

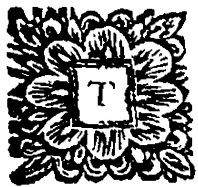


S E R M O N X V I .

The grace of the gospel no encouragement to sin.

ROMANS vi. 1, 2.

What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid: how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?



THE great apostle of the *Gentiles*, having, in the foregoing chapter, asserted the free grace of God, in the justification of a sinner, by *Jesus Christ*, and by him alone; he comes in this to answer an objection that some had raised against this doctrine, as if it had a tendency

to encourage sin. They were ready to say, “ If *Christ*, as our surety, is exalted, by bearing “ our iniquities, then let us go on in sin:” and since, the apostle had said in the preceding chapter, *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*^a, some might be ready to say, “ If such propositions as these are true, we “ have from hence encouragement to gratify “ our corruptions, and transgress without fear.” To which the apostle answers, with detestation, in the words of the text, *Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.* This objection to the doctrine of grace was not confined to the days of the apostles, but you know, nothing is more common in our own, than to hear it brought as a charge against those, who *have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*^b. If a person speaks of the perfection of *Christ's* sacrifice, and of the free justification of sinners by his blood and righteousness alone, without their works having any share in the honour of it; I say, if he represents our acceptance thus alone, *in the beloved*, it is much if he is not branded with the name of an *antinomian*, and his doctrine rejected, as having a direct tendency to encourage sinners to continue in their sins. But how unjust a censure, and how unreasonable a reproach this is on the free grace of God, which

^a Rom. v. 20.

^b Acts xx. 27.

which hath abounded towards the elect, I shall endeavour to make appear.

IN the words we have,

FIRST, the objection itself, and that is, that the aboundings of sovereign grace, have a tendency to encourage sin. The apostle tacitly supposes some offering this, by way of objection. And,

SECONDLY, we have his answer to it, with, *God forbid*, and by shewing the unreasonableness of it; *How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* I shall consider each of these, and then draw some inferences from the whole, by way of application.

I. I SHALL consider the objection itself; and it may be reduced to two heads :

I. SOME may say, “ If this doctrine be true, that if rich grace has provided for the pardon of all our sins; and if, by the settlements of the covenant, and the satisfaction of *Christ*, we are certainly delivered from the righteous punishment they have deserved; then we may with safety indulge ourselves in the vilest of practices.” This, you know is an inference, that corrupt reason draws from such glorious premises. “ If the debt is paid,” some will be apt to say, “ as you assert it is, then where is the harm of increasing it? If *Christ* hath so secured us from wrath to come, that we shall never come into condemnation, and sin shall never be able to divest us of our interest in
“ him,

“ him, then, away with all duty, and every
“ thing of a religious nature. We will go on
“ in sin, since we may do it with safety.” This
is one part of the objection.

2. IT will be also argued by way of objection, if, as the apostle says, *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*, then, men may be naturally led to go on and increase their sins, that so the riches of grace may shine forth with greater lustre. “ You allow with us,” will such say, “ that it is good
“ to labour that grace may abound, or that
“ God may be exalted in pardoning our iniquities : and if he is so much the more exalted,
“ by how much the more our offences have
“ abounded ; then we will indulge sin, and that
“ even in flagrant instances, that so rich grace
“ may appear the more glorious.” This is putting the objection in its full strength, and let me tell you, it has constantly been so, from the apostles days even until now. As there have not been wanting some persons, who have been so far abandoned, as to turn the grace of God into such wantonness, as this, so others there always have been, who have dared to charge the doctrine of the grace of God, with having in itself a tendency to promote it, and have therefore rejected that doctrine. I persuade myself, there are very few of you but have met with this latter objection, especially when you have been engaged to plead for the exaltation of *Christ* alone, separate from our frames,
or

or duties, in point of acceptance, and justification in the sight of God. And indeed, when the Lord calls you to this, you are to expect such sort of opposition and reproach. And what is the reason? Why, suffer me to say, with regard to some persons, it is not much to be wondered at, since we have cause to fear, that in destroying their own righteousness, or excluding it from a share in their justification, you even take away their Gods: and what have they more? You destroy the foundation, perhaps, upon which they have been building for many years. And to go about to convince them of its insufficiency and danger, you will too often find, it rather exposes you to their scorn and contempt, than produces the good effect you would hope for. We are all of us so naturally fond of endeavouring to establish a righteousness of our own, that, it is no wonder we cannot easily bear the discovery of its being a bed *shorter, than that a man can stretch himself on it*^c. And unless we are taught by the Spirit of the Lord, I am sure that the man who will venture to tell us that all our prayers, our tears, and the like, are even worse than nothing, when made the matter of our justification, and acceptance with God; I say, a man that tells us thus, will be deemed by many, a licentious preacher, who opens a door to the gratification of our sensual appetites. How far, in reality, this is from
being

^c *Isai. xxviii. 20.*

being the case, I shall endeavour to shew you under the next general head: which is,

II. To consider the weakness and folly of this objection, both from the nature of things, and from the scriptures. And here let me intreat your most serious attention; and excuse me, if I am somewhat large, since this matter is of no small importance, and the odium which is cast upon us, is such, that unless the word of God will help us in wiping it off, I am sure instead of being fit to preach the gospel, we should not be fit even for christian society. The objection then is, that what we lay down is of the same nature, as if we should say, that we may *sin that grace may abound.* In answer to which,

