

as a tendency to other mercies, given out in such a way as to invite hope.

4. We are the more endeared to God by his own mercy and tender care of us: Zech. iii. 2, 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the burning?' The danger heightens the mercy.

Use 1. To reprove the people of God for their diffidence and distrust, when, after many experiences of God, they can no more quiet their hearts concerning future events; upon every new trouble as much tormented and perplexed as if never known nor heard anything of God before. David: 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' When God hath abundantly done enough to evidence his power and love unto his: Ps. lxxviii. 19-21, 'They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' &c. When we are to credit God in another work, as the disciples after the miracle of the loaves. When new temptations assault us, we should not be disheartened. What were God's motives before to help? Because you were in misery; the same you may expect again.

Use 2. To press you—

1. To observe your experiences, and compare them with the word. All that God doth is full of truth and faithfulness: Ps. cxi. 7, 'The works of his hands are verity and judgment, all his commandments are sure;' exactly according to what he hath promised; they certainly come to pass. Especially observe your experiences in your troubles and temptations, what hath been your greatest comfort and support then.

2. Begin to do so betimes; long experience is a great advantage. Most Christians are to be blamed that they begin so late to know God, or to observe the truth of his word, or that adjourn and put it off. Fruits planted late are seldom ripe and come to anything. When we have a long journey to go, we set forth early. Begin with the Lord betimes, if you would thrive in faith. The longer experience you have had of God, the more you will believe in him: Ps. xxii. 9, 10, 'Thou art he that took me out of the womb; thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast: I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly.'

3. Remember and improve experiences. 'They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.' Let not new troubles startle us, after we have found the power and goodness of God so ready for our help.

SERMON CLXXI.

Consider mine affliction, and deliver me; for I do not forget thy law.—VER. 153.

In this verse observe—

1. David's petition, *consider mine affliction, and deliver me.*

2. His argument, *for I do not forget thy law.*

First, His petition is double—for pity and deliverance; the one is preparative to the other.

1. That God would consider his case.

2. Deliver him from the danger into which he was cast by his enemies.

Secondly, His reason is taken from his constant obedience, 'For I do not forget thy law.' The phrase is a *meiosis*, and noteth—

1. His diligence; he did carefully observe.

2. His constancy; he never departed from the obedience of God's word, whatever temptations he had to the contrary.

I shall give you some brief notes.

Doct. 1. That God's choicest servants in this world have their afflictions.

David saith, 'Mine affliction;' and others of God's children have their share of the sorrows and vexations of this world. This will be so whether you consider them as men or as Christians.

1. As men: Job xiv. 1, 'Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.' So Job v. 7, 'Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;' and Gen. xlvii. 9, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.' It is well they are so few, since so evil. As our relations and comforts are multiplied, so are the occasions of our sorrow. God never intended the world to be a place of our rest, but our exercise; it is a middle place between heaven and hell, and hath somewhat of either. In our passage to the other world we must look for it, it is that we are born to. Many are born to great honour and estate, but they have another portion goeth along with it; they are born to trouble. Ever since sin entered into the world, punishment entered with it. *Vitam auspicatur a supplicio.* In heaven full of days, full of comforts; but here it is otherwise, few, and full of trouble. *Unusquisque nostrum, cum nascitur, ex hospitio hujus mundi excipitur, initium sumit ex lacrymis*—Cyprian de Pat. Austin, *infans nondum loquitur, et jam prophetat*—Serm. 24, de Verbis Apost.

2. As Christians. A man is no sooner brought home to God but he must expect to be hated by the world: John xv. 19, 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' Assaulted by Satan: Luke xxii. 31, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat.' Chastened by the Lord himself for their trial and humiliation: Heb. xii. 8, 'But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.' Our own corrupt hearts will be vexing us, thwarting all the motions of the new nature: Gal. v. 17, 'For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary one to the other; so that ye cannot do the thing that ye would.' The lusts of the flesh are as pricks and thorns in our sides. In short, wicked men will hate us because we are so good: 2 Tim. iii. 12, 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.' God will afflict us because we are no better: Isa. xxii. 9, 'By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.' A Christian is too strict and pure for the world, and is not strict and pure enough for God; and therefore must look for afflictions to mortify sin from God's hand, and great enmity from the world, if he meaneth to keep up the majesty of his profession.

Use. It presseth us—

1. To look for crosses.

2. To prepare for them.

3. When they come, bear them with more patience.

1. Look for them. The first day that we begin to be Christians we must reckon of the cross. Christ hath drawn up the form of our indenture, to which every one must yield and consent before he can call him Master: Mat. xvi. 24, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' In Luke it is, 'take up his cross daily,' Luke ix. 23. Though there be fair days as well as foul in Christianity, yet we must every day be ready. As porters stand in the street waiting for a burden for them to carry if they be hired to it, so must a Christian every day be prepared to take up his burden if God shall call him to it; yea, 'daily' noteth not only continual readiness, but the frequency of our conflicts; as if every day there were some exercise of our faith and patience. If God keep us to the cross all the days of our lives, we must be content. Once more, taking up the cross daily showeth that private and personal calamities are a part of the cross as well as the afflictions of the gospel. Afflictions from God as well as afflictions for God; such as sickness, death of friends, loss of estate, by an ordinary providence; though not enduring persecution for the name of Christ, yet enduring affliction at the will of Christ. Ordinary crosses do not exclude the comforts of Christianity. These occasion experience of God and trial of grace, and are a part of God's discipline for the mortifying of sin, happy opportunities to discover more of God to us; yea, there is more reason of submission to God in these, because God taketh us into his own hands. A man that stormeth when a bucket of water is cast upon him is patient when wet to the skin with the rain that cometh from heaven. Well, then, we must be daily ready for all these things; if we take up the profession of stricter Christianity with other thoughts, we should soon see our mistake. It is a vain thing to flatter ourselves with the hopes of a total exemption; many think they may be good Christians, and yet live a life of ease and peace, free from troubles and afflictions. This is all one as if a soldier going to the wars should promise himself peace and continual truce with the enemy; or as if a mariner committing himself to the sea for a long voyage should promise himself nothing but fair weather and a calm sea without waves and storms; so irrational is it for a Christian to promise himself a life of ease and rest here upon earth.

2. Be prepared for them, otherwise our looking for them is in vain; and to this end would Christ have us reckon upon the cross, that we may be forewarned. He that buildeth a house doth not take care that the rain should not descend upon it, or the storm should not beat upon it, or the wind blow upon it; there is no fencing against these things, they cannot be prevented by any care of ours; but that the house may be able to endure all this without prejudice. And he that buildeth a ship doth not make this his work, that it should never meet with waves and billows, that is impossible; but that it may be tight and stanch, and able to endure all weathers. A man that taketh care for his body doth not care for this, that he meet with no change of weather, hot

and cold, but how his body may bear all this. Thus should Christians do; not so much take care how to shift and avoid afflictions, but how to bear them with an even and quiet mind. See Chrysostom, Hom. 35, in 1 Cor. As we cannot hinder the rain from falling upon the house, nor the waves from beating upon the ship, nor change of weather and seasons from affecting the body, so it is not in our power to hinder the falling out of afflictions and tribulations; all that lieth upon us is to make provision for such an hour that we be not overwhelmed by it. We need get a stock of spiritual comforts, that all may be peace within when trouble without; and as afflictions abound, so may comforts. We had need get a sound back, be much mortified, and weaned from the vanities of the world: Heb. xii. 13, 'And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but rather let it be healed.' If we have any weak part in our souls, there the assault will be most strong and fierce. A garrison that looketh to be besieged taketh care to fortify the weak places; so should a Christian mortify every corrupt inclination, those that are most pleasing. We need much resolution. A Christian had need be a resolved man, well shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, Eph. vi. 15, or else in a hard way he will soon founder and halt. That *ἐτοιμασία*, that preparation, is a resolved mind, to go through thick and thin, and to follow Christ in all conditions: Acts xxi. 13, *ἐτόιμωσ ἔχω*, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' A well-shielded established mind in the comfort and hope of the gospel; unless we be thus prepared and armed with a mortified heart, and a thorough persuasion of the truth and worth of gospel privileges, and thereupon a resolution to encounter all difficulties and hardships, we shall not long be faithful to Christ; but after we have launched out into the deep with him we shall be ready to run ashore again. Now most Christians are not mortified, and so they trip up their own heels. Most Christians are not resolved, and so take to religion as a walk for recreation, not a journey, so as to be prepared for all weathers.

3. When they come, bear them with more patience. A resolution which we thought strong out of a trial, is often found weak in a trial; for we have other apprehensions of things when we know them by experience, of what we have when we know them only by guess and imagination. Therefore, notwithstanding expectation and preparation, there must be a care of patience in troubles and afflictions, that we bear them with an equal and Christian mind; not suffering as perforce, by compulsion and constraint, but willingly: it is not enough to bear the cross, but according to Christ's law we must take it up. It is said of the three children, Dan. iii. 28, that they yielded their bodies willingly, cheerfully suffered themselves to be cast into the furnace, rather than worship any but the true God. Many suffer, but it is unwillingly, and with repining and impatience, under the hand of God, like refractory oxen that draw back, and are loath to submit their necks to the yoke. Patience perforce, is no true patience, little better than the suffering of the devils and damned in hell, who suffer misery and torment against their wills. Rebellion, murmuring, and want of subjection is the very curse of crosses: the sacrifice that went strug-

gling to the altar among the heathen was counted unlucky. Two things feed this impatience:—

[1.] Men think none suffer as they do: ‘Is any sorrow like unto my sorrow?’ Lam. i. 21. Every one hath the greatest sense of his own burden, therefore they think none hath so heavy and grievous an one as they have. It were well if they did this in feeling of sin. Paul felt his burden greatest in that respect: 1 Tim. i. 15, ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.’ But alas! in afflictions, all God’s children have their trials; many fare more grievous. When you lament the feared loss of an only child, what think you of the Virgin Mary? Luke ii. 35, ‘A sword shall pierce through thy soul.’ Generally, 1 Peter v. 9, ‘The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.’ Every Christian hath his measure of hardship and suffering; you are not singular and alone; your lot is no harder than the rest of the saints of God through the world; others are poor, and carry it well, and are cheerful; such an one under a painful disease, very patient in an acute fever, racked with stone, &c. If they, why not thou?

[2.] They could bear any other cross but this that is now upon them. Christ biddeth us to take up the cross indefinitely, whatever God is pleased to lay upon us; we must not be our own carvers, but stand to God’s allowance. The wise physician knoweth in what vein to strike. God knoweth us best, and what is fit for us. Many in their troubles wish God would afflict them in any other kind, lay any trouble upon them but that which is laid, and think they could bear it better. The poor man wisheth any other cross but poverty; the sick man he could bear poverty better than pain or sickness; he that hath a long and lingering sickness wisheth for a sharp fit, so it might be short; *e contra*, another that hath a sharp and violent sickness had rather have a lingering distemper. Thus apt are we to dislike our cross which God layeth on us for the present. This is disobedience and folly too; for if God should leave us to ourselves to choose our own crosses, we should choose that affliction which is hurtful and dangerous for us.

Doct. 2. That in our afflictions we should run to God by prayer. So doth David here, so should we.

1. We may do so.

2. We must do so.

1. We may do so; we have leave to come to God. Affliction is a fruit of sin, a part of the curse, introduced into the world upon the breach of the old covenant; yet then the throne of grace standeth open for us: when God seemeth most angry, we have liberty to come to him. In afflictions we are apt to think God an enemy, and that he beginneth to put the old covenant in suit against us; but our trouble should not be our discouragement, but our excitement; the throne of grace was for such an hour: Heb. iv. 16, ‘Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need;’ and it is God’s allowance: James v. 13, ‘Is any among you afflicted? let him pray: is any merry? let him sing psalms.’

2. We must come; it is a duty God hath required at our hands:

Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble;' and Job xxii. 27, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.' God will have us come and speak to him in our most serious frame, and act faith by putting promises in suit, and take new vows and resolutions to part with sin, when we feel the bitter effects of it. He knoweth it preventeth distracting fears and cares, when we can commend our condition to his pity and powerful providence: Phil. iv. 7, in every thing we are to make our requests known to God; and he knoweth this maketh us sensible of his providence and dominion over us in all conditions. Prayer is an acknowledgment of his sovereignty over all causes and events; the affliction could not come without his appointment, nor go away without his leave: it is a kind of breaking prison, to hope to get through without supplication to God: Job xxxiv. 28, 29, 'So that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted: when he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be against a nation, or against a person only.'

