

THOMAS MANTON

THE DESCRIPTION,
RISE, GROWTH,
AND FALL OF
ANTICHRIST

EIGHTEEN SERMONS ON THE SECOND CHAPTER OF
THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS



WITH DIVERS CAUTIONS AND
ARGUMENTS TO ESTABLISH
CHRISTIANS AGAINST THE
APOSTASY OF THE
CHURCH OF ROME

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by Thomas Manton

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TO THE READER

READER,—Dr Thomas Manton was not so unknown to London, nor is he so much forgotten, as that his name or writings should need any of my commendations. But booksellers expecting such an office, I have great reason to be willing to serve thee in serving the memorial of such a friend. What he was I need not tell even strangers, after the character truly given of him by his friend and mine in his funeral sermon. How sound in judgment against extremes in the controversies of these times, a great lamenter of the scandalous and dividing mistakes of some self-conceited men; how earnestly

desirous of the healing of our present breaches, and not unacquainted with the proper means and terms, of which the author of his funeral sermon and I had more than ordinary experience; how hard and successful a student he was, and how frequent and laborious a preacher, and how highly and deservedly esteemed;—all this, and more, is commonly here known. The small distaste that some few had of him I took for part of his honour, who would not win reputation with any by flattering them in their mistakes or unwarrantable ways. He used not to serve God with that which cost him nothing, nor was of their mind who cannot expect or extol God's grace without denying those endeavours of man to which his necessary grace exciteth them. He knew that without Christ we could do nothing, and yet that by Christ's strengthening us we can do all things which God hath made necessary to be done by us. He was not of their mind that thought it derogatory to the honour of Christ to praise his works in the souls or lives of any of his servants, and that it is the honour of his grace that his justified ones are graceless; and that their Judge should dishonour his own righteousness if he make his disciples more righteous personally than scribes and pharisees, and will say to them, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' He knew how to regard the righteousness and intercession of Christ, with pardon of sin and divine acceptance, instead of legal personal perfection, without denying either the necessity or assigned office of our faith, repentance, or evangelical sincerity in obeying him that redeemed and justifieth us. He knew the difference between a man's being justified from the charge of being liable to damnation as a Christless, impenitent unbeliever and ungodly, and being liable to damnation for mere sin as sin, against the law of innocency, which required of us no less than personal, perfect, perpetual obedience. He greatly lamented the wrong which the truth and church underwent from those that neither knew such differences, nor had humility enough to suspect their judgments, nor to forbear reviling those that had not as confused and unsound apprehensions and expressions as themselves.

But he hath finished his course, and is gone before us, and hath left here a dark, self-distracting world, and a church of such as Christ will perfect; but, alas! yet lamentably imperfect, as their errors, divisions, contentions, and scandals have these thirteen hundred years too publicly declared. Children of the light we are, while the world is in darkness; but, alas! yet how dim and clouded! With thousands it does not so much as convince them of their ignorance, nor maketh them humbly suspicious of an erring judgment; so that through the copulation of pride and ignorance, few cry out so loud of error as the erroneous, or of heresy as the heretical, or of schism as the schismatical; and false conceptions are so common among men, that I think with almost all mankind the number of false apprehensions in comparison of the true ones is far greater than unhumbled understandings will easily believe; and yet, while mankind doth swarm with error, those that least know their own cry down even the toleration of that which, alas! we cannot cure; and if a multitude of errors must not be tolerated, I know not the person that must be tolerated. And who then be they that shall be the avengers of other men's mistakes? Christ knew that none are so forward to reproach and so backward to bear with the motes in men's eyes as they that have beams in their own.

Among such, what sort of men on earth hath more cried down error, heresy, and schism, than the Papal tribe? AWAY WITH THEM, EXTERMINATE THEM, BURN THEM, hath long been their cry, their laws and practice, little thinking how they are polluted with error, heresy, and schism themselves. The revived attempts of this consuming fiery spirit hath made those that dispose of Dr Manton's papers take these against Popery as now most seasonable; and their plainness, suited to common capacities, may make them to many more useful than more argumentative disputations. They that would have such may see errors that are unanswerable (I should say unrefutable, for I find that men, and women too, can answer anything). I confess myself not thoroughly studied in these prophetic parts of the scriptures, and therefore none of the fittest to commend such writings, any further than they commend

themselves. But I am hasting after this my dear departed brother to the world of light, where all divine mysteries are unveiled, and life, and light, and love are perfected; for which, even at the door, I am, though weak, a believing and desiring expectant.

RICH. BAXTER.

July 8, 1679.

SERMON I

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, that you be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, that the day of Christ is at hand.—
2 THES. 2:1, 2.

THE former chapter was spent in a consolation against troubles, this in a caution against error, or to rectify their judgments concerning the time of Christ's second coming. In these two first verses, we have the manner of proposal, ver. 1; the matter proposed, ver. 2.

1. The manner of proposal is very pathetic, by way of adjuration or obtestation.

2. The matter. An error had crept in among the Thessalonians concerning the speedy and immediate coming of Christ to judgment, while they were yet alive; which error the devil set on foot to subvert their faith and expose the whole Christian doctrine to contempt.