I. WE absolutely deny the thing to be fact. For there never was a true believer who maintained it, as his avowed principle, that because of the riches of the grace of God he might go on to throw the reins on the neck of his corruptions. Observe, I do not say, that there never was a christian, who hath, when under strong temptation, been left of God, so far, as at sometimes to draw very bad conclusions, from the riches of divine grace; and how far such temptations, under a suspension of grace, have prevailed, I will not pretend to say. But, what I assert is, that it cannot be his avowed principle, which he ad-

adheres to, that he hath therefore reason or occasion given to indulge himself in sin, because it cannot do him any real damage. This is not the reasoning of God's children, or what they dare plead for. So that we absolutely deny the fact. Men may talk at this rate who have a name to live, and yet are dead; but it is not the language of renewed souls. The holy Spirit, indeed teaches, from the stability of the covenant, that sin shall not ruin us; but then the argument is always so handled, as to lead us into a solicitude for grace to walk, as becomes the gospel: And indeed the strongest motives are drawn from it to induce us to an holy, humble, and constant obedience. But again,

2. WE observe, that those who make this objection, look upon all imperfections of the christian through a wrong glass. If a man who pleads for the honour of *Christ* in our salvation, is suffered to fall into temptation, how ready are the enemies of free grace to say, "We see what is the consequence of these notions; we expected no better; the man has now plainly shewn us, that his principles lead to licentiousness, since he indulges it in his own practice?" But how unjust is this conclusion? Alas! where is the man, that *doth good and sinneth not* *? Where is the opposer of these doctrines but what sometimes falls? And how hard is it, that all the misconduct of those that defend them must be charged upon the grace of

* Eccles. vii. 20.

of the gospel? No, *God forbid*. I am sure if a man falls, it is not the grace of God that teaches him to do so: though the grace of God tells him, if he is a believer, that he shall rise again. It is true, when he falls into sin, instead of depending on his repentance, and performances to expiate and atone for it, he desires to repair to the great sacrifice, whereby *Christ* has perfected them that are sanctified. And thus, because he cannot think of making a Saviour of his duties, must he, from thence, be charged with a contempt of them? What, is there no difference between neglecting, and despising duties? Where persons conclude thus, they judge without knowledge, and censure without reason. For remember, tho' we look not to our duties to satisfy for our sins, yet we have, we humbly hope, a strict regard to them in their proper place, and it will be bad with us, if this regard is not really superior to that of those who make their all to depend upon them. But then, again,

3. ADMIT that among those who stile themselves advocates for free grace, there were some, who, should not only talk, but even act thus; must the grace of God, from thence, be sullied, as if that grace led them to this sinful conduct? No, we may much safer judge concerning such persons, that they have only a name to live, and never tasted of the grace of God; than to charge this conduct on principles, which, if received in faith, will

be necessarily productive of holiness. Might we not, with the same justice, charge a good, a wise, and gentle administration of civil government, with all the enormities that are committed by licentious men under it? You see how this would be looked upon, by men of the least sense in the world. It is, you know, always esteemed as an act of the highest injustice, to charge the irregularities of a few particular members of a community, as a brand of infamy on the constitution; and if it is so in civil societies, why not in religious ones, and where *Christ* and his interest are concerned? There have been from the first, and will continue to be, perhaps, as long as there is a church in the world, some who have crept in at unawares, who, under specious pretences of exalting *Christ*, have, not only pleaded for great irregularities, but have been chargeable with them themselves. But from thence, are we to conclude that the grace of God instructed them into this, or that the doctrines of the gospel had this influence upon them? This is not only the most monstrous absurdity imaginable, but is an act of such injustice, that we should be ashamed of in other cases. I most freely confess, there have been persons of the vilest characters, who have screened themselves under the notion of being warm pleaders for the great doctrines of the gospel: but, I am ready to persuade myself, that there are but very few, even of those that only bear the
name

name of christians, who will ever pretend to say, they committed this or the other sin, with that view, that grace might abound, and therein think they did well. However, I am thoroughly convinced that, upon the least examination, it will be found, that where there is one who is left of God to so great a wickedness as to plead for such unlawful liberty, there are multitudes who are building upon the sandy foundation of their own works, and strength to perform them, in the contempt of Christ's sacrifice and righteousness, and the aids of his Spirit, who have fallen an easy prey to the temptations of *Satan*, and the gratification of their own corruptions. But to proceed,

4. WE observe, that, whatever may be the sentiments of carnal professors, a true christian cannot possibly *continue in sin*, or avowedly do so, *that grace may abound*, because he is not in his own, but Christ's keeping; as the apostle tells the *Corinthians*; *Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price^d. And if we are Christ's, we have his spirit**, and if we have his spirit, he will teach us otherwise. Were we indeed left to ourselves, we might join with the profane, in drawing such abominable inferences from the richest grace; and not only do so in argument, but in practice too; but, blessed be God, the case is

* Rom. viii. 9.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.
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is quite otherwise. The believer is under the care of the great shepherd, who will make him hear his voice, and instruct him, not only into the way of salvation, but so influence his heart and life, that instead of drawing such conclusions, as the world would fain persuade us he doth, that he will from the love of God manifested to him, be so much the more solicitous for grace to walk as becomes his relation to *Christ*, and his character as a christian; and instead of thus vilely abusing the grace of God, it will be the business of his life and conversation to exalt and recommend it. He will, by the grace of *Christ* say, “What, did my Lord shed his blood for my sins, and shall I from thence fetch occasion to multiply my transgressions? By no means.” “*Shall I continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. I cannot so much as admit the thought: this would be so flagrant an instance of the basest and vilest ingratitude, that I cannot but abhor it.*” And how comes he indeed to say so, but by the mighty grace of God that has made him to differ? Thus I have laid down some propositions, that may serve as an introduction, to assist us in our search into scripture concerning this matter; such as, that it is absolutely false, that a christian as such, can or doth allow it as his avowed principle, to *continue in sin, that grace may abound*; that the imperfections of believers, in order to estab-

establish this charge are viewed in the most invidious light; and notwithstanding there may be, or really are some, that call themselves christians, who have the daring impiety to adhere to such an abominable principle, and bring forth the scandalous fruits of it; yet this cannot in any justice be charged on the doctrines of grace, however such men boast of their regard to them. For the devils themselves believe there is a God, and yet their enmity against him must, in no sense, be charged upon their belief of his being. I have also observed the impossibility of this, from the union between *Christ* and the believer, and his care over, and concern for him; and that he, not being in his own keeping, but in that of the great shepherd of the church, cannot, therefore, avowedly continue in such an abuse of the grace of God.

