



# S E R M O N   X I V .

*On the final perseverance of the saints.*

JOHN X. 28.

*And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

The fourth SERMON on this text.



HAVE, in some former discourses from these words, endeavoured to explain the meaning of the great doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, and to establish the truth of it by several arguments; and then I came to answer the most considerable of those objections which are advanced against it. And here, I have gone through the most remarkable texts of scripture, which are produced by the enemies of this doctrine in order to overthrow it, and shall now go on,

3. To the consideration of those personal instances, which are found in the word of God, of defection and apostacy, by which they think they can demonstrate that final falling from grace hath been the case with some, and therefore may with all. And here, before I come to a particular examination of these instances, allow me to lay down a distinction or two, which may have a tendency to lead us through this part of the argument. And,

(1.) LET it be considered, that two principles, though in their own nature perfectly distinct, and contrary to each other, may subsist, at the same time, in the same person. This I think the apostle *Paul* proves at large to be his own case, in his epistle to the *Romans*, where he speaks of a two-fold law that subsisted at the same time in him: *I delight*, says he, *in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members*<sup>a</sup>. And I cannot but think, that every man, who hath been acquainted with the plague of his own heart, and is himself in the experience of the grace of God in his soul, will set his seal to the same thing; that he finds two laws, or two principles within him, the one arising from the depravity of his nature, the other from the Spirit of God.

Which

<sup>a</sup> Rom. vii. 22, 23.

Which, though it is an entire mystery to a man unacquainted with the things of God, yet none, I think, ever disputed the possibility of it. And when we have the testimony of the word of God, and the universal experience of the saints for the proof of it, I think we may, without being charged with prejudice for our own scheme, acknowledge our belief of it. Which being allowed, I observe again,

(2.) THAT the exercise of either of these principles, upon this or that occasion, doth not necessarily imply the loss or deprivation of the other. Thus when *Paul* was in the experience of the striving of the law in his members, it doth not imply the cessation of the other principle, to wit, the principle of grace in his mind. Observe, grace and corruption may be compared to two contending parties. The field that they engage in is the soul of every renewed man, while here below; and sometimes one, and sometimes the other prevails: and yet both remain, till, at death, one is entirely vanquished by the great Captain of our salvation. So that we are not to say because the law in the members of a good man hath had the better of him to day, tho' a very humbling consideration, that therefore he never had grace, or hath entirely lost it, any more than, because, upon another occasion, when in the exercise of grace, he may be perhaps a stranger to any

remarkable power of corruption, at that season; that therefore, either he never was depraved, or hath now entirely got rid of his corruptions.

WELL, taking these two things along with us, let us now consider the examples which are produced of the saints apostacy. And here we shall confine ourselves to those of *Noah*, *David*, *Solomon*, and *Peter*, who are all of them so many instances indeed that the saints may fall, and fall very low, and yet not fall from grace, either as to their interest in the favour of the Lord, or the principle of it in their souls.

To begin then with *Noah*; and you have the account of his sin at large in the book of *Genesis* <sup>b</sup>. The sum of it is this, that after his great deliverance he planted a vineyard, which became a snare to him, and accordingly he was drunken with the wine of it. Now take the sin in all its aggravations, *viz.* that it was an instance of the greatest ingratitude to God, who had shewn such miraculous and distinguishing kindness to him, in delivering him, and only him and his family from the common and universal destruction; view it again as an ill precedent to his family, and with all the other aggravating circumstances that can be supposed; and doth it any more prove that he had lost the principle of grace, than that his ready compliance with God's command

<sup>b</sup> Gen. ix. 20,—29.

mand in building the ark for the safety of his house, and afterwards his sacrificing to the Lord as a testimony of his thankfulness, prove that the principle of corruption was entirely rooted out of him? Alas! when *Noah* was sacrificing, and that acceptably too, he still had the seeds of corruption in him, or else he had never been drunken. And when he was overtaken by this sin, though grace seemed to lie inactive in his soul, he had still the principle, otherwise (and which, notwithstanding his great fall, puts his final perseverance out of all doubt) he could not have been reckoned by the apostle among those, who *died in faith*<sup>c</sup>. The same might be said with respect to *Lot*, upon a like occasion.

BUT to come to the case of *David*. I will allow them to consider his sin with all imaginable aggravations. Suppose him then a special favourite of God; taken from the sheepfold, and exalted by God's own hand to be captain of his host, and king of all *Israel*; preserved from the envy and rage of *Saul* upon many occasions, even in a miraculous way, and from a thousand other dangers; partaker of the richest spiritual as well as temporal blessings; under the strongest vows as well as the strongest obligations; see him now in the enjoyment of all things heart could wish, seated in a state of peace and tranquillity upon the throne of *Israel*; and then suppose him

<sup>c</sup> Heb. xi. 13.

contriving the wicked gratification of his sensual appetite, and the most cruel method of concealing it with the utmost foresight, engaging in it with the greatest pleasure, and remaining afterwards under the most amazing stupidity, insensible, in a great measure, of what he had done. And doth all this prove that he had lost entirely what was wrought in him by the Spirit of God? I say this transgression, great and complicated as it was, doth no more suppose him to have been without grace; than when he said, *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day*<sup>d</sup>, or when his soul was thirsting and panting after God, that he was then without a principle of corruption. But, as his humiliation was deep, so let me observe, that he not only had pardon of this sin declared to him, almost as soon as he was made truly sensible of it; but we find him afterwards speaking to this purpose, *Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me*<sup>e</sup>. Which supposes that he had then some experience of God's presence, and some enjoyment of his Spirit, and is, as tho' he had said, "Truly Lord, I deserve  
 " that thou shouldest throw off any concern  
 " for me; but I flee to thy grace, to thy  
 " covenant, to thy promises, and to thy faith-  
 " fulness, in which thou hast caused me  
 " to hope." And so it is rather expressive of the becoming sense he had of his own  
 guilt,

<sup>d</sup> Psal. cxix. 97.<sup>e</sup> Psal. li. 11.

guilt, than any fear of his losing the habitual presence of the holy Ghost, which was impossible. And the happy event is abundantly proved by the account we have of his death, in the old testament <sup>f</sup>, and the character given of him in the new <sup>g</sup>.