Use 1. It informeth us of the goodness of God, that he is willing to receive us upon any terms. When afflictions drive us to him, he doth not turn away his face from us. Those very prayers that are extorted from us by necessity, he accepts as a piece of worship done to him, provided we do not neglect him upon other occasions, for that is hypocrisy: Job xxvii. 10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? let him always call upon God.' We ought not therefore to be discouraged if our acquaintance with God begin in the time of our afflictions, and these set us a-work to think of him. Man will say, You come to me in your necessity; but then God is willing to receive us. Christ had never heard of many, if their necessities had not brought them to him—palsy, possession, deaf, dumb, fevers. Long would God sit upon the throne of grace unemployed if he did not send trouble and secret rack with it to bring us into his presence; so that that which in appearance doth drive us off from him, doth in effect make us draw near to him.

2. It informeth us of the folly of them that neglect God in their troubles: Dan. ix. 13, 'All this is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God.' You defeat the dispensation; now you should make up your former negligence. When we are pressed hard on all hands it should put an edge upon our prayers, otherwise our afflictions will turn to a sad account; when God sendeth a tempest after us, and this will not bring us back to him; we are summoned to make our appearance, and will not come. Joab would not come till Absalom set his barley-field on fire.

Use 2. 'To encourage us to come to God in our afflictions. Now is a time to put the promises in suit, to begin an interest if we have none, to make use of it if we have any; then our weakness and nothingness is discovered, that we may more apply ourselves to God; and a time of need will be a time of help: Ps. xlvi. 1, 'God is a refuge for us, a very present help in trouble;' that is, when trouble is trouble indeed, then therefore we should call for it most earnestly; a necessitous creature is a fit object for mercy. You expound providences amiss if you

think afflictions are a casting off. No; they are God's voice calling you, nay, his hand pulling you to him. Blessed seasons to bring God and us together; then God's aim is accomplished: Hosca v. 15, 'I will go, and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early;' Isa. xxvi. 16, 'Lord in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.' Afflictions do not work thus simply, for then they would work upon all, but as accompanied with some drawings of the Spirit. Every condition is blessed when it bringeth you nearer unto God; though crosses be great trials to any, yet if they chase us to the throne of grace, God is not wholly gone, but hath left somewhat behind him to draw us to him. It is desertion in point of felicity, but not in point of grace.

Doct. 3. One great request of the children of God in prayer is that he would consider their affliction.

This David promiseth in the first place. So elsewhere: Ps. cxxxii. 1, 'Remember David, O Lord, and all his afflictions.' He beggeth God to take notice of his person and condition. So also Ps. xxv. 18, 'Look upon my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins.' He beggeth that his groans might not be passed over. So Hezekiah, Isa. xxxvii. 17, where many words are used to this effect: 'Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, and see, and hear all the words that Sennacherib hath sent to reproach the living God.' If God would but take notice, hear, and see, all would be well. And as for personal calamities, so in public and church cases: Ps. lxxx. 14, 'Return, we beseech thee, O Lord God of hosts; look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine.' If God will but come and see, it is enough. So in the Lamentations, chap. i. 9, 'O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself.' So again, ver. 11, 'See, O Lord, and consider, for I am become vile.' Yet again, ver. 20, 'Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress.' Thus do the children of God lay open their miseries before him, in confidence of his pity.

But why do the children of God press this point so earnestly, as if they did doubt of his providence and omniscieny? God knoweth all things, and can forget nothing. I answer—

1. Though God be not ignorant and unmindful of our condition, yet we are to put him in remembrance: Isa. lxii. 6, 'Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' Christ is the advocate, we are solicitors and remembrancers for others, and humble supplicants for ourselves. Indeed, in so doing, we do not put God in mind, but put ourselves in mind of the providence of God, which is most graciously conversant about us in our afflicted condition, which is a great comfort and support to us. The moving of God to consider begets faith in us that he will consider; and so we wrestle with God, that we may catch a heat ourselves.

2. The sight of misery is a real argument. It is clear that we are to use arguments in prayer; for God dealeth with us as rational creatures, and as such we are to deal too with him. Now, among arguments, our afflictions and miseries are real ones; they have a voice

to work upon his pity, and to move him to have mercy upon us. He being inclined to compassion, his eye doth affect his heart, as a beggar, to move pity, will not only plead with his tongue, but uncover his sores; so do the saints lay open their misery, and unfold their estate before the Lord; for God so loveth his people, that the very show of their miseries moveth him to help them. Thus God saith that he would show mercy to his people, 'for I have seen with mine eyes,' Zech. ix. 8. God seeth our case, and every degree of our trouble is marked by him, which bringeth it the nearer to his heart; yea, God's people themselves are comforted under their saddest sufferings by the Lord's seeing and marking thereof: Ps. x. 14, 'Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand.' It is enough to them thou hast seen it. So Ps. xxxi. 7, 'I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy, for thou hast considered my trouble, and known my soul in adversities.' It is a mighty comfort that God hath an eye upon them in particular, and hath friendly affections towards them.

3. The Lord is said to consider when he doth in effect declare his not forgetting, or remembering us for good; and therefore, though God cannot but see and consider our trouble, yet we cannot rest satisfied with it, till by real effects he maketh it evident, that we may know, and all the world may know, that he doth consider us, and regard our condition; and this is that which saints beg so earnestly, that he would, by some act or work, experiment the truth, or make it appear that he hath heard and seen and taken notice of our sorrows. Though the saints believe his omniscieny and particular providence, yet they cannot rest satisfied till they feel it by some effect, by giving real support or help in need, according to covenant; and so must all the places before mentioned be interpreted.

Use. When we, or the church of God, or any of the people of God, are in any distress—

1. Let us go to God and beg that we may see, and the world may see, that he hath regard to us in our sorrows, and doth not wholly pass us over. To this end, impress upon your hearts the belief of these two things—the eye of his pity, and the arm of his power.

[1.] The eye of his pity, which is more than bare omniscieny; it imports his knowledge accompanied with a tender love. This is often spoken of in scripture: Exod. ii. 28, 'God looked on the children of Israel, and had respect to them.' So Exod. iii. 7, 'And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, and have known their sorrows;' Acts vii. 34, ἰδὼν εἶδον, 'I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people;' or seeing, I have seen. The very sight of God is a comfort and support to a sinking soul; it is some comfort to us to have our crosses known to such as we are assured do love us, if they condole with us, though they be not able to help us; so that the Lord looketh upon us with a merciful, pitiful eye.

[2.] As God will cast the eye of his pity on us, so he will put forth the arm of his power; as he hath a merciful eye, so he hath a powerful hand, ready to help; though sometimes we see nothing of this: 2 Chron. xvi. 9, 'For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout

the earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.' There is his care and effective providence.

2. Be sure you keep up your qualification: 'I do not forget thy law.' Many times when men in their prosperity do not regard God and his commandments, he regardeth them in their straits; for though we forget the duty of children, he doth not forget the mercies of a father. But surely he will not forget them that do not forget his law; therefore it is not credible that God should forget us and our condition, that we should be more mindful of his law than he of our affliction. He that puts us in mind of his law will also put himself in mind of the troubles we endure for the keeping of it; for certainly God is more mindful of his part of the covenant than we can be of ours. See Christ's argument, John xvii. 10, 'And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.'

Doct. 4. We may ask deliverance from temporal troubles; not only support, but deliverance. So doth David.

1. God hath promised: Ps. l. 15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.'

2. Much of God is discovered in it. His wisdom: 2 Peter ii. 9, 'The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.' We are at a loss many times, but God is never at a loss. His power: Dan. iii. 17, 'If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king;' when the wrath of the king was great, and the fiery furnace burning before them. His goodness: God is sufficiently inclined to it by his own grace, and delights to do it: Ps. cxlix. 4, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation.' He loveth the person of believers, and loveth their prosperity and happiness, and delighteth to see them do well in the world. He hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants, Ps. xxxv. 27, which is a good encouragement to pray for it: 2 Sam. xiv. 1, 'Joab perceived that the king's heart was towards Absalom.' Yea, not only his love, but the constancy and unweariedness of his love: 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who delivereth us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' There are all respects of time. Solomon saith, Prov. xxv. 17, 'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house, lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.' Men waste by giving, but I Am is God's name; we still need, and he is still a-giving: 2 Tim. iii. 11, 'Thou hast fully known my persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, &c.; but out of them all the Lord delivered me.' So many troubles, so many gracious experiences of God: Ps. xxxiv. 19, 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all;' Job v. 19, 'He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven shall no evil touch thee.' Seven is the number of perfection. God can and doth deliver us as often as we need deliverance; when clouds return after the rain, or one evil treadeth on the heels of another; he hath a succession of mercies, for our succession of sorrows. We are dismayed when we see one trouble is over and another cometh. We have the same God still, the same certainty of his mercy in delivering. Many times God so delivereth that the troublers of his people shall come in their room: Prov. xi. 8,

‘The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead;’ as the leprosy of Naaman went to Gehazi. His faithfulness, which he hath laid at pledge with us, that he will make a way to escape: 1 Cor. x. 13, ‘God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way for you to escape, that you may be able to bear it.’ His dominion and sovereignty: Ps. xlv. 4, ‘Thou art my king, O God; command deliverances for Jacob.’ He hath all things at his command, all second causes, the hearts of his enemies.

3. We have greater opportunities to serve God: Ps. cxix. 134, ‘Deliver me from the oppression of man, so will I keep thy precepts;’ Luke i. 74, 75, ‘That he would grant unto us that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, should serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.’

Use. They are too nice that think we may not ask of God temporal mercies. It is lawful to ask them if we ask them lawfully, with a submission to God, and for his glory, that we may serve him more cheerfully; so you may ask a deliverance out of your troubles.

Doct. 5. Those that would have God to deliver them out of their afflictions should be sure they do not forsake their duty.

All the evil that David suffered could not weaken his love to the law of God, nor draw him from the obedience of it. And what was the issue? He pleadeth this in prayer to God.

Reason 1. Because if we do so, the nature of our sufferings is altered, both as to God and man. As to man, we do not suffer as evil-doers: 1 Peter iv. 15, ‘But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men’s matters;’ which will much darken our comfort and glory in suffering; though for the main you have an interest in God, if by your miscarriage you have deserved the stroke of human justice. As to God, your sufferings are not castigatory, but probatory: Rev. ii. 10, ‘The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried;’ not punished, but tried.

Reason 2. Because uprightness giveth boldness with God in prayer: 1 John iii. 21, ‘If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.’ So Paul showeth he was capable of their prayers, or a fit object of them: Heb. xiii. 18, ‘Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.’ It is an error to think that justification giveth us only comfortable access to God, and sanctification hath no influence at all upon it. We lie in some secret sin, then our plea is spoiled. If God give thee a heart to adhere close to him in a constant course of obedience, the more you may be assured to be delivered. The joy of our faith is mightily confirmed by the conscience of our constant respect and observance of the word of God, and firm adherence to him.

Use. If we would boldly come to God in our straits, let us not forget or forsake our duty, nor throw off the profession of godliness, whatever we suffer from men: Ps. xlv. 17, ‘All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.’ Yea, from God; though he seem to cast us off, taketh no care of us: Job xiii. 15, ‘Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him.’ Diogenes

Laertius telleth us of a cynic that went to Athens to Antisthenes to be taught by him; when often met with a repulse, yet still insisted on his request.

SERMON CLXXII.

Plead my cause, and deliver me : quicken me according to thy word.—VER. 154.

In this verse are three requests, and all backed with one and the same argument.

1. The three requests are—

[1.] That God would own his cause.

[2.] Deliver him out of his troubles.

[3.] And in the meantime, before the deliverance came, quicken him.

In the first he intimateth the right of his cause, and that he was unjustly vexed by wicked men; therefore, as burdened with their calumnies, he desireth God to undertake his defence, ‘plead my cause.’