First, The manner or obtestation falleth first under our consideration, in which two things are mentioned:—

1. The coming of Christ.

2. Their gathering together unto him. Obtestations are by those things which have great reverence and respect with us, as most likely to prevail. Now these two things are mentioned:—

[1.] As weighty: 2 Tim. 4:1, 'I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, at his appearance and his kingdom.'

[2.] This was the article mistaken and perverted as to one circumstance, the time; but the thing is taken for granted as an unquestionable truth, and the support of all their hopes: 2 Thes. 1:10, 'When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.'

[3.] This was a famous Christian doctrine with which the apostles usually began, in planting religion in any place: 1 Thes. 5:1–3, 'But of the times and the seasons ye have no reason that I write unto you, for ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night,' &c.

[4.] It was of precious account with them: 2 Tim. 4:8, 'Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto them also that love his appearing.' So that the obtestation implieth both the certainty of their belief, and also their dear account of this article of faith; and therefore the sense is: As you do assuredly expect him, and love, and look, and long for this day, that it may go well with you, and Christ appear to your glory, so be not troubled.

Doct. 1. That the coming of Christ to the judgment is a truth well known, firmly believed, and earnestly desired by all true Christians.

Doct. 2. That when Christ shall come, all the saints shall be gathered together unto him.

Doct. 1. That the coming of Christ to the judgment is a truth well known, firmly believed, and earnestly desired by all the saints.

1. That it is well known, the apostle produceth the testimony of Enoch: Jude 14, 'Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints.' David often mentioneth it as a thing delighted in by believers; therefore, in a poetical, or rather prophetical strain, he calleth upon the heavens, earth, sea, and fields to rejoice 'before the Lord, for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth; he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth,' Ps. 96:13; and again, Ps. 98:9, he calleth upon the creatures to rejoice 'before the Lord, for he cometh to judge the earth; with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity;' passages which relate, not only to the kingdom of the Messiah, as it is exercised now in the world, but also to his final act of judging, till which time they are not fully verified. Solomon bindeth the whole duty of man upon him by this consideration: Eccles. 12:13, 14, 'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man; for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.' And the apostles, when they went abroad to proselytise the world, usually began with this point.

2. That this is firmly believed by all true Christians. This must needs be so, because it is the grand inducement to all piety and godliness, and none ever disbelieved it but those the interest of whose lusts engaged them to question it: 2 Peter 3:3–5, 'Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of,' &c. Willingly ignorant; their interest puts them upon it, rather than their conscience, because this doctrine filleth them with unquiet thoughts, that they cannot so securely follow their sinful practices till they blot out the fear of it, or banish the thoughts of it out of their hearts. But all that obey the teachings of grace (take it for objective or subjective grace), they firmly believe it: Titus 2:11–13, '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, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.' The sound belief of it is not so much encountered with the doubts of the mind, as the inclinations of their perverse hearts. Now, the seeming reasons of partial men are not to be heard, especially as delivered in a scoffing, malicious way; and on the other side, godliness and mortification standeth upon such evident reason as man's unquestionable duty, that it needeth not to be maintained by a lie and manifest falsehood. Certainly, they that deny it do not so much reason against this article of our Christian faith as scoff at it; and it is to be imputed to the malignity of their tempers, rather than the acuteness or sharpness of their reason that they do not believe it. Many things which they urge are a manifest token of the contrary; as the calamities of the good: 2 Thes. 1:4, 5, 'So that we glory in you for your faith and patience in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God.' The perversion of justice: Eccles. 3:16, 17, 'And moreover, I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there; I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.' Things must be reviewed and judged over again. A state-engine to serve order and government. Doth the benefit of mankind need a lie to promote it? Doth carnal interest govern the world, or virtue? If mere carnal interest, what a confusion would there be of all things? Then men might commit all villany, take away men's lives and goods when it is their interest, or they could do it safely and secretly, without infringement of their interest; servants poison their masters, if they could do it without discovery, and there were no sin in it; men prey upon others, if it be in the power of their hands; and 'catch he that catch can,' without impunity, would be the truest wisdom. Clear it is, virtue cannot be supported without the thoughts of a world to come; and it is unreasonable to imagine that God would make a world which cannot be governed without falsehood and deceit.

