



SERMON VI.

Of walking humbly with God.

MICAH vi. 8.

*He hath shewed thee, O man; what is good;
and what doth the Lord require of thee,
but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to
walk humbly with thy God?*

The fourth SERMON on this text.



IN speaking from the last clause of these words, I have in a former discourse proposed,

- I. To consider the duty itself; and what it is *to walk with God.*
- II. THE manner of its performance; it is to be done *humbly.* And,
- III. THE reason, or authority by which it is enjoined. *The Lord hath required it of us.*

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THE first of these I have considered, and proceed now,

II. To treat on the way and manner how this duty should be performed. It is to be done *humbly*; with becoming apprehensions of the privilege we are admitted to, and our unworthiness of it.

THE term *humility* is as frequently used, and as little understood, in the genuine meaning of it, by the generality of professing christians, as any one word by which any branch of our religion is expressed. Some take it for a free, ingenuous, and unreserved deportment towards our equals and inferiors, in opposition to a lofty, imperious carriage. And this is certainly one lower branch of humility. Others confine it to a serious form of countenance, or a particular tone of voice in religious services, attended with a distinguished meanness of apparel and behaviour; when at the same time, there may be as much pride in such affected singularities, as in the most pompous and expensive excesses. No, as the soul is the seat of humility, and God the author, and primary object of this grace, it must needs contain something of a much more excellent nature in it. If we were not acquainted with the vileness of our nature, we might be tempted to think that there could

could be little or no occasion for the exhortation in our text, to walk *humbly* with God: but, if we know any thing, we must be sensible of the infinite disproportion betwixt him and us, both as to nature, and perfections. For a worm to be allowed to walk with the Creator of all things, and a sinful creature to be admitted to converse with perfect purity, are wonders of grace, which must needs astonish the soul that is a partaker of so inestimable a privilege: and the higher we are lifted up in the enjoyment of it, the lower we must needs sink in our own eyes. The nearer we are to our God, the further we shall be from vanity, and carnal pride. There is indeed a sort of external communion with God in ordinances and privileges, that may be separated from *humility*. Thus the church of the *Jews* was, you know, for several ages distinguished by some special tokens of the divine presence; in which sense, God might be said to *walk*, or to dwell externally with them. This favour they abused to a fond conceit of themselves, and a haughty contemptuous treatment of the rest of the world; and by their gross pursuit of bodily services, and resting in them, they at last sunk into an utter neglect of all spiritual and vital religion. But where the soul is taken by the Spirit of Christ into the immediate presence of God, and indulged with communion with him, every look of love is of a humbling

humbling nature, and each testimony of his grace leaves such an one more abased in his own eyes. And that we may the better come at the meaning of the Spirit of God in the text, as to the manner of the discharge of this duty. I shall,

FIRST, Consider the believer in his first setting out for God.

SECONDLY, In his conversation afterwards in his passage to heaven. And,

THIRDLY, In the reward that he is to receive, when he comes to *see as he is seen, and know as he is known.*

UNDER each of which it will be evident, that it is the great work of the Spirit of God, to bring us to low thoughts of ourselves, and to engage us to *glory only in the Lord.*

FIRST, We are to take a view of the believer in his first setting out in religion. We shall then find him brought under a sense of his being a lost, undone, perishing creature, viler than the beasts of the earth, deserving the same torments with the very devils themselves. We are naturally prone to think ourselves something, when in reality we are nothing; and to fancy ourselves *rich, and increased with goods, when we are poor,* and stand in need of every thing. Nay, so great is our pride, that we say in our practice, if not in words, *Who is the Lord that we should obey him* ^a? The spirit of man, thus vainly exalted,

^a Exod. v. 2.

exalted, requires the agency of a divine hand to humble and bring it down: and till we feel the power of almighty grace in bringing us to a just knowledge of ourselves, we cannot be said to *walk with God*. Many indeed have, to appearance, set out very well, with determined resolutions for new obedience, and perhaps have done many things for God, and yet, after all, have turned back. And the apostle assures us, concerning himself and his brethren the *Jews*, that they were *zealous for God*, and *followed after righteousness*, but never obtained life by it, as seeking to be justified by the works of the law. ^b They hoped to be *the end of the law* unto themselves *for righteousness*; but when informed by the ministration of the gospel, that they must have *no confidence in the flesh*, they discover that they never had felt the power of divine grace, by their *stumbling* at this, as an *offence* unto them. ^c And indeed the doctrine of the cross, or reconciliation to God by the blood of *Jesus*, as it reduces the creature to the necessity of acknowledging that all the salvation is of *grace*, and not of *debt*, hath ever been rejected by the wisdom and pride of this world. And this will always be the case, till men become the workmanship of *Christ Jesus*, and receive a new creation from his Spirit. As our Lord's errand into this world was to save sinners, to call,

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^b Rom. ix. 31.^c Ver. 33.

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not the righteous, but lost, sick and perishing souls; so there never was one that came to the Father by him, but was made sensible, in some good degree, of his having sinned, and come short of the glory of God, and of the plague of his own heart, as being *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* And this, is the very first step towards *walking with God*: for they are the poor and hungry that he fills with good things, whilst the rich and the full he sends empty away.^a It is to the humble and contrite one that he looks, as one made desirous of his presence by his Spirit, and having a right to it by his relation to his Son. Till we can see ourselves in some measure in the same light with the apostle *Paul*, we must not think of *walking with God*. He who now came not behind the very chiefest apostles, could remember the time, and was ready enough to acknowledge it, when he was a *blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious*: and therefore he recommends *the grace of God* to others, as bestowed on himself, when he was the *chief of sinners*. But *I obtained mercy*, says he, *because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*: *And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith, and love which is in Christ Jesus.* This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*; of whom

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^a Luke i. 53.

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I am chief.^e And this I take to be one great thing included in that promise made to *Christ, Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power;*^f *willing* to own themselves what they really are, sinners by nature and practice, deserving death as the wages of their iniquities; *willing* to submit to the grace of God as given to the most unworthy, and in this way to maintain fellowship with God. Let the thoughts of the heart be never so much exalted before conversion, no sooner doth the Lord visit the spirit of a man with his grace, but *when the commandment comes, sin revives, and the sinner dies;*^g that is, is dead in himself; he sees what he is, what he deserves, and what would become of him, unless an arm of infinite power and grace relieve him. Thus then, in the first setting out of a believer, it is the constant way of the Holy Spirit to lay him low in his own eyes, and this partly by representing to him the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and more especially, by leading him to an acquaintance with the nature of rich and undeserved mercy: and this agrees with the experience of every child of God. Can we not look back and remember what mean thoughts we once had of ourselves? how were we made to loath ourselves, and lie in the dust before God? Even the common mercies of life, such as food and raiment appeared

^e 1 Tim. i. 13, 14, 15. ^f Psa. cx. 3. ^g Rom. vii 9.

