



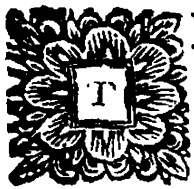
SERMON IX.

*The character and privileges of
Christ's sheep.*

JOHN X. 27.

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,
and they follow me.*

The first SERMON on this text.



HERE are two reasons which our Lord assigns for his speaking in parables: one of which relates to his obstinate enemies, the scribes and pharisees, who wilfully shut their eyes against the clearest light. To these he speaks under these figures, *that seeing they might see, and not perceive, and hearing they might hear, and not understand*^a; as a just punishment for that inveteracy and contempt, with which they treated his person and his doctrine, notwithstanding all the ratio-

^a Mark iv. 12.

rational, the divine, and miraculous evidence, which he brought along with him. The other reason of *Christ's* speaking in parables refers to his disciples, who were *slow of heart to believe*^b, and very dull and imperfect in their knowledge and understanding, and therefore, by this manner of instruction, especially when these parables were explained, the doctrines of truth became more familiar to them, and they were able to conceive and judge more readily about them. So that what was designed as a punishment to the adversaries of our Lord, by his wisdom and goodness, became a mercy to his disciples. In this manner, in the chapter before us, he acquaints his followers, with the intimate relation he stands in to them, and his watchful care over them, under the familiar similitude of a shepherd and his sheep. But this was an entire mystery, a hard and dark saying to the *Jews*. Thus you read, in the context, *This parable spake Jesus unto them, but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them*^c. And it is very probable the disciples would have known little more of it, if our Lord had not more particularly applied it to himself, and explained it to them.

I SHALL not stay to enquire into the several parts of this parable at present. The most material things in it will naturally fall under our consideration, in the prosecution of the subject

^b Luke xxiv. 25.

^c John x. 6.

subject before us. All that I shall farther observe, by way of introduction to it, is, that the *Jews* having solemnly asked our Saviour whether he were the *Christ*, he replies, *I told you and ye believed not : the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me*^d. He refers them to the miraculous works which he had wrought among them. And moreover, assures them, that their incredulity was no surprize to him ; for he knew that they were not his sheep, and therefore it was no wonder that they did not hear his voice, or believe the report that he made concerning himself. *But ye believe not, says he, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you*^e. In opposition therefore to their character, and in contradistinction from his enemies, he adds concerning his disciples, in the text,—*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* As if he had said, “ If the wicked
 “ despise me, and perish, if they see no form of
 “ comeliness in me ; yet my friends, my dis-
 “ ciples, they know the pleasure of conver-
 “ sing with me ; and all mine elect shall
 “ hear my voice, and live ; they shall fol-
 “ low me, and I will make them to lie
 “ down in green pastures, and lead them beside
 “ the still waters.” And here then,

I. LET us consider with what propriety and affection our Lord speaks of his disciples : he calls them his *sheep*.

II.

^d John x. 25.

^e Ver. 26.

II. WHAT he asserts concerning them, and as peculiar to them: that they *bear his voice.* And,

III. OUR Lord's special regard to them, he *knows them*; and their duty and privilege, they *follow* him whithersoever he goes.

I. IT is remarkable with what propriety and affection *Christ* speaks of his disciples; he calls them his *sheep.*

THEY may be said to be *Christ's sheep*, as they were created by him. For we are to know that this 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*^f. He it is, of whom it is said, *all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*^g. Now it is certain we must be the property of him who gave us our being, and especially as we live upon his providence continually, and are upheld by the word of his power. But this is not the sense of the words in the text, because in this view, our Lord might as well say it of his enemies as of his friends. The vessels which are fitting themselves for destruction, as well as those which are prepared for mercy, are in this sense, his *sheep*, as they are the workmanship of his hands.

THOSE therefore, of whom *Christ* speaks in this place, are his *sheep* in a peculiar sense,

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^f Psal. c. 3.

