obedience is the only way of safety and happiness here and hereafter. David did so as to his own case: Ps. xviii. 21, 'I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God.' And was he a loser by it? No; 'God hath recompensed me according to the cleanness of my hands.' On the other side, those that depart from God are destroyed; his word will be made good against them: Ps. cxix. 119, 'Thou putttest away the wicked of the earth like dross.'

Use 1. Direction to us both in public and private cases. Be sure you follow such ways as God's word doth allow, for otherwise it is not constancy, but obstinacy; and then whatever troubles and discouragements you meet with, this will be a comfort to you, that you are in God's way.

First, As to your private case, be not discouraged by the instability of your heart and the temptations of Satan. You will be up and down with God; but observe these two rules:—

1. It is necessary to watch against your first declinings, lest by little and little the heart be stolen away from God. When you lose your savour of holy things, lessen your diligence, and are not so exact and watchful, you begin to depart from God. The gap once made in the conscience groweth wider and wider every day. The first declinings are a cause of all the rest; remitting your watch and spiritual fervour, by degrees you do not walk with such a straight foot: he that looketh to the house to keep it tight and in constant repair, prevents the fall of it.

2. If through our infirmity we miscarry at any time, we must not persist in a wrong course, but reclaim speedily, not depart wickedly, Ps. xviii. 21, not lie in the dirt when we have caught a fall. There is a departing out of infirmity, and a departing wickedly. A candle sucketh light if presently kindled again; the longer we lie in our sins the worse; the more care, the more speedy, the more likely to succeed, when there is any breach between us and God; not lie in it.

Secondly, As to public actions. We live in changeable times, but it is well that we have a sure rule; this may stablish your hearts. If governed by sense and interest, with what a gracious face shall we appear to the world? Though you meet with troubles for being exact and punctual as to principles of conscience, and many disappointments from God, yet in the issue that will be found to be the best course for you and yours. Now, when you see your duty, for which you must consult both with word and Spirit, take heed of two things:—

1. Unbelief: Heb. iii. 12, 'Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' The cause of apostasy is unbelief; they do not look upon God's directions as judgments. Men that look to the present face of things cannot see things to come, and so miscarry. Hezekiah, in the midst of dangers

and difficulties, was steady to God: 2 Kings xviii. 5, 6, 'He trusted in the Lord God of Israel: he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.' Every duty hath a sanction, invested with promises and threatenings; therefore, as there needeth obedience to make conscience of the precept, so faith to believe the sanction, which doth enliven the duty, and keep our hearts under the awe of it.

2. Mortification; for till there be an indifferency to all events in temporal things, we shall ever be departing and turning off from God; sometimes allured out of our obedience, sometimes affrighted out of it; therefore, till dead to worldly accidents and interests, we are easily turned out of the way: Heb. xii. 13, 'Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way;' that which is lame, feeble, and fearful. Good men may be carried away thus, as Peter. Too weak and inconstant are the best of men; the least blast of temptation will make them leave off the course of well-doing, and, without respect had to conscience or credit, openly desert it. For fear of man's offence Peter slipped from his duty. Fear of losing applause, or incurring hatred with men, maketh us venture on God's dishonour; unmortified lusts make us more tender of ourselves than of God.

Second point. That divine teaching causeth constancy; for therefore David saith, 'I departed not, for thou hast taught me.' Here—

1. What it is to be taught of God; it is often spoken of in scripture: Isa. liv. 13, 'All thy children shall be taught of the Lord'; John vi. 45, 'All taught of God.' Now God teacheth outwardly by his word, but inwardly by his Spirit; these two must not be severed. Our hearing is necessary: Eph. iv. 21, 'If so be ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus;' the ordinary means of hearing him preached, and set forth in the gospel and public ministry, and by that means doth Christ make use of it to teach us by his Spirit. So John vi. 45, 'Heard and learned of the Father;' it doth not seclude a teaching ministry in the gospel; but it is said, 1 Thes. iv. 9, 'Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another;' and 1 John ii. 27, 'But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you; and ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie; and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.' It is a rhetorical insinuation, the negative to be understood comparatively; man's teaching is nothing to what you have already by the Spirit. On the other side, much more doth it not exclude the Spirit, upon whom the efficacy dependeth. God teacheth by men, but the effect is from his grace: Mark xvi. 20, 'They went forth preaching the word, the Lord working with them;' 1 Cor. iii. 6, 'Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.' The internal efficacy worketh by external means: *Docet Spiritus Sanctus, sed per verbum*, saith Ferus, *docent apostoli; sed per co-operationem Spiritus Sancti*—God worketh in and by the means.

2. Inwardly God teacheth two ways—(1.) By common illumination; (2.) Special operation.

1. Common illumination, barely enlightening the mind to know or understand what he propoundeth by his messengers. So Rom. i. 20,

God showed it to the heathen, 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse.'

2. But then, by way of special operation, effectually inclining the will to embrace and prosecute duties so known: Jer. xxxi. 33, 'I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.' This way of teaching is always effectual and persuasive. Now in this sense they are taught of God, that they do not only get an ear to hear, but a heart to understand, learn, and practise.

Secondly, Why this teaching is the ground of constancy.

1. They that are thus taught of God see things more clearly than others do: God is the most excellent teacher. One man seeth a thing by candlelight, another by daylight; he seeth most clearly that seeth by noonday. The light of the Spirit doth clearly manifest things, both object and faculty. The unction teacheth us all things, 1 John ii. 20, 2 Cor. iii. 18.—a distinct, clear, abiding light. Carnal men are blind, 2 Peter i. 9. How sharp-sighted soever in other things, yet blind; they do not see so as to affect their hearts.

2. They know things more surely, and with certainty of demonstration; whereas others have but dubious conjectures, and loose and wavering opinions about the things of God: John vi. 69, 'We believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God;' John xvii. 8, 'Known surely that I came out from thee.' The many temptations and assaults we meet with need such a certain apprehension.

3. This teaching is so efficacious and powerful, as that the effect followeth: Ps. lxxxvi. 11, 'Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth;' 1 Cor. ii. 4. It is a lovely teaching, causing us to cleave to what is taught.

4. God reneweth this teaching, and is always at hand to guide us, and give counsel to us, which is cause of our standing. We need this continual teaching to keep us mindful, that we may not forget things known. The Spirit puts us in remembrance, because of the decay of fervency, and dulness of spirit that groweth upon us; therefore are truths revived to keep us fresh and lively, that we may not neglect our duty. Because of incogitancy and heedlessness we mistake our way, and are apt to run into sin in the time of trial and temptation. Therefore we need a monitor on all occasions, Isa. xxx. 31, that we may not be carried away with the corrupt bent of our own hearts. Well, then, this abiding in us is the cause of perseverance, 1 John ii. 27.

Use. To show the reason of men's fickleness and inconstancy, both in opinion and practice. He that is led by man unto man, both as to opinion and practice, may be led off by man again, when we take up truth upon tradition and human recommendation. Oh! seek it of God: Isa. xlviii. 17, 'I am the Lord your God, that teacheth you to profit.' Not our own ability, but the light of the Holy Ghost; wait upon God, learn something of him every day, and give God all the glory.

SERMON CIX

How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.—VER. 103.