LET us now look into the scriptures, and see what arguments the Spirit of God, makes use of there, in order to press us to holiness. And if he uses the very same arguments to this purpose, which these persons think have a tendency to destroy holiness, then, either they must be mistaken, or the holy Spirit. The latter of which, God forbid that we should so much as admit the supposition of. See how the apostle argues in this same epistle where our text is; says he, *God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have*

mercy upon all^e. And accordingly he breaks out into holy admiration of the riches of divine grace. *O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*^f ! Well, and what follows? Why, *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*^g. Here is an exhortation, enforced with an argument, that the wise men of this world may treat with contempt. He does not say, “ I beseech you, if you mean to get to heaven, “ and escape eternal destruction,” which are, no doubt, just arguments, and very properly and frequently used in the holy scriptures, but, “ *I beseech you by the mercies of God, by those extraordinary instances of his favour, that he has manifested to you.*” The apostle knew well enough, that unless these would influence them, all other arguments would be to no purpose.

So, to the same purpose, is what you have in the first epistle to the *Corinthians*. The apostle had been exhorting them to *fly fornication*^h. Well, he adds this as a reason, *for ye are bought with a price* : or which is the same thing, your sins are pardoned, *therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods*ⁱ. What a sad sort of a persuasion would the apostle have been thought, and how

^e Rom. xi. 32. ^f Ver. 33. ^g Chap. xii. 1. ^h 1 Cor. vi. 18. ⁱ Ver. 20.

how preposterous his reasoning, had he lived in our days! You see, in this passage, the argument is not taken from the terrors of hell and destruction, but the very choicest blessing that we are favoured with, and that which effectually secures the soul from destruction: *Ye are bought with a price.* “You are redeemed
 “ from *wrath to come, therefore glorify God, or,*
 “ be solicitous for his grace, being thus pur-
 “ chased, as a testimony of the great sense you
 “ have of your privilege: look to the Lord for
 “ grace that you may be enabled to glorify him.” Had the apostle thought of the consequences, that some men draw from such a doctrine, he would certainly have concealed it, or however, have been very far from mentioning it as a motive or argument to the practice of holiness; when he must be sensible, that it would rather encourage to the contrary disposition and practice. However he thus manifests how different his sentiments were, from those of the objectors with whom we have to do.

SEE also what the same apostle says to *Titus,* *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, what? not to live as we list, but, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world^k.* Observe, it brings us salvation, and then teaches us, as the consequence of our having this great blessing, to walk as becomes

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those

* Tit. ii. 11, 12.

those that enjoy it. And again, *Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.* And what is the result of this? Why, it follows,—*and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*¹.

UNTO the same purpose, we have a remarkable passage in one of *John's* epistles, *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not*^m. *These things*, what things? Why, look into the preceding chapter, there he tells those to whom he writes, that, *the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin*ⁿ. This is you know the very doctrine, that these persons think would abound with such ill consequences. Well, *these things write I unto you*, says the apostle, *that ye sin not*. Some would say, were we thus to argue, that we aim rather to establish sin, than to dethrone it in the soul.—*And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*:^o Observe, his design in writing to them, is, that they should not sin, his argument is, *Christ* is their *propitiation*^p, and is entered into glory for them, as their *advocate*. So, that you see very plainly, for any to say, that the preaching of free grace, as the great argument that is to influence us in our new obedience, is so far from being a licentious doctrine, that it is the very same, that the Spirit of the Lord himself makes use of.

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¹ Tit. ii. 14. ^m 1 John ii. 1. ⁿ Chap. i. 7. ^o Chap. ii. 1.
^p Ver. 2.

THE last instance I shall give you, shall be that made use of in our text, and context. The apostle had told us, *that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*^a: and that *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*^r; or, by how much the more our sins have abounded, by so much the more glory will be brought to *Christ* our great propitiation. He comes then in our text, and brings in an objection, that might be made, *What shall we say then?* or is this the conclusion we shall draw from it, *shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?* God forbid, Says the apostle, *let it not be*^s, or, *far be it from us; how shall we who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* That is, as I humbly apprehend, “How shall we who are dead to it, “as being delivered from its ruining power “by the satisfaction of our blessed Lord: “how shall we, who have received a principle of grace, and so, our renewed part “is dead unto sin, how shall we now live “any longer, or continue with delight, and “pleasure therein? *How can we, who are “thus freed from condemnation and from “the dominion of sin, live any longer “therein?*” And thus he argues, *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of righteousness*

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unto

^a Rom. v. 8.

^r Ver. 20.

^s μὴ γένοιτο.

unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you : for ye are not under the law but under grace^t. “Ye are,” as if the apostle had said, “freed from the law as a covenant of works, or from its curse as broken, and instead of being in bondage to it, ye are now under grace. And what is the consequence of this ? Why, *sin shall not have dominion over you.*” Thus you see how the holy Ghost argues for holiness constantly, from the rich aboundings of sovereign grace, and from hence we have sufficient ground to conclude, that the wisest way to engage christians to an holy obedience unto God, is to convince them of what he has graciously done for them.