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peared as favours we had forfeited, and the least glimmering of hope was received with unspeakable wonder, as an instance of marvellous love. But again,

SECONDLY, If we consider the believer in his conversation, while passing through this world, we shall find that, as he grows in grace, he will encrease in humility. He is not only convinced, in his first setting out for God, that he is less than the least of all his mercies; but this in some measure abides upon him, and he carries it about with him, more or less, through the whole of his conversation. And this is manifested, (1.) In all that he doth for God, and all that he receives from him; and, (2.) In all that he meets with in the way of his providence, whether of an afflictive or prosperous nature.

1. THE man that is truly under the leadings of the Divine Spirit, walks humbly with God in all that he doth for him, and receives from him.

(1.) IN all that he doth for God: and this he evidences, partly by the apprehensions that he has justly entertained of his own insufficiency and impotency to do any thing that is spiritually good, by any power of his own; and partly by an acknowledgement of his unworthiness, when he hath been assisted to do his best.

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1. HE walks humbly with God as a necessitous, weak, and helpless creature. One of the first lessons which the Spirit of God teaches us, is, that we cannot of ourselves either speak a good word, or think a good thought, and that all *our sufficiency is of God.*^h No sooner do we feel, that *when we would do good, evil is present with us,*ⁱ or that the will may be present, when the power to perform is absent, but we must necessarily, if under the influence of grace, be led to acknowledge that all *our springs are in our God*, and our help alone can come from him. In the beginning of our profession, perhaps, through the strength of our affections, we thought that we had received grace enough for many days, that no duty could be too great, nor any service too hard for us : but, in proportion to our experience, we learn that if we do any thing acceptably, *it is God who must work in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*^k And as this gives the glory to him, to whom alone it is due ; so it hath a natural tendency to humble the soul in itself ; and the believer will be ready to say, “ To what a strange degree of
“ wretchedness and impotency am I reduc’d
“ by my original apostacy ? That which I
“ believe to be my most reasonable service,
“ is now out of my power. *Adam*, like an
“ angel, could have once sung the praise, and
“ adored

^h 2 Cor. iii. 5.

ⁱ Rom. vii. 21.

^k Phil. ii. 13.

“ adored the grace of his God at pleasure,
 “ without weariness or interruption; but
 “ now, if a serious reflection, or a spiritual
 “ meditation were to save my soul (as blef-
 “ sed be God my salvation is not put on this
 “ footing, yet were this the case) and were
 “ God to leave me to myself, I cou’d not
 “ command my heart into such an exercise.”

Thus in all the believer does, as far as he is led by the spirit of *Christ*, he remembers his own insufficiency, and his dependance upon God.

2. As he is humbled, as impotent or helpless, so also as an unworthy creature. Grace hath taught him that the law of God is holy, just, and good, and perfectly agreeable to the divine nature; and the same principle hath acquainted him with his engagements to obedience as a creature, and as an obliged creature, who hath been preserved and supplied through his whole life, by the care and bounty of heaven. Now, as he is sensible, after all his labour and industry to make some grateful returns, that there hath cleaved abundance of imperfection and defilement to every part of his service, this is made use of by the Spirit of God, to lead him out of himself, to an entire dependance upon the righteousness of *Christ* for acceptance. And is it not a very humbling consideration, altho’ there is great comfort attending it, that man now, being fallen, cannot possibly redeem his own soul; but if ever he is accepted, it must be

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by the compleat atonement of the Son of God? What the apostle *Paul* says concerning the ceremonial law, is certainly as true of the moral; *If any other man thinketh, that he hath whercof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.* Well, what account doth he make of all this? why instead of boasting before God, says he, *what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.* And lest this should be confined to the ceremonial law, he adds, *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*¹ Let our obedience be never so universal, or never so compleat, whilst there is but one flaw in it, it cannot be answerable to the demands of the divine law, and therefore will stand us in no stead in that respect. For a man to *rejoice in a few sparks of his own kindling,*^m or to *sacrifice to his own net,* and to

¹ Phil. iii. 4.—9.

^m Isa. l. 11.

to *burn incense unto his own drag,* ^a is to declare that he is a stranger, so far, to himself, and the power of divine grace. But where a man is under the guidance of the Spirit of God, he knows that, as his sufficiency for duty, so his acceptance is only in, and from the Lord *Jesus Christ*: by his power he is made ready to every good word and work, and by the sprinkling of his blood he is made acceptable in the sight of God; and therefore his language is, *Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name be all the glory.* ^o. And the more he advances in grace, and in the knowledge of *Christ*, the more this conviction, and these dispositions increase upon him.

(2.) As in duty, so in enjoyment, the believer is made sensible of himself, and *walks humbly with God*. This I have shewed in some measure already, as what he is apprised of in his first conversion; and is improved afterwards. And I think I need only appeal for this to the experience of every child of God. Did the Lord ever speak peace to your souls? did he every say, in the whispers of his Spirit, *I am thy salvation,* and thus give you joy in believing? and has it not in this case been the constant language of your hearts, *Who am I, and what is my house that the Lord should thus manifest himself unto me?* ^p When God hath been

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pleased

^a Hab. i. 16.

^o Psa. cxv. 1.

^p 2 Sam. vii. 18.

pleased to discover himself at any time in his greatness, or in the glory of his perfections, we find this hath been the consequence of it. Thus you know it was with *Job*, when the Lord answered him out of the whirlwind, and discovered to him the glory of his power, and wisdom; in the works of creation and providence. What was the reply he made him but this? *Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth, Once have I spoken, but I will not answer: yea, twice, but I will proceed no further.*^a And again, he says, *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself; and repent in dust and ashes.*^c And thus the prophet *Isaiab*, after he had been honoured with an extraordinary discovery of the glory of God, says, *Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*^e Now if such a discovery of the greatness of God hath been attended with these effects, we may readily suppose that the apprehension of his goodness, and the believers interest in it, hath laid him still lower, if possible, in his own eyes. Nor need we have any other proof of this than a christian's own experience. He never enjoys communion with God, but he is sensible, in some measure,

^a Job xl. 4, 5.^c Ch. xlii. 4, 5.^e Isa. vi. 5.

measure, of his unworthiness of it: and this is equally true of whatever grace he derives from God. If he increases in knowledge of him, or in love to him, or in faith and dependance upon him, he will still be ready to say, *By the grace of God I am what I am.* ^c And thus, the greater progress he makes in true and vital religion, the more will he lose of that spiritual pride, which is, more or less, the disgrace and unhappiness of every one of us.