IN this verse you have another evidence of David's affection to the word, and that is the incomparable delight which he found therein, as being suitable to his taste and spiritual appetite. This pleasure and delight he found in the word is propounded—(1.) By way of interrogation or admiration, 'How sweet are thy words unto my taste!' As if he said, So sweet that I am not able to express it. (2.) By way of comparison, 'Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.' To external sense nothing is sweeter than honey; honey is not so sweet to the mouth and palate as the word of God is to the soul. It is usual to express the affections of the mind by words proper to the bodily senses, as taste is put here for delight, and elsewhere eating is put for believing and digesting the truth: 'Thy word was sweet, and I did eat it,' Jer. xv. 16. Again, in all kind of writers, both profane and sacred, it is usual to compare the excellency of speech to honey. The poet describes an eloquent man, that his speech flowed from him sweeter than honey. And the like we may observe in scripture: Prov. xvi. 24, 'Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.' He means words of wisdom, such words as come from a pure heart; now these are sweeter than honey. So the spouse; because of her gracious doctrine, it is said, Cant. iv. 11, 'Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb;' and Ps. xix. 10, 'More to be desired are they than gold; yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb.' For profit, he esteemed them more than gold; for pleasure, more than honey or the honeycomb. And David saith here, 'Thy words are sweet unto my taste.' He doth not say in general, They are sweet unto *the* taste, but sweet unto *my* taste. Holy men, that have much communion with God, such as David was, they that have his Spirit, find this delight in the word of God; nothing so sweet, or so full of pleasure to the soul. Two points:—

1. That there is such a thing as spiritual taste.

2. That to a spiritual taste the word of God is sweeter than all pleasures and delights whatsoever.

Doct. 1. That there is such a thing as spiritual taste.

I shall show *that* it is, and *what* it is; the use of it, and what is requisite to it.

First, It appears that there is such a thing; the soul hath its senses as well as the body. We do not only know, but feel things to be either hurtful or comfortable to us; so the new nature doth not only know it, but doth seem to feel it, that some things are hurtful, and others are comfortable to it; and hence the apostle's expression, Heb. v. 14, 'Such have their senses exercised, to discern both good and evil.' Christians, if there be such a thing as spiritual life, certainly there must be spiritual sense; for all life is accompanied with a sense of what is good or evil for that life, and the higher the life the greater

the sense. Beasts feel more than a plant when hurt is done to them, because they have a nobler life, and a man than a beast; and the life of grace being above the life of reason, there is a higher sense joined with it, and therefore the pain and pleasure of that life is greater than the pain or pleasure of any other life; for spiritual things, as they are greater in themselves, so they do more affect us than bodily: 'A wounded conscience, who can bear it?' Prov. xviii. 14. What a sense doth the evil of the spiritual life leave upon the soul! And then for the comforts of the spiritual life, the joys and pleasures of it are unspeakable and glorious, 1 Peter i. 8, such joy as no tongue or words can sufficiently express. A taste of the first-fruits of glory, how sweet is it! Briefly, let me tell you there are three internal senses spoken of in scripture—seeing, tasting, and feeling. Sight implies faith: John viii. 56, 'Abraham rejoiced to see my day;' and Heb. xi. 27, 'By faith Moses saw him that was invisible.' There is a seeing not only with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of the mind, things that cannot be seen with the outward sense: 'Abraham saw my day,' at so great a distance. As there is sight, so also taste; which, if we refer it to good, is nothing else but spiritual experience of the sweetness of God in Christ, and the benefits which flow from communion with him: Ps. xxxiv. 8, 'Oh, come, taste and see that the Lord is gracious.' Do not only come and see, but come and taste. The third sense is feeling or touch; that relates to the power of grace: Phil. iii. 10, 'That I might know him, and the power of his resurrection,' &c. There is a sense that a Christian hath of the power of grace and of Christ upon his soul; so 2 Tim. iii. 5, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' When men resist the force and virtue of that religion which they profess, then they are said to deny the power of those principles. Well, then, there are spiritual senses.

Now, that we might know what they are, let me show—

1. How these spiritual senses differ from the external.

2. That in some sense they differ from the understanding.

1. These spiritual senses differ from the external sense; that I shall prove by three arguments:—

[1.] Because in those things that are liable to external sense, a man may have an outward sense of them when he hath not an inward.

[2.] There are certain things that cannot be discerned by external senses, yet a Christian may have a feeling of them by internal sense.

[3.] The outward senses sometimes set the inward senses awork.

[1.] Because in those things which are liable to external sense, a man may have an outward sense of them when he hath not an inward, as in seeing, tasting, touching.

In seeing: Deut. xxix. 2, compared with ver. 4, 'Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt; and yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day.' They saw, yet had not a heart to see; they saw those wonders with the eyes of their body; they had a sense outward and natural, but not a sense inward and spiritual.

So for taste; there is a taste of God's goodness in the creature; all taste it by their outward senses: Ps. cxlv. 9, 'The Lord is good to all,

and his tender mercies are over all his works.' The wicked are not excepted from his taste; for the creatures are as useful for the preservation of their lives, as the lives of others. They do not mind God's love in it, and so do rather taste the creature, than God's goodness in the creature; but the child of God tasteth his love therein. The fly finds no honey in the flower, but the bee doth. A fleshly palate relisheth only the gross pleasure of the creature, not that refined delight which a spiritual palate hath, who hath a double sweetness; it doth not only receive the creature for its natural use, but it tastes God, and feels the love of God in the conscience as well as the warmth of the creature in his bowels.

So for feeling: Jer. iii. 25, 'We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God.' Men may feel the blows of his providence, and be sensible of the natural inconvenience, yet they have not a spiritual feeling so as to be affected with God's displeasure, and have a kindly impression left upon the soul, that may make them return to God.

[2.] It differs from the outward senses, because they can by a spiritual sense discern that which cannot be discerned by the outward sense; as in that place, Heb. xi. 27, 'By faith Moses saw him that was invisible;' see the invisible God, and are as much affected with his eye and presence as if he were before the eyes of the body, as others are awed by the presence of a worldly potentate; this is matter of internal sense. So for taste; they have meat which the world knows not of, invisible comforts, John iv. 37. They have hidden manna to feed upon, and are as deeply affected with a sense of God's love, and hopes of eternal life, as others are with all outward dainties. Then as to feeling; many things the outward sense cannot discern; sometimes they feel spiritual agonies, heartbreakings: when all is well and sound without, a man would wonder what they should be troubled about, that abound in wealth and all worldly comforts and accommodations. They have an inward feeling, they feel that which worldly men feel not; when they are afflicted in their spirits, carnal comforts can work nothing upon them; when they are afflicted outwardly, spiritual comforts ease their heart. And as they feel soul agonies and soul comforts, so they feel the operations of the spiritual life; they have a feeling of the power of the Spirit working in them; they live, and know that they live. Now no man knows that he lives but by sense; therefore if a child of God knows he lives, he hath internal sense as well as external. We know we live naturally by natural sense, and we know we live spiritually by spiritual sense: Gal. ii. 20, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;' he lived, and knew that he lived. They have a life which they feel within themselves, the operations and motions of the spiritual life; they feel its impulsions to duty, its abhorrences from sin; tendency of soul to God, and spiritual supports; and they feel the stirrings of the old nature, workings of heart towards sin and vanity, which the outward senses cannot discover.

[3.] The outward senses sometimes set the inward senses awork. The sweetness of those good things which are liable to sense, puts us in mind of the sweetness of better things; as the prodigal's husks put him in mind of the bread in his father's house; or as the priests of

Mercury among the heathen, when they were eating figs, they were to cry, Truth is sweet, because the god whom they worshipped was supposed to be the inventor of arts, and the discoverer of truth. So Christians, when by the outward taste they find anything sweet, the inward sense is set awork, and they have a more lively feeling of spiritual comforts; as David, honey is sweet, but the word of God was 'sweeter than honey to him, or the honeycomb.' Thus Christ, when he was eating bread, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,' Luke xiv. 15; and they that have Christ's spirit, they act suitably.