THE same may be said as to *Solomon* and *Peter*: corruption had the upper hand in them both, on sad occasions indeed; but it is not difficult to prove that they were not then without grace in the habit.

As to *Solomon*, tho' his sins were very great, yet the many gracious experiences that are recorded in his life, and the testimony he bore to true religion in his inspired writings, especially in the close of it, abundantly shew that the principle of grace in his soul was still preserved to the last.

AND then as to *Peter*, if you will take our Lord's word for it, he assures us, that he had *prayed* for him *that his faith should not fail* <sup>h</sup>: and you know his prayer is always prevalent, being founded in his own merit, as I have before proved at large. Now view *Peter's faith*, as to the exercise of it, and you will find it did *fail* him, and that in a most lamentable manner; so that our Saviour's prayer must refer to the principle, which, though covered with abundance of corruption, was not so entirely defaced, but the author of it soon renewed it, and it appeared again in fresh, illustrious

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<sup>f</sup> 2 Sam. 23.    <sup>g</sup> Heb. xi. 32.    <sup>h</sup> Luke xxii. 32.

lustrious exercise. Thus then you see how little these examples serve to their purpose, who would prove from them the possibility of the final apostacy of true believers : whereas all that can be concluded from them is only this, that the most eminent saint, when left to himself, may fall into sin, into great sin ; and that it is not grace received that will preserve them, when under the power of temptation, but they must have fresh measures from the fountain. But then, on the other hand, these instances will also prove, that tho' they may fall, and sink very low, yet they shall not be swallowed up, and utterly lost : for the hand of the Lord still in a measure sustains them. And let me add this, that instead of weakening, they serve exceedingly to strengthen our cause. For if persons falling thus low, have been raised again, then the foundation of God cannot but stand sure, and the truth in our text be confirmed, that *Christ's sheep shall never perish*, being under his care. I proceed now,

4. To another objection against this doctrine. And you may take the force of it in this proposition, That the doctrine which is according to godliness, and hath the greatest tendency to promote practical religion, is undoubtedly from God ; and whatever is of a contrary nature is not from him. And thus they who plead for the possibility of our falling away, even after the greatest measures



of grace received, conclude that their doctrine has a natural tendency to excite caution and circumspection, whereas the contrary leads directly to a sinful carelessness and security. Or you may take it thus, Religious fear is the main spring of obedience: but the doctrine of the saints final perseverance takes away occasion of fear, and accordingly tends to destroy instead of promoting true godliness, and therefore is not of divine authority. This I take to be the sum of what can be offered from this head. And that we may the better come at a full and satisfactory answer to it, we must,

FIRST, Endeavour to explain what we mean by true gospel-obedience, or consider what we are in reality to understand by it. And then,

SECONDLY, Shew you that the doctrine of the saints final perseverance has the greatest tendency to promote it. Accordingly I begin,

FIRST, With the thing itself that is the foundation of this objection, *viz.* gospel-obedience: and we are to inquire into the true nature of it. And in general it consists in conformity to the will of God, as revealed in his word. And would we know concerning this or the other particular action, whether it be a part of this gospel-obedience, we must enquire,

(1.) INTO the matter of it, whether it be an human appointment, or commanded by

God. For the most exact adherence to any thing in religion, which is of our own invention, and that is either contrary to, or not revealed in God's word, is very far from deserving the character of gospel-obedience. What is so, must have God's authority instamped upon it, as a warrant for our regard to it. Again,

(2.) As the matter of it must be good, and appointed by God, so it must arise from a right principle, or else, though it may be called obedience, yet it is not gospel-obedience. A man must first have his heart renewed by grace, before he can serve God, in any sense acceptably. Thus you know the apostle says, *Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin*<sup>i</sup>. *And without faith it is impossible to please God*<sup>k</sup>. So all things, of a religious kind, in which we engage, if our obedience be acceptable, must arise from a principle of affection to God, who commands them, as well as a becoming sense of our duty to him, as our Lord and King. And they must also be done in faith; that is, not only in dependance upon the merits of *Christ*, for our acceptance therein, but with a believing regard to him for assistance in the discharge of them. Thus, suppose a person setting about any religious duty, such as prayer for instance, if he is sensible that prayer is his most reasonable service, that as God is the giver of his mercies, so he hath an indisputable right to all the ho-

<sup>i</sup> Rom. xiv. 23.