2. AND this humility will further be made manifest, in all that the christian meets with from God, in the way of his providence. If the Lord smiles upon him in the bounties of his goodness, as far as he *walks with him*, he will regard every mercy as afforded in the way of his gracious covenant, and designed to engage him more to his service: and whilst he remembers how unworthy he is of these things, he will be the more ready to acknowledge that he is indebted to pure sovereign kindness for the enjoyment of them. And thus in proportion to his improvement in communion with God, the addition of temporal blessings, instead of raising and increasing a vain opinion of himself, will serve as a means, in the hand of the Spirit of God, to make him walk more humbly, and more thankfully with him. He will be ready to say, “ *What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits to-*

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“ *wards*

^c 1 Cor. xv. 10.

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“ *wards me?* ” what obligations doth he lay
“ me under? and how much have I reason
“ to be humbled, that I improve his boun-
“ ty no more, nor walk no more thank-
“ fully in the sense of it?”

BUT if the same wisdom and goodness should see it necessary to *empty him from vessel to vessel*, to strip him of all, and reduce him to extremity, if he *walks with God* in a humble way,

1. He will be concerned to eye his sovereignty and equity, in his proceedings towards him, as one who hath a right to dispose of his own at his pleasure. It is only ignorance or pride that tempts the believer to think hard of God in this case, on account of the appearance of severity in his dealings towards him: for we have no reason to be angry at the removal of a mercy, till we can lay some claim to it. *Job* seemed to have a just sense of this, when he said, *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* ^w It was the Lord that gave, or who in a way of sovereignty bestowed the mercy, and he had a just right in the same way to remove it. *In all this*, it is said, *Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly, or as it is in the margin, attributed folly to him.* ^x And thus you find *Aaron*, when he
lost

^w Psa. cxvi. 12.

^w Job i. 21.

^x Ver. 22.

lost his two sons, *Nadab* and *Abihu*, by fire from the Lord: though it was a very severe dispensation, yet he *held his peace*,¹ he was silent because the Lord had done it. And you are well acquainted with the answer of *Eli*, when judgment was denounced against his family, *it is the Lord*, says he, *let him do what seemeth him good.*² There seems to be abundance of force in that expression, *Be still, and know that I am God.*³ To walk humbly with him under afflictive circumstances, must needs include a willingness to view him as our sovereign, and the just judge of all, who can do nothing but what is right.

2. THE believer in such circumstances, is concerned to act faith upon the wisdom and goodness of God, which will make every thing to issue in his advantage. He shou'd not only manifest his humility in being *still*; but in *hoping against hope*, when there is but little probability of any appearance for him. This made the prophet *Habakkuk* conclude, *although the figtree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*⁴ One would think he could

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have

¹ Lev. x. 3.
² Hab. iii. 17, 18.

³ 1 Sam. iii. 19.

⁴ Psa. xli. 10.

have but very little occasion to rejoice, in the want of every thing; but he gives us the reason of it: *The Lord God was his strength^c*, and therefore he knew that his grace would be sufficient for him. And, methinks, this is the most genuine humility a christian can manifest, when, in very dark appearances, he is enabled to look to him who is the *head over all things to the church^d*, and able to do exceeding abundantly above all that he can ask or think^e. We are too apt to say, why should we wait for the Lord any longer^f? But it is the desire of a true believer to wait upon God, and commit his way unto him, as one who doth great and marvellous things: this seemed to be the case of *David*, when he says to his soul, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God^g*. He was ready to sink and give up all: but, as his last refuge, he encourages himself in his God. We are for hasty immediate deliverances, like the people of *Israel*, as represented by the prophet *Isaiab*, that took council, but not of the Lord: that walked to go down into *Egypt*, (but had not asked at his mouth) to strengthen themselves in the strength of *Pharoah*, and to trust in the shadow of *Egypt^h*. Whereas, we are told their strength was to sit stillⁱ, not in a way of in-

^c Hab. iii. 19. ^d Eph. i. 22. ^e Chap. iii. 20. ^f 2-Kings vi. 33. ^g Pfal. xliiii. 5. ^h Isai. xxx. 1, 2. ⁱ Ver. 7.

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indifference, but of duty, to look and cry to God, and leave the event to him. And again, *thus saith the Lord God, the holy one of Israel, in returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not^k.* And we are further told, *therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him^l.* Well, this is what the christian is longing after. He would be a follower of them, *who through faith and patience inherit the promises^m*: he would submit to the wisdom and judgment of God, and leave it to him to choose his lot for him, in a firm belief that he will issue every thing for his own glory, and to his advantage. And this is especially the case, when the believer is called out to hard services, for which he apprehends his entire insufficiency, or that, to all appearance, his way is quite blocked up. As it was with *Abraham*, who without doubt concluded, that God must work a miracle, or else his son *Isaac* could not be born, or restored to him, after his intended sacrifice. And yet he *staggered notⁿ*, knowing the power, goodness, and faithfulness of him who promised. Well, in this we are to walk humbly, submitting our darkeſt concerns to him, who is able to ful-

^k *Iſai.* xxx. 15. ^l *Ver.* 18. ^m *Heb.* vi. 12. ⁿ *Rom.* iv. 20.

fulfil all his promises, and perform all his pleasure. Which leads us,

THIRDLY, To consider the temper of the soul, when all imperfection shall be done away, and it shall be admitted into the most intimate and eternal *walk*, or communion *with God*. And we have a very full description of this in that well known passage in the *Revelation*: *The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created*^o. As it hath been observed by all the people of God in this world, that the nearer they have approached to him in a way of communion, the less they have thought of themselves; so we are sure there is no proud inhabitant in the *new Jerusalem*. There the Lord alone is exalted. All that dwell there are perfectly happy, and perfectly humble. Their humility justly arises from the sense they have of the infinite distance there is betwixt God and them. And thus I have considered the believer in his first setting out, in his walk in this world, and in his reward in a better. But to shut up all with a few reflections,

1. **WE** may learn from hence the sovereignty of divine grace, that God should
never

^o Rev. iv. 10, 11.

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never invite offending angels to *walk with him*, but that *his delights* should be *with the sons of men*. As the capacities of those spirits are doubtless larger, so, had they been the objects of divine grace, they might have been furnished, for such a privilege as this, more fully than we are; and yet he dwells with man upon the earth, whilst they are *reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day*^p. And thus, by the way, let me observe, that we have no reason to quarrel with the sovereignty of divine grace, in choosing one man and leaving another, till we can charge God with injustice, in leaving the angels to this perdition, and visiting sinful men with his mercy and salvation.