3. That it is earnestly desired by all true Christians. That is of chief respect here; for the apostle conjureth them by all that is dear and sacred in their most holy faith; and upon this I will mainly spend the first part of this discourse. I shall prove it by these two choice pieces of scripture, which describe the communion of the church with Christ, or the dispensations of Christ to the church; the one concerneth God's internal, the other his external government—the Canticles and Revelations. The book of Canticles is ended with this desire, vote, and wish: Cant. 8:14, 'Make haste my beloved, and be like a young hart or roe upon the mountains of spices.' The bride's last and great suit to the bridegroom is 'make haste,' as to his coming in glory to judge the world; not that Christ is slack, but the church's affections are strong. They that go a-whoring after the world neither desire his coming, nor love his appearing; but the spouse would have all things hastened that he might return. He cannot come soon enough to set the world to rights and complete their happiness; it is that only that will perfect their consolation, and therefore would have the blessed and longed-for meeting hastened. In the other book, of the Revelations, see how it is closed: Rev. 22:20, Christ saith, 'Surely I come quickly;' and the church, like a quick echo, saith 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus; come quickly.' It taketh the word out of Christ's mouth, and presently improveth the promise into a prayer, and so Christ's voice and the church's voice are unisons. The acclamation of the saints answereth to his proclamation. Christ saith, 'I come,' as desiring to meet with us. The church answereth, 'Even so, come,' as desiring his fellowship and company. When once faith apprehendeth the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus to judgment, love presently desireth it, as the most comfortable thing which we can ask of him; that is the farewell suit of the church to Christ. If he will grant this, all complaints, and sorrow, and sighing will be no more.

Now I shall give you reasons why this is desired by all true Christians.

1. In respect of him who is to come: his person, that we may see him who is our great Lord and Saviour. All that believed anything of Christ desired to see him; those that lived before his coming in the flesh: John 8:56, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad;' and the same affection possesseth us that live after his coming in the flesh. We know him by hearsay, we have heard much of him; he wooeth us by a proxy, as Eliezer, Abraham's servant, did Rebekah. Now, Christians would fain see him of whom they have heard, and whom they loved, and in whom they have believed: 1 Peter 1:8, 'Whom having not seen, ye love, and in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' They do not see Christ, but they have a taste of his goodness: 1 Peter 2:3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.' They have felt his comforts and live by his life; all that is wanting is but ocular vision, that they may see him face to face; therefore they long for his coming.

The excellency of Christ their head shall then be fully revealed; therefore it is comfortable to his saints to think of his second coming. It is called, 'the revelation of Christ,' 1 Peter 1:13. Christ is now under a veil, retired within the curtain of the heavens. The wicked often ask, Where is now your God? and our own unbelieving hearts are apt to question the glory of his person and the truth of his promises, when his most faithful servants are under disgrace. Christ is a glorious king, but little of his glory is seen in the world; therefore they desire that he may appear in glory and royalty; we pray that his kingdom may come.

2. The persons desiring; there is somewhat in them to move them to it.

[1.] The Spirit of Christ: Rev. 22:17, 'The Spirit in the bride saith, Come;' the Holy Ghost breedeth this desire in the church. Nature saith, It is good to be here; but this is a disposition above nature. The flesh saith, Depart; but the Spirit saith, Come. The great work of the Spirit is to bring us and Christ together; he cometh from the Father

and the Son to bring us to the Father by the Son; his business is to marry us to Christ; the promise being passed, the spouse longeth to see her beloved. It is the Spirit kindleth a desire in us of his second coming, when the marriage that is now contracted shall be consummated; when the queen shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework, and shall enter into the palace with him, there to abide for ever. Well, then, though guilty sinners would have Christ stay away still, and if it might go by voices, the carnal world would never give their voice this way, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly;' no, they are of the devils' mind, 'Why art thou come to torment us before the time?' Mat. 8:29. Thieves and malefactors, if they might have the liberty to choose, they would never look nor long for the day of assizes; but the Spirit in the bride is another thing, it giveth us other inclinations: the sooner Christ cometh the better; they can never be soon enough taken up to him, nor he come to them.

[2.] There are graces planted in us, faith, hope, and love, to move us earnestly to desire his coming.

(1.) Faith believeth Christ will be as good as his word: 'I will come again; if it were not so, I would have told you,' John 14:2. And if Christ saith in a way of promise, 'I come,' the church saith, 'Amen,' in a way of faith, 'even so, come.' If Christ had gone away in discontent, and with a threat in his mouth, 'Ye shall never see my face more, we should altogether despair of seeing him again; but he parted in love, and left a promise with us, which upholdeth the hearts of believers during his absence. Would Christ deceive us, and flatter us into a fools' paradise? What need that? He can strike us dead in an instant if we do not please him, and we have hitherto found him true in all things, and will he fail us at last?

(2.) Hope, which is faith's handmaid; it looketh for that which we do believe, it is the immediate effect of the new creature: 1 Peter 1:3, 'Begotten to a lively hope;' as soon as grace is infused, it discovereth

itself by its tendency to its end and rest; it came from heaven, and carrieth the soul thither.

(3.) Love is an affection of union; it desireth to be with the party loved: Phil. 1:23, 'I desire to depart, and to be with Christ;' therefore its voice is, 'Come, come.' He hath communion with us in our houses of clay; therefore we desire presence with him in his palace of glory. His voice now is very sweet when he saith, 'Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden,' but much more will it be so when he saith, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit a kingdom prepared for you before the foundations of the world were laid.' Reconciliation with God is comfortable, but what will fruition be!