<sup>k</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

homage he is able to pay him; if he is convinced that it is most reasonable, that as he *lives and moves and has his being* in, and from God, so he ought in an humble and explicit manner to acknowledge his dependance upon him; and if to this he adds the remembrance that God hath commanded this at his hands, that thus *saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them*<sup>1</sup>; and if what he does is under a sense of duty, he may be said to act from right principles. Well, but this is not all, for he must act also from a principle of love to God, such a principle as, under the influence of the Spirit, leads him as a child to his father: and as he knows that without him he can do nothing, so at the same time that he is bowing before him in a way of duty, he must look for assistance from him in a way of grace: he must eye not only the precept, but the promise; the one as the warrant, for what he does, and the other as an encouragement to the performance of it. Thus not only the matter of the action must be good in itself, and commanded by God; but the principle from which it arises must be the new creature formed in the soul, a principle of faith and love, implanted there by the Spirit of God. And this might be confirmed by many places of scripture: but the very nature of the thing shews the necessity of it: for

for how can we suppose a man to draw nigh to God as a child to a father, whilst he hath a reigning principle of enmity in his soul against him? Or how can he come to him acceptably, unless it be in the exercise of that *faith*, which is his *gift*<sup>m</sup>, and *without* which *it is impossible to please him*<sup>n</sup>? An unbeliever, a man that hath never tasted of the grace of God, may indeed come up to the letter of many of God's precepts, but while in that case, he is, in God's account, a stranger to gospel-obedience. For the first act of evangelical duty, or however one of the first, is to obey God in that great command of his, that we *honour the Son, even as we honour the Father*<sup>o</sup>, and that is by believing on him; which we cannot possibly do, but by the influence of the Spirit of God. And till he hath given us thus to believe in the Son of God, though we may boast, or pride ourselves ever so much in our conformity to the divine law, we shall find, in the issue, that it is not sufficient to entitle us to the character of christians. But, then again,

(3.) OUR obedience must not only be thus good, both as to the matter and principle of it; but also it must be genuine as to the end we have in view, which must be the glory of God. I know to this it is said, that were there no heaven in view, perhaps none in the world would trouble themselves about obedience: so that while we deny seeking our-  
selves

<sup>m</sup> Eph. ii. 8,<sup>n</sup> Heb. xi. 6.<sup>o</sup> John v. 23.

selves, this is only in pretence, and the fact is far otherwise. But to this I think it is easy to reply, that what God hath joined together no man should separate; and we know it is impossible to seek the glory of God as our ultimate end, without pursuing our own greatest, and best interests: and the regard a believer hath to heaven and eternal life, naturally arises from a principle of grace, and the love of *Christ* shed abroad in his heart, by which he concludes that the Lord hath loved him with an everlasting love, and that he hath in reserve for him more than heart can wish: and if this reflection draws forth his desire to walk becoming the gospel, and animates his obedience, it is by no means in a way of merit, but of gratitude. He may have regard to God as a rewarder, in a way of grace, and from this be encouraged in his duty, while the glory of God is the great end he has in view; and while he firmly believes that the blessedness he hopes for, is secured beyond the possibility of his losing it; that heaven and happiness are his; that God hath given him eternal life; and therefore, as the best evidence of his love to God, he desires to keep his commandments. This I say is the principal end a good man purposes in the discharge of his duty, *viz.* to glorify God: and here we may see a very material difference betwixt evangelical and legal obedience, for in the latter men seek their  
their

their own things, and little else but their own; they are looking for an interest in the favour of God in a way of merit, and, by mistaken apprehensions of themselves and their services, and of the nature of the divine Being, they are ready to conclude, that he is to be appeased by this or the other instance of obedience, and his glory has the least share in their view. Thus then I have endeavoured to state the true notion of gospel-obedience. And this leads us to the next thing, which is,

SECONDLY, To shew you that the doctrine of the saints final perseverance has the greatest tendency to promote this obedience in the christian; for it is only of such we are speaking. And, in general, I think it must be allowed, that if, as we have before proved, this obedience flows immediately from love and confidence in God, then, whatever principles have a tendency to, draw out and increase these graces in our souls, must be allowed to have the greatest likelihood to promote gospel-obedience. For, observe, as it cannot be performed without them, so in proportion to the increase or diminution of these graces, it hath been experienced, that we either run the ways of God's commandments with delight and pleasure, or are careless, cold, and indifferent. And here, that we may guard against all mistakes, observe, that no doctrine in itself, how great a tendency so ever it may have to promote any good ends in us, will  
be

be of any service to us, but as it is set home by the Spirit of God. Christians themselves may sit under the clearest displays of God's love in the gospel, and yet be unmoved, unless the Spirit of God set home the word, and attend the discovery with power and energy from himself; but, when in the hand of the Spirit, it must be allowed, that the doctrine of the saints perseverance has the greatest tendency imaginable to promote evangelical obedience. Since it is not only every where in sacred scripture recommended as an argument to excite us to it; but it gives us such evidence of the infinite greatness of the love of God to us, that must, in its own nature, powerfully tend to draw forth our love to him, which is the great hinge upon which all our obedience is to move. To reduce this to an argument you may take it thus, The more we see of God's love to us, the more we shall love him; and the more we love God, the more conscientious we shall be in obeying him. Now nothing hath a greater tendency to discover God's love to us, than what we have revealed to us in the comfortable doctrine of our perseverance. Therefore this doctrine, instead of obstructing, encourages, and promotes our obedience. The truth of this will more fully appear, if we consider how this doctrine abounds with intimations of God's special, and particular regard to us. And,