AND thus, having given you so many instances out of the scripture, of arguments taken from the free unmerited grace of God, manifested to us in the Son of his love, in whom we are all accepted, to engage us to holiness in life and conversation, you see when we take this method, we tread in the very steps of those persons, who are allowed to be inspired. And you must forgive me, if upon this occasion, I cannot forbear expressing my wonder, that any of those, who I dare not but believe have a regard for the scripture, should raise such clamours at dispensing the mysteries of the kingdom in their own light and beauty, as if they had a tendency to encourage immorality : when
unless

^t Rom. vi. 13, 14.

unless these are the proper motives of our obedience, and they operate on our minds by the grace of God given to us, whatever our pretences may be to strictness of life, there will be no more of it, than will just suit with our carnal interests. It is true indeed, that *knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men*; but surely no arguments seem so likely to influence ingenuous minds, which we suppose those of believers to become by the work of God's Spirit, as those which are drawn from the love and grace of God, and the security of their eternal state as in *Christ Jesus*. But, whatever be the effect of this reasoning, I think, I have sufficiently shewn that these, and such like motives, were those used by the apostles of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, or rather the Spirit of God by them. And thus I have endeavoured to shew you the weakness of this objection, both from reason and from scripture. What I shall further add shall be by way of application. And,

1. How abundantly doth it appear that *the carnal mind is enmity against God*^u? The scripture abounds in nothing more than the declarations of the free grace of God; and the men of this world level all their wisdom against it. There is no doctrine that is charged with such abominable consequences, as the clear declarations of the sovereign grace of our heavenly Father, in taking
us

^u Rom. viii. 7.

us into so near a relation with himself, and laying our sins on his Son : nor need we wonder at it, that, with regard to most men, this doctrine is esteemed but foolishness ; but it is very sad indeed, that, of those who have tasted of the truth of grace, any should have a share in such ungrateful treatment of it. To me it appears very plainly, that they are so far left of God. Were the matter represented in scripture under any obscurity, or would it admit of the least dispute, we might be esteemed rash for saying so : but being wrote as with a sun-beam, and being allowed in a degree, by almost all that own the authority of scriptures, that it should be disputed as it has been, plainly proves that the *carnal mind is enmity against God* : otherwise it could not but receive what is so plainly revealed.

2. How cautious should we be of admitting prejudices, against any particular truth, because of the slander that is cast upon it by the world. If the sentiments of carnal men, or of the generality of the professors of christianity, were to be the standard of truth, what the apostle says, that *when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son* *, had long ere this been banished, not only out of the world, but also out of the word of God. Instead then of entertaining an ill opinion of any sentiment because it is not received by the world, let us look very
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* Rom. v. 10.

carefully, and see whether there is sufficient foundation for it in scripture. Because, for the most part, it will be found, that those truths which are the least esteemed in the world, are the most agreeable to the mind of God. And then,

3. AND lastly, let me entreat you, who make a profession of these truths, *by the mercies of God*, to be so much the more cautious, that there may not be so much as an appearance of reason for this objection. Be not only distinguished for your sentiments, but *let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ**. The enemy will indeed be apt to reproach you, let your conduct be what it will: but O that I could say, concerning all christians, if it were the pleasure of the Lord, that their conversation bore a sufficient testimony to the reality of those truths they profess! Remember, believer, the eyes of the world are upon you, and especially if you plead for *Christ* and his salvation, and bring your testimony against any thing else being set up in his room. I say, remember the least failure in your conduct, will have the worst construction put upon it. Look to the Lord *Jesus* then, as to a Saviour who has a fulness of grace lodged in his hands, that you may be enabled to make it appear that you *are bought with a price*, even the precious blood of *Christ*, this great sacrifice, *that denying*
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* Phil. i. 27.

*ungodliness and worldly lusts, you live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world^γ. And when this is the case, let the world go on to reproach, or say what it pleaseth. Yet, since, through grace, you abhor the thought of sinning that grace may abound, walk on in the light of God's countenance, and let *Christ*, as your righteousness, be exalted in your souls; till you come to that world, where every sin, every sorrow, and all contradiction and calumny, shall eternally be done away, and you will join the spirits of just men, in that song of grateful praise, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory, and dominion for ever and ever. Amen^z.**

^γ Tit. ii. 12.

^z Rev. i. 5, 6.





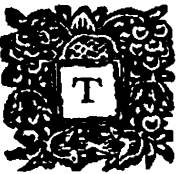
SERMON XVII.

Self-examination recommended.

PREACHED at a monthly EXERCISE,
in the Year 1744.

JEREMIAH viii. 6.

*I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright:
no man repented him of his wickedness, say-
ing, What have I done? every one turned to
his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.*

 HE importance of the work we are professedly engaged in this day, will by no means admit that I spend your time in a large explication of the context. It is sufficient to observe, that God was now reasoning the point with his people: they had sinned, and greatly rebelled against him, and their provocations were attended with most heinous aggravations: he was

was coming out of his place to execute judgment against them, which he had often threatened, in case of their continuance in disobedience. And, tho' there were awful signatures of his resentment already upon them, but few comparatively attended to them, and laid them to heart. So that God seems to be speaking after the manner of men, as surprised at their obstinacy and stupidity; and yet mercy being his delight, and judgment his strange work, there seems to be some relentings and an unwillingness to proceed to extremities. *I hearkened and heard*: these are expressions after our manner, and are to be understood with security to the glory of the divine immensity and prescience. God, as it were, stooped down from heaven, bent his ear in a way of attention to their discourse, to know whether there were any righteous holy persons among them, any who were lamenting over their own sins, or exciting one another to acts of solemn humiliation, for the transgressions of the people. *But none of them spake aright*: that is, none, if compared with the great multitude who spake against God, or whose lips uttered vanity and falsehood. *No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?* Every one was ready to shift off guilt from himself; but few, very few, hardly any mourned over their own iniquities; on the contrary, almost *every one turned to his own course*; turned away from God, from all advice and reproof, to his own course of folly and rebellion, according to his particular

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cular appetite and inclinations, and this with impetuous violence, *like the horse rushing into the battle*, not knowing it was to the hazard of his life. From the words, thus opened, we may,