2. FROM hence we may learn, that most men begin at the wrong end, in their obedience. They are for obedience before reconciliation. Whereas, whilst God is our enemy, we can have no friendly correspondence with him. And,

3. WE may also discover the mistake of poor saints in the dark, who think it essential to *walking with God*, that they should always have the light of his countenance: whereas we are, for the most part, to *live by faith, and not by sight*. And our close, and uninterrupted enjoyment is reserved for a better world.

4. IF

^p Jude 6.

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4. IF there are such pleasures attending communion with God here below, what will be the joy of his presence in that blessed state?

5. HENCE we may also learn, that he who is a stranger to the Lord *Jesus* cannot be said to *walk humbly with God*, let his other pretensions to humility be what they will. Such may *walk humbly* with men, but they cannot be said to *walk so with God*; while they are practically opposing their pretended wisdom and authority, to that of their Creator, and are despising the only way of salvation which he has revealed.

6. THE greatest privileges, and the highest attainments have nothing in them, that should cause us to think better of ourselves, than is meet. The apostle's reasoning upon this head is so very just, that he that runs may read it. *For who, says he, maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?* With this you may compare what he says in his epistle to the *Romans*: *For I say, thro' the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith*^r. And surely, if all that we
have

^q 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^r Rom. xii. 3.

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have comes from God, if we *glory*, it must
be *in the Lord* *.

7. MAY not this serve as a reproof to us,
who have come so short in this grace. How
many times have we gone forth in our own
strength into a duty, or against a temptation?
How many times have we boasted ourselves
in our services, and abused our privileges?
may this serve to lay us low in the sight of
God. In one word,

8. AND lastly, Let what has been said en-
gage us to admire that God should humble
himself to *walk with us*; and let it stir us up
to be importunate for more of his presence,
grace, and assistance, that we may *walk* more
becomingly with him.

* 1 Cor. i. 31.



S E R-



S E R M O N VII.

On the new birth.

JOHN iii. 3.

Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

The first SERMON on this text.

YOU will easily observe, that these words are a part of that most surprising conference, which our Lord held with a certain Jew, who is described by his name, *Nicodemus*, by the party he espoused, he was *a man of the Pharisees*, as also by the public office he sustained, he was *a ruler of the Jews*^a, or a master of the *sanhedrim* or great council of that nation, as appears I think very plainly from the 7th chap. of this gospel ver. 50th : where an account being given of a meeting of the chief priests and pharisees in a judicial capacity, he is said to be *one of them*. He having heard the fame of
Jesus,

^a John iii. 1.

Jesus, and perhaps, seen some of the miracles which he had wrought; it is said *the same came to Jesus by night*, to escape, as it is probable, the resentment of his countrymen, who had agreed to reject every one who appeared to espouse his cause, or receive his doctrine. Then, we have the manner of his addressing our Lord; he says, *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God*: in which he speaks the sentiments of others, as well as himself. *Christ* had some friends, it is not unlikely, who did not publicly acknowledge him. His conduct, one would think, must needs gain him the favourable opinion of the more sober and judicious, though biassed by temporal interests, they were afraid to venture all, and follow him. And what *Nicodemus* said, was not disagreeable to the general opinion of the people, nay, even to his enemies, as the apostle *Peter* observes, upon a very great and public occasion, *Ye men of Israel, says he, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know*^b. And as it was very customary to give the title of *Rabbi* to teachers or instructors, lest our Lord should receive it as a bare compliment, or testimony of civil respect, *Nicodemus* adds the reason of his addressing him in this manner: *For no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him*^c. Many
very

^b Acts ii. 22.^c John iii. 2.

very surprising things may be done, which may carry a shew of being miraculous, without such a divine interposure. But the extraordinary works which were performed by our Saviour stand in no need of any appeal, carrying their own evidence, that the arm of the Lord was with him. Works indeed so many in number, so excellent in their kind, and so great in their degree, that nothing less than resolute infidelity, or direct scepticism could, one would think, have shut the eyes of those, who had an opportunity of being acquainted with them.

IN the text you have our Lord entering upon a most necessary and useful point of doctrine. The expression with which it is introduced, viz. *Jesus answered and said unto him,* seems indeed to be a reply to what was just before said by *Nicodemus*. But it is easy to observe many instances in the new testament, where this mode of speech is used at the very opening of a discourse, and is rather a transition from one subject to another, than a direct answer to a question proposed. So that, as I take it, we are to understand by it no more than this; when *Nicodemus* had thus acknowledged *Christ* as *a teacher come from God*, he sets immediately upon instructing him into the great things that concerned his everlasting peace, and opens the discourse with a very weighty sentence, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* You must

must have observed that when something of the greatest consequence and undoubted certainty, hath been delivered by our Lord, it was common with him to introduce it with this asseveration, *verily, verily, I say unto you*, intimating the weight and importance of it, and the attention it deserved. Now what he delivers here to this eminent person, was not merely for his own instruction and advantage, as if no other had any concern with it: for this certainly is one of those scriptures that are not of private interpretation. What therefore our Lord said unto him, he saith unto us all, *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. Accordingly you will observe, that it is laid down in an indefinite way, *except a man*—that is, let his character, or his circumstances, be what they will; old or young, rich or poor, prince or subject, unless he is *born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. By being *born again*, I understand a spiritual impress wrought on the soul, or a divine principle implanted in it, which before was *dead in trespasses and sins*. By *the kingdom of heaven*, I understand, either the kingdom of grace here, or glory hereafter, the state of the church militant, or triumphant. No man hath a right to church fellowship here, nor will ever have a part in the general assembly above, who hath not this new nature, or is not *born again*. The manner of our treating this subject, will be,

- I. To offer some things which deserve our attention respecting this new birth, and,
 II. To consider the reasons why those who are destitute of it, and die in such a condition, cannot *see the kingdom of God*.
 I begin,

I. WITH offering some things to your consideration concerning this new birth. And we have defined it to be a spiritual impress, wrought on the soul, or a divine principle implanted in it, which before was *dead in trespasses and sins*. Now, as a principle, it stands opposed to the particular exercise of grace, and is distinguished from it, as previously necessary to it. For as it is in nature, so it is in grace, a man must have life before he can move, or walk, or perform any of the offices of life: and thus in religion, the mind must first be made spiritual, and the soul be renewed, before it will either relish or breathe after any spiritual exercises or entertainments. Now in regeneration, or the new birth, you will observe.