^g John i. 3.

those only, and all of those who are of the election of grace; part of whom are already brought in, many of them got safe to glory, and others there are who must yet be brought in, till they all become *one sheepfold* under the one great *shepherd*^h, and *bishop of souls*, the Lord *Jesus Christ*. These may be compared to *sheep* on account of their natural, weak, and defenceless condition; they are like *sheep* among wolves, and were they left to themselves, would easily fall a prey to every enemy; and they are only safe, as under the shepherd's care. Moreover they, like sheep, are very subject to go astray. But perhaps, the principal reason of this comparison may be taken from the change that divine grace makes upon them. When, by that blessed influence, the pride and haughtiness, the passion and fury of their nature is effectually subdued, and they are made *meek and lowly*, in some measure, like their humble Lord; when they are disposed, in some good degree, like him, to the tenderest treatment of others, while they are ready to forgive, and not apt to indulge a severe resentment of the injuries which they receive themselves.

THEY are *Christ's sheep*, as the gift of the Father to him. And this special propriety in them he frequently takes notice of in this gospel of *John*. *Thine they were*, says he, *and thou gavest them me*ⁱ. Here we might

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^h John x 16.ⁱ Chap. xvii. 6.

consider the Father's right to give them, and the delight and satisfaction of the Son in receiving them from his Father's hands. As God knew from everlasting what creatures he would form, so he had an undoubted right to dispose of them, according to his pleasure. These, by his everlasting purpose, were his *portion*, and, by his own appointment, were *the lot of his inheritance*^k; and accordingly he gives them to his Son, in the covenant of grace, to which his Son consents, and doth it with a great deal of joy and pleasure, as having his heart fixed upon them. As the Father could bestow no greater testimony of his love on the church, than in the gift of his Son; so it was a peculiar mark of his affection to him, that he gave him all the elect, who were so dear to himself. Now you know nothing is freer than a gift, and what we obtain in this way we generally value, and may safely call our own: yea, it is as really ours, as it was the property of the donor, before he bestowed it upon us. Moreover, they were given to *Christ* as his care, and his reward, as a trust committed to his charge, and as an inheritance, that he should enjoy for ever.

AGAIN, they were his by purchase, as well as by gift. Thus he bought them out of the hands of justice, as sinful creatures. As they were given to him as creatures, so they were purchased by him as sinners. Now what a

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* Deut. xxxii. 9

man buys, and pays an equivalent for, is certainly his own. This was necessary with respect to the elect, for the maintenance of the glory of the divine perfections, which were so much dishonoured by the fall. *He hath purchased the church unto himself, with his own blood*¹.

AGAIN, his sheep are his by conquest, as well as by purchase, as they are made his *willing people in the day of his power*^m. This is necessary in order to our happiness and his glory; to our happiness in the enjoyment of him, and to his glory in our subjection and obedience to him. And in this conquest he acts both powerfully, and tenderly; at once to secure the victory over them, and yet to do it with their own consent.

ONCE more, they are his by possession, and that partly in this world, and they will be fully so when they come to glory. According to which it is said of *Christ*, that God the Father *hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all*ⁿ. But I come now to the next general head, which is,

II. To observe what *Christ* asserts concerning his *sheep*, and which is peculiar to them; *viz.* that *they hear his voice*. In this, to be sure, he alludes to the usage of shepherds, and

¹ Acts xx. 28.^m Psal. cx. 3.ⁿ Eph. i. 22, 23.

and especially of those in the eastern part of the world, where their custom was to go before the sheep; and every flock knew their own shepherd's voice, and followed him, and by his call he recovered them when they were going astray, and brought them into the fold when it was a proper time for them to take their rest. Thus our Lord *Jesus Christ* is as well the prophet of his people, as he is their Lord and governour. And as they are naturally without knowledge, and at best but very imperfect in it, so he hath several ways of speaking to them for their instruction, their reproof, and comfort. It is observable, that he asserts this in general concerning all his sheep. "*My sheep*, whoever
" are so, not in name and profession only,
" but indeed, and in truth, these, all these
" *hear my voice*:" and then he plainly distinguishes them, in this, from the rest of the world, " these, and only these *hear my voice*.
" Others either hear nothing at all of me,
" or in hearing, understand not, and in seeing are utterly blind to the excellency of
" my person, and the great and glorious
" things which the gospel reveals concerning me; but these *hear my voice*." Now here we may enquire,