FIRST, observe, that sin, in every instance of it, is evil in the sight of God, and most hurtful to the souls of men; its wickedness is great, in the account of an infinitely wise and holy judge, and will cost the sinner dear, either in the bitterness of repentance in this world, or everlasting misery in the world to come. The original word, which we render *wickedness* in the text, signifies, what divines call *malum culpæ, & pœnæ*, both criminal evil, and the punishment of it. And most true it is that there is the essence of the one, and the desert of the other, in every violation of the law of God. Many sins may appear to us little and inconsiderable, but there is not one of them, but which is abominable in the sight of God, and exposes the guilty creature to the curse of his law, and to the fury of his indignation. *The wages of sin is death*^a. Further,

SECONDLY, every man hath *his own* wickedness.—*No man repented him of his wickedness.* There are some sins which may be more properly said to be a man's *own* sins, or as the apostle *Paul* says, *the sins which do easily beset us*^b; to which, by constitution, or situation,

^a Rom. vi. 23.

^b Heb. xii. 1.

tion, we are most inclined, or most exposed. It is true indeed of all the transgressions we commit, that we are personally charged with the guilt of them, and must answer for them before God. But how apt are we to soften the language, when we are speaking of our *own* sins? This is a common case: what men call wickedness in others, they are ready to stile unavoidable failures, or mere human infirmities in themselves. But let us remember, that sin found with us is as real *wickedness*, as when committed by others; as hateful to God, yea, if possible, more so in professors, than in the profane. Sin as sin, abstractedly considered, where ever it is found is infinitely odious in the pure eyes of that God with whom we have to do: but a profession of religion aggravates it greatly. Moreover,

THIRDLY, we may further observe that, tho' we cannot make satisfaction to God for our sins, it is our indispensable duty, and, when enabled by his Spirit, a very great and invaluable mercy to repent of them. Or, as the original word signifies, to grieve for them, as having changed our minds concerning them. God complains in the text, that *no man repented him of his wickedness*: plainly suggesting, that this ought to have been the case. And what more reasonable than that a creature wholly dependent upon his Maker, and infinitely obliged to his goodness, when he

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he hath ungratefully departed from him, and rebelled against him, should repent, or, as *Solomon* expresses it, *bethink himself*, and turn to the Lord, saying, “ *I have sinned, I have done
“ amiss, I have dealt wickedly^c*; but, won
“ over by thy grace, I would return to thee
“ with all my heart, and with all my soul:
“ bear thou from the heavens, even from thy
“ dwelling-place, and forgive thy servant who
“ hath sinned against thee^d?” And, for our encouragement, there is very special notice taken of the true penitent by God, who, tho’ he is *the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity^e*, yet he saith *to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word^f*. So, in the text, God *hearkened and heard whether any spake aright, and repented him of his wickedness*. The expression may not only intimate the accuracy of the inquiry, but the great pleasure God takes in it. Wherever this is truly the case, he says, *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth^g*. In what melting, pathetic language doth

^c 2 Chron. vi. 37. ^d Ver. 39. ^e Isai. lvii. 15. ^f Chap. lxvi. 2. ^g Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

doth God speak upon *Ephraim's* making this acknowledgement? *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord*^h. Thus, in order to repentance of the right kind, it is absolutely necessary that things should be brought home to ourselves, each of us *saying*, “*What have I done? wherein have I departed from the Lord? what am I chargeable with in his sight?*” God *hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright*. Many might be making acknowledgements of the iniquities of the public, and of a general departure from God; but none repented him of *his own* wickedness, *saying, what have I done?*

AND thus I am brought to what I had chiefly in view in the choice of these words, I mean the great duty of self-examination, in order to humiliation and repentance. If ever we would rightly humble ourselves before God, we must, every one of us, put this question to his own soul, *What have I done?* That this is our duty, will not be disputed in the theory, how much soever it be neglected in the practice. We are to commune with our own hearts, to *examine ourselves, to prove our own selves*ⁱ. We are to look back upon the words of our lips, the actions of our lives, and the ways we have walked in; and not only
so

^h Jer. xxxi. 20.ⁱ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

so, but we must enquire into the frames, the dispositions, and workings of our hearts, in order to discover of what kind, and nature they have been, whether good or evil. As to the manner of the performance of this duty,

1. IT should be done secretly, or in our retirements, at a distance from the business, the noise, and hurry of the world; where no eye sees us, but that of the great God. A merchant is not willingly interrupted when he is settling his accounts, and casting up his books. The most desirable company, and the most welcome at other times, is then unseasonable. And thus we should say to the world and every thing in it, Keep at a distance till the enquiry is finished. Far be it from me to suggest that a christian should live out of the world, and throw up all his temporal concerns, in order to devote his life wholly to meditation and reflection. But there are some seasons in which he is called to be alone; some things which are to pass between him and his own soul, as well as betwixt God and him, things that will admit of no earthly witness. And when this is the case, every thing else should stand still. And, by the way, it is a sorrowful sign, that the affairs of our souls are but in a bad condition, when we are afraid, or unwilling to go into our retirements, and enter into a close examination of ourselves.