2. This sense differs from a bare and simple act of the understanding. Why? For a man may know things that he doth not feel. Simple apprehension is one thing, and an impression another. An apprehension of the sharpness of pain is not a feeling of the sharpness of pain. Jesus Christ had a full apprehension of his sufferings all his life-long, but felt them not until his agonies, therefore he said, John xii. 27, 'Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?' We have notions of good and evil, when we neither taste the one nor the other. It is one thing to know sin to be the greatest evil, and another thing to feel it to be so; to know the excellency of Christ's love, and to taste the sweetness of it, this doth not only constitute a difference between a renewed and carnal man, but sometimes between a renewed man and himself.

[1.] Between renewed men and carnal men; they know the same truths, yet have not the same affections. A carnal man may talk of truths according to godliness, and may dispute of them, and hold opinions about them, but doth not taste them; so he does but know the grace of God in conceit, not in truth and reality, as the expression is, Col. i. 6. As a man only that hath read of honey may have a fancy and imagination of the sweetness of it, but he that tastes it knows it in truth and in effect; they know the grace of God, and the happiness of being in communion with God, by the light of nature, in conceit, but not in reality; but the other they taste it: 'If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious,' 1 Peter ii. 3. There is an impression of sweetness left upon the soul, and real experience of the goodness of God in Christ, so as to make them affect him with all their hearts, to choose him for their portion, and to make his will their only rule, and obey and serve him, whatever it cost them. They have such a taste of this sweetness, as doth engage their hearts to a close and constant adherence to Christ. Carnal men have only a naked knowledge of these things, weak and ineffectual notions and apprehensions about them; and if the sublimity, reasonableness and suitableness of these truths to soul necessities cause any taste, it is but slight, slender, and insufficient. So indeed temporaries and hypocrites are said to 'taste the heavenly gift, the good word of God, and powers of the world to come,' Heb. vi. 4. They have some languishing apprehensions, but they do not so taste them as to relish and feed upon them. They do not relish Christ himself, but only some benefit which they hope to get by him upon slight and easy terms; have not such experience and sweetness of God in Christ, as that their souls should constantly cleave to him. It may be their fancy may be pleased a little in a supposition

and possibility of salvation by Christ, or in some general thought of those large promises and great offers which God makes in the gospel, not as it enforceth duty and subjection to God ; well, then, it differs from a bare understanding of the goodness of God's ways.

2. This constitutes a difference sometimes between a renewed man and himself, as to some things ; his inward senses are not always alike quick and lively ; he is still like-minded as he was, but yet not alike affected ; his sight is not so clear, nor taste so acute, nor his feeling so tender ; though he hath the same thoughts of things he had before, yet his spiritual sense is benumbed, and is not at all times affected alike, while he keeps his spiritual eye clear from the clouds of lust and passion ; he is otherwise affected with things to come than he is when his eye is blinded with inordinate passion and love to present things ; and while he keeps his taste, how sweet and welcome is this to his soul, the remembrance of Christ, and salvation by him ! And so, while he keeps his heart tender, he is sensible of the least stirring of sin, and is humbled for it ; and the least impulsion of grace, to be thankful for it. Those instructions, reproofs, consolations, which at some times either wound or revive their spirits, at other times do not move them at all ; their senses are benumbed, not kept fresh and lively. And thus in the general I have proved that there is such a thing as spiritual taste.

Secondly, What is this spiritual sense ? It is an impression left upon our hearts, which gives us an ability to relish and savour spiritual things ; but it cannot be known by description so much as by these two questions :—

1. The use of it, what doth this taste serve for ?

2. What are the requisites that we may have such a taste and relish of divine and spiritual things ?

1. What doth this taste serve for ? There is a threefold use of them :—

[1.] To discern things good and wholesome from things noxious and hurtful to the soul ; that is the use of spiritual sense in general. to discern things good and evil, Heb. v. 14 ; Job vi. 30, 'Is there iniquity in my tongue ? Cannot my taste discern perverse things ?' God hath given all sensitive creatures a taste, whereby they may distinguish between things pleasant or bitter, sweet or sour, wholesome or unwholesome, savoury or unsavoury, that they may choose what is convenient to nature ; so the new creature hath a taste to know things, things contrary to the new nature, and things that will keep it in life : Job xii. 11, 'Doth not the ear try words, and the mouth taste his meat ?' or, as it is more plain, Job xxxiv. 3, 'For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat.' Spiritual taste distinguisheth between what is salubrious and profitable to us, that which is the pure word, milk agreeable to the new nature ; and what is frothy, garnished out with the pomp of eloquence, it is tasteless to a gracious soul, if it suiteth not with the interests of the new nature : they have a faculty within them, whereby they distinguish between men's inventions and God's message. A man of spiritual taste, when reason is restored to its use, he comes to a doctrine, and many times smells the man ; saith he, this is not the breast-milk that must nourish me, the pure milk of

the word by which I must grow in strength and stature ; and if he finds anything of God, he owns God ; he discerns what is human and what is divine.

[2.] The use of this taste is also to refresh and comfort the soul in the sweetness of spiritual things : Cant. ii. 3, ‘ I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste ; ’ the taste of Christ’s fruit in the comforts of redemption ; the fruit that grows there is sweet and pleasant to the new nature. When the love of God to sinners in Christ is not only heard but believed, not only believed but tasted, it ravisheth and transports the soul with sweet delight and content, that excels all the pleasures of the world.

[3.] It serves for this use, to preserve the vitality of grace, that is, to keep it alive and in action. *Omnis vita gustu ducitur*—every life hath its food, and the food must be tasted. This grace quickeneth us to look after that food ; it keeps the new creature free for its operations, helps it to grow : 1 Peter ii. 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.’ The truths of the gospel are as necessary and natural for the cherishing and strengthening the spiritual life as the milk of the mother is to the new-born babe, and taste is necessary that we may relish it. They that have a taste have an appetite, and they delight in the word more than in any other thing ; whereas those that have no taste or appetite, grow not up to any strength, they thrive not.

2. What is requisite to cause this taste ? (1.) Something about the object ; (2.) Something about the faculty.

[1.] Something about the object, which is the word of God. Eating, or taking into the mouth, that is necessary before tasting ; for the tongue is the instrument of taste ; the outward part of the tongue that serves for meats, the inward part, towards the root, for drink. So for this spiritual taste there is required eating, or taking in the object, therefore we read often of eating the word of God : Jer. xv. 16, ‘ Thy word was sweet, and I did eat it ; ’ and Ezek. iii. 3, we read of eating the roll ; it is interpreted spiritually, ‘ I did eat it ; ’ then follows his taste, ‘ it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.’ So Rev. x. 10, ‘ I took the little book and ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.’ There was somewhat of prophetic vision in these things, but generally it is carried not an outward and literal eating, but a spiritual taste, relishing the sweetness of it. Well, then, the word must not only be read and heard, but eaten. What is this spiritual eating of the word ? Three things are in it, and all make way for this taste. (1.) Sound belief ; (2.) Serious consideration ; (3.) Close application. He that would have a taste of spiritual things, these three things are necessary.

(1.) That there be a sound belief of it. Men have not taste, because they have not faith ; we cannot be affected with what we do not believe : Heb. iv. 2, ‘ The word profited not, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.’ What is the reason men have no taste in the doctrine of God, and in the free offers of his grace ? It is not mingled with faith, and then it wants one necessary ingredient towards this taste. So 1 Thes. ii. 13, ‘ Ye received the word of God, which

effectually worketh also in you that believe.' If you would have spiritual sense, faith makes way for it: we must take the word as the word of God. When we read in feigned stories of enchanted castles and golden mountains, they affect us not, because we know they are but witty fictions, pleasant fables, or idle dreams; and such atheism and unbelief lies in the hearts of men against the very scriptures, and therefore the apostle seeks to obviate and take off this: 2 Peter i. 16, 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables;' intimating there is such a thought in man's heart. Certainly if men did believe the mystery, that is without controversy great, that God hath indeed sent his Son to redeem the world, and would indeed bestow heaven and eternal happiness upon them, they would have a greater taste; but they hear of these things as a dream of mountains of gold, or rubies falling from the clouds. If they did believe these glorious things of eternity, their hearts would be ravished with them.