1. WHAT the *voice of Christ* is? And
2. WHEN we may be said to *hear* it?

1. THEN, what is the *voice* of *Christ*? The *voice* you know is that by which we convey our ideas of things one to another. By this we impart the secrets of our minds, open our hidden purposes and works, and instruct and comfort those with whom we are conversant. And, in this sense, it was peculiar to the immediate followers of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, to hear his voice, when he was upon earth. As they were honoured with the sight of his person, so he indulged them with a great deal of discourse about spiritual and heavenly things. But then, we are to remember, that the bare hearing of *Christ* speak, though it was a great honour, yet it conveyed no necessary spiritual advantage: for thus *Judas* heard his voice, as well as the rest of the disciples, and a vast multitude of the *Jerws*, who never received any saving benefit from him. They heard him cry out, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink* °, and yet they never tasted of the divine refreshment. Nay the worst enemies *Christ* hath will *bear* his *voice*, in the great day, but it will be to their utter confusion and destruction; when he will say unto them, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire* †.

AGAIN, there was a *voice* of *Christ* which the apostle *Paul* heard, after the ascension of our Lord to heaven, which was peculiar to him,

° John vii. 37.

† Mat. xxv. 41.

him, and which we are not to expect; and together with this *voice* he had a vision of his person, that he might be able to say he had seen our Lord, which was necessary to the character of one who was to be a witness of his resurrection. And I may add, that *John* the beloved disciple, in the revelation which was given him in the isle of *Patmos*, had some special discoveries, which we also are not to expect. *Christ* speaks to us in another and more familiar manner.

WE might here likewise observe, that *Christ's* voice was heard under the old testament dispensation. Thus, he spake in the first promise, and in all the sacrifices and other services of the tabernacle and temple; he spake in all the prophecies of that dispensation, and especially in those which relate more immediately to his person, righteousness, death, and satisfaction. His *sheep* then heard his *voice*, so as to *follow* him, and to commit the keeping of their souls to him, though he did not speak so plainly then, as he hath done since, under the present dispensation, when *life and immortality are brought more clearly to light* by the everlasting *gospel*. And now, that we may the better form a judgment of the *voice* of *Christ*, we are to consider him in the several capacities, in each of which he speaks to us. And,

(1.) WE may consider him as a prophet sent from God; and so, he reveals to us the

great mysteries of salvation, and the several glorious and important doctrines of the gospel; the knowledge of which we could obtain no other way. For this our Lord is well qualified, as he lay in the bosom of the Father, and was privy to all the counsels of his will: to this he was particularly appointed, as you find in the promise which God gave to his people of old, *The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, though superior in dignity and glory; unto him shall ye hearken*⁹; and in this office he was actually engaged, as the apostle tells us, *God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*^r. Now this he did, in part, by his own ministry, while he was upon earth, but more fully, after he was ascended into heaven, by his apostles, whom he inspired with the knowledge of those truths which before lay hid in the wisdom and counsel of God. Thus we are by them acquainted with the great doctrine of a trinity of persons in the unity of the divine essence, which is so full of instruction and comfort to the saints; as they observe how each of the eternal three is concerned in their salvation, and how every way equal they are to the work, which they were severally pleased to undertake. To this purpose, we might also take
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⁹ Deut. xviii. 15.

^r Heb. i. 1, 2.

notice of the great doctrine of electing love, the wonderful mysteries of redemption, and justification, which are now set before us in the clearest light, together with the convicting and sanctifying influences of the Spirit: these things are, in all their saving efficacy, most clearly and fully revealed to us by *Jesus Christ*.