I. THAT God is the author of it, and that man is entirely passive, in the first reception of this divine principle. I say, the work is altogether the Lord's, and man is only the recipient, and not the origin of it, or co-adjutor in it. What is observed of our first creation, is true of our regeneration. *Know ye,*
 says

says the psalmist, *that the Lord he is God, it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*^d. And to this purpose the apostle John says, *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*^e. Compare with this some other passages of the new testament: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works*^f. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures*^g. *Blessed be the God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*^h. *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God*ⁱ. And as this is the current language of the inspired penmen, in the new testament, so it is also agreeable to the antient promises of the covenant of grace, under the old. *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people*^k. *A new heart also*

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will

^d Psal. c. 3. ^e John i. 12, 13. ^f Eph. ii. 10. ^g James i. 18. ^h 1 Pet. i. 3, 23. ⁱ John v. 1. ^k Jer. xxxi. 33.

will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh¹. The work is therefore the Lord's, and the glory of it must be ascribed to him. Should it be objected to this, that we are commanded to cleanse ourselves, as in that passage, *wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil*^m. And again, *cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double minded*ⁿ. We answer to this, that these and such like expressions, are not to be opposed to the many scriptures we have already quoted, as though they were inconsistent with them : but they are to be understood rather as intimations of our duty, than of our ability ; of what we ought to be, rather than what we are capable of being, by any might or power of our own ; and at most they can signify no more, on our part, than the actual exercise of divine grace when received, and that under the influence of him that gave it. For Job says, *If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean ; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me*^o. And the wise man adds, *who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin*^p ? which will yet further appear, if we proceed to consider, not only that God is the author of this work, but that

¹ Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ^m Isai. i. 16. ⁿ James iv. 8. ^o Job ix. 30, 31. ^p Prov. xx. 9.

that man is entirely passive in the first reception of this divine principle. I allow, that after we are born again, it may properly enough be said that we believe in Christ, the act is ours, though even then the effectual influence and assistance is God's. But in our first conversion, the change which we receive in regeneration, is altogether of God, the creature has no share in this work. Which will more fully appear, if we consider,

(I.) THE state in which we are found, when God begins the good work in our hearts. This the scripture hath represented by a variety of metaphors, all which imply the greatness of our corruption and defilement. We are said, you know, to be *dead in trespasses and sins*^a, to be blind, nay even darkness itself, as the apostle writes to the *Ephesians*. *For ye were sometimes darkness*^r. And it is said, *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*^s. We are also called *the servants of sin*^t, and said to be *enemies in our minds by wicked works*^u; yea enmity itself: *The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*^w, since we cannot of ourselves so much as think a good thought. Nay it is said of man, *that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually*.

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^a Eph. ii. 1. ^r Eph. v. 8. ^s 1 Cor. ii. 14. ^t Rom. vi. 17. ^u Colof. i. 21. ^w Rom. viii. 7.

nally^{*}. Now this is really the state of our case, we may as well pretend to create a world, as to convert ourselves. And so far are we from helping on our conversion, or assisting in it, that we universally make all the head we can against it, and oppose the Spirit of the Lord in his first motions, with respect to this work, till, by the almighty power of sovereign grace, he gains the victory. As to the sum of what might be offered on this head, read at your leisure the third chapter of *Paul's* epistle to the *Romans*, and I persuade myself, comparing it with your own experience, you will have reason to conclude, that if ever you are converted, you must be entirely *God's workmanship*^γ.

(2.) ADD to this the consideration of the exceeding greatness of that power, which the scripture represents as exerted in our conversion. Thus it is stiled a *creation*, and we are said, in the passage just now mentioned, to be *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*. As also it is called a *resurrection*, or believers are said to be *risen with Christ*^a, and God promises he *will take away the stony heart out of our flesh, and that he will give us an heart of flesh*^b. It is called a being *drawn by the Father*^c, a *receiving the Spirit*^d. And there are other expressions of the same kind, made use of, which imply the utmost degree of power. You have a very remarkable passage to this purpose, in the

^{*} Gen. vi. 5. ^γ Eph. ii. 10. ^a Col. iii. 1. ^b Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ^c John vi. 44. ^d 1 Cor. ii. 12.

the apostle's prayer for the *Ephesians*; he prays that they may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead^e, &c. The apostle seems here to want words to express the sense he had of the greatness of that might, which is exerted in the conversion of a sinner. How much think you did *Lazarus* contribute towards his own resurrection? no more can a sinner towards his conversion. The tree must first be made good, before it can produce the least good fruit.

(3.) THIS will yet more fully appear, if you consider, that, to suppose the creature hath a hand in his first conversion, is so far to oppose the main design of the gospel, which is, that God should have all the glory, whilst we have all the blessings of salvation. If a sinner could say, thus far, he changed himself, so far he would have matter of boasting, as having something of his own, that he had not received. And thus the honour of our conversion must be divided between the creature and his Maker; and an easy answer might then be given to the apostle's question, *who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive^f?* Upon

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• Eph. i. 18, 19.

f 1 Cor. iv. 7.

the whole then, if the condition of the human nature is as the scripture represents it, if the work of conversion requires such power as no created being is possessed of, and if the design of the gospel will not admit of the creature's having any part in the work of his own regeneration, we may justly conclude that God alone is the author of it, and man the subject, and not assistant in it. Let a man but seriously look into his own soul, and consider how closely he is attached to sin, and he will find abundant reason to join in the prophet's question, *can the Ethiopian change his skin? or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*^s.

HAVING thus considered God as the author of this work, I should have proceeded to have treated on the extent of it. But I shall leave that to a future discourse, and close this with two or three reflexions, on what has been said. And then,

I. IF our assertion be just, that this whole work is the Lord's, we may very evidently see that mere moral suasion, or objective light, is not sufficient to convert a sinner. Some divines have been ready to think, that it is enough for God to set before us the reasonableness of religion, the beauty and excellency of godliness, which, if the mind is made thoroughly sensible of, it will of itself be inclined to pursue it. But alas! we find, that
 though

^s Jer. xiii, 23,

though *Paul*, nay even *Christ* himself were the preacher, the gospel would be a dead letter, unless cloathed with the power of God. Many persons of the brightest capacities, and of the most eminent character for seriousness and morality, have yet remained ignorant of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and have, with *Nicodemus*, been stumbled at the first principles of true spiritual religion. When our Lord called to *Lazarus*, to come forth from the grave, all must acknowledge it was not the mere force of words, but a secret divine power that went with them, which effected the miracle. Thus we may hear the voice of the Son of God externally, all our days, and yet, be strangers to that secret and victorious power which attends it, when it brings life and salvation to the soul. And farther,

2. FROM hence we may also see, that if God will work, none can let it. Truly the new creation is too much for us to perform. But with the same ease, that the Lord *commanded the light to shine out of darkness*, he can *shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ*^h. The apostle *Paul* was, you know, an eminent instance of this. He went on raging in his malice against Christ and his people, and doing his utmost, if possible, to destroy his interest in the world. Yet, of an enemy, he

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^h 2 Cor. iv. 6.

is immediately made a friend ; from a persecutor, he became a preacher of the gospel, and the chief of Christ's apostles, as a glorious monument of victorious grace. And, for my part, I cannot read without wonder, what we meet with among the mighty successes that are recorded in the acts of the apostles, at the first publication of the gospel, that *a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*¹, persons of all others most prejudiced against it. But,

3. LET not sinners, think it a light or easy matter, on the one hand, or an impossible thing on the other, to be *born again*. Satan hath often served his turn with both these suggestions: some apprehending conversion, to be nothing but an external reformation of life, have rested in a partial amendment, or in cutting off some branches, while the root or stock has remained entire. Corruption must be destroyed in the principle as well as the produce; and this is a work too hard for you. On the other hand be not discouraged, *what is impossible with man, is possible with God*.