[3.] Look upon a Christian's privileges; believers then find the fruit of their interest in him, and have their reward adjudged to them: Rev. 22:12, 'Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me.' Christ doth not come empty-handed: it is but maintenance we have from him now, but then wages; earnest now, but then the full sum; it is our pay-day, yea, rather, it is our crowning-day: 2 Tim. 4:8, 'Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God the righteous Judge will give me in that day;' 1 Peter 5:4, 'When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory, which fadeth not away.' Those that have been faithful and diligent in their duty shall not need to seek another paymaster; that which Christ giveth us in hand is worth all the pains that we lay out in his service; grace and inward peace: but then we shall have glory and honour; he will honour us in the sight of those that have opposed, contradicted, and despised us: our comfort is hidden, but our glory is sensible, and visible, and public before all the world.

Object. But how can true Christians earnestly desire it, when so many tremble at the thought of it, for want of assurance of God's love?

Ans. We suppose a Christian in a right frame, and one that doth prepare for his coming; but—

1. The meanest saint hath some inclination this way. It was one of the points of the apostolical catechism: Heb. 6:2, 'The doctrine of resurrection from the dead, and of eternal judgment:' and the apostolical catechism was for the initiating or entering of Christians into the faith and profession of the gospel: when they laid the foundation, this was one truth which was never omitted, the coming of Christ to judgment. Now faith is a believing, not with the mind only, but the heart; they were to be affected with what they did believe—*sapida scientia* was the qualification—and not with trembling only, for that would deter them from Christianity; but with rejoicing of hope, which did invite them to the practice of it: Heb. 3:6, 'Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end;' and indeed what other affection can become the thought of Christ's rewards which he will bring with him?

2. Sometimes there may be a drowsiness and indisposition in the children of God when their lamps are not kept burning: Luke 12:37, 'Blessed are those servants whom, when the Lord cometh, he shall find watching;' but the wise virgins slumbered as well as the foolish; and so for a season they may be unprepared for his coming by carelessness or remission of their watchfulness and neglect of preparation, yet the spirit and inclination this way beginneth with the new birth. A wife desireth her husband's coming home after a long journey, but it may be all things are not ready and in so good order: sometimes all good Christians desire the coming of Christ, but sometimes they are not so exact and accurate in their walkings, and therefore their affections are not so lively; security breedeth deadness, and God is fain to rouse us up by sharp afflictions.

3. The church doth really and heartily desire Christ's coming, though they tremble at some circumstances of his coming: there is a degree of bondage that hindereth much of our confidence and boldness: 1 John 4:17, 18, 'Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear,

because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love.' While we are imperfect there may be some fears how it shall go with us in the judgment. The day of judgment may be considered in esse rei, or in esse cognito,—the success of the day itself, that we may stand before Christ in the judgment, or in our apprehension of it, that we may think of it with boldness, confidence, and desire. All sincere persons shall speed well in the judgment; but while we are thus weak and imperfect, we have little confidence of our sincerity. Certainly the more holy we are, the more we are emboldened against judgment to come; therefore we must every day get a conscience soundly established against the fears of hell and damnation.

4. To be of such a temper as not at all to value, and prize, and delight in it, quencheth all sense of godliness and religion. Surely they are not touched with any fear of God who wish it would never come, who would be glad in their heart to hear such news; they have the spirit of the devil in them who count his coming their burden and torment; they cannot say the Lord's Prayer without a fear to be heard, and pray, 'Thy kingdom come,' when they desire it may never be; the thought of it casts a damp on their carnal rejoicing; and he that is afraid lest his prayers prove true, can never pray heartily; no, not with a moral sincerity.

Use. To press us to keep up a firm belief and an earnest desire of Christ's coming; this will make you heavenly-minded: Phil. 3:20, 21, 'For our conversation is in heaven, where we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' It will engage you to fidelity in your duty; for every one of us must give an account of himself to God: 1 John 2:28, 'And now, little children, abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.' To watchfulness as well as faithfulness: Luke 21:36, 'Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.' Yea, to diligence, that you may clear up your title and interest: Heb. 9:28, 'And to them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation;' 2 Peter 3:14,

'Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.' Oh, therefore, let this be a precious truth to you, which you would not forego for all the world; if others tremble at the mention of it, still carry it so that it may be your comfort and solace. In short, believe it strongly, think of it frequently, prepare for it diligently, improve it fruitfully, to all holy conversation and godliness, yea, to get oil not into your lamps only, but vessels,—grace in your hearts, as well as profess yourselves to be Christians.

Doct. 2. That when Christ shall come, all the saints shall be gathered together unto him.

For evidencing this, let me clear to you, that at the day of judgment there shall be:—

1. A congregation.
2. A segregation.
3. An aggregation.

They are all intended, but principally the last.