(2.) As faith is necessary, so serious consideration, by which we concoct truths, and chew them, and work them upon the heart, that causeth this sweetness; by knocking on the flint the sparks fly out: those ponderous and deep inculcative thoughts of divine and heavenly things make us taste a sweetness in them. When we look slightly and superficially into the word, no wonder we do not find this comfort and sweetness; but when we dig deeply into the mines of the word, and work out truths by serious thoughts, and search for wisdom, when we come to see truth with our own eyes in its full nature, order, and dependence, this is that which gets this taste: Prov. xxiv. 13, 14, 'My son, eat thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste. So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul, when thou hast found it.' When men are serious, look into the nature, and see all truths in their order and dependence, then they will be like honey and the honeycomb; this makes way for this sweet taste.

(3.) There is necessary to this taste close application; for the nearer and closer things touch one another, the greater their efficacy; so the more close you set the word home upon your own hearts, the more it works: Job v. 27, 'Know it for thy good;' break out thy portion of the bread of life, look upon these promises and offers of grace as including thee, these commands speaking to thee, and these threatenings as concerning thee; look upon it not only as God's message in common, but urge it upon thy soul: Jer. xv. 16, 'It was unto me the rejoicing of my heart.' There must be a particular application of these things. These things are necessary to this taste with respect to the object; as there must be eating, a taking into the mouth, if we would taste, so there must be a digesting or working upon the word, by sound belief, serious consideration, close application.

[2.] As to this taste, there is somewhat necessary as to the soul or faculty; we must have a palate qualified for these delicacies. Now there is a double qualification necessary to this taste—a hungry conscience and mortified affections.

(1.) A hungry conscience. Without this, a man hath a secret loathing of this spiritual food, his taste is benumbed; but to a hungry

conscience the word is sweet, when he is kept in a constant hungering after Christ and his grace: Prov. xxvii. 7, 'The full soul loatheth the honeycomb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.' Cordials, they are nauseous things to a full stomach; oh but how reviving, comfortable, and sweet are they to a poor broken heart! The first time that we got this taste, it was when we were under the stings of a guilty conscience, then God came and fended his grace to us in Christ; he sent a messenger, one of a thousand, to tell us he hath found a ransom, and that we shall be delivered from going down into the pit; that he will spare us, and do us good in Christ Jesus, then the man's flesh recovers again like a child's, Job xxxiii. 25. When men have felt the stings of the second death, and God comes with a sentence of life and peace by Christ, how sweet is it then! Now, though we have not always a wounded conscience, yet we must always have a tender conscience, always sensible of the need of gospel support; we came to this first relish of the doctrine of eternal life and salvation by Christ when we lay under the sentence of eternal death.

(2.) The heart must be purged from carnal affections; for until we lose our fleshly savour we cannot have this spiritual taste: Rom. viii. 5, 'They that are after the flesh, do savour the things of the flesh;' the word may be translated so. A carnal heart relishes nothing but carnal things, worldly pleasures, worldly delights; now this doth exceedingly deaden your spiritual taste. Spiritual taste is a delicate thing, therefore the heart must be purged from fleshly lusts; for when fleshly lusts bear sway, and you relish the garlic and onions and flesh-pots of Egypt, your affections will carry you elsewhere, to the vanities of the world, and contentments of the flesh. Look, as sick men have lost their taste, and that which is sweet seems sour and ungrateful to a distempered appetite, so a carnal appetite hath not this taste from the word of God; to a carnal heart it is no more savoury than the white of an egg; yea, it is as gall to them, but now to others it is exceeding sweet, it is their joy, the life of their souls. Well, then, you see what is this spiritual taste, that relish which a renewed soul hath for spiritual comforts.

Use. To persuade you to get this taste; and when once you have got it, take heed you do not lose it.

1. It concerns you very much to get this taste; take these arguments:—

[1.] It is a good evidence of the new nature; it is a sign you have gotten that other heart, that new spirit, which must have new comfort, new supports: 1 Peter ii. 3, 4, 'As new-born babes you desire the sincere milk of the word; if so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' Hereby we may know the new man, by his appetite and savour. Life is known by this, as much as by any one thing else.

[2.] This will give you a more assured knowledge of the truth and worth of spiritual and heavenly things, whereas otherwise we shall but talk of them by rote, until we experiment the comfort and sweetness of them in our own souls; then we will see there is more than notions in promises, the word of God is not a well-devised fable and golden dream, for our taste will be our confirmation. The greatest demonstration is from the senses, 1 John v. 10, the believer hath a testimony

of the truth of religion within himself, in his own heart. Oh! it is a great advantage to have our remedy there where our danger lies, in the heart; where atheism and disbelief lurks, to have spiritual sense there: when you have a real experience of them, then Satan cannot have such advantage, and atheistical and unbelieving thoughts such advantage, for you have felt the benefit of spiritual things. It is a great advantage against temptation, when you have had a sense, when you do not only know by hearsay and guess that the word is sweet, but you have had a taste, as a man that hath been at the fire knows it warms; when we can not only say with him, 'We have heard the kings of Israel are merciful kings,' but, with the men of Samaria, 'We have seen him ourselves.'

[3.] The life of grace mightily depends upon it; all your liveliness in grace depends upon this taste, therefore get it. When you have no taste, you lose your appetite; and when you lose your appetite, you lose your strength; and when you lose your strength, all goes to ruin in the soul; sin prevails, and deadness increaseth upon the soul. All the strength, comfort, and vitality of your lives depend upon your taste.

[4.] It is this taste that will make you more useful to others. That which we have seen, heard, and tasted, that we commend to others. A report of a report and tradition, it may be or not; that is a cold thing, this is not a valid testimony. Ay! but when you can speak of that which you 'have felt and tasted, your eyes have seen, and hands handled of the word of life,' 1 John i. 1; when it is matter of sense, then we can speak boldly and affectionately, as the apostle, 2 Cor. i. 4, 'That we might comfort them which are in trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.' When we ourselves are comforted of God, and that which we speak is the result of our own experience, it makes us more useful in our Christian converse. The prophet Ezekiel was to eat his own prophecies, and St John to eat the book; the meaning is, they must digest it. What we communicate to others, we must digest it ourselves, that, finding it sweet, we may speak the more effectually for God.

2. Do not lose this taste. Oh! it is a sad thing to lose these spiritual senses. Hypocrites, their taste doth lightly come and lightly go; they have a little vanishing sweetness now and then, but it is soon gone; it is a sad thing to lose our spiritual taste. It may be lost in a great measure; sometimes a Christian hath it, and sometimes he hath it not, at least not in such a degree as formerly. Experience shows it may be lost too too often; all the business will be to discern the first tendencies of this evil when we begin to lose our taste and spiritual senses. This may be discerned with respect to the threefold object of this taste—heavenly gift, the good word of God, and powers of the world to come.

[1.] Heavenly gift, that is Christ Jesus. When we do not so highly value the love of God in Christ, and prize his blood, and the precious effects of it; when we do not so earnestly beg pardon of sin, and hunger and thirst after his righteousness; when we have not that former earnestness and strength of desire to enjoy Christ. Time was when thou thoughtest no terms too dear for him, when thy heart made

hard pursuit after him ; but now thou art grown cold and careless, and so pass him by lightly, as a full stomach with meat, with which it is cloyed ; when you are not so earnest and zealous for Christ, it is a sign you have lost your taste.