2. THIS duty calls for great seriousness of spirit; for it is a business of the last importance, and therefore should be attended with

suitable solemnity. The honour of God is nearly concerned, as our lawgiver and judge. It is no trifling affair when we come, as under the eye of an infinitely righteous, and heart-searching God to say, *What have I done?* Moreover, the importance of the enquiry should make us search with the utmost deliberation, and with the severest strictness and impartiality. It is not enough that we recall the matter of our actions, but the manner, principle, and end of them are to be attended to; what knowledge we have sinned against, what convictions of our own consciences, and how often we have resisted the Spirit of God; what professions we have made, and what obligations we have been laid under to live to God, and walk closely with him, and the like. The self-love, that is found with every one of us, may tempt us to put more favourable constructions on things than we ought; as on the other hand, unbelief, and the malice of Satan may swell the charge beyond measure, and aggravate circumstances beyond the truth. But the word of God is to be our rule of judging: this is the grand directory of obedience; every deviation from the precept is evil: *the law of the Lord is pure*, and spiritual, reaching to the inward man; to our desires and affections as well as our words and actions; and, if we would come to a right knowledge of ourselves, we must, with the *psalmist*, lift up our voice to the Lord, and say, “ *Search me, O God, and*
“ *know*

“ *know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts :*
“ *thou, whose eye nothing can escape, shew me,*
“ *every evil that is in me, or hath been commit-*
“ *ted by me, and lead me in the way everlasting^k.”*

Once more,

3. THE enquiry should be entered upon with a determination, in the strength of grace, to charge ourselves with every evil we discover, to take shame to ourselves for it, to judge and condemn ourselves, and to apply to the fountain of *Christ's* blood for pardon, and to his Spirit for cleansing, and preservation, for the time to come. Duty is enjoined, not merely to throw a man into confusion, much less to drive him to despair ; but to make him loath himself in his own eyes ; to bring him to acknowledge the mercy and forbearance of God ; that *Christ* may be exalted in the character of a Saviour ; and that, under deep conviction of guilt and unworthiness, the soul may fly for refuge to him, and shelter itself, under the shadow of his wings. Nor can the case be so bad, where the heart is right with God, and solicitous to pass a righteous sentence on itself, as to admit of no relief. *The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin^l :* and we have promises from the God of truth, that if, from an humble and a heart-affecting sense of the error of our ways, *we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness^m.* *There is no man that lives, and*

Y 3

sin.

^k Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^l 1 John i. 7.

^m Ver. 9.

*sinneth not*ⁿ: but if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous^o: we have a fountain set open, to which faith may apply with comfortable assurance, that God, for *Christ's* sake, will forgive all our sins, and heal all our backslidings. Neither can we regularly come at comfort, I mean such as God gives and approves, but as having first judged ourselves, and acknowledged our guilt. Thus I have considered the duty itself, with the manner of its performance.

I go on to observe, that there are some seasons in which we are more especially called to attend to it. As,

I. WHEN conscience is stirring, and charging us with any new guilt, instead of putting off an enquiry, we should endeavour immediately to enter upon it. It is a wonderful instance of the wisdom of God, that he hath lighted up this candle in the breast of every man; and though, through the fall, this light is greatly impaired, and, till sanctified by the Spirit of God, it will not regularly and effectually do its office; yet there is not a man in our world, except those who are given over to judicial blindness, whose consciences are *seared as with a hot iron*, but feels it accusing him more or less, at one time or other, for the evil he commits. But an enlightened and a tender conscience is peculiar to the saints; and when this speaks it is the voice of God, and ought im-
medi-

ⁿ 1 Kings viii. 46.

^o 1 John ii. 1.

mediately to be attended to. When perhaps we have hastily concluded a matter, or unwarily taken this or the other step, we have often had a sudden whisper in the soul, *This is not right, you have not done well.* Whenever this is the case, the believer should immediately retire, and take a careful and serious survey of his temper or conduct, compare it with the rule, and judge himself accordingly. This is the way to maintain peace in the conscience, and a method which God greatly owns for the advantage, and improvement of his servants. Let us then be willing our own minds should charge us, when there is a proper call for it: and, on every such occasion, let us seriously enquire, *What have I done?*

2. WHEN any thing unusual befalls us, as to our persons, families, or friends, which hath the appearance of chastisement, and looks as though God was displeas'd with us. In time of *affliction* we are to consider what may be the voice of God, wherefore he is contending with us, whether we have not provok'd him by some neglect of duty, or commission of evil. It is certain God may exercise his people with affliction for the tryal and improvement of their graces: but, upon strict inquiry, we shall find guilt enough in us at all times, to justify him in his afflictive dealings with us; and sometimes he may point at some particular instances of it by his rod. And when this is discern'd, we should take up the language of the church, and say,

I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him ^p. Elibu's description of a sick man is full of instruction to our purpose. *He is chastened, says he, with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away,—and his soul draweth near to the grave* ^q. To which he adds, that in this the Lord *looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not: he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light* ^r. It is highly proper that God should be justified in all his ways, as well those of rebuke, as those of mercy; and when the hand of the Lord is upon us, or upon any that are dear to us, we should say, *Behold we are vile, shew us wherefore thou contendest with us.*

3. WHEN God hides his face from us, and we seek him in the way of his appointments, and find him not; when those duties and ordinances, which have formerly been eminently owned for our consolation and joy, are now become barren and uncomfortable; surely every child of God who values the presence of his Father, and hath sweetly tasted that the Lord is gracious, should, in this case, with his eyes directed up to heaven, lay his hand on his heart and say, “ *What have I done? What hath provoked my God to suspend the visits of his*
“ *love?*

^p Mic. vii. 9. ^q Job xxxiii. 19, — 22. ^r Ver. 27, 28.

“ love? Why is it that *Jesus*, who is my best
 “ friend, the lovely object of my supreme af-
 “ fection, oh why is it that he keeps at such
 “ a distance! that he is so long before he re-
 “ turneth to my weary, thirsty soul? Have I
 “ not been careless, and drowsy, carnal, and
 “ worldly? Is there no idol indulged, no ri-
 “ val to his glory admitted? Whence is it that
 “ I go mourning all the day long? Shew me O
 “ Lord the matter of the controversy, and take
 “ it away.” Here the believer is loudly called
 upon to search his heart, and examine his ways;
 and whilst he is faithfully attending to this,
 there is good reason to expect, from the usual
 conduct of our gracious Saviour, that he will
 surprize him with his love, and, *before* he is
aware, by the returning presence of his Lord his
 heart shall be made *like the chariots of a willing*
people.