4. LET not the christian be disheartened, who perhaps cannot assign any particular season, or remember exactly the manner in which God wrought this mighty work upon his soul. It is enough for us if we are conscious of the blessed fruits of the Spirit. As to the manner of the operation, it is described

¹ Acts vi. 7.

scribed to be like the wind, of which we know very little. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit*^k. And,

To conclude, if you have good reason to hope that you are *born again*, remember what you owe to God for such a mercy; let him have all the glory of his own work; remember what was his design in it; examine your hearts, and watch over your lives; that you may be able to make it appear that this great design has taken place in your souls, and that you are *cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*^l.

^k John iii. 8.

^l 2 Cor. vii. 1.





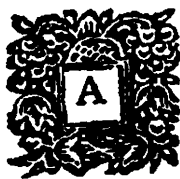
S E R M O N V I I I .

On the new birth.

JOHN iii. 3.

Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

The second SERMON on this text.

FTER I had in a former discourse considered, that the particular view of our Saviour, in these words, was to instruct a master in *Israel* in the important doctrine of regeneration ; I proposed, more largely, to explain the privilege itself, and then to attend to our Lord's reasoning upon it: that *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* Accordingly, in order to explain the privilege, I observed,

I. THAT God is the author of this blessing, and that man is entirely passive in the first reception of it : or that this is one of those gifts which
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which descends from the Father of lights, and in the bestowment of which, he will alone be exalted. This I endeavoured to confirm by several arguments, and closed with some practical reflexions. I proceed now,

2. To consider the extent of this privilege, which I apprehend is universal, as reaching to the whole soul. As the soul was created after the divine image at first, so it was defaced in every faculty, by our apostacy from God; and this image is renewed in part, in the whole mind, when we are born again, and effectually engaged to turn unto the Lord. The work indeed is not perfected at once, or compleat in its degree. But if it is genuine in its kind, it must be universal in its extent. Hence you find the Spirit of God, when speaking of this blessing, uses indefinite terms. We read of being *renewed in the Spirit of our mind*, that is, in the whole soul. And again it is called *the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and true holiness*^a; plainly intimating, its author, influence, and extent. Thus, as the whole compass of corruption is comprised in this term, *the old man*, so, the entire work of grace is represented by the *new man*. And as the poison of the one, so the influence of the other, is diffused through the whole soul. Some are so mistaken, as to confine the work of conversion to the understanding, as though it were sufficient

^a Eph. iv. 23, 24.

ficient to denominate a person a servant, that he *knew his Lord's will*. Others mistake as much, when they limit it to the affections, as though a zeal for God, though never so blind and ignorant, was to *worship him in spirit and in truth*. But how much they are both deceived, we may learn from the instance of *Paul* on the one hand, who, in zeal for God, persecuted the church, and blasphemed the name of *Christ*, till he was renewed by the divine power; and then from *Judas* on the other, who could not be said to perish for want of knowledge, but yet was involved in ruin, his heart being untouched by the efficacy of sovereign grace. The light thrown in upon the understanding, if it is distinguishing and saving, is always attended with suitable impressions on the affections, whence the soul is at once improved and delighted, grows in grace, and advances in useful knowledge. Agreeable to this, we find the apostle speaking of *the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Christ*, by which *the eyes of the understanding being enlightened, ye may know what is the hope of his calling*^b, &c. And, you know, it is said of our Lord, with respect to his disciples, that *he opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*^c. Observe, it is not said that he opened the scriptures to their understanding, or, by a suitable paraphrase or comment, he

^b Eph. i. 17, 18.^c Luke xxiv. 45.

he explained the great and spiritual import or design of them, tho' it may be well supposed he did that: but *he opened their understanding*: the work was internal, and the soul entirely passive in the reception of it. From whence we may gather, by the way, that objective evidence is not sufficient to enlighten the mind of a sinner. The vail must be taken off from the understanding, and the mind cleared from darkness and prejudice, before it will rightly apprehend, or receive the things of *the kingdom of God*. *David*, even after his conversion, prays to this purpose, *open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*^d. Moreover, as the new man *is renewed in knowledge*; so also in *holiness*. Thus, you know the description we have of conversion in the covenant of grace, where God says, *I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh*^e. It is a removing the obstinacy and enmity of our nature, and a bringing us into subjection to Christ. Agreeable to this, it is promised by the Father to him, in the covenant, that his *people should be willing in the day of his power*^f. Nor is this blessing confined to the understanding and affections, but the judgment is rectified and established; conscience maintains its authority; and the memory becomes a treasury of sacred truth, and a repository

^d Psal. cxix. 18. ^e Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ^f Psal. cx. 3.

fitory of spiritual experience. No faculty is indeed without imperfection, but all are changed and altered. This is the new birth or regeneration. But,

3. I WOULD farther observe, that the privilege of regeneration is most valuable, not only in itself, but on account of the blessings which attend it. Its author bespeaks its excellency. Every thing that comes from heaven, must be divine, and highly deserving our attention. What subject should so much challenge our admiration and esteem, as the reparation of the divine image in the apostate creature? But if you add to this, the many precious advantages, which necessarily arise from, or are closely connected with this heavenly blessing, they must needs increase our apprehensions of it. And here allow me to be a little particular, in the following instances. And,

(1.) IN our conversion or regeneration, a veil, of worse than *Egyptian* darkness, is taken away, and we immediately become *light in the Lord*. What more melancholy, than to be deprived of natural sight? Every such object awakens our concern, and engages our compassion. But, by how much the interest of the soul, and the affairs of eternity, exceed those of time, and the body, by so much the more wretched is the condition of every unrenewed, ignorant sinner. Nor is it the least part of the misery of men, in this sad condition,

dition, that they cannot say, *Is their not a lie in our right hand*? Now in conversion, as the apostle expresses it, *ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord*^h. It is a change, not more excellent, than surprising: hence the apostle calls it *marvellous light*ⁱ. It is hardly possible to conceive with what a transport of joy a person, who had been long confined to darkness, would welcome the returning light. Nor is it otherwise with an heir of salvation, when he looks back and observes, how *wise* he was *to do evil*, and how ignorant of, as well as averse to the paths of holiness and duty. The very review of his case affects him with horror, as the apprehension of its alteration strikes him with the most pleasing satisfaction. How ready is he to acknowledge, “ Alas, I lately knew nothing comparatively of myself, or my Saviour, my misery through sin, or remedy through grace! all was dark and gloomy; and had not grace prevented, would certainly have led me to the world of utter darkness and confusion!”