1. A congregation: Mat. 25:32, 'Before him shall be gathered all nations;' and not only all nations, but all persons: 2 Cor. 5:10, 'We must all (collectivè) appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one (distributivè) may receive according to the things done in his body,' &c. All that have lived from the beginning of the world unto that day shall, without exception of any one single person, from the least unto the greatest, appear before the tribunal of Christ; no age, no sex, or nation, or dignity, or greatness, can excuse us. In the world some are too high to be questioned, others too low to be taken notice of, but there all are brought forth to undergo their trial; there is no shifting or avoiding this day of appearance: Adam will there meet with all his posterity at once. Take all the distinctions of mankind, infants, and grown persons; I mean infants who die before

they are in an ordinary way capable of the doctrine of life (the scriptures are written for grown persons, the case of infants is more obscure), those of them who are born within the church, God is their God: Gen. 17:7, 'I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.' Good and bad is the next distinction,—both sorts come to receive their sentence; only the one come to the judgment of condemnation, the other to the judgment of absolution: John 5:28, 29, 'Those that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation;' Acts 24:15, 'There shall be a resurrection of the dead; both of the just and unjust.' The next distinction is men of all callings,—apostles, ministers, private Christians. Apostles: Paul expected to be judged: 1 Cor. 4:4, 'I know nothing of myself, yet am I not thereby justified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord;' he speaketh with respect to the execution of the apostolical office. Ordinary ministers: Heb. 13:17, 'They watch for your souls, as those that must give an account.' If souls miscarry through their negligence, they are answerable to God for it. Ordinary Christians: Rom. 14:12, 'Every one must give an account of himself to God.' Men of all conditions, poor or rich, weak or powerful, high and low: Rev. 20:12, 'I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God;' I mean those that are so distinguished now; these distinctions do not outlive time, there all stand on the same level; the ruffling men of the world shall then be afraid, and 'call upon the mountains to cover them from the wrath of him that sitteth upon the throne,' Rev. 6:16. The poor are not forgotten; they are God's creatures, and must undergo his judgment. Thus shall all people that live scattered up and down in the world, how much soever they differ from one another in rites, tongues, customs of living, be brought together in one place.

2. There is a segregation: Mat. 25:32, 33, 'He shall separate the one from the other, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left.' There may be now a confusion and mixture of the godly and the

wicked, as sheep and goats feed in the same pasture; and they may be all raised together according to the places where they lived and died; but then a perfect separation: good and bad are first gathered together, but the good are drawn into a company by themselves, but no pure company, till the great Shepherd will 'judge between cattle and cattle,' Ezek. 34:17; 'He will gather his saints together,' Ps. 50:5; Ps. 1:5, 'The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.' So Mat. 13:49, 'At the end of the world the angels shall come, and sever the wicked from among the just.'

3. An aggregation: believers are gathered together to him for several ends:—

[1.] To make up the number of Christ's train and attendants to wait on him: Jude 14, ἐν μυριάσιν ἁγίων, 'with his holy ten thousands;' Zech. 14:5, 'And the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with him;' 1 Thes. 4:17, 'The dead in Christ shall rise first, and we which are alive shall be caught up together in the clouds with them, to meet the Lord in the air.'

[2.] That after judgment we may be solemnly presented to God by head and poll. We were given to Christ to be preserved unto the glory we were designed for: John 17:6, 'I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me;' not by way of alienation, but oppignoration, recompense, and charge. Christ is to give an account: John 6:40, 'And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.' The form of presentation is, Heb. 2:13, 'Behold I and the children which God hath given me.'

[3.] That in one troop we may be brought into his heavenly kingdom: John 14:3, 'And if I go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.' The

whole flock shall then follow the great Shepherd of the sheep into the everlasting fold.

Use 1. Believe this gathering together to him. We are joined to the church of God's elect now by faith only: Heb. 12:22, 23, 'Ye are come to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven,' &c. Πανήγυρις is a meeting made up of many different persons gathered together from several countries into one body and one place; as the meeting of all sorts of persons from all the corners of Greece to see the Olympic Games was called the πανήγυρις; people of all countries came to behold their ἀγῶνες; so the mystical state of the church of the gospel is a general assembly, because it is not confined to one nation, but extended to believers of all nations and ages; they are drawn into a body, or heavenly society, into one fold, under one Shepherd; but they never meet in an actual assembly until the last day, which is the great congregation or rendezvous of the saints, so that now it is matter of faith.

2. See you be of the number. When some are admitted, others are thrust out: Luke 13:28, 'There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and ye yourselves thrust out;' the wicked shall not stand in this congregation. Oh, it is a blessed and a comfortable thing when we are made members of the mystical body of Christ, and have hopes that we shall be in the number of those that shall meet together in the great assembly and congregation of the righteous; that we are trained up in the church of Christ, which is the seminary of heaven; that we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints.

3. Let us improve it many ways.

[1.] To comfort us against the paucity of serious walkers and real Christians. Alas! now they are but like two or three berries upon the top of the uppermost bough; here one, and there another; in some places thinner, in others thicker, as God hath service for them; in

appearance, μικρὸν ποίμνιον, 'a little flock,' Luke 12:32. But take all together, they are a general assembly, that are 'redeemed out of every kindred, tongue, and nation,' Rev. 5:9; yea, Rev. 7:9, 'a great multitude, which none can number, of all kindreds, tongues, peoples, and nations.' As few as we are, and as despised as the interest of the godly is, we shall not want company in heaven; we see few going to heaven, but when we are gathered together we shall see that our everlasting companions are many.