In the second he representeth the misery and helplessness of his condition; therefore, as oppressed by violence, he saith, ‘deliver me;’ or, as the words will bear, ‘redeem me.’

In the third; his own weakness and readiness to faint under this burden; therefore, ‘quicken me.’

Or, in short, with respect to the injustice of his adversaries, ‘plead my cause;’ with respect to the misery of his condition, ‘deliver me;’ with respect to the weakness and imbecility of his own heart, ‘quicken me.’ God is his people’s patron, to defend their cause; his people’s redeemer, to rescue them out of their troubles; the author and fountain of their life, to quicken them and support them: accordingly we may beg of him, as the Psalmist doth here, defence of our cause, the deliverance of our persons, and the support of our hearts.

2. The reason and ground of asking, ‘According to thy word.’ This last clause must be applied to all the branches of the prayer: plead my cause, according to thy word; deliver me, according to thy word; quicken me, according to thy word: for God in his word engageth for all, to be advocate, redeemer, and fountain of life. This word that David buildeth upon was either the general promises, made to them that keep the law, or some particular promise made to himself by the prophets of that time. The sum of all is this: If we believe the word of God to be true, we may in a righteous cause with comfort and confidence ask defence, deliverance, and support.

I begin with the first request, *plead my cause.*

Doct. When we have to do with unjust and wicked adversaries, we should desire God to plead our cause; or, as the original will bear, to judge our judgment, or contend our contention—*κρίνων τὴν κρίσιν μου*, Septuagint—*litiga litem meam*. So others.

There is a threefold cause that cometh usually into debate:—

1. *Inter hominem et hominem*, between man and man ; as between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent : Gen. iii. 15, ‘ And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed : it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel ; ’ those that are born after the flesh, and those that are born after the spirit : Gal. iv. 29, ‘ He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit ; ’ the children of God and men of this world : John xv. 19, ‘ If ye were of the world, the world would love its own ; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.’ As between wolf and lamb, raven and dove. This is an old controversy, that will never be reconciled. It is often set afoot in kingdoms, in cities, in townships, in villages, and families, and will continue till the world’s end. For while there are two seeds, there will be strifes and enmities. Now, in this quarrel and strife, sometimes success is cast on this side, sometimes on that, as God seeth fit either to favour, or to try and correct his servants. Usually the world prevaieth, being more numerous ; only let me tell you, this controversy doth not always appear to the world unveiled or bare-faced. Enmity to godliness is such an odious thing in itself, and hath so often miscarried, that it is not for its interest to appear openly and in its own colours, but under the mask and disguise of other pretences, which are the more plausibly taken on when the holy seed have scandalised their profession, and made the way of truth to be evil-spoken of ; and yet it is the old enmity and antipathy still, as appeareth by the parties contesting, their aims and designs, and the means and ways they use to compass them, with scorning of faith and piety.

2. *Inter hominem et diabolum*, between man and the devil : he is called *ἀντίδικος*, the adversary, 1 Peter v. 8, ‘ Your adversary the devil like a roaring lion walketh about continually seeking whom he may devour ; ’ and such an adversary as hath law of his side, and by law would carry it against all the children of fallen Adam, if there were not a new court erected, where grace taketh the throne. So Rev. xii. 10, he is called ‘ the accuser of the brethren ; ’ but it is our comfort that as there is an accuser, so there is an advocate : 1 John ii. 1, ‘ If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who also is the propitiation for our sins.’ We shall do well to put our cause into his hands, and then it cannot miscarry. Satan will not be more ready to accuse than Christ to plead for us ; and he hath a greater interest in the court of heaven than our adversary hath, stronger arguments to plead, merits to represent ; therefore make him your attorney, to appear in court for you.

3. *Inter hominem et Deum*. God hath a controversy with us about the breach of his law, and our undutiful carriage to him. Now you can never reason it out with God. It was Job’s presumption to think that he could order his cause before him : Job xxiii. 3–5, ‘ Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat ! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments : I would know the words which he would answer me ; and understand what he would say unto me.’ No ; there is no trusting to the equity of our cause, or hope to clear ourselves before God’s judgment-seat.

We have no way left but submitting and humbling ourselves, and suing out our pardon in a broken-hearted manner; no way but yielding to the justice of the first covenant, and putting in the plea of favour and grace according to the second: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who can stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' If you deny or excuse sin, you stick to the first covenant, and plead innocency, and then God will deal with you according to the tenor of strict justice; but if you humbly confess sin, and acknowledge your guiltiness and shame, then you may plead mercy. Justice dealeth with the innocent, mercy with the guilty.

We speak now of the strife between men and men, or the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, who do not only oppress them by violence, but seem to have a plea against them in law, because of the seeming justice of their quarrel, and the calumnies and slanders wherewith they burden their cause. Therefore David beggeth God to plead his cause for him; and elsewhere, that God would stand by him, not only as a champion and second, but as a patron and advocate: Ps. xxxv. 1, 'Plead my cause against them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me;' as they allege false things against him, and condemn him as being in an evil cause and evil way; so plead my cause against them that strive with me; as they opposed him with violence, so fight against them that fight against me.

In this point—

1. The nature of God's pleading our cause.
2. The necessity of it.
3. What hopes there are that he will plead the cause of his people.

First, The nature of this pleading would first be explained; and here—

1. In what quality God pleadeth for us. In all judicial proceedings there are the principal contending persons, and those are called *actor et reus*, the plaintiff and defendant; and the manner of proceeding in judgment is, that the plaintiff bringeth forth his bill, and the defendant his answer. But besides these principal contending persons, there are the witnesses, the advocate, the judge. Now, in some sense God might be all these, *testis, advocatus, et judex*, without any wrong and injustice. Our witness to attest for us, as he knoweth all things, and knoweth our hearts; for as such do the saints often appeal to him. Our advocate to plead for us, for he is tender of the credit of his people, and hath undertaken to preserve them from the strife of tongues: Ps. xxxi. 20, 'Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of men, thou shalt keep them secretly in thy pavilion from the strife of tongues.' As a judge to give sentence in our behalf, or such a decree whereby the adversary may be convinced of our righteous cause, and our innocency cleared; and all this may be called God's pleading, either as *testis, advocatus, or judex*. But I rather confine it to the last. God's pleading is rather as a judge; not as *advocatus*, but as *patronus*; that is a more proper and honourable name. Zonaras tells us that the Romans called their patrons *τοῦς κηδεμονικοῦς*; and it was enacted in the law of the twelve tables, *si patronus clienti fraudem fecerit, sacer esto*. If any man had deceived

his client, he was accursed, devoted to slaughter, and any man might kill him. *Cientes quasi colentes, patroni quasi patres*, saith Servius. So that to deceive a client was as to deceive a son. This was begun by Romulus, who commended the common people and worser sort to the nobles, leaving every man his liberty to choose whom he would for his patron; and that defence of them was called patronage: and the *jus patronatus* during this constitution consisted in these duties and offices; they were to defend the poor in judgment, to answer for them in all points of law; they were to take care of them that none might wrong them present or absent; they were *omnem accusatoris impetum sustinere*; and this *jus patronatus* was of such authority among the ancients, that Marcus Cato telleth us that first the name of father was most sacred, next that of patron. It were long to say all that might be said of them; this is enough, that their principal work was to be present at all causes wherein their poor client was concerned, and to appear for him and defend him, as they would their own cause. Advocates were taken in afterwards, when laws were multiplied, to suggest what was law; they were men skillful in the law. See Hall's lexicon. Now thus it is God pleads the cause of his people as their patron, who hath taken them into his tutelage and clientship; not as interceder, but defender. They have betaken themselves to his tuition, and desire to honour and serve him; God will therefore take part with them against their enemies. He doth not only hear pleas and debates on either side, but interposeth as the patron and chief party concerned in the strife, and having withal the power of a judge, will pass sentence on their behalf, and see it executed.

2. The manner of God's pleading. It is not a verbal or vocal, but a real and active plea. God pleadeth not by words, but by deeds, by his judgments, and powerful providence, righting the wrongs done to them. For since, as I said, there concur in God the relations of *judex* and *patronus*, he maketh the one serviceable to the other. As their *patronus* he owneth the cause, taketh it upon himself, as the answerable party, and then useth his judicial power in defence of his people. Now the property of a judge is to pronounce sentence, and then to put his sentence in execution. God hath pronounced sentence in his word, and he puts the sentence in execution in his providence; and that is God's pleading. Many times there is *sententia lata*, but *dilata*; long ago was sentence passed, but it is not speedily executed, Eccles. viii. 11. Because sentence is not speedily executed upon an evil-doer, therefore do they vaunt and insult over his people, as if God had forsaken and disclaimed them, and would never more own their cause and quarrel; but when God seeth fit to appear, and to show himself in this mixed relation of judge and patron, the world will have other thoughts of their cause; and therefore, Isa. iii. 13, 'The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge his people.' He will bring matters under a review, and will powerfully show himself against their oppressors. To this pleading Job alludeth when he saith, Job xxiii. 6, 'Will he plead against me with his great power?' if he should use his almighty and invincible power against me, he would easily ruin me. So Ezek. xxxviii. 22, 'I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood;' against Gog and Magog, that is, the Scythians, Turks, and Tartars.

So that you see that God's pleading is not by speaking, or by word of mouth, but by the vengeance of his providence against those that wrong his people. So against Babylon: Jer. li. 36, 'Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee.' But that this is a mixed act of patron and judge, see Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him; until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.' When God's people provoke him to anger by their sins, he casteth them into troubles; and then their adversaries are chief, and their cause is much darkened and obscured: all this while God is pleading against them, but it is not the enemies' quarrel, but his own vindication of abused mercy and goodness. But when once the controversy is taken up between God and them, by their submission, and clearing his justice, and imploring his mercy, then God will plead their cause, and take their part against the instruments of his vengeance (and clear their righteous cause), who only sought their own ends in afflicting them. When God hath exercised their humility and patience, he will thus do. And how, I pray you, will he plead for them? The text saith there, by executing judgment for them; that is, by putting his sentence in execution, and then will restore to them their wonted privileges, and own them in the public view of all, and make manifest they are his: he will bring them forth to the light, and they shall see his righteousness.

3. The effect of God's pleading, which is the clearing of God's people, and the convincing of their adversaries; which God doth partly by the eminency and notableness of the providences whereby he delivereth his people, and the marks of his favour put upon them: Neh. vi. 16, 'And it came to pass that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.' Their own judgments were convinced of their folly in opposing the Jews; the extraordinary success showed the hand of God was in it: by such incredible and remarkable occurrences doth God bring about their deliverance. So Micah vii. 10, when God shall plead her cause, 'Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her; now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.' Those who mocked her faith should be confounded at the sight of her deliverance. Thus God delights to make the happiness of his people conspicuous. So Rev. iii. 9, 'Behold I will make them which are of the synagogue of Satan (which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie), behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.' He will make their enemies to know that he hath loved them, and ask them forgiveness for the wrongs and outrages done to them. Partly by the convictions of his Spirit, undeceiving the world, and reproving them for the hatred and malice against his people: John xvi. 8, 'The Comforter, when he is come, shall reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.' The word is ἐλέγξει, not comfort, but convince or reprove; put them to silence, so as they shall

not in reason gainsay. The object, the world, the unconverted, if not the reprobate. The things whereof convinced, of sin and righteousness and judgment, of the truth of Christ's person and doctrine. This was spoken for the comfort of the disciples, who were to go abroad and beat the devil out of his territories, by the doctrine of the cross, that were weak men destitute of all worldly sufficiencies and props and aids. Their master suffered as a seducer, their doctrine cross to men's carnal interests, for them in this manner to venture upon the raging world was a heavy discouraging thing. Now the Spirit should come and convince the opposing world, so far that some, terrified before, brought to evangelical repentance: Acts ii. 37, 'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart;' soon desire to share in their great privilege: Acts viii. 18, 19, 'And when Simon saw that through laying on the apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost;' but he was yet in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. Some almost persuaded: Acts xxvi. 28, 'Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Some forced to magnify them, who did not join with them: Acts v. 13, 'And of the rest, durst no man join himself to them, but the people magnified them.' Some would have worshipped them, being yet pagans: Acts xiv. 11-13, 'And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lift up their voices, saying, in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. Then the priests of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.' Others bridled that were afraid to meddle with them: Acts v. 34, 35, 'Then stood there up one in the council, a pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space, and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do as touching these men.' That Christ, that Messiah, that righteous person, one able to vanquish the devil, thus without any visible force, and with mere spiritual weapons, by this conviction of the Spirit, did the Lord subdue the world to the owning and receiving Christ's kingdom; at least, not go on in a high hand to oppose it. God cleared Christ as righteous, and Lord.