(2.) In our conversion, we shake off the fetters of the worst of tyrants, and take upon us the yoke of the best of masters. Thus you read of the gospel as an instrument in the hand of the Spirit, not only *to open our eyes, and to turn us from darkness to light*, but also, *from the power of Satan unto God*^k. *Satan's*

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power

^g Isai. xlv. 20. ^h Eph. v. 8. ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 9. ^k Acts xxvi. 18.

power is so great in every unrenewed heart, that he may be said to rule and govern there, to have the ascendant in the affections, and the chief influence on the will. As his design is the ruin of mankind, so he suits his temptations to their corruptions; and while they ignorantly propose satisfaction to themselves, they are really, *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*, pursuing that which, at the best, will not satisfy, and, if the mercy of God do not interpose, must certainly end in their destruction. Now this is the case of every one of us by nature, as the apostle describes it to the *Ephesians*, *Wherein, says he, in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*¹. And from this sad and deplorable condition we are not delivered, till the Spirit of grace rests upon us, and breaks the union between us and this great adversary of God and our souls. There is then such a discovery made of his wickedness and malice, as begets a special and abiding fear of him, and aversion to him in the soul; and thus, renouncing the former subjection to him, the soul is engaged in the service of another, even the Lord *Jesus Christ*; whose service is not only our duty, but our honour and happiness, for the ways of wisdom *are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*^m. *Satan*

¹ Eph. ii. 2.^m Prov. iii. 17.

tan treats his greatest votaries with deceit and treachery; whilst our Lord is not only just, but gracious and merciful: *his yoke is easy*, for he assists us to bear it; and he treats us as friends, and not meerly as servants. And is it a valuable blessing to be delivered thus from the cruel tyranny of the hardest of all masters, and to be engaged in the service of a most just and bountiful benefactor? such then is the happy alteration the soul passes under, that is delivered from the captivity of this enemy, and subjected to the free and gracious government of our Lord *Jesus Christ*.

(3.) IN our regeneration, we arise from a death in trespasses and sins, to a life of holiness and religion. So says the apostle, *you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins*ⁿ. The meer light of nature teaches us the preference of good to evil, but it is revelation only which hath fully instructed us into the amiable excellency of grace, and the vile deformity of sin. Now as death spreads itself through the whole animal frame, so sin by nature entirely possesses the soul, and we are as lifeless and inactive in the things of God, as one, who is naturally dead, is in the affairs of this world. The removal of which is the great end of our conversion. Hence the apostle, writing to the believing *Romans*, observes, that the design of God in calling them was, that they should

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be

ⁿ Eph. ii. 1.

be *saints*, or holy persons. He writes his epistle to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be *saints*^o. And he uses the same phrase, in his salutation to the church at Corinth. To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be *saints*^p. And agreeable to this, our calling is said to be an *holy calling*^q, not only as it is the work of the *Holy Ghost*, but as it is *holy* in its tendency: and thus the *grace of God*, where it is received in reality, the same apostle says, will teach us, *that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world*^r. And the apostle *John* adds, that *whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin*^s; i. e. in the same way, or in the same degree, with those who are in the world. Thus such a one receives that instruction of the *Holy Ghost* by the apostle *Peter*, who says, *As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy*^t. But again,

(4.) IN our conversion we exchange a burdensome conversation with vain company, and unsatisfying enjoyments, for spiritual and delightful communion with the Father, Son, and Spirit, with the saints, and with the world above. Perhaps before conversion, none more greedy after the world, or more ear-

^o Rom. i. 7. ^p 1 Cor. i. 2. ^q 2 Tim. i. 9. ^r Titus ii. 12.
^s 1 John iii. 9. ^t 1 Peter i. 15, 16.

earnest in the pursuit of sensual pleasure and carnal company. But when the mind is changed and renewed, instead of saying, to the world, *Who will shew us any good?* we are seeking for the light of God's countenance; being instructed in some measure, that the world hath nothing suitable to our spiritual nature, or sufficient to make us truly and eternally happy. The character of unconverted persons, you have in short in that of the *Ephesians*, *That at that time, they were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*^u. But the end of our conversion you may read in those words of the apostle, to the church at *Corinth*, *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*^w. Now what greater honour or happiness than to have *Christ* manifesting himself unto us, as he doth not unto the world? But,

(5.) IN our conversion, from being under the curse as children of wrath, we visibly become entitled to heaven and glory. I believe I need not go far to prove that *he that believeth not, is condemned already*^x: and that, whilst a sinner is unrenewed, he is, according to scripture, to look upon himself as *under the curse*. Now, in our conversion, one considerable part of our happiness is, that we are

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called

^u Eph. ii. 12.^w 1 Cor. i. 9.^x John iii. 18.

called not only unto grace, but unto glory also; as the apostle exhorts the *Thessalonians*, to walk worthy of God, who had called them unto his kingdom and glory^y. So likewise the apostle *Peter* speaks of the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory^z. And here I might add,

(6.) AND lastly, the consideration of the permanency of this divine principle, and that it shall not be lost, as another infinite advantage that belongs to it. And this might be argued from the decrees of God, from the unchangeableness of his nature and his other attributes, from the account we have in scripture of the everlasting covenant, from the character and satisfaction of the great Saviour, and the interest the believer has in him and his salvation, from what he has already experienced, and what the faithful and powerful intercession of Christ, together with the promises of the gospel, give him leave to hope for. But as I intend to treat more particularly on this doctrine of the saints everlasting safety from another text, I shall proceed,

II. AND very briefly, to consider, why none, but such who are born again, shall ever see the kingdom of God. And,

THE necessity of it is fixed, *first* in the divine will, and *secondly*, in the reason of the thing itself.

I. IN

^y 1 Theff. ii. 12.

^z 1 Pet. v. 10.