(1.) IT

(1.) IT sets before us the immutability of God's love to us. And can any thing in the world encourage a christian more in a walk becoming his profession and character, than this? What says the child of God with regard to it? "Hath the Lord not only  
 " loved me from everlasting, but is it conti-  
 " nued for ever? Is he ever mindful of me?  
 " Oh how vile, how disingenuous, and un-  
 " grateful have I been, to forget my duty to  
 " him, or to perform it in so careless, and  
 " negligent a manner? Surely the former part  
 " of my conversation shall suffice, that I have  
 " walked in rebellion and disobedience against  
 " him, or in a cold and indifferent discharge  
 " of any duty. Oh that I may now begin to  
 " act as one that hath been the object of such  
 " remarkable grace! O I am ashamed of my-  
 " self," says such a soul, "that when the  
 " love of God to me hath been like *moun-*  
 " *tains of brass*<sup>p</sup>, my *goodness* and love to  
 " him hath been *as a morning cloud, and as*  
 " *the early dew, it goeth away*<sup>q</sup>!" Whereas,  
 on the contrary, suppose the poor soul regard-  
 ing his interest in the love of God, as founded  
 on his obedience, and therefore liable to be  
 lost; suppose him to be never so certain of his  
 present interest in it, may he not justly argue  
 thus with himself? "I am now in the favour  
 " of God, but alas how soon may it be other-  
 " wise! The devils themselves were once in  
 " the

<sup>p</sup> Zech. vi. 1.<sup>q</sup> Hosea vi. 4.



“ the same case with me, but are now re-  
 “ served in everlasting chains under dark-  
 “ ness, unto the judgment of the great day<sup>r</sup>.  
 “ They had no enemies to encounter with,  
 “ no subtle tempter, no indwelling corrup-  
 “ tions, no alluring world; and yet they  
 “ fell; and oh how much more then, may  
 “ I expect the same portion, who have  
 “ a heart that is deceitful above all things,  
 “ and desperately wicked<sup>s</sup>! who have no  
 “ strength to look to, that I can depend upon  
 “ for certain assistance, no established pro-  
 “ mise upon which to ground my hope of  
 “ standing! Surely it is preferable for me to  
 “ take my fill of present enjoyments, since  
 “ I have no certain security of better in ano-  
 “ ther world.” This I humbly apprehend is  
 the very natural language of a person under  
 apprehensions of the possibility of his falling  
 away, after grace received. And I believe I  
 may, in this appeal to the experience and  
 observation of the most thriving christians, of  
 those that are the best established in the im-  
 mutability of God’s counsels, that in the view  
 of their interest in his unchangeable love,  
 they walk most chearfully and thankfully.  
 But again,

(2.) THIS doctrine represents to us the  
 nature of God’s love, as perfectly free, as  
 well as unchangeable; and thus it hath a  
 tendency to draw out our love to him, and  
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<sup>r</sup> Jude 6.<sup>s</sup> Jer. xviii. 9.

consequently our regard to his will. It represents God's love to us as a favour that we never deserved, and that was never bestowed upon us, with regard to any thing that was excellent or valuable in us, or that God expected from us: for God loved us, and so quickened us, *when we were dead in trespasses and sins*<sup>t</sup>; he foresaw nothing good in us, but what he designed to bestow upon us; and could not therefore be said to love us because of those qualities, but to love our persons, and from that to bestow them upon us. And therefore a soul, duly affected with this, will say, "Hath the Lord thus acted towards me? what, to love me when vile and exposed to his wrath! Oh what shall I render to him for all his mercies! Can I ever think any thing too dear to be sacrificed to such grace! Oh who shall deliver me from this law that leads me aside from God, when I should by such goodness be every day more effectually, and intimately drawn to him!" But then again,

(3.) THIS doctrine represents the love of God to us as pregnant with the best of fruits. It is not a disposition of kindness only, but a love that influenced the Father, when nothing less would do for our salvation, to part with his only begotten Son out of his bosom to die for us; to provide the sacrifice, and then to accept it in our room and stead. It is a love also that influenced the Son of God, in this manner,  
freely

<sup>t</sup> Eph. ii. 1.

freely to give his soul an offering for our sins, and by his sufferings and death to make atonement for us. And is it possible that we can be properly acquainted with this love, and not be constrained by it to some suitable returns? What can fill us with greater detestation of sin, than a believing view of it, as done away by the blood of the Son of God? When we consider that it was no less than this blood that was sufficient to cleanse us from it, and are apprised of the grace of God in providing it for us, I say, what monsters in nature must the children of God be supposed to be, to draw from thence encouragement to commit it? Would not that man be justly branded as an instance of unparalleled brutishness, who, when his friend had laid down his life for him, should from thence take the greater liberty to treat his counsels with neglect, and his name and memory with contempt? And can we suppose a child of God to behold his very creator bleeding, or the Son of God, in his nature, dying on the cross, to remove his guilt, and from thence be the more attached to those sins which cost his Saviour so dear, and the more encouraged to commit them? No, you must see, that whatever abuse men may make of this doctrine, yet it is very far from having any such tendency in its own nature. Whereas the contrary doctrine, which tells a man that God hath loved him indeed,

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and *Christ* hath died for him, but notwithstanding all this, his salvation depends on his own doings, and, tho' his faith be of the right kind, it may fail, his hopes may be dashed in pieces, and he may perish at last ; I say, if a man is at all acquainted with his own heart, this doctrine must lay him under great discouragement. " What," says he, " hath *Christ* " died for me, and yet am I left at such an " uncertainty about my salvation ? Can I do " nothing without him ? and have I no security " that he will assist me ; though if he doth not " I must perish ? Why, as this is but a very " small intimation of his love to me, who " might have entirely secured my salvation, " had he pleased ; so it is likely to have but " a proportionable influence on me." Thus then you see, upon the comparison, which doctrine hath the greatest tendency to draw out our love to God, and to promote our obedience to him. To sum up the argument then, let me add, in the last place,