(2.) As a sovereign and a lawgiver, he speaks to us, in those directions which he hath given us for the worship of God, and for the regulation of our conduct in this world. That he hath a right to speak to us under this character cannot be disputed. It is certainly his prerogative to give laws to his subjects; and that he cannot err herein is plain, from his being perfectly acquainted with his Father's will and glory, and therefore a proper judge how we are to honour him. Now the voice of *Christ* herein is exceedingly plain, and easy to be understood, if we are enabled to attend unto it without prejudice, or partiality. Thus, let the true christian search the scriptures, and he will soon find the great ordinances of hearing the word, baptism, and the Lord's supper, revealed therein. And he need not be long at a loss in his enquiries after what manner these things are to be performed: for I think they are told us in the plainest language that can be. And the same may be said with regard to our personal conduct in all other respects towards the great God, towards our fellow-creatures, whether
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friends or enemies, our families or strangers. Our Lord hath, in his doctrine and his example, told us what he requires of us in these several relations: and it is not because men want direction, or, in many instances, that they do not understand the matter of their duty, that they are so careless about it, but it commonly proceeds from other causes; it is owing to the hardness of their hearts, and the prevalence of their lusts and corruptions.

(3.) THERE is the *voice of Christ* as a redeemer, a saviour, and a friend, in those gracious discoveries, and glorious promises of the gospel, which are designed for the strong consolation of those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Thus he says to sinners, burdened with a sense of their guilt, *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*^s. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price*^t. He tells them, that *his blood cleanseth from all sin*^u. And his Spirit assures them, that *he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*^w. To his people in a backsliding state, he says, *Take with you words, and turn to the Lord, say unto him, take away all iniquity,*
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^s Mat xi. 28.
vii. 25.

^t Isai. lv. 1.

^u 1 John i. 7.

^w Heb.

and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips^x. And he said to Peter, when he prophesied his fall, *I have prayed for thee; that thy faith fail not^y*: and thus Paul, under the influence of his Spirit, saith to the Romans, *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly^z*. To his people, under ill usage from the hands of their enemies, or under any other trouble, he says, *Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me^a*. And thus, when they are weak and distressed, he leads them to himself, as to the fountain from which, they are supplied with every needful thing.

(4.) THERE is the voice of *Christ* as the great disposer of providence. So he *speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not^b*. Thus he speaks both in merciful and afflictive dispensations. Sometimes he says, *My son, give me thine heart^c*; at other times, *All things work together for good to them that love God^d and your light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for you a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory^e*. Again,

(5.) HE speaks as God's power to his people, and then he speaks not to the ear only, but to the heart. This he doth sometimes with means, and sometimes without them.

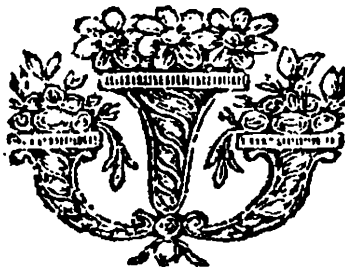
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^x Hof. xiv. 2. ^y Luke xxii. 32. ^z Rom. xvi. 20. ^a John xiv. 1. ^b Job xxxiii. 14. ^c Prov. xxiii. 26. ^d Rom. viii. 28. ^e 2 Cor. iv. 17.

I take it, the first time he speaks to us effectually in our conversion, as it is in a way of power, so we are absolutely passive. And having removed our deafness, and enabled us to hear and welcome his voice, he teaches us every thing that is necessary, in order to his own glory, and our salvation. All the preaching of the apostles would have had no effect to the salvation of those that heard them, had not *the arm of the Lord been revealed*. Peter had never been so happy in the conversion of three thousand souls by one sermon, if *Christ* had not made way to their hearts by his Spirit. And the same may be said of the people of God now: they can receive no advantage by the most evangelical sermon they can hear, unless *Christ* speaks to them in it. So that whoever *plants* or *waters*, he only can *give the increase*. I should now go on to enquire,

II. WHEN we may be said to *hear his voice*.

BUT I shall leave that, and what follows to another discourse.





SERMON X.

*The character and privileges of
Christ's sheep.*

JOHN X. 27.

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,
and they follow me.*

The second SERMON on this text.