1. IN the divine will, God hath determined that *without holiness no man shall see his face*^a. He hath certainly a right to determine under what circumstances we shall enjoy eternal life, or to insist on what he pleases, as requisite to it. And he hath said, *the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*^b. They that die in an unbelieving and un sanctified condition, can have no portion in the land of purity, and eternal bliss. *Old things must pass away, and all things must become new*^c, before we can ever have any foundation to hope for an enjoyment of the blessedness of that world. As those only who *have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb, can stand before the throne of God, and serve him in his temple*^d; so it is the unalterable decree of heaven, that, *nothing that defiles shall enter into the new Jerusalem*^e, but they only that do God's commandments have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city^f. So that had we no other evidence but this, it might be sufficient to convince us, that God hath settled the way to everlasting life, in all ages of the world; and that where he gives glory, he always first gives grace as preparatory to it. But add to this,

2. THE reason of the thing itself. A man without this supernatural change, would be

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^a Heb. xii. 14. ^b Psal. ix. 17. ^c 2 Cor. v. 17. ^d Rev. vii. 14. ^e Chap. xxi. 27. ^f Chap. xxii. 14.

absolutely unfit both for the employment and happiness of a better world. *Holiness becomes the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwells*^s; and certainly then, to admit a man, in his carnal, ignorant, and corrupt state, into the general assembly of the church of the first born, and even into the palace of the divine Being, would be most dishonourable to God, and most unfit in itself. *Isaiab* was not only a regenerate and spiritual man, but, I think, it is not to be doubted, had as much acquaintance with God, and conformity to him, as any one of his time; and yet, under a sense of the imperfect circumstances which attend the best of men in this world, when he was brought nigh to the throne of God in a vision, and saw the *Seraphims* bowing before it, and heard them, *crying to one another, and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory*, he said, *Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts*^h. Such is the holiness of God that *angels veil their faces, and elders cast their crowns before his throne*ⁱ, and acknowledge that *heaven is not clean in his sight*^k, and that, in their most perfect condition, he may justly charge them with folly^l. Now, what could a sinner,

^s Psal. xciii. 1. ^h Isai. vi. 1, 2, 3. ⁱ Rev. iv. 10. ^k Job xv. 15. ^l Chap. iv. 18.

finner, in his unrenewed state, do in such a world? what part could a man, dead in trespasses and sins, bear in such pure and spiritual services as these? The attention of an hour in this world to divine things is a grievous burden to a carnal mind, and the more spiritual the service is, the heavier is the burden: what then must such a man endure, through a long eternity, in the midst of the most exalted devotion, and the most holy and refined conversation? He could have no competent knowledge of the manner in which God is to be worshiped, no capacity for his service, nor any relish for the enjoyment of him. The company of angels would be wearisome to him, and he must needs be uneasy in the society of the spirits of just men made perfect. In a word, to such persons, heaven would be a most disagreeable place, instead of affording them any satisfaction and delight. Well therefore might our Lord say, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* But, to draw to a close, from what hath been said,

1. You will see, that there may be knowledge in the head, without grace in the heart. As many, in the present day, take pleasure in deriding the great fundamentals of religion, so others satisfy themselves with a bare speculative acquaintance with them. Suppose a man had the capacity of a fallen spirit, if he had his vicious nature too, would it not rather in-

crease his misery, than be any ground of rejoicing? It is very possible for a person to have very distinct apprehensions of the gospel, and yet to retain his enmity to the Lord *Jesus Christ*. Would you know therefore, whether your knowledge is saving? Observe what influence it hath upon your hearts and lives; whether in proportion to your improvement in knowledge, you grow in humility; or whether you are not rather puffed up with a fond conceit of your own attainments; whether your apprehensions of the evil of sin produce a growing abhorrence of it; whether this is attended with an increasing tenderness of conscience, and watchful diligence in your walk; whether your acquaintance with the gospel fills your hearts with love to *Jesus Christ*; and, in a word, while you improve in a speculative knowledge of the other world, you die the more to the things of this; and while your hopes increase respecting your interest in that blessedness, your confidence increases also in the merit of that Saviour, by which alone it is to be obtained.

2. Do not take a particular fit of zeal and affection, for this new birth. Many have seemed earnestly to set their *hands to the plough*, who have soon *looked back*. Some like the stony-ground hearers, *when they have heard the word, have immediately received it with gladness: but having no root in themselves, have endured but for a time^m*. And where this is the case with any, *it had been better for them*

^m Mark iv. 16, 17.

them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto themⁿ.

3. WHAT enemies are finners to themselves, while they are unconcerned and thoughtless about this blessing, without which they cannot serve the Lord aright, nor have any well grounded peace in their own breasts, or enjoy even the blessings of this life, in a way of true comfort and satisfaction, and much less the hopes of a better? O finners, finners, what are you pursuing! And what are you neglecting! Were you truly sensible of the deplorable condition you are in, you could neither eat your food, converse with your acquaintance, nor lie down on your beds with any composure. Or had you ever felt this saving change, had you ever seen a glimpse of pardoning love, or had a real taste of divine things, how unsatisfying would every vanity, in which you place your present hope, appear? Sad and deceivable state indeed, *to seek the living among the dead!* to sleep on the top of a mast, and sport on the brink of a precipice! And O what then will become of such who despise, and deride the efficacious operations of the Holy Spirit in the new birth! who brand the whole of the christian's experience, with the ignominious names of enthusiasm and delusion! Certainly

ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 21.

tainly our Lord was the best judge, and he says, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* To be strangers to the experimental power of this work upon their own hearts is bad enough surely, men need not enhance the misery of it, by such a daring contempt of its almighty Author, and of its genuine and gracious effects on the hearts of others. That word of *Paul* to the unbelieving *Jews* at *Antioch* may be very justly applied to such men, *Beware lest that come upon you which was spoken of in the prophets. Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.* For, says the author to the *Hebrews*, *He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he is sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?* But to add no more,

4. WHAT ground of strong consolation have those, who have fled for refuge to the Lord *Jesus Christ*? They have the purpose, covenant, promise, and oath of God the Father, with all his perfections, the merit of the Redeemer's blood, the power of his intercession, and his own glory, together with the

• Acts xiii. 40, 41.

† Heb. x. 28, 29.

the honour of the Spirit, all interested in their happiness, and security. This should fill the hearts of God's people with joy, in the midst of all the afflictions they pass through in this life, give them courage in every danger, and raise their drooping spirits in their darkest hours. Happy indeed, and only happy is he who is *God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works!* In this blessing, we have all other blessings, let our circumstances otherwise be what they will: If God doth this for us, it is as much as our hearts can wish. This new nature makes the poor rich, the simple wise, and changes the sinner into a saint. This is food to the hungry, and cloathing to the naked. And though we pass through a thousand afflictions in this life, and even through the valley and shadow of death, we are still going to take possession of a kingdom. We are entitled to promises and comforts, which will support us in the way, and, being born from above, we shall shortly enter into our *inheritance among the saints in light.*