(4.) THAT we may safely conclude, that the doctrine of the saints perseverance, or that doctrine wherein we are assured of the everlasting continuance of our interest in the love of God, must be according to godliness ; because the holy Ghost hath been pleased to make use of this very way of reasoning, all along, to unbelievers. I believe there is hardly any observation more common than this, that

in almost every epistle we have extant, and in almost every other place, where we have any duty recommended, we have some privilege laid down as an inducement to it. Now, if it may be allowed that the Spirit of God best knew what was the greatest inducement to obedience, I believe we shall find it almost universally fall on our side. I might turn you to many places; but a few that are most remarkable shall suffice. See particularly that passage in the epistle to the *Romans*, *How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein*<sup>u</sup>? that is, we that are intirely delivered from the power and dominion of it, as bringing condemnation along with it, how shall we continue in it? And again the apostle says, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*<sup>w</sup>. And once more, in his epistle to *Titus*—*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*<sup>x</sup>. I thought to have concluded this subject at this time; but there yet remains one head, and that is, to set before you the way in which we are to account for the exhortations and threatnings, which are scattered up and down in the word

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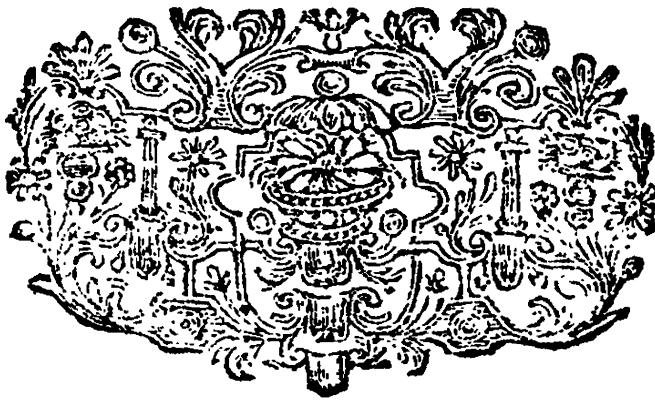
<sup>u</sup> Rom. vi. 2.<sup>w</sup> Chap. xii. 1.<sup>x</sup> Titus ii. 11, 12.

of God ; how these are consistent with the absolute security of salvation ; which, together with some general remarks upon the whole subject may serve for another discourse. I shall conclude therefore at present with a reflection or two. And,

1. FROM hence we may see how easy it is to have mistaken notions of obedience. When we act from any other principle, but love and duty to God, we may think what we please, but it is far from being acceptable to him. The matter of the act may be good, and the manner of the performance in our apprehensions may be right, and yet the end may be foreign to what it ought to be. Our obedience was never designed, under the covenant of grace, as the matter of our acceptance. No, this is *Christ* alone, in his mediatorial character, in the virtue of his blood and righteousness. And, if our obedience is well pleasing in the sight of God, it must spring from faith in this all-sufficient Saviour, from a sense of the love of God in this salvation, and be the product of a principle of grateful love, wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God. Which, leads me to add,

2. THAT, if we would grow and flourish in religion, we should earnestly pray for larger discoveries of the divine love. This is not only of the greatest consequence to support and comfort us under the various afflictions,  
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and dispondencies we are subject to, in our passage thro' this vale of tears; but to animate us in the various conflicts with which we must be tried, to fortify us against temptation, and to enable us to maintain a steady, constant, and unfainting obedience to God's righteous, and reasonable commandments.





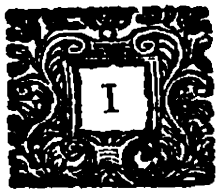
# S E R M O N X V.

*On the final perseverance of the saints.*

JOHN X. 28.

*And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

The fifth SERMON on this text.



IT is mentioned, you know, by the apostle *Peter*, as a very great and honourable circumstance in the character of *Lot*, that he was *vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked*<sup>a</sup>. And I think it cannot but sensibly affect the minds of the truly serious, who have felt the divine energy of the holy Ghost, to observe the increase of impiety and profaneness among mankind. Perhaps it hath been from this prin-

<sup>a</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 7.



principle, that in all ages, it hath been the common voice of the church, that the day wherein they lived exceeded that which went before, for daring instances of rebellion against God. But I am fully persuaded, as to this day, that a man must be a stranger in our *Israel* indeed, if he is not apprised, that error and iniquity, those two inseparable companions, seem, the one to have seated itself in the minds, and the other to have possessed the conversation, alas! but of too many, from whom, some time since, we were ready to hope better things. And can we, ought we, who are set for the defence of the gospel, to hold our peace, and not bear our testimony against them? Shall the foundations of our hope be assaulted, with daring arrogance, in public, and every thing, of a religious nature, prove the subject of raillery and banter in private, and we sit looking unaffected on? Some indeed gild over such a conduct with the specious title of charity. But I wish, how exceedingly fond soever, for the present, they may seem to be of this pretended charity, it may not be charged upon them, as an instance of unfaithfulness at the great day. With this view, in order to bear my testimony against error, I have been endeavouring, for some time, to establish the glorious truth, that shines forth with so much brightness in the words of our text, I mean that of the saints final perseverance. Which doctrine, as it is the very basis of our comfort, and has been so, in the esteem

of the saints in all ages; so we can never be too well established in the belief it.