Secondly, The necessity of this pleading.

1. Because the people of God are often in such a condition that none will plead their cause unless the Lord plead it; and therefore we are driven to him as our judge and patron. God's design is not to gain the world by pomp and force, but by spiritual evidence and power; and therefore, as to externals, it is often worse with his people than with others; for the world is upon their trial, and therefore though God will give sufficient means of conviction, yet not always such evident marks of his favour to the best cause in temporal things as that mere sense shall lead them to embrace it. No; he will only set a good cause a-foot, and then suffer it to be exposed to the hatred of the world, and sometimes to be overcome as to any temporal interest it can get, that the mere evidence and love of truth may gain

men, and not any secular motives. All the countenance and owning God will give to it is by infusing courage and constancy to his servants to suffer for it, and so they overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and not loving their lives to the death, Rev. xii. 11. He speaketh of such a time when the church seemeth weakest, like a poor woman travailing; and her enemies seem strongest, like a great red dragon ready to devour the child as soon as born. Now, though at such a time the church is overcoming, and the devil and his instruments are but pulling down their own throne, and establishing Christ's while they are shedding the blood of his saints, yet none of this appeareth and is visibly to be seen. Though suffering be a feeling and ratifying of the truth, yet to the world's eye it seemeth a suppressing and overbearing of it. Therefore few will own such a despised, hated, persecuted way; and the difficulty is the greater when there is much of God's truth owned by the persecuting side, and the contest is not about the main of Christianity, but some lesser truths, and so the opposition is more disguised; then certainly it may be said, Isa. lix. 4, 'None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth;' all half friends are discouraged, therefore nothing is left the people of God, but their prayers, 'Lord plead my cause.' David in the text appealeth to God's judgment when he was deserted by men, burdened by prejudices, oppressed by man's wrong judgment. So often God's people are not able to defend themselves, and few in the world will own them, or be advocates for them, then God will take their cause in hand. In the civil law, if a man could not get an advocate, *metu adversarii*, the judge was to appoint him one to plead for him; so God taketh notice of his people's condition: Jer. xxx. 13, 'There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up.' Often among men none can or dareth undertake the defence and patronage of oppressed right.

2. Though we have a good cause and hopeful instruments, yet we cannot plead it with any effect till God show himself from heaven. Nay, though the cause be never so right and just, and instruments and means hopeful, yet it requireth God's power to keep it afoot; for the justice of the cause must not be relied on, nor probable means rested in; but God must have the trust of the cause, and the glory of maintaining it; otherwise by our own ill managing, or by some secret and unseen opposition, it will miscarry: Ps. ix. 4, 'Thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.' This is a work wherein God will be seen, while it is in agitation, or under decision. God will have the trust, and when it is over, he will have all the glory.

Thirdly, What hopes or grounds there are to expect that God will plead the cause of his people.

1. He can.

2. He will. Infinite power and infinite justice can do it.

1. He can. The Lord is able; he that pleadeth our cause hath infinite power: Prov. xxiii. 11, 'Their redeemer is mighty, he shall plead their cause with thee.' It is easy to bear down a few afflicted creatures, that have no strength or heart to oppose, being in bonds, and under oppression; but there is a mighty God, who when he pleadeth any one's cause, he will do it to the purpose, really and

effectually delivering them for whom he pleadeth : Jer. l. 34, ' Their redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is his name ; he will thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.'

2. He will, considering—

[1.] Their relation to God.

[2.] God's relation to them and to the whole world.

[1.] Because of their relation to him. The *dominus*, the lord whom they had chosen, was to be their *patronus*. They that have put themselves under God's protection, and are faithful to him, keeping close to his word, he will plead their cause, and manage it as his own : Isa. li. 22, ' Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord and thy God, that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold I have taken out of thy hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury ; thou shalt no more drink it again.' He being their sovereign Lord, had undertaken to protect his servants ; he counteth the wrongs done to them done to himself : Acts ix. 4, ' Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?' especially since molested for his truth.

[2.] Because of his relation to them. He is the supreme potentate and the righteous judge of the world, and so bound by his office to defend the weak and innocent when oppressed : Ps. cxlvi. 7, ' He executeth judgment for the oppressed. Those that should maintain right upon earth, and punish wrongs, are often prevaricators ; but the judge of all the earth will do right ; he is an impartial judge, and will maintain the cause of his people : Prov. xxii. 22, 23, ' Rob not the poor, because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate ; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.' Though no relation to him, yet, if poor, if afflicted, if destitute of human help, the Lord taketh himself to be the patron of all such, much more his people.

Use 1. To rebuke our fears and misgiving of heart. When we see the best men go to the wall, and to be made objects of scorn and spite, we are apt to say, as the church doth in the prophet Isaiah, chap. xl. 27, ' My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God ;' that is, in effect, that God doth wholly neglect them, and will not plead their cause. Oh no ! He knoweth what strife there is between us and our adversaries, and how good our cause is, and how much he is concerned in it ; only we must wait his leisure, and bear his indignation until he plead. True submission to God ought to prescribe no day to him, but refer all to his will.

Use 2. Let us commit our cause to the Lord, as the expression is, Job v. 8, ' I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause ;' who is the friend and advocate of the afflicted, and hath promised to be so, and to keep us from the hand of the wicked and the mouth of the wicked ; from their hand and violence so far as it shall be for his glory : Isa. xlix. 25, ' I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children ;' and from the mouth of the wicked : Ps. v. 15, ' He saveth the poor from the sword, and from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty ;' from slanders that may endanger their life and credit. So ver. 21, ' Thou shalt be hid from

the scourge of the tongue;’ from their bitter reproaches. Therefore commit your cause to God. But then—

1. Be sure that your cause be good, for God will not be the patron of sin. Unless he hath passed sentence for us in his word, it is boldness to appeal to him; as Baalam, that would hire God by sacrifices to curse his people. Hasty appeals to God in our passion and revengeful humours are a great dishonour to him. Sarah appealed: Gen. xv. 3, ‘The Lord judge between me and thee;’ and David appealed: 1 Sam. xxiv. 15, ‘The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between thee and me, and see and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thy hand.’ But there was more of justice in David’s appeal in the case between him and Saul than in Sarah’s appeal in the case between her and Abraham; it would have been ill for her if God had taken her at her word; it showeth that even God’s children are too apt to intitle him to their private passions.

2. Let us be sure that there be no controversy between God and our persons, when yet our cause is good. The Israelites had a good cause, Judges xx., but there was once and again a great slaughter made of them, before they had reconciled themselves to God. There must be a good conscience as well as a good cause, otherwise God will plead his controversy against us before he will plead our controversy against our enemies: Jer. ii. 35, ‘Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger will turn from me: behold I will plead with thee, because thou sayest I have not sinned.’ Because we have a good cause, we think God hath no cause to be angry with us; therefore he will first plead in judgment against us. So Hosea xii. 2, ‘The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, according to his doings will he recompense him.’ Though God may approve what is right in worship and profession, yet he will punish our shameful disorders and unanswerable walking in his people.

3. Let us pray in a right manner, with confidence, with earnestness.

[1.] Confidence that God will plead our cause when he seeth it good and for his own glory, whether there be any likelihood of it, yea or no; for he hath promised to support the weak and humble, and protect the innocent against their oppressors: Ps. cxl. 12, ‘I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.’ God is party with you, not against you, and leave him to his own ways and means. Faith should support us when sense yieldeth little comfort and hope. He knoweth how to justify your cause, and deliver your persons; and you should know that he will do it, and can do it, though the way be not evident to you, and God seem to sit still for a while.

[2.] Earnestly. Oh! be not cold in the church’s suit. If you be Sion’s friends, and are willing to take share and lot with God’s people, awaken him by your incessant cries. Nay, it is God’s cause: Ps. lxxiv. 22, ‘Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily.’ The godly are not maligned for their sins, but their righteousness. So Ps. xxxv. 23, ‘Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause, my God and my Lord.’ There is a long suit depending between the church of God and her

enemies; desire that God would determine it, and declare what is right and what is wrong.

Secondly, He begged God in the text to redeem or deliver him; the word in the text, גֹּאֵל, the usual word for *goël*, redeemer; the Septuagint, λύτρωσαί με, 'ransom me.' Here he craveth that as his cause might be in safety, so his person.

Doct. We may beg a deliverance or a release from our troubles, provided we do not beg it out of an impatience of the flesh, but a desire of God's glory.

God delights to be employed in this work. What hath he been doing all along in all ages of the world, but delivering his people from those that oppressed them? He delivered Jacob from the fury of Esau; Joseph from the malice of his brethren: Gen. xxxvii. 21, 'And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, saying, Let us not kill him.' Daniel from the lions' den: Dan. vi. 22, 'My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me, and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.' Peter from prison: Acts xii. 11, 'And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.' And will not he do the like for his suffering servants? How came his hand to be out? he delivered Israel out of Egypt, out of Babylon; he can do it again, it doth not cost him much labour: Ps. lxxviii. 2, 'As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.' Therefore refer your deliverance to God, and when you are in a way of duty, be not thoughtful about it: there is a price paid for it; Christ redeemed us from temporal adversity so far as it may be a snare to us. God hath his times; we may see it, unless he hath a mind to sweep away the unthankful and froward generation that provoked him to so much anger: Num. xiv. 22, 23, 'Because all those men that have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt, in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened unto my voice: surely they shall not see the land, which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it;' Jer. xxix. 31, 32, 'Thus saith the Lord concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite, Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie; therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his seed; he shall not have a man to dwell among this people, neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the Lord; because he hath taught rebellion against the Lord.' It may be, we may be more broken and afflicted first: Deut. xxxii. 36, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.' Oh! let us desire to see the good of his chosen: Ps. cvi. 5, 'That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.' It is a favour: Ps. l. 23, 'Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me; to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.'

Thirdly, For quickening, 'Quicken me;' in which he prayeth either to be kept alive till the promises be fulfilled, or rather to be comforted and encouraged in waiting.

Doct. We need continual influence from God, and lively encouragement, especially in our troubles.

1. We are apt to faint before God showeth himself: Isa. lvii. 16, 'I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.' The devil's design is to tire and weary us out. Some are of a poor spirit, that they will tire before their strength faileth them: Prov. xxiv. 10, 'If thou faint in a day of adversity, thy strength is but small.' Yea, there is a readiness to faint in the best through many troubles, delayed hopes. Those that have upheld others by their good counsel are apt to sink themselves.

2. At least we are clogged, cannot so cheerfully wait upon God, and walk with him: Heb. xii. 12, 'Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.' We grow weak, slothful, remiss in God's service. Fear and sorrow weakeneth the hands, indisposeth us for duty.

Use. Let us encourage ourselves, rouse up our heavy hearts, and wait for God's quickening; let us not give God cause by our negligence to deny support to us.

SERMON CLXXIII.

Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.

—VER. 155.

DAVID had begged his own deliverance, as one of God's servants or clients, in the former verse; now he illustrateth his petition by showing the opposite state of the wicked. They could not with such confidence go to God, or put in such a plea for deliverance: 'Salvation is far from the wicked.' Some read it prayer-wise, Let salvation be far from the wicked; for in the original the verb is understood, and it is only there, Salvation far from the wicked; but most translations read it better proposition-wise; for as the man of God comforts himself in his own interest and hopes, so also in this, that God would not take part with the wicked enemies against him, who had no interest at all in his salvation and protecting providence, and therefore would keep him from their rage.

In the words—

1. An assertion.

2. The reason of it.

1. In the assertion we have the miserable condition of wicked men, salvation is far from them.

2. In the reason we have the evil disposition of wicked men, 'They seek not thy law;' which will give us the true notion and description of them, who are wicked men; such as seek not God's statutes, busy not themselves about religion, study not to please God.

In the words two propositions:—

Doct. 1. That salvation is far from the wicked.

Doct. 2. They are wicked who keep not God's statutes.