[2.] Your tasting of the good word of God. When you slight the word, either in not reading, hearing, meditating in it so frequently as you were wont to do. Oh, time was when you could say, No honey or honeycomb so sweet as this to my poor soul ! Ps. xix. 10 ; when you could hardly call off your thoughts. Now you are more infrequent in these godly exercises, or else, if conversant about it, not with that life and that affection ; in a more customary manner you can read of the love of God and sufferings of Christ Jesus, without any love to him again ; can read the promises, and they seem to be but like dry chips and withered flowers, and not yield that marrow and fatness to you. You can read the promises of eternal life, and have not that joy, thankfulness, and blessing of God. You could hardly contain yourselves before, but cry out, ‘ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and blessed be God that hath visited and redeemed his people.’ Now your affections are more flat and cold, and have not that relish in holy conference, sweetness in hearing, and that contentment of soul in meditating.

[3.] You may lose your taste in the powers of the world to come, when you grow more mindless of God, and eternal blessedness, when you have not such fresh and warm thoughts as you were wont to have ; when your desires, hopes, expectations of the life to come is abated, you have not that lively hope, 1 Peter iii. 3, to quicken you for the attaining of eternal blessedness. While this taste is fresh upon the hearts of Christians, they are for heaven, for God, carried on with vigour and strength in the way of holiness ; but when your hearts are carried out to worldly vanity, and you relish more the honour, applause, fulness of estate, worldly increase, and you are grown more cold in heavenly things, you have lost this taste of the powers of the world to come, Heb. vi. 4.

The causes of this. One is, want of a due esteem, not an esteem in an idea, naked or abstract notion from those thoughts out of a temptation. No man is so unreasonable, but, if he be a little enlightened with Christianity, will say, the favour of God is better than all things. Ay ! but want of that practical esteem, when they can forfeit this taste for every trifle and flesh-pleasing vanity ; or when they carelessly look after him, are indifferent as to communion with God, and think it not much whether they are accepted of God, yea or no ; or manifest himself to you in Christ, when the comforts of the Spirit are things you can spare, and the consolations of God seem to be small, it is all one to you whether you have experiences from God in duty or no, your souls are satisfied ; this is a cause of decaying. Then negligence in duties ; pray lazily, hear carelessly, not meditate often. Inordinate savour of carnal pleasure, that is another cause. What is the reason the temporary seems to be so affected ? He loseth his taste altogether ; carnal things have the first possession of his heart, and being confirmed there by long use and custom, being so suitable to us, and so long rooted in us, and we have such a vanishing glance of

things to come, this will work out that taste, the love, the sense we have of better things. Godly men, when they turn out to the contentments of the flesh, they lose their taste, it becomes dead. This is a considerable loss as to the vitality of your graces; for without a taste of good or evil, we shall neither eschew the evil, nor follow that which is good, with that serious constancy and diligence that is necessary. A man that hath tasted of the poison of asps, and the bitterness of the gall and wormwood that is in sin, will be afraid of it, Rom. vi. 21. So a man that hath tasted of the sweetness of communion with God in Christ, he is quickened and carried on with life, courage, and constancy. That is a dreadful place, Heb. vi. 4, 5; the loss of their taste is a degree to final apostasy. Oh, how many lose their taste, their relish of Christ, the good word of God, the powers of the life to come, and are fallen foully, some forward into error, some backward into a licentious course, so that it is impossible to recover themselves by repentance!

SERMON CX.

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.—VER. 104.

IN the former verse, the man of God had spoken of the pleasure that was to be had by the word, now of the profit of it. There is a great deal of pleasure to spiritual sense; if we could once get our appetite, we should find a world of sweetness in it; and there is as much profit as pleasure. As the pleasure is spiritual, so also is the profit to be measured by spiritual considerations. To escape the snares of the devil, and the dangers that waylay us in our passage to heaven, is a great advantage. Now the word doth not only warn us of our danger, but where it is received in the love of it, breedeth a hatred of all these things that may lead us into it: 'Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.'

In which sentence, the prophet seems to invert the order set down, ver. 101. He had said, 'I refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word,' where the avoiding of evil is made the means of profiting by the word. Here his profiting by the word is made the cause of avoiding evil. In the one verse you have an account of his beginning with God, in the other of his progress.

In this verse there is—

1. The benefit he received by the word, and that is sound and saving knowledge.

2. The fruit and effect which this knowledge produceth in his heart, *therefore I hate every false way.*

Mark, first, The firmness of this effect, *I hate*. He doth not say *I abstain*, but *I hate*.

Secondly, The note of universality, *every*.

Thirdly, The object, *false way*. It is not said *evil way*, but *false way*; or, as it is in the original, 'every path of lying and falsehood.'

Falsehood is either in point of opinion or practice. If you take it in the first sense, for falsehood in opinion, or error in judgment, or false doctrine, or false worship, this sentence holds good. Those that get understanding by the word are established against error; and not only established against error, or against the embracing or profession of it, but they hate it.

1. They are established. All error cometh from ignorance, or else judicial blindness.

[1.] From ignorance, or unacquaintedness with the word of God; so Christ said to the Sadducees, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures,' Mat. xxii. 29. When men study not the word, which is the rule of truth, no wonder if they lie open to every fancy; they take up things hand over head, and by a fond credulity are led away by every suggestion presented to them. So it is said, 2 Peter iii. 16, that 'the unstable and unlearned wrest the scriptures to their own destruction.' By *the unlearned*, is meant not those that are unskilful in human literature, though that be a great help; but those that are unskilful in the word of righteousness, poor deluded souls that lie under a great uncertainty.

[2.] Judicial blindness. For men that have great parts, and a presumption of their own wit, are given up to be blinded by their own lusts; and though they know the scriptures, yet they wrest them to speak according to the sense of their carnal interest, 1 Thes. ii. 12. And so they see not what they see, being given up to the witchery and enchantment of error: Gal. iii. 1, 'O foolish Galatians! who hath bewitched you?' So that all false ways proceed from the want of reason and the pride of reason. The one is the cause of the simple's erring, who believeth every word; the other of those that are knowing, and are otherwise of great parts, but they make their wit their idol, and so would be wise above the scriptures, or else are swayed by their own lusts. They do not fix themselves in the power, love, and practice of truths revealed in the scriptures, and so are given up to hellish delusions. Now, in this sense, I might speak with great profit of these words, especially now when so many errors are broached, and all the errors of Christianity come abreast to assault it at once; and such changeable times as produce several interests, whereby men are blinded, and such levity in the professors of religion. Why, then, study the word with a teachable heart; that is, renouncing your own wit, and giving up yourselves to God's direction, and practise what is plain, without being swayed with the profits and pleasures of the world, and you may come to know what is the mind of God. Men think all is uncertain in religion, and are apt to say with Pilate, 'What is truth?' John xviii. 38. No; the scriptures are not obscure, but our hearts are dark and blind with worldly lusts. Otherwise the counsel is plain, and you might say with David, 'Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.'

(1.) Where the Spirit of God doth affect men with an earnest desire of knowledge, and so affect them as to desire to know the will of God, for no other reason but that they may avoid what is displeasing to God, and do what is pleasing in his sight; and therefore hear, pray

read, meditate, and study the holy scriptures ; they are sure to be right for the main.

(2.) Not only avoid the belief and profession of falsehood, but hate it: 'I hate every false way.' Not the persons, but pity them: Phil. iii. 19, 'I tell you weeping.' It should be the grief of our hearts to see them misled; but as for the error, hate it, whatever is not agreeable to the rule of truth, or dissenteth from the purity of the word. There is too great a coldness and indifferency about the things of religion, as if truth were not to be stood upon. Carnal men hate the truth: Ps. l. 17, 'They hate instruction, and cast my laws behind their backs.' Truly we have much more reason to hate error, without which we cannot be safe, it is so catching with our natures.

2. In point of practice, and so every falsehood may be applied—

[1.] To craft, or carnal wisdom. I hate fraud and deceit; true understanding makes us hate false wisdom. A simple, honest conversation suits best with Christians: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'In simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.'