IN some former discourses I have endeavoured to confirm your faith in this truth by a variety of arguments, which, if thoroughly understood, and weighed in the scripture-balance, may sufficiently arm, even the weakest of *Christ's* sheep, so that they need not be afraid or ashamed, when called by the providence of God, to contend with the wise and prudent, for this part of that faith which was once delivered to the saints. I shall give you a very short recapitulation of what I have delivered, for the refreshment of your memories, and then proceed to the last thing, with which we shall close our thoughts upon his subject. Our proposition then was to this effect,

*THAT Christ's sheep, being given him by the Father, or committed to him as a trust, have such a security in him, that not one of them shall ever perish, but Christ will give unto them all eternal life.*

AND I told you the question lay in this: whether an elect vessel, having once tasted of the grace of God, can entirely lose that which was wrought in him, and so finally perish. The impossibility of this, and the truth of our proposition we established from the immutable purpose of God in election; from *Christ's* having, by his glorious undertaking, and the accomplishment of it, set them out of the reach of  
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all their enemies, *viz.* sin, satan, this world, and death itself; so that of none those who would pluck them out of *Christ's* hand, shall be able to effect it. We further established this truth from the consideration of the nature of the covenant of grace, which is *ordered in all things, and sure*; from the saints union with *Christ*, as members of his body; from *Christ's* intercession for them, which being founded in his blood and righteousness, cannot but be efficacious; from the promise of the Spirit to take up his abode in the hearts of *Christ's* sheep, and to remain with them for ever; and lastly, from the absurdity of the contrary sentiment, as derogatory to the glory of Father, Son, and Spirit. And then we came to answer objections made against it; and, in the last discourse, considered at large the tendency this doctrine hath to promote practical religion, or gospel-obedience, in answer to that cavil of our opponents, that it opens a door to licentiousness. And here I observed to you, that as love to God, and faith in him are the great springs of evangelical obedience; so, this doctrine, as revealing God's love to us, and his ability to assist us, hath the greatest tendency to draw forth those graces in our souls, which cannot but be most likely to encourage the christian in a conversation becoming the gospel. And I confirmed this by observing, that it is the very same way in which the holy Ghost always  
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proceeds. Thus you find the inspired apostle speaking, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service<sup>b</sup>.*

WHAT remains at present to be attended to, is the objection arising from the exhortations and threatnings which are scattered up and down in the word of God. And you may take the sense of it, in its greatest latitude, thus : The doctrine of the saints perseverance, considered in that absolute, unconditional way, in which we have represented it, renders all the exhortations to duty, and threatnings of punishment, in case of failure ; perfectly useless and insignificant, not to say impertinent. What avails exhorting me (says such a person) to take heed lest I fall, if I am sure this shall never be my case ? or such an exhortation as that of the apostle, *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God<sup>c</sup>*, if I am assured that God will hold me so fast, that I never shall depart from him. All that fear and circumspection, which the christian is commanded to be in the exercise of, is entirely useless. For why should he be afraid of that, which he is fully assured shall never come to pass ? Thus, I think, (our adversaries themselves being judges) the objection is represented in its full force. And,  
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<sup>b</sup> Rom. xii. 1.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. iii. 12.

if I mistake not, it is in the very words of one of their greatest champions. And now, that I may give a distinct and full answer to it, I shall,

1. PREMISE something in general concerning the fear of God. And,
2. LAY down some positions concerning the will of God in his exhortations and threatnings. And, from the consideration of both these, I hope to make it evident, that this objection, notwithstanding all its appearing force, is really invalid. I begin,

1. WITH endeavouring to state the true meaning of the fear of God. And I cannot but observe,

(1.) THAT there is a fear of God, which, in a believer, is absolutely unlawful, and therefore is expressly prohibited. This I think must be universally allowed, being so evident from many passages of sacred scripture. So, for instance, in *Isaiab's* prophecy, for the encouragement of the timorous soul, it is said, *Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not<sup>d</sup>*: and again, *Fear not, for I am with thee<sup>e</sup>*: and so in the prophecy of *Zechariah*, God says, *Fear not, but let your hands be strong<sup>f</sup>*. And *Christ* says to his disciples, *Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure*

<sup>d</sup> Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.    <sup>e</sup> Chap. xliii. 5.    <sup>f</sup> Zach. viii. 13.

sure to give you the kingdom<sup>e</sup>. And in another place, *Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*<sup>h</sup>. This then being a slavish fear of God, must be looked upon as a sin, else it would not be prohibited. And if this fear is a sin, then none of those exhortations to fear God, that we meet with in other places of scripture are to be understood in this light, because that would be charging the holy Ghost with the most palpable contradiction in the world, in commanding in one place, what he expressly forbids, and that in the same persons, and under the same considerations, in another. I might also shew you, that the children of God, being very prone to this sinful fear, the Lord hath in many places promised them deliverance from it. You have a remarkable passage in the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, wherein this matter is set before us in a very beautiful light. *Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord, neither be dismayed, O Israel: for lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest and quiet, and none shall make him afraid*<sup>i</sup>. And you know what is said of the good man; *he shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord*<sup>k</sup>. Now if God hath thus expressly forbidden it in his children,

<sup>e</sup> Luke xii. 32.    <sup>h</sup> John xiv. 1.    <sup>i</sup> Jer. xxx. 10.    <sup>k</sup> Psal. cxii. 7.

dren, and given them promises of deliverance from it, it must necessarily follow, that such a fear is displeasing to him. To which I add,