Doct. 1. That salvation is far from the wicked. Salvation is of two sorts—temporal and eternal. The proposition is true in both senses; they are far from salvation, and salvation is far from them. To be far from salvation is to be in a dangerous case, as to be far from light is to be in extreme darkness. To be far from God's law, ver. 150, is to be extremely wicked; to be far from oppression, Ps. liv. 14, is to be in a most safe condition. So that the point is—

That the wicked are in a very dangerous case, both as to their temporal and eternal estate.

First, Temporal salvation is far from them, and they are in a dangerous condition as to their outward happiness. This seemeth to be the harder part, and to have most of paradox in it; but this will appear to you if you consider—

1. That all these outward things are at God's disposal, to give and take according to his own pleasure: Job. i. 21, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;' not the Sabeans and the Chaldeans: 1 Sam. ii. 7, 'The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up.' He that cast the world into hills and valleys disposeth of the several conditions of men, that some shall be high and some low, some exalted, some dejected. All things that fall out in the world are not left to the dominion of fortune or blind chance, but governed by the wise providence of God: 'Their good is not in their hands,' Job xxi. 16.

2. That it belongeth to God, as the judge of the world, to see *ut malis male sit, et bonis bene.* Gen. xviii. 25, 'That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' Rom. iii. 5, 'But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous that taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?' Job xxxiv. 17, 'Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just?' Job xxxiv. 11, 'For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.' He is not indifferent to good and evil, and alike affected to the godly and the wicked; but hateth the one, and loveth the other. He hateth the wicked: Ps. v. 5, 'Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity;' and, on the other part, he loveth the good and the holy: Ps. xxxv. 27, 'He hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants;' it is his delight to see them happy and flourishing. This different respect is often spoken of in scripture: Ps. xxxi. 23, 'The Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.' That he will uphold and maintain those that are faithful to him, and avenge himself upon the pride and oppression of the wicked; though all the world be against the godly, God will preserve them and ruin the wicked, though all the world should let them alone. So 1 Peter iii. 12, 'For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.' There is a

watchful eye of God over the righteous, to supply their wants, to direct them in their ways, to uphold them against dangers, to comfort them in their griefs, to deliver them out of all their troubles. God hath an eye to take notice of their condition, and an ear to hear their prayers; but his face is set to pursue the wicked to their ruin: so that this is enough to assure us that holiness is the way to live blessedly, even in this life, where misery most aboundeth, because this is a part of the care that belongeth to the judge of the world

3. Besides his general justice as the ruler and judge of the world, and the condecency that is in such a dispensation to the rectitude of God's nature, there is his covenant declared in his word, wherein he promiseth temporal happiness to the godly, and threateneth misery and punishment to the wicked. And God ever stood upon the truth of his word, to make it good in the eyes of the world; therefore it will be with men as their condition is set forth in the word of God. A promise there is as good as accomplishment, and a threatening as sure as performance; and therefore, accordingly as the word saith of them, so is salvation far or near from them. Now search all the word of God, and see if it speak anything of hope and comfort to the wicked, or them that make a trade of provoking God. Nay, they are well enough aware of that, and therefore will not come to the light, care not to busy themselves in the scriptures; for they say of them as Ahab of Micaiah, 'He prophesieth nothing but evil to me;' and justly enough, for they can see nothing there but their own doom. If they are evil, it can speak nothing but evil: Isa. iii. 10, 11, 'Say ye unto the righteous, It shall be well with them; for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked: it shall be ill with them; for the reward of his hands shall be given to him.' This is the tenor of the whole word of God: so Eccles. viii. 12, 13, 'Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.' It is a certain truth; it is a certain evident truth, for it is *judicium certi axiomatis*. I do know and confidently affirm that it shall be well with them that fear God; but it shall not be well with the wicked, that is, it shall be very ill with them.

But here cometh in the great objection of sense, How can these things be so? We see the contrary, that all things come alike to all: Eccles. ix. 1, 2, 'The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.' That those outward things are given indifferently to good and bad, and the wicked are as free from temporal punishment as others, and enjoy all prosperity in this world, even sometimes to the envy and offence of God's children, and the hardening of their own hearts; and, which is more, that often it happeneth to the just according to the work of the wicked, Eccles. viii. 14, and to the wicked

according to the work of the righteous ; that is, evil to good men, and good to evil men. As to outward things, the advantage is usually on the side of the worst.

Ans. 1. By concession ; we must grant what is to be granted, that temporal things not being absolutely good or evil, the Lord taketh a liberty in the dispensation of them. The eternal promises and threatenings, being of things absolutely good and ill, are therefore absolute and peremptory. None that live godly can fail of the eternal promises ; none that goeth on still in his trespasses can escape the eternal threatenings. But the temporal promises and threatenings, being of things not simply good and evil, are not so absolutely fixed, but God will take a liberty sometimes to cross his hands, out of his general indulgence to give prosperity to the wicked, and out of his fatherly wisdom to chasten the godly ; and so all things come alike to all. Is Abraham rich ? So is Nabal ; yea, so the godly may be afflicted when the wicked triumph ; as Lazarus pined with want when Dives fared deliciously every day, and Jerusalem was in a heap of ashes when Babylon flourished.

2. By correction. The wicked have no right by promise or covenant, and so salvation is far from them ; for this promise or covenant-right inferreth two things—(1.) A sanctified enjoyment ; (2.) A more sure tenure.

[1.] A sanctified enjoyment ; they that have salvation by promise, they have it as an effect of God's special love, and so have it as a mercy, not as a judgment ; but without this they have it only by God's general indulgence, and so it may be a snare : Ps. lxxix. 22, ' Let their table become a snare before them, and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap,' and promote their ruin, not only eternal, but temporal. If they be not by these common mercies brought to repentance, the greater shall their condemnation be, and their downfall the more speedy. For while they let loose the reins, and run headlong into all sin, God is the more provoked against them, and his anger, that was a little delayed and put off, is the more severely executed. It is a blessed thing to have salvation by covenant : Rom. viii. 28, ' All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.' When we are sanctified to God, saith Baxter, all things are sanctified to us ; to serve us for God, and to help us to him.

[2.] Our tenure is more sure, and we can with more confidence wait upon God for it. In this sense salvation is far from the wicked, because they cannot lay claim to God's favourable providence, or look for the continuance of it with any confidence, because they have no right, no promise to build upon. The word of God speaketh no good to them, whatever God may do out of his general indulgence : James i. 7, ' Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord.' Now the misery of this appeareth by considering wicked men either as in prosperity or adversity.

(1.) If they be still at ease for the present, yet they are not upon sure terms, because they know not how soon God may break in upon them and theirs : Job v. 3, 4, ' I have seen the foolish taking root ; but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety'

(the notion of the text), 'and are crushed in the gate, and there is none to deliver them.' In the eye of the godly they are far from salvation. I judged him unhappy for all his wealth, foretold his sudden destruction, which God would speedily bring on him and his; I read his doom. So Job viii. 11-13, 'Can the rush grow without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in its greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb: so are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hopes shall perish.' A wicked man cannot lift up his head above others for want of God's favour to uphold him, as the rush or flag cannot grow without mire or water. The prosperity of wicked men, when it is most green and flourishing, yet wants its sustenance, which is God's blessing. This is the condition of wicked men in the opinion of the good. But what is it in his own opinion? Take him in his serious and sober moods, he always liveth miserably and expecting a change, as knowing that God oweth him an ill turn: Job xv. 21, 'A dreadful sound is in his ears: in his prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him.' He trembleth secretly, as if danger were always near; therefore cruel and mischievous against whom they fear, that shut the door against their own danger, for everything that is fearful will be cruel.

(2.) If he fall into adversity. In their troubles they have not a God to go unto, nor promises to build upon; therefore it is said, Prov. xv. 29, 'The Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.' God's children have ready access to a sure friend, and are assured of welcome and audience when they come; but they are at their wits' end, know not which way to turn: Job xv. 22, 'He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword;' that is, full of terrors of conscience and distracting disturbing fears, hath no hope to be delivered, but lives as if he had a sword hanging over his head.

Use 1. To show us the reason why the people of God, when they grow wicked, are often disappointed in that salvation which they expect: Isa. lix. 11, 'We look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us.' Why? Because they had exceedingly sinned against God, and scandalised their profession. There was a horrible depravation of the people of God in those times, and therefore all their prayers and fasts and seekings of God could not prevail for a deliverance.

Use 2. Comfort in a good cause, wherein the godly are opposed by the wicked. There is a double comfort:—

1. Because the prosperity, power, and pride of the wicked is not to be regarded; for though they flourish for a while, and all things flow in upon them according to their heart's desire, yet salvation is far from them. God is engaged both for the rectitude of his nature, the quality of his office, as judge of the world, and the tenor of his covenant, to employ his power and terror for their ruin; and though he may for a while spare them, and they take occasion from this indulgence to do more and more wickedly, yet you should not be dismayed if you see them engaged in ways or courses that are naught and wicked; you may say, I know they cannot prosper in them. When they are lifted up in the prosperity of their affairs, you should lift up

your hearts by faith, see a worm at the root of their happiness: *ἔνδον τὸ κακόν, &c.*

2. Because by the rule of contraries, if salvation be far from the wicked that seek not God's statutes, then deliverance is near to the godly that fear God and desire to be faithful with him, how hard soever their condition seemeth to be for the present: Ps. lxxxv. 9, 'Surely his salvation is nigh unto them that fear him.' You should be confident of it. They that please God cannot be always miserable; it is nearer than we think of, or can see for the present. There is a *surety*, or a note of averment put upon it. It is better be with the godly in adversity, than with the wicked in prosperity; when they are men appointed as sheep for the slaughter, yet there is a way of ransom and escape; but the wicked, at their best, are in the appointment of God as the stalled ox, or as swine fatted for destruction; when fattest, then nearest to destruction and slaughter.

Secondly, As to eternal salvation, so they are in a dangerous case.

1. The phrase here used by the Psalmist seemeth to be used to obviate their vain conceit. They think they shall do well enough, and have as much to show for heaven as the best; it is near in their conceit, but far indeed: 1 Cor. vi. 9, 'Be not deceived; know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?' Thoughts of impunity are natural to us; those that are in the ready way to hell are apt to think they shall get heaven at last, as if God would turn day into night; but alas! it is an eternal truth, 'salvation is far from the wicked.'

2. There is somewhat of a *meiosis* in the expression, less being said than is intended. The man of God saith that salvation is far, but he implieth that damnation is near; certainly the one it doth imply the other: Heb. vi. 8, 'The ground that beareth briars and thorns, is *ἐγγὺς κατάρας*, nigh unto cursing.' They are upon the borders of hell, and ready to drop into those eternal flames which shall consume God's adversaries.

3. Once again, the longer they continue wicked, the farther off is their salvation every day; farther off from heaven, and nearer to hell. A godly man, the more progress he maketh in virtue, the nearer he is to his salvation: Rom. xiii. 11, 'Now is your salvation nearer than when ye first believed.' Not only nearer in point of time, but nearer in the preparation of their hearts; not because older, but because better: and so by consequence, wicked men go farther and farther off, and therefore they are said to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, Rom. ii. 5. Every sin they commit puts them a degree farther off from salvation, as every degree of grace is a step nearer heaven.

Reason 1. The inseparable connection that is between privileges and duties. The gospel offereth salvation conditionally; if we forsake the condition, we fall short of the privilege; and therefore if we be wicked, salvation is far from us. When God took Abraham into covenant with him, he doth not tell him only what privilege he should enjoy, but also bindeth him to walk suitably: Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect.' God will take care of our safety, if we will take care of our duty. The covenant is called a bond: Ezek. xx. 37, 'I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;' because it hath a tie upon us, as well as upon God. We are not at

our own liberty, to walk as we list; there are bonds upon us; not *vincula carceris*, the bonds of a prison, gins and fetters, but *vincula nuptiarum*, the bonds of wedlock. Now, they that cast away these bonds from them, as the wicked do—(Ps. ii. 3, ‘Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us’)—and will be their own men, and walk by their own will, have no title to the privileges that accrue by the marriage; such licentious spirits are at liberty, but to their own woe; they have a liberty to go to hell, and undo their own souls. It was the wisdom of God to bind us to displeasing duties by the proposal of comfortable privileges. Every man would desire to be saved, and to be happy for evermore, but corrupt nature is against holiness. Now without holiness there is no happiness. The conditional promise doth more bind and draw the heart to it, when we lay hold of it, by yielding to perform the condition required; then may we groundedly expect the privilege promised. We would have salvation, but we cannot unless we submit to God’s terms; for Christ came not to gratify our selfish desires, but to subdue us to God. We would have sin pardoned, we would be freed from the curse of the law and the flames of hell, but this can never be while we walk in our own ways, and are averse to holiness of heart and life, for God would even sweeten duties by felicities.