[2.] Carnal or worldly vanities, and flattering or fallacious pleasures, these entice us with a fair outside, and promise a great deal of happiness and comfort to us; but when we neglect better things, and run after them, they deceive us in the issue. They are called 'deceitful riches,' Mark iv. 19. And 'beauty' is said to be 'deceitful,' Prov. xxxi. 30. And those that run after these things are said to 'run after lying vanities,' Jonah ii. 8; those that fail when we hope to enjoy them.

3. I take it more generally for all sin. Sinful ways are false ways, and will surely deceive those that expect good from them or walk in them: Heb. iii. 13, 'Deceitfulness of sin;' and 'deceitful lusts,' Eph. iv. 22; and 'sin hath deceived me, and slew me,' saith Paul, Rom. vii. 11. Sin is false and deceitful many ways—

[1.] It presents itself in another dress than its own, proposing evil under the name of good, calling light darkness, and darkness light, Isa. v. 20, or shadows of good for that which is really good, gilded trash for perfect gold.

[2.] As it promiseth happiness and impunity which it never performeth or maketh good, Deut. xxix. 19, 20; and so the poor sinner is led as an ox to the slaughter, Prov. vii. 22, 23. And we do not see the danger of it till it be too late to help it, and it appeareth in its own colours in the foulness of the act and the smartness of the punishment. Esau, when he had sold the birthright, bewailed it with tears when it was too late, Heb. xii. 16, 17. The foolish virgins tarried till the door was shut, Mat. xxv. 11, 12. It is good to have our eyes in our head, to see a plague when we may prevent it, Prov. xxii. 3. The foulness of the act terrifieth, as it did Judas when he betrayed his master, Mat. xxvii. 4. Their hearts give evidence against them, Rom. ii. 15 'Excusing or accusing one another;' as Cain, Gen. iv. 14, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.' The unclean person shall 'mourn at the last, when his flesh and his body shall be consumed,' Prov. v. 11. Adam and Eve were sensible too late, when their eyes were opened.

Doct. By the word of God we get that true, sound wisdom which maketh us to hate every false way.

Four things are implied in the point and in the text :—

1. A *hatred* of sin.
2. The universality of this hatred, *every false way*.
3. That this is a part and fruit of wisdom, *I get understanding, therefore I hate*.

4. This wisdom and understanding is gotten *by God's precepts*.

First, That it is our duty to hate sin. It is not enough to reform our practice, or to abstain from the act, or to avoid the occasions that may lead to it, but it must be hated : Ps. xevii. 10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' He doth not say forbear it, but hate it. Love to the chiefest good is fitly accompanied with hatred of the chiefest evil. God, he is our chiefest good : you love the Lord, and you must also hate evil. The one is as natural to grace as the other ; for the new nature hath its slight and aversion, as well as its choice and prosecution. As it inclines us to choose God for our portion, and to pursue after things that lead to God, so it hath a disposition to make us avoid that which is evil. There are things hurtful to the new nature as well as any other being ; now hatred is to arm us against it. In short, this hatred is required—

1. Because this is the true principle of resistance against sin. Until a man hate sin, he is never truly set against it ; as a man is never thoroughly gained to that which is good until he loves holiness for holiness' sake. His affections may be bribed with other considerations, but then he is rooted in holiness when he loves holiness for its own sake. So a man that is not resolved against sin, that will not hate it for its own sake, may be frightened out of sin for a fit, or by the interposings of conscience put out of humour, but his heart falls in again with his old lusts, until there be an envy and detestation of sin ; but when it comes to this hatred, then temptations cannot easily overcome—examples draw not, nor difficulties compel us to that which is evil. Persuasions and allurements formerly were of great force ; straightway they followed ; but when the bent is another way, they are not so easily drawn by force and examples, which seem to have such cogeney. Before men did easily swim with the stream, but here is a counter motion when they hate that which is evil. This is the fence of the soul, and draws us to an indignation, Hosea xiv. 8.

2. Partly because this is a true distinctive evidence between those that are good and those that are evil. Many may forbear sin that yet do not hate it ; they forbear it out of restraint, out of fear of punishment, shame, worldly ends, yet they 'regard iniquity in their hearts,' Ps. lxxvi. 18 ; as a dog loves the bone, yet fears the blows. God judgeth not as man ; man is blameless, he abstains from sin, but God hateth sin. Man judgeth according to the action, but God judgeth according to the frame of the heart, 1 Sam. xvi. 7 ; for he is able to look to the inward springs, and poise our spirits. So on the other side, good men may slip into an evil action, but their hearts are against it ; it is the evil which they hate, Rom. vii. 15. They may be foiled, but their hearts are bent another way.

But what is this hatred of sin ?

1. It implies a universal repugnancy in every part of a man against sin, not only in his reason and conscience, but will and affec-

tions. There is not a wicked man, but in many cases his conscience bids him do otherwise; ay! but a renewed man, his heart inclines him to do otherwise; his heart is set against sin, and taken up with the things of God: Rom. vii. 22. 'I delight in the law of God according to the inner man.' It is in the whole inward man, which consists of many parts and faculties. Briefly, then, it notes the opposition, not from enlightened conscience only, but from the bent of the renewed heart. Reason and conscience will take God's part, and quarrel with sins, else wicked men could not be self-condemned.

2. Hatred; it is a fixed rooted enmity. Many a man may fall out with sin upon some occasion, but he hath not an irreconcilable enmity against it. The transient motions of the soul are things quite distinct from a permanent principle that abides in a renewed heart; he hath that same 'seed of God remaining in him,' 1 John iii. 9. A habit notes a habitual aversion. A brabble many times falls out between us and sin upon several occasions, when it hath sensibly done us wrong, destroyed our peace, blasted our names, or brought temporal inconvenience upon us. In time of judgment and fears, and present troubles and dangers, men think of bewailing their sins and returning to God, but they fall out and fall in again; this is anger, not hatred; like the rising of the heart against a drawn sword, when it is flashed in our faces, whereas afterwards we can take it up without any such commotion of spirit.

3. Hatred; it is an active enmity, warring upon sin by serious and constant endeavours, manifested by watching, striving, groaning; watching before the temptation comes, resisting in the temptation, groaning under it, and bemoaning ourselves after the temptation hath prevailed over us.

[1.] There is a constant jealousy and watchfulness before the temptation comes. They that hate sin will keep at a distance from whatever is displeasing unto God: Prov. xxviii. 14, 'Happy is the man that feareth alway.' A hard heart, that knows not the evil of sin, rusheth on to things according to the present inclination. Ay! but a man that hath a hatred against sin, that hath felt the evil of it in his conscience, that hath been scorched in the flames of a true conviction, will not come near the fire. A broken heart is shy and fearful, therefore he weighs his thoughts, words, and actions, and takes notice of the first appearance of any temptation; they know sin is always present, soon stirred, and therefore live in a holy jealousy. Certainly they that walk up and down heedlessly in the midst of so many snares and temptations wherewith we are waylaid in our passage to heaven, they have not this active enmity against sin, and therefore hatred is seen by watching.

[2.] It is seen by striving, or serious resistance in the temptation. A Christian is not always to be measured by the success, but by conflict; he fights it out: Rom. vii. 15, 'The evil which I hate, that do I.' Though they be foiled by sin, yet they hate it. An enemy may be overcome, yet he retains his spite and malice. Sin doth not freely carry it in the heart, neither is the act completely willing: Gal. v. 17, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh; for,' saith he, 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit

against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would ;' that is, you cannot sin with such proneness and full consent and bent of heart as others ; they have a principle of opposition, a rooted enmity in their souls against sin.