4. ANOTHER season for this is, when God
 is coming *out of his place*, in a way of national
 judgments, and threatens, or begins to execute
 deserved vengeance: *for when his judgments are*
in the earth, the inhabitants of the world should
learn righteousness^s: and this cannot be, with-
 out searching our ways, in order to mend
 them, and turn to the Lord. The believer
 is safe in the hands of *Christ*, and the bonds
 of the covenant: let what will come in the
 course of providence, *all things shall work to-*
gether for good to him^t. But as he may have his
 part

^s Isai. xxvi. 9.

^t Rom. viii. 28.

part in outward calamities together with others ; so it highly concerns him to see whether he hath not contributed to the public guilt. Good men have always humbled themselves before God in times of public calamity, and God hath encouraged them to do so : for, says he, *If I shut up heaven, that there be no rain ; or if I send pestilence among my people : if my people shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways ; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land* ^u. On the contrary, when God is calling by public visitations to *weeping and mourning, and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen, killing sheep, and drinking wine, &c.* he looks upon himself as greatly affronted, and threatens, *Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die* ^v. Once more,

5. WE are called to this duty, when, by the authority of the magistrate, or our own mutual agreement, on account of the judgments of God, we meet together professedly to humble ourselves before him. It is indeed one great part of the service, and ought always to accompany our days of fasting and prayer. Without this, we rather mock God with declaiming against the sins of others, than honour him by taking shame to ourselves. And as we are now in the house of God on purpose to bewail our own sins, as well as the sins of all the churches in this land, and of the

^u 2 Chron. vii. 13, 14.

^v Isai. xxii. 12, 13, 14.

the nation in general, shall we not engage our own souls? Oh that I could engage mine and yours in this service! Let each of us put the question then to ourselves, and say before the Lord, *What have I done?* And here, I pass over the more enormous instances of vice, hoping that, through the goodness and mercy of our God, we have none of this kind to charge ourselves with. And it is a great favour that we are not running into all excess of riot, and abandoned, with the profligate, to open prophaneness and impiety. I would further hope that, by far, the greater part of this assembly have truly received the grace of God, have true love to the Lord *Jesus*, entire dependence on his blood and righteousness, and some good hope, through grace, that the Lord is their God, and will be their guide in this world, and their everlasting portion in the next. But let us consider, that we are not only called by the name of *christians, children of God, and friends of the bridegroom*; but have entered into a solemn profession of religion, on well-founded hope, of a saving change, wrought by the Spirit of God upon our hearts: and let us take into view the special obligations we are under from privilege and experience, from what we have in hand, and what we have in hope. Has God chosen us unto everlasting life in his Son; called us by his grace; and revealed *Jesus* in us, as the hope of our glory; spoken peace to our troubled consciences; indulged us with the light of his countenance, and given us some *Pisgah* views
of

of that glory, which will be hereafter more fully revealed, some realizing and appropriating exercises of faith? have we sat under the Redeemer's shadow with great delight, and been sealed by the Spirit of promise to the day of redemption? I say, supposing all this to be the case, the question then returns, *What have we done?* I do not say, for God, alas, how little! But *What have we done* against him? Let us a little look back upon our thoughts; how vain and unprofitable have they been; engaged about trifles, things of no moment, neither tending to our own good, nor the advantage of others? May it not truly be said, of the thoughts of our hearts, they are little worth? Were all the ravings and musings of our minds set down, how surprisngly vain and unprofitable would the greatest part of them appear? But that is not the worst. Have there not been many base and unworthy imaginations stirring in our hearts? And whatever hand the enemy may have had in them, have they not almost at all times, met with too much indulgence from us? True, there is, thro' mercy, a law in our minds opposing these things, but how doth sin and corruption seem to prevail? Again, *What have we done?* Has there not been too much irreverence of God in our solemn acts of worship? With how much difficulty are we sometimes brought to our religious duties, even those in which we have often found the greatest pleasure and advantage? How thoughtless of the glory of
 God,

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God, the object we profess to worship? what confusion in our spirits? what distraction in our affections, and strange wanderings from God, even whilst his name has been in our lips? how ready to be satisfied with the work done, though performed at a poor rate, and in a lame and imperfect manner? Farther, *what have we done?* as to our love to *Jesus?* as to faith in his blood, desire after communion with him, and zeal for his glory? Has there not been an abatement as to each of these? Once his person, righteousness, and offices were truly and abundantly precious in our esteem; we saw his superlative excellence and glory, and we could not satisfy ourselves without going out after him in a way of dependence, and reaching forth the desires of our souls after fellowship with him, were glad to do every thing we could for the glory of his name, and willing to suffer any thing for his cause and interest. But how is it now? How hath it been for months, or perhaps years past? Hath not *Jesus* been too much neglected? And have not our hearts gone after other objects? Has there not been too great an attachment to the things of time and sense, and too eager a pursuit after this perishing world? How justly may he complain of us, as having *lost our first love?* Again, how have we behaved in the day of prosperity? Hath every mercy, especially those of a distinguishing, remarkable nature filled our souls with