[2.] To comfort us against the distance of Christian friends. We are often separated from the society of good Christians whom we love dearly, but we shall be gathered together in one congregation. The saints are now scattered by Providence; they live in divers countries, towns, houses, have little comfort of one another. They live where they may be most useful; as stars do not shine in a cluster, but are dispersed throughout the heaven; and as they are the light of the earth, so they are the salt of the earth, which is sprinkled here and there, not laid in a heap; sometimes by violence of men, persecution, and banishment; sometimes by death, which parts friends, perfectus est quem putas mortuum, like people in a wreck, got to shore before us. Now what a comfort is it to be united to all God's people, which have been, are, or shall be, to the end of the world, and to meet in one assembly: Mat. 24:31, 'They shall gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to another.' The saints shall be gathered from all quarters of the earth; though they live in several places, several times, many we never saw in the flesh, Christ will assemble them all, bring them in unto one place.

[3.] To comfort them under the degenerate and collapsed state of Christianity. (1.) The mixture of the wicked; the good and bad are here mixed, they live together in the same kingdoms, cities, societies, visible church, family, bed (perhaps), but then a perfect separation: Zech. 14:21, 'There shall no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts;' Rev. 21:27, 'Nothing that defileth shall enter there:' such a difference shall there be between the state of God's church in this world, and the world to come: here tares are mingled with

wheat, good fish with bad in the drag-net; it is hard by discipline to keep the sound from the infected. (2.) Discord; the saints are divided in affection, but then perfect harmony; they are all gathered together to Christ, and have no signs and badges of distinction to herd apart. (3.) It is universal with all the saints. (4.) Perpetual, never to part more.

SERMON II

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.—2 THES. 2:2.

WE come now to the matter of the apostle's caution, which is in the second verse: 'That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.' In which words take notice:—

1. Of the error disproved: that the day of Christ is at hand.
2. The effect which this error might produce; trouble and unsettledness of mind: that ye be not soon shaken in mind or troubled.
3. A removal of all the supposed foundations of this error, or the means which these impostors used to entice them to embrace it. Three are mentioned—spirit, word, and letter.

[1.] Nor by spirit; that is, pretence of spiritual revelation; be not soon shaken in mind by it.

[2.] Nor by word; some word of the apostle, which they pretended to have heard—and that is another sleight of deceivers; some tradition or doctrine delivered by the apostle by word of mouth.

[3.] Nor by letter as from us. This may be understood—(1.) Either of some passage in the former epistle; for the apostle saith there, 1 Thes. 4:17, 'Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air;' and because he joins himself with them, they thought he should survive until that day. Or else those warnings which the apostle gives them: 1 Thes. 5:1–3, 'Of the times and seasons I need not write unto them, for yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night,' &c. Now these warnings they might abuse; and this is one way by which men may be unsettled and unshaken, i.e., by false glosses and interpretations of scripture. (2.) Or rather the sense may be, some spurious and counterfeit writings, which was one means of deceit used in the primitive times; supposititious or apocryphal legends, wherein the apostle might be said to write something, as if Christ should come in that age wherein they lived. Now, to obviate this, the apostle is supposed to insert that passage, chap. 3:17, 'The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.'

First, From the error disproved, observe:—

Doct. That the time of Christ's coming to judgment must be patiently expected, not rashly defined or determined; for this is the error which the apostle with such earnestness opposeth here.

But you will say, Is this such an error? Do not the holy apostles themselves say, in effect, the same, as the apostle James, chap. 5:8, 'The coming of the Lord draweth nigh;' and the apostle Peter, 1 Peter 4:7, 'The end of all things is at hand.' Yea, Paul himself. 1 Cor. 10:11, 'These are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come;' and Rom. 13:12, 'The night is far spent, and the day is at hand;' where by night is meant the state of ignorance, sin, and paganism before conversion; and by the day is meant the state of our full regeneration and illumination in eternal glory, when the corrupt world shall come to an end, and all shadows shall fly away. As if he had said, The morning of the resurrection is at hand, the night is far

spent—not quite past—and the day is at hand; the night is not thoroughly gone, nor the day wholly come, yet, he saith, it is at hand. What evil was in this opinion, that the apostle should with such vehemency argue and reason against it? Ans. There is some difference in the words, for ἤγγικεν signifies, it draweth near; ἐνέστηκεν, it is begun already. But the sense is vastly different; for by these and such like expressions the apostle only did intend that the last dispensation was then on foot—no other change of dispensation or worship was to be expected till the coming of Christ. But I shall more clearly and distinctly show—

1. What reason the apostle had to speak at this rate.
2. What little reason these seducers had to pervert this speech to countenance their hypothesis or supposition.