[3.] By a bitter grief after the temptation ; as Peter, when he had fallen foully, ' he went out and wept bitterly,' Mat. xxvi. 75. They do not lie in sin, but recover themselves by a kindly remorse ; it is the grief of their souls that they have fallen into God's displeasure, grieved his Spirit, and hazarded their communion with him. Oh ! sin is grievous to a gracious heart, and this makes them groan and complain to God, ' O wretched man ! ' &c.

4. It is such an enmity against sin as aims at the utter extermination and expulsion of it, that endeavoureth to destroy it both root and branch. Hatred is all for mischief ; annihilation, that is that which hatred aims at. Anger worketh trouble, but hatred mischief. It is an implacable affection, that continues to the death, that will not be appeased till the thing which we hate be abolished. So where there is this hatred of sin, it follows sin close till it hath gotten the life of it. As by the grace of justification they have obtained such favour with God, *ne damnet*, it shall not damn ; by the grace of sanctification, *ne regnet*, sin shall not reign ; and still they are aspiring and looking after the grace of glorification, *ne sit*, that sin may no longer be ; therefore they are longing and groaning under the relics of corruption : Rom. vii. 24, ' O wretched man ! ' &c. Many scratch the face of sin, but they do not seek to root it up, to destroy the body of death ; it is their constant grief that anything of sin is left in the heart, as enemies are not satisfied till they have the blood of each other. Where there is hatred it is not enough to stop the spreading, weaken the power of sin, but labouring to destroy the being of sin ; as David said of his enemies, ' I pursued them till they were destroyed ; ' so when we set against sin with an aim not to give over till we have the life of it ; or as God said concerning the Canaanites, Deut. vii. 23, ' I will destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed ; ' so doth a renewed heart war against sin, that he may leave neither root nor fruit within them.

Use. If this be to hate sin, how few can say with David, ' I hate every false way ' ! how few are of David's temper ! Some love sin with all their heart, that ' hide it as a sweet morsel under their tongue,' Job xx. 12. The love of sin, that is the life of it ; it dies when it begins to be hated ; but when you have a love to it, it lives in the soul and prevails over us. And as they testify their love of sin, so they misplace their hatred. What do they hate ? Not sin, but the word that discovers it. They ' hate the light, because their deeds are evil,' John iii. 20. They do not hate sin, but God's messengers that plead against it : 1 Kings xxii. 8, ' I hate him,' saith Ahab concerning Micajah, ' for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.' They hate the faithful brother that reproves them ; he is hated because he will not hate his brother, to see sin upon him. They hate the magistrate that would reform, the faithful Christian that condemns them by his exact walking : John xv. 19, ' Because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' They hate God's

image in his people, and cannot endure to be condemned by the light that shines out from their conversations. Godly men are objects reviving guilt, therefore they hate them. Thus shamefully are a man's affections transposed; we love where we should hate, and hate where we should love. And then if we come to the other sort of men, a degree above these, many are frightened out of their sins by slavish fear, but yet their hearts are in league with them still; and as they get out of the stocks of conscience they enlarge themselves in all manner of carnal liberty: these are not changed, but awed; sin is not mortified, but only lurks to watch a safe opportunity when it may discover itself with more advantage.

SERMON CXI.

Therefore I hate every false way.—VER. 104.

THE second proposition is the universality of this hatred, *every false way*. They that hate sin must hate all sin.

1. This doth necessarily follow upon the former; for if we hate sin especially as sin, for the intrinsic evil that is in it, not upon foreign accidental reasons, then we will hate all sin, for hatred is *εἰς τὰ γένη*, to the whole kind; as Haman, when he hated the Jews, he thought scorn to lay his hand only on Mordecai, but would have destroyed all the Jews, Esther v. 6. It is but a casual dislike, and not a hatred. Certainly if we hate sin as sin, we shall hate all sin. The same reasons that incline us to hate one sin will incline us to hate all. Why! what is it to hate sin as sin? As it is a violation of God's law, as it is a contempt of God's authority, a breach of spiritual friendship, it grieves the Spirit; these are the reasons to incline us to hate one as well as another. Well, then, private reservation and indulgences, or setting up a toleration in our own hearts, will not stand with the hatred of all sin. Some sins may shame and trouble us more, but all are alike contrary to the will of God; therefore if we hate them upon reasons of duty to God, we should hate them universally, 'every false way.'

2. Every sin is hateful to God, therefore every sin should be hateful to us. The reason of this is, we should hate what he hates, and love what he loves. There is a perfect friendship between God and those in covenant with him. Now that is true friendship, to will and nill the same thing; it is built upon likeness, and suitableness of disposition. This argument is urged by the Holy Ghost: Prov. viii. 13, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.' This is friendship with God, to hate what God hates: I hate it, therefore they hate it. Sins of thought are intended by pride and arrogance, for that puts us upon vain musings and imaginations; and sins of word by the froward mouth; and sins of action by the evil way, outward practice. All this God hates, so should we: Rev. ii. 6, 'Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.' If we be in the same covenant with God, we will have the same love, the same hatred. Nay, as we have

the same nature with God, the saints are 'made partakers of the divine nature,' 2 Peter i. 4. The divine nature shows itself by suitable dispositions.

3. From our covenant relation with God, which implies an entire surrender of soul, which is without any reservation. When you give up yourselves to God, he will have all. If you say, God be merciful to me, and spare me in this, then you forfeit all the blessings of the covenant. God will have all or none; therefore all sin, without exception, must be hated by us, for otherwise God is not our chief good: if anything be loved besides him, or against his will, it is love above him. One man allowed besides the husband is a violation of the marriage covenant; so one sin allowed in the heart breaks all the covenant between God and us: James ii. 10, 'If a man keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' That sentence is not a legal sentence belonging to the covenant of works; that were a mistake of it: it is not only true in the sense of the covenant of works, one sin undoes us for ever, but it is true in the evangelical covenant. Thus one sin allowed with full consent of heart makes void the gospel covenant, as one article not consented to disannuls the whole treaty and agreement between us and God. It is not consistent with sincerity that we should bring down the gospel covenant, to allow any one sin.

4. From the damage and mischief that it doth to our souls. One sin keeps up the devil's interest; it is like a nest egg, left there to draw a new temptation. You continue his empire in you; this is his great design, to keep a part. Conscience begins to work, they must have something; all then that he pleads for is but a part, and he knows that will bring the whole; as Pharaoh would have a pawn, either their flocks, herds, or children, that this might bring them back again. One sin reserved gives Satan an interest; one leak in the ship, though all the rest be stopped, if that be neglected, will sink it in time.

Use. Let us lay this branch also to heart. There is something usually wherein we would be excused and expect favour. We all have a tender part of our soul, and loathe it should be touched; some vain fashions, customs, or ways, and outgoings of soul, which we are unwilling to leave, though we have often smarted for them. Consider, it is not consistent with your obedience and your love to God, nor with the power of grace in your hearts, to allow any false way. Herod did many things, yet perished for all that. A man may do many things that are good, upon sin's account. When you allow any one thing, it is only to hide and feed your lusts with greater pretence; so many religious things may be fuel of lusts, as well as carnal comforts. It is not for the interest of the flesh or indwelling corruption that men should have no religion; sin cannot be served in such a cleanly way, unless there be something done in compliance with God's will, under some disguise, or conformity to the will of God. Say then, Shall I do and suffer so many things in vain? Bring your hearts thus to hate every false way.

Thirdly, This is a part and fruit of true wisdom.