(2.) THE contrary to this slavish fear, is an humble reverential awe of God, arising from a due sense of the infinite distance there is between him and us; and this is perfectly consistent with the greatest confidence in him, both as to grace here, and glory hereafter. It is an empty conceit of the enemies to this doctrine, that because a believer is not to fear God as an enemy, or to be under a slavish apprehension of losing his favour, therefore he is not to fear God at all. There are other considerations that put him upon this duty. As he labours to set the Lord always before him, so it is in a way of filial, religious fear, and holy awe of him, not as an enemy, but as a friend, infinitely glorious. As an evidence that perfect love to God, nay, the greatest sense of our interest in his love, doth not exclude, but indeed fill the soul with this fear, see what the prophet *Isaiab* says. After he had been favoured with a most intimate discovery of God's glory, he cries out, *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*<sup>1</sup>. God's absolute purity carried a convincing evidence along with it to the prophet's mind that he  
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<sup>1</sup> *Isai. vi: 5.*

was defiled. And thus it will be with us; the more intimate our communion with God is, the more we shall see of his purity, and our own pollution: and in proportion to it, we shall abhor, and humble ourselves in dust and ashes; and the more we see of his glory, the more we shall be filled with holy awe and reverence. When the Lord draws nigh to us in a way of gracious discovery, we shall be ready enough to say, that *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints: and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him*<sup>m</sup>. One main thing wherein this fear differs from that which is slavish, is, that the one springs from love to God, and delight in him, and the other is always attended, either with some aversion to him, or exceeding hard, and unbecoming thoughts of him.

THESE things being premised, I come now more immediately to attend to the objection. And I cannot but think that an absolute assurance, that the God who hath begun, will carry on his work in our souls, is perfectly consistent with an holy awe, and a proper degree of a reverential fear of him, who by exhortations and threatenings hath acquainted us with our duty, as well as by promises of assistance hath encouraged our faith. For your farther satisfaction respecting this truth, I shall now proceed,

2. To

<sup>m</sup> Psal. lxxxix. 7.



2. To lay down the following positions, which will, I apprehend, abundantly confirm and illustrate this matter. And,

(1.) THE saints special relation to God, as children, doth not disannul, or abrogate their obligation to fear and serve him, as their creator, but indeed confirms, and establishes it. Take a view of man, as the workmanship of God's hands, and as in this respect he is God's property, so he is bound to be subject to the pleasure of his Creator, in all those laws that he shall prescribe: a failure in which you know properly calls for punishment, but does not imply a freedom from prior obligation. Thus, for instance, if we take a view of *Adam* when fallen, why, he had indeed broken God's law, and so contracted an inability, ever again, to come up to the spiritual part of any of its precepts, in his own strength. But this weakness or infirmity doth not suppose a cessation of his obligation to obedience, according to that known observation,

*THOUGH man has lost his power of obeying, God hath not lost his right of commanding.*

AND now let us transfer this to a child of God. Our Lord *Jesus Christ*, he hath fulfilled the law, indeed, for him, removed the curse, that so he might inherit the blessing; but hereby, he hath not dissolved God's right, as a sovereign, to the obedience of his children. For observe, though it is absolutely impossible that they should *do good and sin not,*

not<sup>n</sup>, and though this shall not be the matter of their condemnation, *Christ* being made *sin* for them, that they *might be made the righteousness of God in him*<sup>o</sup>; yet it doth not follow, but that God has a right to all the obedience they are able to perform. Their being redeemed ones doth not dissolve their relation to God, as his creatures, though it secures them from the punishment which would otherwise be the result of their deficiency in their obedience. This I need not dwell long upon; for concerning even the blessed spirits above, though they are in a state of perfect felicity, and in the full possession of everlasting life, yet the Lord hath the same right to homage from them, as ever. For as the obligation arises from the relation between God and them as creatures, so it remains for ever. And the work of eternity will be not only to enjoy, but to fear, and adore, the author of all our happiness. So that though, I say, we are delivered from the law, as a covenant of works, yet I very readily grant that we are obliged, in point of duty, to be found in the performance of the precepts of it. And at the same time, we can bless God, that though we come short in every thing, yet this shall not be the matter of our condemnation, *Christ* having fulfilled the law for us. Nay, this relation of ours to God, as children, is so far from destroying, that it abundantly confirms,  
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<sup>n</sup> Eccles. vii. 20.<sup>o</sup> 2 Cor. v. 21.

and establiſhes our obligation to him, according to that ſaying of our Lord, *If you love me keep my commandments*<sup>p</sup>. As if he had ſaid, “ If you are ſenſible of the greatneſs of my  
 “ love to you, in giving myſelf for you, and  
 “ this hath a tendency to excite your affection  
 “ to me, ſhew it by endeavouring to keep my  
 “ commandments; this do in my ſtrength,  
 “ *for without me ye can do nothing*<sup>q</sup>; follow  
 “ me in thoſe ways, in which I have gone be-  
 “ fore you.” This then is our firſt obſervation, that the ſaints relation to God, as children, doth not deſtroy, but abundantly confirm their obligation to ſerve him, as they are his creatures. And this being allowed us, we go on to obſerve,

(2.) THAT an exhortation to that which is our duty, may be perfectly conſiſtent with an abſolute promiſe of grace to aſſiſt us in the diſcharge of it. This is ſo evident from the general current of the word of God, that I think it muſt remain indiſputable. Thus, you know, we are commanded to *ſanctify the Lord of hoſts himſelf, and to let him be our fear, and to let him be our dread*<sup>r</sup>; and it is ſaid, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy ſtrength*<sup>s</sup>; and thus we are commanded to put our truſt in him, and ſerve him,  
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<sup>p</sup> John xiv. 15. <sup>q</sup> Chap. xv. 5. <sup>r</sup> Iſai. viii. 13. <sup>s</sup> Mark xii. 30.