HAVING considered in a former
discourse,

- I. WITH what propriety, and affection our Lord speaks of his disciples, in the words of the text, when he calls them his *sheep*; I have proceeded,
- II. To enquire what he asserts concerning them, and as peculiar to them; and that is, that they *bear his voice*. And here,

1. I HAVE shewn you, what we are to understand by the *voice of Christ*. And I go on now,

2. To enquire when we may be said to *bear* it. And to be sure this expression means a great deal more than a bare attention to it, or general understanding of it. This we may have, and yet be in no better a state than that of the devils, of whom it is said they *believe and tremble*^a. It supposes therefore that he hath given us ears to hear, and that he enables us to pay a proper regard to what he is pleased to say unto us. And we may be said then to *bear Christ's voice*,

(1.) WHEN we understand, in some good measure, the meaning, are satisfied of the truth, believe the importance, and favour the sweetness and excellency of the several doctrinal discoveries, which *Christ* hath made known to us, as a prophet, in the gospel. When I speak of knowing the meaning of the doctrines of *Christ*, I do not intend by it a comprehending the whole of any truth, or a being able to account for every difficulty. For the gospel, in all the parts of it, is a mystery, which hath something in it unfathomable, and which we cannot fully comprehend. And thus, when we meet with a doctrinal truth in scripture, our reason and understanding are to be conversant about it,
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^a James ii. 19.

in a dependence on divine assistance, in our researches into the import or meaning of the terms, under which it is conveyed to us. As, for instance, I must have some notion of the words, *elect*, *ordain*, and *predestinate*, before I can form any just apprehensions of the great doctrine of God's free choice of his people, which is revealed to us in scripture under these terms. And the same might be said, as to the doctrines of *justification* and *sanctification*; we must know what these terms mean, at least in general, or we can form no notion at all of the things represented by them. But though we are, by our reason and understanding, to judge of the *letter*, or external representation of these important doctrines, yet, this is not enough to denominate us hearers of *Christ's voice*. We must be satisfied of the truth of these discoveries, and feel something of the power, and pleasure of them upon our hearts, or else, the evidence we receive would be knowledge, and not faith. We must entertain them with an entire confidence in his wisdom, faithfulness, and authority, who hath made known these things to us: and then our faith is not in man, but in God, who cannot lie. I take it, those men have no true notions of faith, who say they will not believe what they cannot comprehend, but will assent to a proposition only, as they clearly see the natural evidence of it. This may very well become

become them, perhaps, in the pursuit of natural knowledge, or in the study of the liberal sciences. But in things which are supposed to be divine, it is surely most absurd. God commands us to believe several things, because he hath made them known to us; he requires this as matter of duty in us; and as an instance of honour done to him. But these men say, they will not believe even God himself, unless he makes all clear and evident to their reason, than which nothing can be more daring and impious. For they do not treat their fellow-creatures in this manner, where they deem them just and honest. Now a believer hath his name in part from his receiving the several mysteries of salvation, as undoubted truths, upon the sole evidence of *Christ*, whose work it is to bring them forth out of the divine treasury. And such a man is enabled to reason thus with himself: “Has Christ told me so and so? “well, he dwelt in the bosom of the Father, “was privy to all his secrets, and though I, “who am a poor imperfect creature, cannot “fully understand all the grace or glory contained in them, though I cannot tell how “to account for many of these things, yet, “I know, he is a faithful witness, and therefore I will believe him.” But this is not all, a man may go to hell with a great deal of knowledge of the mind of *Christ*, as to the letter of it, and may not scruple to give his

assent to any part of the truth *Christ* has revealed; he may be very orthodox in his judgment, and yet very unsound in his heart. So that we must be brought to know the importance and consequence of these things, and to favour them in their sweetness and excellency, if we attend to them as the language of *Christ*. We must not hear them as a tale that is told, but as containing the mind of God, the *voice* of his Son, the things of the utmost moment, in which our duty is revealed, and on which our comfort and happiness depend. *David* was a man, who greatly delighted in meditating upon the things of God: O, says he, *how love I thy law; it is my meditation all the day*^b! And how often doth he speak of the pleasure and profit of these contemplations? And what is the reason, but his being enabled to taste and favour the sweetness of them? as he himself says, *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea sweeter than honey to my mouth*^c. And thus, when *Christ* speaks in any doctrine, he can make it at once instructive and affecting; he can warm the heart with it, as well as enlighten the head.