Reason 2. Because of the perfect contrariety between the temper of wicked men and this salvation, so that they are wholly incapable of it.

1. They care not for God, who is the author of this salvation; he is not in all their thoughts, words, and ways: Ps. x. 1, ‘The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.’ They are far from him, though he be not far from every one of them; he is within them, and round about them, in the effects of his power and goodness; but they never think of him, nor take care to serve and please him; that is the reason in the text, ‘They seek not thy statutes.’ If they seem to draw nigh to him at any time in some cold and customary duties, they do but draw nigh to him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him: Isa. xxix. 13, ‘This people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me; and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men.’ Or as it is in another prophet, Jer. xii. 2, ‘Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins.’ They profess to honour God with a little outward and bodily service, but have no love and affection at all to him.

2. They slight Christ who is the procurer of this salvation; however they could like him as their Saviour, they like him not as their guide and governor. So he complaineth, Ps. lxxxii. 11, ‘My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me;’ and Luke xix. 14, *οὐ θέλομεν τοῦτον βασιλεῦσαι ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς*, ‘His citizens hated him, and sent a messenger after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.’ Men cannot endure his bonds and yokes: Ps. ii. 3, ‘Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us;’ that they should deny themselves their own wisdom and will, and wholly give up themselves to the conduct and will of Christ. It is his spiritual kingdom that is most contrary to our carnal affections, for if there were no king in Israel, then every man might do what is

best in his own eyes. They would not be crossed in their licentiousness of life, and therefore when Christ bringeth his bonds and cords with him, they set him at naught.

3. They despise the word, in which we have the offer of this salvation, and counsel and direction given us how to obtain it. There God calleth upon us to be saved: 1 Tim. ii. 4, 'He will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.' But most slight his voice, and thereby put all hope far away from themselves. See Acts xvi. 26, compared with the 48th verse; in the 26th verse, 'To you is the word of this salvation sent.' Mark first, he calleth the gospel the word of salvation, because there we have the way and means set forth how it was procured for us; there we have counsel given us what we must do on our parts that we may be interested in it; there also we have the promise and assurance on God's part, that, so doing, we shall obtain it. Mark again, he saith this word of salvation was sent to them; he doth not say brought, but sent. The preaching of the gospel is governed by God's special providence. When salvation is offered according to his mind and in his name, we must look upon it as a message from heaven, directed to us for our good; not by the charity or good-will of men, but by the grace of God. Now if you despise this, what will be the issue? See ver. 46, 'Since ye put away the word of God from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life' (that is, by this obstinacy and perverseness), you become incapable of receiving benefit of it. That phrase, 'ye judge yourselves,' is very notable. There is a judging ourselves unworthy that maketh way for the applying of the gospel unto us, rather than taking it from us, as the publican judged himself, and went home justified; but a humble self-judging is not meant here, but an obstinate, contemptuous refusal of eternal life. All unconverted men are unworthy of eternal life, but they that refuse grace offered judge themselves unworthy of eternal life; put it out of all question, clear God, if he thus judge them by their fact, declare their condemnation just.

4. They refuse the beginnings of this salvation and foregoing pledges, which God vouchsafeth in this world by way of taste and earnest. Grace is the beginning and pledge of glory; to be turned from sin is a great part of our salvation: Mark i. 21, 'He shall save his people from their sins.' It is not only salvation when freed from misery, but salvation when freed from sin; not only from evil after sin, hell, and punishment, but from the evil of sin; from a proud, lazy, self-loving heart: 'He hath saved us by the washing of water,' Titus iii. 5. When the power of sin is broken, and the life of grace is begun in the soul, then do we begin to be saved. The spirit of holiness is the earnest of our inheritance, and an earnest is part of the sum: Eph. i. 13, 14, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise; which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory.' Therefore holiness is a part of eternal salvation. Now without this we cannot have the other part; they that slight holiness shall never see God.

5. They despise the salvation itself, rightly understood, partly be-

cause they only value it under a fleshly notion, as a state of happiness and ease, not as a state of immaculate and sinless purity; for so it is wholly unsuitable to them. What should a carnal sensual heart do with heaven? or how should they desire it that hate the company of God, the communion of saints, the image of God? God maketh meet: Col. i. 12, 'Giving thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' There is *jus hæreditarium, et jus aptitudinale*; though they do not desire to be saved for it, they would love holiness more. Partly because those conceits that they have of the adjuncts of salvation, and that happiness and personal contentment which results to them, they do not practically esteem it as to value it above the delights of the flesh and the vanities of the world, and they do not think it worthy the pursuit, but for the interests of the bodily life, cast off all care of it: Heb. xii. 16, 'As Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright;' Mark xxii. 5, 'They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.'

Use 1. It informeth us of two things:—

1. That wicked men are the authors of their own ruin. Salvation doth not fly from them, but they fly from it; they are far from the law, and therefore is salvation far from them. They will not take the course to be saved, for they care not for God and his statutes; it is but just, *ut qui male vivit, male pereat*, that they which despise salvation should never see it.

2. That the wicked buy the pleasures of sin at a dear rate, since they defraud their own souls of salvation thereby. Their loss you have in the text, 'Salvation is far from them;' and their gain is nothing but a little temporal satisfaction; and are these things worthy to be compared? What is it maketh you wicked, but the ease and sloth of the flesh, and the love of some carnal delight? And are you contented to perish for this whoredom from God?

Use 2. Let it exhort us to believe and improve this truth; for if men did surely believe it, there would not be so many wicked men as there are, neither would they dare to lie in sin as long as they do. Oh! consider, if the wicked have no part nor portion in the salvation offered, nor any jot of God's favour belonging to them, the wicked should not flatter themselves with presumptuous hopes, but break off their sins by repentance.

1. God's mercy will not help you; though he be a God of salvation, yet he will not save the impenitent and such as go on still in their trespasses: Ps. lxxviii. 19–21, 'Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah. He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.' You must not fancy a God all honey and sweetness, and that his mercy should be exercised to the wrong of his justice; the Lord will not spare the abusers of grace whoever he spareth: Deut. xxix. 19, 20, 'And it shall come to pass when he heareth the words of this curse, that if he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst;

the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.'

2. No doctrine preached in the church will bear you out; not law, for that discovereth both sin and the curse. Convinced of sin: Rom. iii. 20, 'By the law is the knowledge of sin,' what is sin, and who is the sinner; that bindeth you over to the curse: Gal. iii. 10, 'For as many as are of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' The gospel, that showeth a remedy against sin, but upon God's terms, that first with broken hearts we sue out our pardon: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Sin must be condemned, confessed, before pardoned. And then, that in the way of holiness we should seek salvation and eternal life. The way and end must not be separated: Rom. vi. 22, 'We must have our fruit into holiness, if we would have our end to be eternal life.' The pure and undefiled have only part in this salvation, but it is far from the wicked. Christ disclaims the unholy and unsanctified: Mat. vii. 23, 'Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' You may as well expect the way to the west should bring you eastward, as to walk in the ways of sin and hope to come to heaven at last; to think God will save us, and suffer us to walk in our own ways; or that this undefiled inheritance shall be bestowed on dirty sinners. This had been pleasing to flesh and blood, but it is the devil's covenant, not God's. That article, you shall be saved, and yet live in your sins, is foisted in by Satan, that false deceiver, to flatter men with vain conceits.

3. Do you hope of repentance hereafter, but in the meantime ye run a desperate hazard to leave the soul at pawn in Satan's hands? It is not easy work to get it out again. Who would poison himself upon a presumption that before it cometh to his heart he shall meet with an antidote? Judicial hardness is laid on them that withstand seasons of grace: Isa. lv. 6, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near;' Prov. i. 24-26, 'Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsels, and would none of my reproofs; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh;' Luke xiv. 24, 'None of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.'

4. The heart is more hardened the longer you continue in this course: Heb. iii. 13, 'But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' Inveterate diseases are seldom cured; a tree that hath long stood, and begun to wither, is unfit to be transplanted: Jer. xiii. 23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.'

5. There is a stint and measure as to nations: Gen. xv. 16, 'The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' Persons, vessels of mercy, vessels of dishonour: Rom. ix. 22, 23, 'What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-

suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared unto glory?' Meet for heaven, ripe for hell. Saints like a shock of corn in season; so when sinned enough, then away to hell.

But this exhortation is like to be lost, because nobody will apply it; let us see, then, the character of wicked men.

Secondly, 'They seek not thy statutes.'

Doct. They are wicked men who seek not God's statutes.

Here I must inquire—

1. What it is to seek God's statutes.

2. Show why they are wicked that do not seek them.

First, What it is to seek God's statutes? There—

1. The object or thing sought is God's statutes, those rules and counsels which he hath given us to guide us in our service of himself, and pursuit of true happiness. These are all enforced by his authority, and enacted as laws and statutes, which we cannot transgress without violation and contempt of his authority. Now, he saith 'statutes' indefinitely, because they must all be regarded without exception, for they all stand upon the same authority. It is said of Ezra, that good scribe, Ezra x. 7, 'That he prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it;' that is, to be thoroughly informed of, and to practise whatsoever was enjoined in the law of God; so must we prepare our hearts to do all. And because our Christian law is broader, and compriseth gospel too, which is the law of faith, we must take care of all which God hath given us in charge, and all that is adopted into our rule of faith and repentance, as well as moral duties, and because there are *minutula legis*, and *βαρύτερα νόμον*, therefore our chief care must be about the weighty things; and those of greater moment must be sought most earnestly. Therefore it is said, Mat. vi. 33, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof;' these concern the change of our estate.

2. The act of seeking. The word implieth earnest and constant endeavour: I seek for that which I mind and pursue with all my heart, and use all means that I may obtain it, till I do obtain or find it. Thus we are bidden to seek that which is good: Amos v. 14, 'Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live;' and Zeph. ii. 2, 'Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgments: seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.' So Christ: John v. 30, 'I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father, which hath sent me.' And here the Psalmist speaketh of seeking God's statutes.

[1.] It implieth earnest endeavour (for a man's heart is upon what he seeketh), that it be the business of our lives, not a thing done by the by, but our *ἔργον*, our work to please God, and to this all other things must give way. Many think it is a foolish thing for them to trouble their heads with matters of religion, and to lay bands of strictness upon themselves; but it must not only have its turn and respect among other affairs, but be indeed as the great affair of our lives. There is no business of such weight and necessity, because the saving of our souls lieth on it; and therefore it must be followed in good

earnest ; as a man, when he is seeking a thing, quitteth all other cares, and mindeth that only.

[2.] Constant endeavour, seeking till we find ; as the woman for her lost groat : Luke xv. 8, ‘ What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it ? ’ So we must not content ourselves with our first and cold essay, as many, if they find not success upon some fair attempt, give over all care of religion, as if it were a tedious thing, not to be endured. Now seeking implies a resolute diligence, and persevering endeavours till we find.

3. The end of seeking after God’s statutes is to have them and keep them ; as Christ saith, John xiv. 21, ‘ He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.’ First hath, then keepeth. To have the commandments is to know them, to understand our duty and prove what is the revealed, holy, and acceptable will of God concerning us, Rom. xii. 2, that it may have the authority of a principle in our consciences. To keep them is to endeavour actual obedience thereunto, and to regulate our practice thereby : for both these ends do we seek, and in both these respects do men show their wickedness.