1. For the first, the apostle had reason to say the day of the Lord was at hand.

[1.] With respect of faith; for faith gives a kind of presence to things: Heb. 11:1, 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen;' that is, it gives a being, a kind of existence, to things future and afar off, and sets them before the eyes of our mind, and gives us some sight of them, as if they were already come. And therein it agrees with the light of prophecy. Look, as by the light of prophecy John saith, Rev. 20:12, 'I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened,' &c., so faith doth in effect see what it believes. Well, then, faith looking upon things distant and absent as near at hand, the apostle had reason to use this language to believers, as if the judge were at the door: Phil. 4:5, 'Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand,' not only in regard of his present providence, but also with respect to his second coming to judgment; it is as certain to faith as if he were already come.

[2.] With respect of love: love will not account it long to endure the hardships of this present world until Christ come to set all things at rights. Jacob served seven years for Rachel 'for the love he bare to her, and it seemed to him but a little while,' Gen. 29:20. If we had any love for Christ, we should be contented to suffer a while for his sake. The time is coming when the wicked shall persecute no more, when the mouth of iniquity shall be stopped, when the desire and hope of all believers shall be satisfied, when the Redeemer's work shall be consummated, when the kingdom shall be delivered up to the Father, when those that made a jest of this day shall be fully confuted. Faith sees the certainty of it, and love makes us hold out till the time come about.

[3.] The apostle might speak so, as comparing time with eternity: Ps. 90:4, 'A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night;' 2 Peter 3:8, 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' The longest time to eternity is but as a drop lost and spilt in the ocean; and all the tediousness of the present life is but like one rainy day to an everlasting sunshine: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Though troubles are lengthened as long as our lives are, yet they are but a moment in respect of eternity; we reckon by time, and not by eternity, and therefore these expressions may seem strange to us.

[4.] The apostle speaks this to particular men, whose abode in the world is not very long. Eternity and the judgment is at hand, though Christ tarry long till the church be completed, and the elect be gathered: 2 Peter 3:9, 'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.' Now, what is long, and what is afar off to the whole church, considered in several successions of ages, it is short to particular persons. Death soon puts an end to their conflict, and then their triumph ensues. And so Christ is ready to judge at all times, though the world be not ready to be judged. The coming of Christ is uncertain, and hidden for this very purpose, that men in all

ages might be quickened to faithfulness and watchfulness, and make that preparation which is necessary. Now, therefore, it concerns the messengers of God to bind men's duty upon them, by showing the nearness of it in all the fore-mentioned considerations, that they might be always ready; for so we find our Lord himself pressing it: Luke 12:40, 'Be ye therefore ready, for the Son cometh at an hour when ye think not;' Mat. 24:42, 'Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord cometh.' He may come in a moment; our duty is unquestionable, but the time of his coming is uncertain. And to please ourselves with the thoughts of a delay, is a mighty deadening thing, and quencheth our duty; yea, it is an enticement to all evil; Mat. 24:48, the wicked servant took liberty to beat his fellow-servants because of his lord's delay. We are bid to be sober and watchful, and always to be looking for the coming of the Lord.

2. The seducers had little reason to pervert this speech to the countenance of their hypothesis or supposition, and therefore the apostle had very good reason to be zealous in the confutation of this hypothesis of the seducers, who maintained that Christ would come in that age.

[1.] To inquire after the time is curiosity: Acts 1:7, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put into his own power.' Those things which God hath reserved to himself, for us to inquire after is sinful. It is a great evil to pry into our Master's secrets, when we have so many revealed truths to busy our minds about. We take it to be a piece of ill-manners to pry into that which is purposely concealed; as to break up a secret letter and the like. The practising of known duties would prevent this curiosity. These things tend not to our profit and edification.

[2.] Much more was it a sin to fix the time; it was an arrogant presumption: Mat. 24:36, 'For of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.' The peremptory time of the day of judgment God keeps to himself, and it is arrogance

for any to define it and set a time, when God has resolved to keep it secret.

[3.] The fixing of that time did a great deal of hurt.

(1.) For the present it drew away their minds from their calling, because they expected a sudden coming of the Lord. Ill impressions either destroy or weaken necessary duties.

(2.) The least error doth gratify Satan and the interest of his kingdom, for he is the father of lies.

(3.) It might shake their faith in other things when their credulity was disproved by the event; the gospel might be brought into contempt when their error only was confuted; as many men, who have been peremptory in fixing times, afterwards have thrown off their religion.

(4.) It showed a diseased mind, that they were sick of questions; as the apostle speaks, 1 Tim. 6:4, 'Doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy,' &c., when they had so much wholesome food to feed upon.

(5.) It did but engender strife among Christians, begat wranglings and disputes in the church: 1 Tim. 6:4, 'He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting (or sick) about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railing, evil surmisings.'

Use 1. Let us not fix times. Many of the ancients were too bold this way, and we are apt to it. Lactantius peremptorily said, the world would endure but two hundred years after his time. So many will fix the time of the calling of the Jews, and the destruction of Antichrist without evident grounds and reasons. What God hath revealed is enough to bear us out in our duty and suffering. In other things let us patiently wait; we see reason to do so, when we consider how many men have proved false prophets.