(2.) To hear the voice of *Christ*, is to regard his laws, as just and righteous, as excellent and desirable, as those which we are obliged to comply with, or submit to, from the constraints of his love, and which we obey

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^b Psal. cxix. 97.^c Ver. 103.

with a sincere and earnest intention to promote his glory: and this supposes, that the Spirit hath influenced us faithfully, and impartially, to enquire into his will, or in what manner it is he requires, and expects to be served by us. And how disagreeable soever any thing that he commands may be to flesh and blood, to worldly interest, or carnal ease and pleasure, yet the *sheep* of *Christ* desire to have their ears open to his *voice*, and their feet ready to run in all the ways of his appointment. This they do from the regard they have to *Christ's* authority: he is the head of the church, the King of saints, and it is in this view that they obey him. Not because this obedience is the established law of the country where they live, or recommended by the custom of it, or the influence of their superiors; but from an inward persuasion, which they have from the Spirit of God, that this their obedience is just and reasonable in itself. Besides, their love to their Lord is such, that they would show it every way they can. This is the apostle's argument in his epistle to the *Romans*. He supposes they had received the doctrines of the gospel, and therefore were desirous to renounce the lusts of the flesh, as engaged to do so by the love of *Jesus Christ*. *But God be thanked*, says he, *that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free*
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from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness^d.

(3.) To *hear the voice of Christ*, is to attend to his counsel, and advice, and as wretched, miserable, and destitute sinners, to come to him, and to *buy of him wine and milk, and gold tried in the fire, without money, and without price*, to seek salvation of him, and receive it from him in all its parts, and branches, on his own terms, and in his own way. Thus, the returning sinner *hears the voice of Christ* in his first conversion, and, I am sure, it is the same *voice* to which he constantly attends thro' all his conversation afterwards. *Paul* had no sooner heard the voice of *Christ*, but he said, *What things were gain to him before, those he now counted loss for Christ*. And he continued always afterwards in the same judgment. *Yea doubtless*, says he, *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*^e.

(4.) To *hear the voice of Christ*, is to attend to the meaning of all his providential dispensations, as designed to alienate our affections from sensual objects, and to fix them

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^d Rom. vi. 17, 18.

^e Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.

more strongly upon himself; to make us truly useful here, to preserve us, and to make us meet for future blessedness. In order to this, the believer is satisfied that nothing comes by chance, that all is under the direction of *Christ*; and though he sometimes deals with his people, as he did with *Peter*, when he said, *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter* ^f, yet he is convinced that he never doth any thing in vain; and therefore he attentively listens, if possible, to hear whatever *Christ* hath to say, in every mercy and affliction.

(5.) THE saints *hear the voice of Christ* in his ordinances, when they are taught and instructed by them, and by them admitted into communion with him. Here they have often had sweet and heavenly interviews, and therefore they rejoice at these returning seasons, and prepare for them, by washing their robes afresh, and making them white in the blood of the Lamb. They say, with the church of old, *Awake O north-wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out: let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits* ^g. By humble and earnest prayer they seek after the free and gracious manifestations of his presence. And as they know his voice on these occasions, so they are filled with joy when they hear it, and cry out, in the language of the spouse in the same song,

^f John xiii. 7.

^g Cant. iv. 16.

song, *The voice of my beloved! behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills*^b. And they rejoice still more when they hear him say, *I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink, abundantly, O beloved*ⁱ. But,

(6.) AND lastly, to hear the voice of Christ, is to be properly affected with the description he hath given of the heavenly world, and to long for that exalted blessedness, which will attend an everlasting communion with him there. As the good shepherd hath given his life for the sheep^k, so they are persuaded, that he that brought him again from the dead, will make them perfect, through the blood of the everlasting covenant^l. And as he has commanded his apostles and other shepherds, to feed^m them, and to fold them, in their way through the wilderness; so they have heard his voice in the gospel, saying, *Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*ⁿ. And they rejoice greatly in the prospect of that day, when the chief shepherd shall appear^o, and having separated them from the goats, shall conduct them into the land of rest, shall make them lie down in those green and delightful pastures,