[1.] We must make it our business to know the tenor and compass of our duty, and we are said to seek after this, because it will cost us pains ere we can obtain it. All knowledge will cost us industry, especially divine and practical knowledge, as he that applieth his heart to the understanding of his duty will soon find : Prov. ii. 4, ‘ If thou wilt seek for it as for silver, and search for it as for hid treasures.’ Now this the wicked cannot endure ; they indulge the laziness of the flesh ; they know they that increase knowledge increase sorrow. If they did know more of their duty, they should be troubled for not observing it ; for knowledge will be urging duty upon the conscience, it bringeth a great obligation along with it : and as an obligation, so an irritation or provocation ; it will call upon them to do that which they have no mind to do ; yea, and further, a self-condemnation and accusation, or sting for not doing it, or breaking any of God’s statutes : therefore to prevent their own trouble, they are so far from seeking light, that they would shut it out, and quench those convictions that break in upon them ; therefore the language of wicked men is, Job xxi. 14, ‘ Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways ; ’ the language of their hearts, and lives, if not of their tongues. They do not only err in their minds, but err in their hearts ; they have no will to know, would not trouble themselves about religion, or acquainting themselves with God, neglect the means of grace.

[2.] We must make it our business to observe them, or our serious study to keep at a distance both in heart and practice from every known sin, eschewing what the Lord forbiddeth, and endeavouring every good duty which the Lord commandeth. This will cost us pains indeed, and requireth much seeking to get such a frame of heart, and whoever trieth it will find it long ere he can attain to it : Rom. vii. 18, ‘ To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.’ He sought for ; his words imply that ; but he could not do as he would ; there was not a total omission, but

a coming short of his aims. We must seriously give up ourselves to the observation of God's will, and attend upon this work. This wicked men do not seek, it is the least of their cares: Ps. lxxiii. 27, 'Lo, all they that are far from thee shall perish.' The whole stream and course of their affections, lives, and actions do run from God to the creature; they care not whether they please God, yea or no: Prov. xix. 16, 'He that keepeth the commandments, keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways, shall die.' He slighteth his way that goeth on as his own heart leadeth him; as a traveller that regardeth not to choose his way, but goeth through thick and thin, he despiseth his way, so he that careth not whether his way be pure or filthy. Well, then, the sum is, wicked men care not to know and obey God's word.

Secondly, Reasons why they are wicked that do not seek God's statutes.

1. Because omissions, where they are of duties absolutely necessary and total and universal, do necessarily draw sins of commission along with them, do argue a state of wickedness. But such is the case here; to live in a known sin, whether of omission or commission, is damnable: James iv. 17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin;' but especially when total, &c. The wicked are thus described, them 'that forget God;' Ps. ix. 17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God;' Job viii. 13, 'So are the paths of all that forget God;' Ps. l. 22, 'Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.' This layeth a man open to all sin, and maketh way for his destruction. So Zeph. i. 6, 'They have not sought the Lord, nor inquired after him;' that is enough to damn them, if they do not break out into excess.

2. Because they are guilty of great wrong to God and to their own souls.

[1.] To God; it is a contempt of his authority when men will not study to know and do his declared will; that is, make it their business to do so; for it is a great slighting of him, looking upon his direction as of little importance: Hosea viii. 12, 'I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing,' and therefore were strangers to it, as if there were no danger in walking contrary to it.

[2.] To themselves; God's statutes concern our salvation as well as his own glory: Luke vii. 30, 'The pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves.' Thus a wicked man is *felo de se*: Prov. viii. 35, 36, 'Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me, love death.'

Use 1. You see now who are far from salvation, they that do not study the word of God to conform themselves thereunto.

Use 2. Let us be sure to be far from the disposition of the wicked; let us with all our hearts seek to comply with the precepts of God, and be more diligent and earnest in bringing our hearts to a true scriptural holiness, that we may not be in this danger.

Motives:—

1. From the excellency of these statutes. To be employed in the service of God is the greatest honour and the most blessed life upon earth. If it be irksome, it is a sign of a disease, and some great distemper or inclination to some base dreggy delights of the flesh. If the soul were rightly constituted, it would be our greatest pleasure, honour, and content; other work spendeth our strength, this increaseth it: 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.'

2. From salvation; it is great, sure, near. Great, both as to body and soul; sure, God's word passed is unalterable; near, should we faint in the sight of our country, and be sluggish and negligent, when heaven is at hand?

3. There is present content in the sight of our qualification and clear distinction from the wicked.

SERMON CLXXIV.

Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments.—VER. 156.

IN the former verse we presented you with the judgment of God against the wicked; we shall now present you with a more comfortable argument, his mercies to his people. Whenever we think or speak of the damnable condition of the wicked, we should remember the grace of God, that hath made the difference between us and them. We were by nature no better than they, only mercy interposed for our rescue, and snatched us as brands out of the burning. So here David flieth to God's mercy, as the original cause of all that he had or hoped for from him: 'Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord,' &c.

In the words there is—

1. An eulogy, or an ascription of praise to God, 'Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord.'

2. A prayer, 'Quicken me according to thy judgments.'

The one maketh way for the other; for because God's mercies are so great, therefore he is encouraged to come unto him for help. In the eulogy we have the thing praised, God's mercy. It is set forth by a double adjunct, one taken from the quality, the other from the quantity. From the quality, it is tender and bowel-mercy; from the quantity, it is great. Or the word may be rendered 'many;' the mercies of God, as one saith, are many and mother-like. Having laid this foundation for his hope, the man of God proceedeth to his prayer, which is our second branch, where you have the request, 'Quicken me;' the argument, 'According to thy judgments;' that is, thy promises in the new covenant as we before explained the word. Those promises are called judgments, because they are rules of proceeding in the new court which God hath set up.

Many things might be observed from these words.

1. That the primary cause of all that we have and expect from God is his mercy. The man of God beginneth here, when he expected dif-

ferent usage from the wicked, or that God should deal with him in another manner than with them.

2. That this mercy is so great and large, that it is every way sufficient for our help.

3. The terms and rules according to which we are to expect this mercy are set forth in the new covenant, where God hath bound himself to show mercy to his people, upon such conditions as are there specified. So that this covenant doth inform us and assure us both of God's mercy and God's quickening.

4. One special new-covenant blessing is the preservation of the life of grace in our souls. There is a great necessity of it, because in the spiritual life we are subject to fainting; and the children of God have a great value and esteem for it, for they are more sensible of soul-distempers than other men; and when they see others stark dead in trespasses and sins, they are the more displeased with their own remaining deadness, and therefore would have the distinction between them and wicked men made more clear and sensible, by the activity and vigour of grace, and their diligence and care of salvation (which the wicked neglect), awakened by new influences from God; and therefore do they so often pray for quickening. Accordingly, God in the new covenant, as the God of their life and salvation, hath undertaken to keep them fresh and lively; and therefore, whenever we are under deadness, we should not be satisfied with it, or think it a light evil, but present our condition to God, looking to the promise of the new covenant, wherein God hath promised to put his Spirit into our hearts, to cause us to walk in his ways.

But because all these points have been often discussed, I shall only handle this one point.

Doct. That in the Lord Jehovah there are great and tender mercies.

1. I shall open the mercy of God.

2. The adjuncts, the greatness and tenderness of them.

First, I shall open the mercy of God. That mercy is one of God's attributes, the scripture is plain and clear: Ps. lxii. 12, 'Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy.' He had said before, 'Once hath God spoken, and twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.' This is an evident and certain truth, that God is almighty, and hath all power to avenge his enemies and reward his friends; but because this is not a sufficient foundation for our trust, there wanteth more to invite the creature to depend upon God than his bare power and ability to help us, there must be also an assurance of his readiness to do what he is able; and that we have in this other attribute, which is as proper, and as much belonging to God as power, and that is mercy; yea, it is an attribute in the exercise of which God delights most of all: Micah vii. 18, 'Because he delighteth in mercy.' God delighteth himself in all his attributes, yea, in the manifestation of them to the world, but chiefly in acts of mercy; these come readily from him, and unextorted. Though God willeth the punishment of a sinner, for the manifestation of his justice, yet these acts of his vengeance are not so pleasing to God as the acts of his mercy; for he never doth them of his own accord, but is provoked. Acts of mercy flow from him like life-honey, but acts of vengeance are his strange work, Isa. xxviii. 21. Bees give

honey naturally, sting when provoked. Therefore God is nowhere called *pater ultionum*, whereas he is called *pater miserationum*, 2 Cor. i. 3, 'The father of mercies.' It is the original and fountain cause of all our comfort; get an interest in his mercy, and all his other attributes shall be for our good. Mercy will set a-work his wisdom to contrive, his power to accomplish, what is for our comfort and salvation; his justice and wrath to avenge your quarrel. All other attributes are serviceable to mercy. Among the things that are ascribed to God there is this order, that one is given as a reason of the other. As in the business of our salvation. Why doth God discover himself with so much wisdom and power? Because of his mercy. Of his mercy hath he saved us, Titus iii. 4, 5; of his mercy quickened us, Eph. ii. 4, 5; of his mercy begotten us to a lively hope, 2 Peter i. 3. But what moved him to show mercy to us? You can go no higher, unless you assign a cause like itself; God, who is rich in mercy, out of his great love wherewith he hath loved us; indeed, so he showed mercy because he would.

1. The goodness of the divine nature, as it doth discover itself to the creature, is called benignity or bounty, sometimes grace, and sometimes mercy. The first issue or effect of the divine goodness is his benignity or bounty, by which God, by giving something to the creatures, showeth himself liberal or bountiful; this is his goodness to the creature as a creature. Thus he hath given being to all things, bare life to some, sense to others, and to man and angels reason and grace. The next term by which the goodness of God is expressed is grace, by which he freely giveth to the creature all that good which they have, beyond all possibility of requital. The third term is mercy, which implieth the ready inclination that is in God to relieve our misery notwithstanding sin. These three terms agree in this, that they all express the goodness of God, or his communication of himself to the creature. God knoweth himself, loveth himself, but he cannot be said to be bountiful, or gracious, or merciful to himself; these things respect us. And again, that none of these can be reciprocated, or turned back from the creature to God. We may love God, who hath loved us first, 1 John iv. 19, but mercy or grace never results from the creature to God. We know God, and love him, but cannot be said to be merciful to him. He giveth out mercy and grace, but receiveth none. Thus they agree; but they differ in that bounty or goodness respects the creature as a creature, grace respects the creature as being able to make no recompense to God, or to merit anything at his hands; but mercy addeth these two things to the former, as supposing us in misery. The object of it is *persona miserabilis*, or as finding us under demerit or ill-deserving, and appoints a remedy for us. God doth good to the angels, that never sinned, out of grace; but to man fallen, out of mercy; so that his mercy is nothing else but his proneness to help a man in misery notwithstanding sin.

2. We must distinguish between mercy as it is an attribute in God, and the acts and effects of it as they are terminated upon the creature. As it is an attribute in God: Ps. ciii. 8, 'The Lord is merciful and gracious.' So it is infinite, as his nature is; but in the effects as to us there is a great difference. Mercy is one in the fountain, many in

the streams, because there are divers effects, divers ways of showing mercy. Mercy in the effect may cease, as when the angels turned devils, and when God threateneth to take away his mercies from us; but God doth not cease to be merciful in himself: the effects of God's mercy are more or less, but the attribute in God is not so. Mercy as an attribute doth not oppose justice; but the effects of God's mercy may be, and are, contrary to the effects of his justice, as punishment is contrary to blessing.

3. God's mercy is either general, or special, or peculiar. First, God's general mercy hath for the object of it not only men, even them that are strangers to the faith, but also all the creatures; for it is said, Ps. cxlv. 5, 'His tender mercies are over all his works.' God helpeth the poor brute creatures in their needs, and doth supply them with provision convenient for them. Then there is his special mercy to man, helping and succouring him in his misery, notwithstanding sin; and so the giving of Christ to be the Saviour of the world: Titus iii. 4, 'But after the loving-kindness of God our Saviour to mankind appeared;' his man-kindness, this was pity to us above the angels: no remedy was plotted for them. And then his peculiar mercy is to his elect in Christ. So the Lord saith, Rom. ix. 15, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.' This is again seen either in the first grace, or bestowing that upon us, or in all the subsequent grace that we stand in need of.