1. That this is a chief part of wisdom and understanding, to hate every false way, appears from Job xxviii. 28, 'The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding.' So much as we hate sin, so much of spiritual wisdom and spiritual under-

standing. Certainly to hate sin is wisdom ; I prove it from the nature of sin. All disobedience is the greatest folly that can be in the world ; and therefore, if to sin be to do foolishly, to hate sin is to be wise ; and not to have understanding certainly is a fruit of folly, for a man to do that which will condemn himself, if ever he comes to himself. Now, when a man comes to himself, as when he dies or repents, oh ! how will his heart condemn and reproach him for the vanity of his worldly course, when he is filled with his own ways ! Especially repentance, that is a coming to ourselves. As a man when he hath slept out his drunkenness and excess, and begins to look back upon his follies committed under that distemper ; such is repentance, it is an after-wisdom, and therefore it argues that there was an imprudence and inconsideration of the things we repent of, and therefore we condemn ourselves. That is folly which gratifies those that are our utter enemies. Now sin it gratifies the devil, which seeks our ruin : he ‘ goes about, seeking whom he may devour,’ 1 Peter v. 8. You please him that seeks your utter destruction ; and will you grieve God and please the devil ? That is folly which brings no disadvantage upon him whom you disobey, but upon you it brings the greatest mischief imaginable. God is not hurt by your sins ; he is above our injury : Prov. ix. 12, ‘ If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself ; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.’ There is no hurt done to God ; all the hurt is to our own souls : Prov. viii. 36, ‘ He that sinneth against me, wrongs his own soul ; and he that hateth me, loveth death.’ Every sinner is his own murderer and his own destroyer. All those arrows we shoot up against heaven, they fall down with more violence upon our own heads. That is folly for a man to hazard a jewel for a trifle, to stake his soul, and heaven, and eternal happiness, against a little flesh-pleasing and carnal satisfaction : Jonah ii. 8, ‘ They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercies.’ Poor fugacious comforts, lying vanities, to follow after, and forsake their own mercy ; that is, all that happiness which might have been their own. A sinner is a mad gamester, that throws away the kingdom of heaven at every cast for a little momentary short delight and vain contentment. That is folly to break with him upon whom our all depends, our life, being, comfort, happiness ; so doth sin make us break with God : Isa. lix. 2, ‘ Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.’ Well, then, if sin be to do foolishly, to depart from sin, this is wisdom, this is understanding. Certainly he that provides against the greatest mischief doth escape the greatest danger ; he is the wise man, and not he that provides against temporal inconveniences only, as poverty and disgrace. He that escapes sin, escapes hell, the wrath of God, the extremest misery that can light upon a poor creature : Prov. xv. 24, ‘ The way of the wise is above, to avoid hell beneath ;’ and therefore it is a high point of wisdom to hate sin.

2. As it is a high point of understanding, so it is a fruit and effect of understanding. According to the degree of understanding that we have, so will our hatred of sin be ; for he saith, ‘ Through thy precepts I get understanding ; therefore I hate every false way. To prove this by two reasons :—

[1.] Our affections follow our apprehensions. There is no way to

come to the heart but by the mind, by the understanding. Look, as there is no way to come to the bowels to purge our distempers that are there but by the mouth, stomach, and other passages that lead to the bowels, so there is no way to come to the heart and affections but by the understanding. Knowledge begets all other affections, those which belong to choice and pursuit, or those that belong to slight or aversion. Those that belong to choice and pursuit, desire, delight. There is no desire of that which is unknown; so in those things that belong to slight and aversion, those affections, be it grief or shame for sin already committed, or fear or hatred that sin may not be committed. Grief or shame: Jer. xxxi. 19, 'After I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.' It is light which humbles, and the soul is affected according to the sight it hath of things; or go to those affections which serve to prevent the commission of sin, as hatred and fear. Hatred in the text; a good understanding goes before, a thorough hatred will follow.

[2.] Second reason; that when the mind is fraught with truths, and gotten a good stock of knowledge by God's precepts, then it will be checking and urging the soul to caution against sin; and therefore the more understanding you yet by God's precepts, the more are you warned and put in mind of things: Ps. cxix. 11, 'I have hid thy word in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.' When the word hath laid up in the heart a good stock of knowledge, there will be one thought or other that will be rising up and defying all temptations wherewith you are assaulted: Eph. vi. 17, 'Take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' In the spiritual conflict we need weapons not only defensive but offensive; not only the shield of faith, but the sword of the Spirit, that we may destroy and slay sin, and withstand temptation, and chase away Satan from us. What is this sword of the Spirit? The word of God. The more seasonable relief the more fresh thoughts you have to withstand temptations which are apt to come in upon you: Prov. vi. 21, 22, 'Bind them upon thine heart: when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.' This will always be urging him to duty, and warning him of his danger.

A word of *use*. (1.) Get understanding; (2.) Never count yourselves to understand anything but as you increase in hatred of sin.

1. Get understanding. Partly—(1.) Because there are many false ways you will never discern without much understanding. There are many false ways that are palliated and represented under the show of good, and we are easily ensnared unless we have light to choose our way: 1 Cor. ii. 8, 'Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' A man will be carried on with a great deal of life and activity in a way contrary to God: Acts xxvi. 9, 'I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.' Oh! the tyranny and madness of an erring conscience and an ignorant zealot! What a ready prey is a man to Satan, and is carried headlong to destroying courses, when a man hath more zeal and earnestness of spirit than knowledge to guide

him! How will he stumble and dash upon things that are very contrary to the will of God. (2.) If they can discern them, they shall not have a heart and skill to remedy them without understanding. We shall not have a heart, for light will be urging, calling upon us, minding us of our duty, warning us of danger; whereas otherwise we shall go on tamely, like an ox to the slaughter, and like a fool to the correction of the stocks. We shall not have this restless importunity of conscience, which is a great restraint of sin; and then we shall not have the skill, for all is misapplied and misconceived by an ignorant spirit, for the whole business of his religion is making cordials instead of purges, and potions instead of antidotes, catching at promises when threatenings belong to him, lulling his soul asleep with new strains of grace, when he should awaken himself to duty.

2. Never count yourselves to have profited in anything till your hearts are awakened into a further hatred of sin. Christians! they are but notions; it is not saving knowledge unless it be in order to practice; men have no understanding that have not this active and rooted enmity against sin: Ps. cxi. 10, 'A good understanding have all that they do his commandments;' they that hate sin more, and are more weary of corruption. He is made wiser by the word that is made better by it. It is not the talker against, but the hater of iniquity that is the wise man. If wisdom enters upon the heart, and breaks out in our practice, by that is our thriving in knowledge to be measured: 1 John ii. 3, 'Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.'

This was God's scope in giving the word, not to make trial of men's wits, who could most sharply conceive, or of their memories, who could most faithfully retain, or of their eloquence, who could most nimbly discourse; but of the sincerity of the heart, who could most obediently submit to the will of God. Jer. xxii. 16, when he had spoke of hating of sin, and doing good, 'Was not this to know me? saith the Lord.' This is to know God to hate sin. Outward things were not made for sight only, but for use, as herbs, plants, and stars. So our reason, and the scriptures the Lord hath given us; it is not only for sight, but for use, that we may be wise to salvation; not that we may please ourselves with acute notions about the things of God, but seriously set our hearts to practise.

The fourth thing in this general point is, that this wisdom and understanding is gotten by God's precepts. Mark, 'I hate every false way.' Why? 'Because by thy precepts I get understanding.' Where have we it? 'By studying God's word.' Rom. iii. 20, 'By the law is the knowledge of sin.' How is the knowledge of sin by the law? Three ways: according to the nature of the sin, according to who is the sinner, and according to the guilt and dreadful estate of them that lie in a state of sin. So the knowledge of sin, that is, the nature of it, and where it lives, and where it reigns, and what will be the effects of it, all this knowledge is by the law.

1. By the law is the knowledge of sin, *quoad naturam peccati*. There are many things we should never know but by the law of God, though we have some general notions of good and evil. Rom. vii. 7, saith the apostle, 'I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not

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

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

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

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

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

SERMON CXII.

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

VER. 105.

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