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and

^b Cant. ii. 8. ⁱ Ch. v. 1. ^k John x. 11. ^l Heb xiii. 20, 21.
^m John xxi. 16. ⁿ Luke xii. 32. ^o 1 Pet. v. 4.

and lead them beside the still and pleasant waters^p that flow there for evermore; when they shall, in a word, be *made like him*, for they shall see him as he is^q, and when they shall sit down with him in his throne, as he is sat down with his Father in his throne^r. They have heard him say, *Lo, I come quickly, and my reward is with me^s*: they believe his word, and that the happy hour is not far off, when they shall hear the same voice, saying, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you—enter into the joy of your Lord^t*. And in the glorious prospect of it they often cry out, *Even so come Lord Jesus^u*.

BUT I proceed now to the last thing which I observed from the words, and that was,

III. OUR Lord's special regard to his sheep, he *knows them*; as also, their duty and privilege, they *follow* him whithersoever he goes. And,

I. OUR Lord says of his sheep, *I know them*. Knowledge in man may be considered, either as a habit in the mind, or as that habit is drawn forth into exercise, by being conversant with some object. Thus, when we say of a man, that he is a knowing and understanding man, we mean, that he hath good natural parts,

^p Psal. xxiii. 2. ^q 1 John iii. 2. ^r Rev. iii. 21. ^s Chap. xxii. 12. ^t Mat. xxv. 33, 34. ^u Rev. xxii. 20.

parts, or hath made considerable improvement in useful knowledge. Now as we are distinguished from other creatures by being reasonable, so we are distinguished from one another, according to our different measures of knowledge. And here we are to observe, that some men very much exceed others in clearness of understanding, solidity of judgment, and strength of memory, as gifts of providence, and for which they are indebted immediately to the great author of nature. Others have taken a great deal of pains in the improvement of these abilities, and especially in some particular sciences. And indeed, a tolerable measure of knowledge, in this way, cannot be attained by men without a great deal of time, observation, and experience. But when we think, or speak of knowledge in God, we are to separate from it all the imperfections which attend us, either in what we desire from him, or in what we attain, under his blessing and influence, in these pursuits, or in the use and enjoyment of what we attain. For it is essential to God to know, and to know every thing, and that at once; not by degrees, or one thing after another, as we do, but by an intuitive, perfect, and immediate view of them, in their natures, causes, effects, dependence, yea, every thing that relates to them. That this knowledge belongs to God, and to him only, reason as well as revelation confirms to us. And that

our Lord *Jesus Christ* is possessed of it, we learn, not only from what *Peter* said, to his master, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee* ^w; but, also from what our Lord says of himself, *And all the churches shall know, that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts* ^x: Nothing more hid and secret, than the purposes, counsels, and devices of a man's heart: and if *Christ* knows these things, he must surely know every thing else: for God only knows the heart. And he who is possessed of one divine perfection, is possessed of them all. Besides, without this knowledge he would not be fit to judge the world. Some sins in that case might escape without due examination; some secret instances of love to, and zeal for his name might be forgotten, and be unrewarded; the hypocrite might continue to wear his mask, at the bar of judgment, and the godly be neglected and condemned. Now, if you take the words in this sense in the text, then the meaning is, that our Lord *Jesus Christ* is perfectly acquainted with the persons and all the circumstances of his people: and we may safely say, that there is no circumstance which concerns us from our birth to our death, but what *Christ* hath his eye immediately upon, and takes special notice of. The inward, spiritual life of a believer is hid indeed to the world, but it is hid with *Christ*,
and

^w John xxi. 17.^x Rev. ii. 23.

and he is perfectly well acquainted with it, in all its springs and actions, in all its motions and affections, in all its joys and sorrows. This knowledge of his reaches to them all, and to every one of them. He knows them at all times, and under all conditions; he knows all of them as perfectly as if there was but one for him to take notice of; and he knows every one of them, as if they were alone the objects of his concern. And as this knowledge is thus extensive and universal, so there are several properties of it which we may more particularly consider, as,