[1.] The first grace is pardoning all our past sin, or receiving us into a state of favour upon our repentance. So it is made the motive, Joel ii. 13, 'Turn unto the Lord, for he is merciful;' penitent sinners will find him so to be. The apostle saith, 1 Tim. i. 13, 'But I obtained mercy, ἡλεήθητι; I was overwhelmed in mercy.' So also in giving us a heart to repent and turn unto him, 1 Peter i. 3. We were unworthy and miserable sinners, could not help ourselves, and then his eye pitied us and his hand saved us; by his preventing grace he brought us home to himself.

[2.] In all the subsequent grace that we stand in need of. So the objects of his mercy must have a qualification; such as fear God, Ps. cxiii. 13; such as love him, and keep his commandments, Exod. xx. 6; that walk according to the rule of his word exactly, Gal. vi. 16. To the merciful, Mat. v. 7; for to the unmerciful God will not show himself merciful, James ii. 13; but to those that are thus qualified he reneweth his pardoning mercy, in taking away the guilt of our daily failings, Ps. xxv. 7. His sanctifying mercy, by freeing them more and more from the dominion of sin, Rom. vi. 14. His preserving mercy, by delivering them from afflictions, so far as it is convenient: Ps. cxix. 41, 'Let thy mercies come unto me, O Lord; even thy salvation according to thy word;' Lam. iii. 22, 'It is of the Lord's mercy we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' His rewarding mercy: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of God unto eternal life.' So Ps. lxxii. 12, 'Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work.' He will graciously accept, reward, and crown every sincere and faithful servant of his when they have done their work. Sincerity and faith-

fulness shall be accepted and rewarded, when infirmities and weaknesses shall be pardoned and covered.

Secondly, Let me now open the two adjuncts of his mercy.

1. It is tender mercy: Luke i. 78, 'Through the tender mercy of our God.' The word signifieth bowels; as when you see a poor miserable creature, your bowels work within you, especially if you be related to him. *Misericordia complectitur affectum et effectum.* Let us take the nearest relation. If you be a father, we need not much entreat a father to pity a poor helpless child; his own bowels will persuade him to it: Ps. ciii. 13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' Or if you think passions in females more vehement, take the relation of a mother; as Hagar was affected to Ishmael when the water was spent in the bottle; she sat over against the child, and lift up her voice and wept, Gen. xxi. 16. God will take the affections of a mother; as Isa. xlix. 15, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee.' It is passionately set out by the prophet. If all the compassions of all fathers and mothers were joined together, it were nothing to God; he is the father of mercies, he is pitiful and merciful, James v. 11. It is true there is in God no sickness, or trouble of mind, no commotion; but there is pity and tender love, though no perturbation, which will not stand with the perfection of his nature; that is, he layeth to heart, and taketh notice of our misery. The tenderness of God may be known by the compassion which Christ had in the days of his flesh, for he was the express image of his Father's person. Now we read, Mat. ix. 36, 'When he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were as sheep scattered abroad that had no shepherd.' Their teachers did not do their duty to them in any profitable way; this wrought upon Christ's heart, when he saw the multitude. So when he saw many sick and under noisome diseases, Mat. xiv. 14, when they followed him, he pitied them, and helped them. So Mat. xv. 32, Jesus had compassion on the multitude, when they continued with him three days, and had nothing to eat. The care of man's welfare lieth near unto Christ's heart. Before the disciples took notice of it, he taketh notice of the people's necessities, and is affected with it; he would not send them away fasting. The two blind men, when they feelingly laid out their miseries, Mat. xx. 34, 'Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes.' So Luke vii. 13; the widow of Nain lamented her only son, the Lord saw her, and had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. This for a taste what a tender heart Christ had. And in heaven he is still a merciful high priest; he came down on purpose to acquaint himself with our griefs and sorrows. Surely he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and God's pity, though it hath no trouble with it, is real, operative, and efficacious.

2. His tender mercy is seen in his readiness to hear and help, and come in to the cry of his people, if they be but anything humble and profitable in their afflictions: Isa. lviii. 10, 'And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day;' Luke

xv. 20, 'And he arose and came to his father; but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.' When the son was coming, the father ran to meet him: Isa. lxv. 24, 'Before they call, I will answer;' as if God could not tarry to hear the prayer made: Ps. xxxii. 5, 'I said, I would confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin;' Jer. xxxi. 19, 20, 'Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.' The first relentings of the creature work upon the bowels of God's mercy; when we do but conceive a purpose, the Lord is easy to be entreated.

3. By the motives that do induce God to show mercy, the bare sight of our misery, and therefore the saints do so often represent their condition: Ps. lxxix. 20, 'I am poor and sorrowful; let thy salvation, O Lord, set me on high.' You see he bringeth no other argument but his grief and misery. Justice seeketh a fit object, mercy a fit occasion: Deut. xxxii. 36, 'For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.'

Thirdly, The next adjunct is 'great.' The mercies of God are seldom spoken of in scripture but there is some additional word to show their plenty and excellency; as Ps. cxxx. 7, 'For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption;' 1 Peter i. 3, 'Which according to his abundant mercy;' and Eph. ii. 4, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us.' So Eph. ii. 7, 'The exceeding riches of his grace,' *ὑπερβάλλοντα πλοῦτον*. Paul thinketh he can never word it enough: when he speaketh of mercy, he saith it over over-abounded; all to show the multitude and greatness of God's mercies. So Ps. li. 1, we read of the multitude of his tender mercy. It must needs be so if we consider—

1. How many there are to whom God hath done good, even as many as there have been, are, and shall be creatures in the world. None that ever had a being, but tasted of God's goodness. Nay, for his special mercies, the same persons that are pardoned, all the elect from the beginning of time, till the day of judgment. What hath God been doing these thousands of years that the world hath continued, but multiplying pardons and passing acts of grace in favour of his people? Time would be no more, but only that there are some more whom God meaneth to pardon: 2 Peter iii. 9, 'Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' When we come to heaven, how many monuments of grace shall we see there! A man would think that the unthankful world had given discouragement, and God should wait no longer; but yet there are some vacant places to be filled: 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' John xiv. 2. We waste by giving, give from ourselves what we give to another; but this fountain is never dry: Rom. v. 10, 'The free gift is of many offences.'

2. How many benefits he bestoweth on every one, many repeated acts of grace of the same kind, divers kinds of benefits, bodily mercies, soul mercies: Ps. xl. 5, 'Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done; and thy thoughts, which are to usward, they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.' Private mercies and public mercies, mercies in hand and mercies in hope: Ps. xxxi. 19, 'Oh! how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men.' We have not one sin, but many sins; not one misery, but many miseries; therefore we have many mercies. The creatures are always in some necessity, and so are always an object of mercy. How many supports this life continually needeth! all which the providence of God supplieth to us.

3. The greatness of these effects, the sending of his Son: 1 John iv. 9, 10, 'In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.' The gift of the Spirit himself to be everlastingly with us, John xiv. 16, and by present troubles to prepare us for future glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17, and Rom. viii. 18. Surely nothing but mercy, and great mercy, could do all this for us.

Use 1. To exhort us to consider of this, and to meditate much upon this attribute. To this end I shall lay down a few considerations:—

1. All that come to God should consider of his mercy; it is the great motive to repentance, and beginning our acquaintance with God: Joel ii. 13, 'And rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.' Our distrustful and unbelieving thoughts draw an ill picture of God in our minds. We think him a hard and austere one, that is more ready to condemn us than to receive us to mercy. Thus we look upon him in the glass of our guilty fears. Oh no! he is merciful, if we will but stoop to him. Besides, it is a great check to our pursuit of carnal vanities: Jonah ii. 8, 'They that seek after lying vanities forsake their own mercies.' Thus to the secure and careless, when they consider all this grace and tender mercy, it is the great means to overcome them with kindness. A serious consideration of what God hath done and is ready to do for us: Rom. xii. 1, 'I beseech you by the mercies of God.' Saul wept when David had spared him, 1 Sam. xxiv. 16. If we had not let all ingenuity: 'I am not worthy of all the mercy and truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant,' Gen. xxxii. 10. Then when we come to a reckoning and audit with God, how great is the sum of them! There are more effects of his mercies, and of more diverse kinds: Ps. cxxxix. 17, 'How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great are the sum of them!'

2. It is not enough to know that God is merciful, but we must also consider how great and tender his mercy is; for God's children are wont to have great and large thoughts of it. We must think of it as becometh the infiniteness of his nature whose mercy it is: Isa. lv. 8,

9, 'For my thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor my ways as your ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts;' Hosea xi. 9, 'For I am God, and not man.' We must not straiten God to our scantling; our drop is soon spent. Peter, a good man: What! forgive seven times a-day? How tender it is! It is so natural to God. Acts of punitive justice are exercised with some reluctancy, but he rejoiceth over them to do them good; he is strongly inclined to let out his goodness to unworthy and miserable sinners who deserve the contrary from him. The sea doth not more naturally flow, nor the sun more naturally shine, nor fire more naturally burn, than God doth naturally show mercy. These thoughts will answer all the doubts and fears of a penitent. Thou canst never have too large thoughts of God.

3. We shall never have such great and large thoughts of God's tender mercy as when they arise from our own experience and particular observation. To know God by hearsay will not work upon you as when we have seen him ourselves; as they said unto the woman, John iv. 42, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the saviour of the world.' We do not think or speak of God with any sense and life, affection and admiration, till we have studied his nature and observed his ways; otherwise we speak by rote when we praise him for his mercies, and it is but an empty compliment: Ps. ciii. 1-3, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name: bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thy iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases,' &c.

4. Then will our own experience inform us of the greatness and tenderness of mercy, when we are sensible of our sins and miseries. When a man seeth his sins great, his dangers great, then he will see God's mercies towards him great also: Ps. lxxxvi. 13, 'For great is thy mercy towards me, for thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.' We do not know the greatness of the pardon but by the greatness of the debt, nor the greatness of our protection and deliverance but by the greatness of the danger. God continueth trouble upon his people, that they may be sensible of the sweetness of the mercy, and his help in their deliverance: Rom. v. 8, 'But herein God commendeth his love to us, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.'

5. When our sense of sins and miseries hath most recommended mercy to us, we should magnify it, both with respect to supplication and gratulation.

[1.] With respect to supplication. When we are under fears and discouragements, we should oppose and set these great and tender mercies in the balance against our doubts and fears. Our sins are many, our troubles great, yet let us not be discouraged from praying, and making our supplication to God; for God will pardon a penitent people, and help a sensible supplicant. The more sensible of our misery, the fitter objects for mercy. What is it that troubleth us? fear of not speeding with God in prayer? You hear how soon he

relenteth when you relent and lie at his feet; for to what use doth pardoning mercy serve but to encourage broken-hearted sinners? 'We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings.' Benhadad having lost the day, and in great fear of losing his life with his kingdom, his friends comforted him with the fame they had heard of Israel's kings, 1 Kings xx. 31. We know most certainly it is hard to raise up truly poor, downcast sinners, how presumptuous soever they have been before. God would have these by all means to be encouraged; so that though you have many objections from your unworthiness, the multitude and greatness of your sins. Or is it the power of men, and difficulty of our deliverance? God's mercy is beyond the proportion of their cruelty. The more violent and ungodly our oppressors are, the more hope of God's pity towards us: Ps. lxxxvi. 14, 15, 'O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul, and have not set thee before them: but thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.'

[2.] Let us magnify it as to gratulation: Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of all the mercy,' &c. Less than the least of all thy mercies. Let us consider our unworthiness; that God may have all the glory.

Use 2. To press us to be merciful: we should be like God, let us put on bowels of mercy: Col. iii. 12, 'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering;' Luke vi. 36, 'Be ye therefore merciful, as your heavenly Father also is merciful.'

SERMON CLXXV.

Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.—VER. 161.

In this verse we have—

First, David's temptation.

Secondly, The godly frame of his spirit.

First, In David's temptation, take notice of—

1. The nature of it, it was a persecution.
2. The instruments of it, Saul, and the chief men about him, *princes*.
3. The malice and groundlessness of it, *without a cause*.

Secondly, The godly frame of his heart, *but my heart, &c.* And there we have—

1. The seat of his affection, *my heart*.
2. The kind of the affection, *standeth in awe*.
3. The object of it, the *word of God*.

First, With David's temptation I will not meddle any further than an introduction, or the necessity of an exposition enforceth me a little to reflect upon. And—

1. From the nature of it. Persecution is one of the ordinary trials of God's children. As God chasteneth them because they are no better,