and the like. Well, and are not the very same things mentioned in a way of free and gracious promise? Doth not God say, *I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me<sup>t</sup>?* and again, *I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them<sup>u</sup>?* Now, either these must be consistent with each other, or the Spirit of God must contradict himself. For you see that the very same things which God requires in a way of duty, in one place, he promises in a way of favour in another. Which being granted, we observe in the next place,

(3.) THAT all the threatenings, which are to be found in the sacred scriptures, were never designed to excite a slavish fear of God in the believer, either as to his losing his interest in him, or falling from grace: this being directly contrary to that joy, peace, comfort and satisfaction for which the Lord hath made abundant provision in his word. We cannot suppose a Being infinite in wisdom, in one place, exhorting us to rejoice in him, and in another, to be filled with the most tormenting apprehensions of his being an enemy to us, these two are incompatible. If it is our duty to joy and rejoice in the Lord, and place our confidence in him, then certainly it is not so, to be tormenting ourselves with melancholy

<sup>t</sup> Jer. xxxii. 40.

<sup>u</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

choly apprehensions, that, through the imperfection of our obedience, we shall lose our interest in the divine favour. Nothing can be more apparent, than that the design of the Lord is, that his people should honour him by believing, and rejoicing in him. And for this reason it is, that we have such repeated exhortations thereto. *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord<sup>w</sup>*, says the apostle Paul in his epistle to the *Philippians*; and a little after, *Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say rejoice<sup>x</sup>*; and thus he exhorts the *Thessalonians* to *rejoice evermore<sup>y</sup>*. Now if this is our duty, as redeemed ones, it cannot be the design of the holy Ghost, in the threatnings which are in his word, to excite that which is contrary to it, even, a strangeness to God, and a slavish fearfulness of him. But,

(4.) AND lastly I observe, that, notwithstanding what I have before said, these exhortations and threatnings are not without their use even to believers themselves. As in the one, they have their duty laid before them, and are admonished to the discharge of it, as obedience is their own act, while, at the same time, by the promises of God, their faith is encouraged to look to him for assistance; so in the other, they have the connection there is between sin and punishment set before them,

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<sup>w</sup> Phil. iii. 1.    <sup>x</sup> Chap. iv. 4.    <sup>y</sup> 1 Thess. v. 16.

for their humiliation on the one hand, in a just apprehension that, unless the Lord was to keep them, this would certainly be their case, as well as it is the case of those who perish; and on the other hand, it is to excite their gratitude to God, by whose grace and assistance they are sensible they shall be preserved.

THUS, for instance, when they consider such a passage as that, *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*<sup>z</sup>, they are instructed first, that they should certainly fall back, even to perdition, unless kept by the mighty power of God; and then, from the dreadful condition of those nominal professors who fall in that sort, they are quickened to holy watchfulness, and circumspection. And then, in the view of their being of that number who hold on believing to the saving of their souls, they cannot but admire the grace of God, that this distinguishing favour should be thus given to them. Thus then you see how weak this objection is. For though the exhortations to duty suppose no sufficient power in a man of himself, and without the divine aid, to discharge it; nor threatenings, in case of failure, are any just ground for the believer to fill himself with slavish and tormenting fear; yet they are not without their use, in the hand of the Spirit of God. For as be-  
lievers,

<sup>z</sup> Heb. x. 38.

lievers, in their relation to God as children, are under equal, if not superior obligations to serve him, as his creatures; and therefore may and ought to be acquainted with, and exhorted to their duty, these exhortations being perfectly consistent with promises of grace for the discharge of it; so they may converse with the threatnings of God, without sinking into a slavish fear of him, as an enemy; those threatnings being designed for their humiliation before God, *that no flesh should glory in his presence*; but, *that, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord<sup>a</sup>*: and that, from a consideration of the terrible consequences of the final apostacy of others, they may be excited to holy diligence in duty, and a grateful discharge of it, in some proportion to such distinguishing grace.

AND, thus then, I have finished what I designed, in a doctrinal way, from this subject. I intended to conclude the whole with a more large and general improvement; but as I have made some remarks on each part of this glorious truth, of the saints perseverance; as I have gone along, so I shall close all with a few reflections on this last discourse. And,

I. HENCE we may see the wisdom and grace of God, in this remarkable instance of

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<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. i. 29, 31.

it, the connection he hath been pleased to make, between what is our duty, and the promises of his grace to assist us in the discharge of it. As the one might make us afraid, when we consider our inability, so by the other we can converse with our duty with pleasure, knowing where our help is laid. But,

2. WE may also here see the preference of the covenant of grace to the covenant of works. The one like the *Egyptian* task-masters, requires the full tale of bricks, without affording the least straw to assist: the other gives every thing freely; first, an interest in the favour of God, and then grace to help us to walk becoming the dignity of our character.

3. HATH *Christ* engaged that his sheep shall never perish, what a distinguishing instance of grace must it be, to be one of his flock; and to have some comfortable assurance that this is our case? How may this comfort the weakest in the fold? And how may it support them under all the trials and dangers, they pass thro', in their way to the everlasting rest?

4. AND lastly, let us be ashamed of ourselves, that we walk no more worthy of this privilege, and that our hearts are no more filled with praises to this Redeemer, whose trust we are. Let him have all the glory of his own work. Say not, my mountain stands  
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so strong that it shall never be moved, in a way of presumption, but in a way of triumph, and thankfulness. And while you maintain this temper of mind, you will find yourselves, under the influence of the strongest obligations, to behave agreeably to your believing character, and to your glorious, and your well founded expectations.