(1.) IT is a discriminating knowledge. Thus I take it, the word is understood in that passage, *Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his*^r. What though *Hymeneus* and *Alexander* make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience? should this stumble the saints? No, God will take care of his own interest. We are told, *as many as were ordained to eternal life believed*^z. And he that believes shall be kept, *by the power of God, through faith unto salvation*^a. And so our Lord tells the *Jews*, in the verse before our text, *But ye believe not; because ye are not of my sheep*. They came about him, with a great deal of concern, and said to him, *How long dost thou make us to doubt? if thou be*
the

^r 2 Tim. ii. 19. ^z Acts xiii. 48. ^a 1 Pet. i. 5.

the Christ, tell us plainly^b. *Christ* answers them, that he had taken upon him that character, and appeals to his works for his right to it. *I told you, says he, and you believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name they bear witness of me*^c. Well, they are resolved to shut their eyes, and *Christ* suffers them to go on in their blindness: but this was not the case with his sheep. Again,

(2.) THE knowledge *Christ* has of his sheep is an affectionate knowledge, a knowledge of approbation. Thus we are to understand our Lord when he says to the foolish virgins, *Verily I say unto you I know you not*^d; that is, I never knew you, as my friends, or as my sheep. As to speculative and intuitive knowledge, *Christ* knew *Judas* in all his hypocrisy, as well as *Peter* in all his zeal, and in all his infirmity too. But the one, he knew as an object of his aversion, and the other, of his love. And this affection shews itself, in the acceptance of the persons and services of his people, and in a sympathetic compassion for them under all their infirmities, in a gracious care over them, and an affectionate communion with them, as a prelude of that acknowledgement of them, before the throne of his Father, in the important day of their account. But,

2. OUR Lord not only says he knows his sheep; but, he also adds *and they follow me*.

Now

^b 1 Pet. i. 24.

^c Ver. 25.

^d Mat. xxv. 12.

Now to follow a person is, either the act of a friend, a disciple, or a servant. If a person, for whom we have an affectionate friendship, is going before us, one in whose company we take great delight, we shall follow him with diligence and speed: and so it will be with the industrious scholar, and the faithful servant. And thus our Lord intends by it, that the hearts of his people are towards him, and to the *remembrance of his name*, and that they desire to tread in his steps, and to follow him in a way of obedience and imitation: and this is their privilege as well as their duty. There are glorious perfections in *Christ*, which are above all imitation; but there are others, which though we cannot reach, we may strive, in our measure, to follow; such as his humility, he *made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant*^e; his holiness and unblemished conversation; his resignation to his Father's will, and his zeal and fervency for his glory; his patience, constancy, and courage under his sufferings; his unalterable love to the church, and his persevering obedience to his Father, which held out to the end.

AND now to close all with some application, what hath been said may serve,

1. To encourage the weakest follower of the Lamb, when he reflects that he is under

^e Phil. ii. 7.

der the eye of his Lord, who hath a heart to pity, and hands to help him. For *he knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust*[§]. He loves us, he has laid down his life for us, he has mercifully acknowledged us here, he has promised he will never leave nor forsake us; we have found him true to his word thus far; and we have no occasion to doubt, but that he will faithfully fulfil all the engagements that he has entered into on our behalf, with respect to his acknowledgement of us, if we appear to be his sheep, in the great day of account. But,

2. IN vain do we pretend to *bear* Christ's voice, if we are not concerned to *follow* him. These are the marks, by which his sheep are known now, and by which they must be tried hereafter; they *know* him, and they *follow* him. They must prove their knowledge of him, and their faith in him, by their obedience to him. Mere speculative knowledge will be of no avail, and the highest pretensions to an experimental acquaintance with him will only enhance the misery of their condemnation, who do not follow him in a faithful obedience to his commandments, and imitation of his example.

3. AND lastly, we may safely conclude that *Christ's* sheep shall never perish, since they are in his hands. And he says, in the
verse

§ Psal. ciii. 14.

verse following my text, *I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.* But as I intend some discourses from these words, I shall stop here, and leave what I have said to the blessing of the great shepherd, and bishop of souls.