8 adoring

adoring apprehensions of the loving kindness of God? Have our hearts been turned towards him with grateful acknowledgements, and our lives shewn forth his praise? Or rather, have we not been proud, vain, and forgetful of God, even the God of our mercies, and of ourselves too? But further, what advantage have we made of the means of grace? and how have we improved under the droppings of the sanctuary? Hath our fruitfulness bore any proportion to the care the Lord has taken in our cultivation? When we have attended on divine ministrations of the word preached, or at the table of the Lord, have we looked for God, for the living God? Have we desired the presence of the Redeemer, and the awakening, purifying, comforting influences of the Spirit? I am afraid the enquiry must issue, as to many of us, in this mournful acknowledgement, “O my leanness, my barrenness, under rich means of fruitfulness, and profit?” Yet again, *What have we done?* Have we not been apt to envy the prosperous state of others, and to fret, and be uneasy at the dispensations of providence towards ourselves? Have there been no heart-risings when others have been loaded with honour, have increased in riches, and enjoyed a great share of health, whilst we have been disappointed, impoverished, and despised, or have groaned under pining sickness, and sore pain? And, to add no more, *What have we done?* If we have had a little comfort, or

a spiritual frame, how apt have we been to *sacrifice to our net, and burn incense to our drag* *? And when denied it, have we not grown fullen, peevish, and been ready to quarrel with God and all about us? This may serve as a specimen of the reasonableness of this inquiry. Many other particulars might be mentioned, in which the best of us may, with great propriety, put the question in the text to ourselves, *What have I done?* and upon a serious, and faithful answer to it, find reason for repentance and humiliation.

AND, with great deference to the serious piety, exemplary usefulness, and zealous spirit discovered by you, my honoured fathers and brethren, who are engaged in the great work of the ministry, suffer me, without offence, to say, that perhaps there may be yet some reason for each of us, sure I am there is great reason for me, to say with deep concern of soul before the Lord, *What have I done?* You are sensible of the great honour God has put upon us, in calling us to preach the gospel; our obligations are of a peculiar nature, and our account very awful. If I ask my own soul, “ *What have I done with*
 “ God in secret? have I been wrestling for fur-
 “ niture, assistance, and success, crying for souls
 “ to be gathered, and edified? *what have I done*
 “ in preparation? have I studied with depend-
 “ ance on the Spirit, and laboured hard to find out
 “ what might be suitable to every case, and useful
 “ to all? *what have I done* in my publick ministry?
 “ what

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“ what seriousness and reflection of spirit have I
 “ used; what earnestness and zeal for the honour
 “ of *Christ* and the good of souls? *what have I*
 “ *done* in the oversight of the flock? have I
 “ watched over them in love, taking every op-
 “ portunity to advise and reprove, as the case
 “ called for it? *what have I done* by my example,
 “ in following after righteousness, and godliness,
 “ faith and love, patience and meekness? what in
 “ every other particular of my important office?
 “ so much hath been amiss, that shame may
 “ well cover me, and there is great reason for me
 “ to cry out, *Enter not into judgment with thy*
 “ *servant* ^x, O Lord, but *according to the multi-*
 “ *tude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgres-*
 “ *sions* ^y.” But, to draw to a close, from what
 has been said we may learn,

I. WHAT a poor miserable creature the
 hardened impenitent sinner is. He is taking all
 the pains he can to stifle the convictions of his
 own mind, to put away the threatnings of God’s
 word from him, whilst he is every day *treasur-*
ing up wrath against the day of wrath, and the
revelation of the righteous judgment of God ^{*}.
 Should I be speaking to any such at this time,
 remember there is a long eternity before you.
 Perhaps you are too much engaged in the busi-
 ness of the world, or too much immersed in the
 pleasures of it, to attend to the voice of con-
 science now: but you will have nothing else
 to do hereafter. If you die in this condition,
 the worm will never cease gnawing, and with
 bitter

^x Psal. cxliiii. 2.

Psal. li. 1.

^{*} Rom. ii. 3.

bitter howlings you will cry out for ever, *Oh what have I done ! the summer is gone, the harvest over, my soul is lost for ever, and that for trifles, for vanity, for worse than vanity ! Wretch that I am, what have I done !*

2. WE may farther learn, from what hath been said, the utter impossibility of being saved by any righteousness of our own. How shall a creature, who cannot stand before the bar of his own conscience, if it is faithful, pretend to meet his judge, a God of infinite knowledge, and infinite purity ? Alas, we see but little comparatively of ourselves ! but God *searches the heart*, and understands our errors in another manner than we can do. How shall man then be just with God ? Let us therefore thankfully embrace Jesus as *the end of the law for righteousness*², and with the apostle disclaim, and give up our own, and count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, that we may be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is thro' the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith².

3. WE may infer the necessity of the operations of the holy Spirit, and the marvellous success which attends them in the work of grace wrought upon the hearts of sinners. The heart of every natural man is *fully set in him to do evil* : none of them say, *is there not a lie in*

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my

² Rom. x. 4.

² Phil. iii. 8, 9.

my right hand^b ? But they speak peace, and promise happiness to themselves, even in the ways which lead to death, and say, in a very different spirit, *What have I done* that should deserve the divine resentment ? What less than almighty efficacy can bring such a one to say, *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight*^c ? And how often have we seen such an haughty, obstinate rebel brought, with tears of contrition, to cry out, *God be merciful to me a sinner.*

4. AND lastly, From hence we may learn the happiness of the heavenly state. The believer will have nothing there to charge himself with ; will be in no danger of offending God, or grieving his spirit. Every tear will be wiped away from his eyes, every corruption banished from his soul, and he will be always in a spiritual frame, and his joy full, and without interruption. Bless God for *Jesus your hope of glory* ; live more upon his Spirit, the author of all grace ; look frequently into the promises ; believe the word, and the oath of a faithful God ; reach out the arm of faith, and let your desires go before you into that world, where your everlasting employment will be, not as at present with tears of grief to say, *What have I done ?* but with an elevation of triumph, *What hath God done ? what hath Christ done ? what hath grace, sovereign, matchless grace*

^b *Isai. xliv. 20.*

^c *Luke xv. 21.*

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grace *done* for our souls? Oh the riches of the
glory of what is *done* by Father, Son, and
Spirit! Happy now in the contemplation of
it; but thrice happy then, in the ineffable
enjoyment of it, you will for ever say, *Not
unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy
name be all the glory!*