2. Let us not put off the time, and set it at too great a distance. Distant things, though never so great, will hardly move us; that which men put off they do in effect put away; they put far off the evil day, they would not let it come near their minds to have any operation upon them. Look, as the stars, those vast globes of light, by reason of the distance between us and them, do seem but as so many spangles, so we have but a weak sight of what is set at a great distance, and their operation on us will be but small; the closer things are, the more they will work upon us. One that looks upon what God hath revealed of this as sure and near, is more affected with it than others are. Therefore set yourselves at the entrance of that world, where you must everlastingly be, and watch and be ready. They that put it off, are apt to loiter in their work. If Christ's coming be not near at hand, certainly the time of our departure is at hand, and it will not be long ere it come about. But this is but introductory to the doctrine of Antichrist. Therefore I come to the second thing.

Secondly, The effect that this error might produce, trouble and unsettledness of mind: 'That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or troubled.' In the words there is a twofold metaphor; the one taken from a tempest, or sea-storm, as the word plainly implies, 'that ye be not shaken in mind;' and the other word is taken from the sudden alarm of a land-fight, which breeds trouble.

Doct. 1. That errors breed trouble of mind: they do not only trouble the church's peace: Gal. 5:12, 'I would they were even cut off which trouble you;' but they hinder tranquillity of mind: Gal. 1:7, 'There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.'

How do errors hinder tranquillity of mind? Partly because it is an unsound foundation; it can never yield solid peace. We only find rest for the soul in a true religion, and there where it is purely professed; others are left to great doubts and uncertainties. The Lord seems to direct us in this course when we are upon consultation about the taking up of a religion: Jer. 6:16, 'Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye

shall find rest for your souls.' Soul-rest is only found in God's way, and where it is most clearly professed. Partly because whatever false peace is bred there, it will at last end in trouble. The apostle compares seducers, Jude 13, to 'raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame;' and we are told of the locusts that came out of the bottomless pit, Rev. 9:5, that they 'stung like scorpions.' Every erroneous way of religion is comfortless; yea, their doctrine breeds anxiety, and vexes the spirit; for they have no true way of quieting the conscience; let us therefore detest error, because it is so much our interest. It is the property of truth to beget a delectation of mind; it is 'sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.' Verum est bonum intellectus—truth is the good of the understanding. Now when we understand truth satisfyingly, it breeds an incredible delight; when we have been in some perplexities, and begin to find out a truth: Prov. 24:13, 14, 'My son, eat thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet unto thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be when thou hast found it.' Honey is not so sweet to thy taste as this is to thy understanding. When a man hath found out any truth, though it be but a natural truth, it breeds its oblectation: much more spiritual truth; it is very pleasing to the understanding, and most of all when spiritual. Truth is obeyed and practised; for the understanding gives us but a sight of it, but obedience gives a taste thereof. Our Saviour saith, Mat. 11:28–30, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' If you will but come under Christ's blessed yoke and sceptre, and that way of religion he hath recommended to you, you will find an incredible peace, joy, and oblectation in your mind.

Doct. 2. That Christians should be so established, and have such constancy of mind, that they should not be easily shaken and moved from the faith.

1. Let us see how this is pressed. Sometimes it is pressed from the encouragement of your great hope: 1 Cor. 15:58, 'Be stedfast, and

unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.' First, he would have them stedfast and unmoveable; these two words have their special signification, the one is a degree above the other. A man may be stedfast in a thing, though he be moved a little in some by-matters; but now, since your innocency will bear you out, be not only stedfast but immoveable, which is a higher degree; but take it thus, be stedfast in yourselves, and unmoveable by the storms of temptation from without: a man is stedfast in himself, settled upon his own foundation; and you are unmoved when you are strengthened against outward assaults: Acts 20:24, 'None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so I might finish my course with joy.' A man may be settled in the knowledge of the truth, but he is not unmoveable except he be fortified against all temptations that may draw him off from his profession. Such constancy of mind may be well enforced because of our great hope; thus it is pleaded for there. Then the absolute necessity of it is urged at other times, as Col. 1:23, 'If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.' The same condition is required to continue as to begin our right in the privileges of the gospel. There are some conditions required for the beginning, others for the continuing of our right. Now this is absolutely required for the continuing of our right, both for present reconciliation with God, and future glory; it is upon this condition, 'if ye continue in the faith.'

2. Let us inquire what is necessary to this constancy and establishment of mind, that we may not be soon troubled and shaken; partly that our minds may be enlightened to know the truth, and our hearts renewed to believe and love the truth; for without this there can never be any constancy of mind in religion.

[1.] A clear conviction of the truth, or certainty of knowledge, a rooted assent, or well-grounded persuasion; not some fluctuating opinion about it. A half light maketh us very uncertain in our course: James 1:8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways'—

δίψυχος ἀκατάστατος; first 'try all things,' 1 Thes. 5:21, then 'hold fast that which is good.' When men resolve upon evidence, or after due examination, the truth sticketh the closer and faster by them; but when they take up things hand-over-head, they have no firm principles, and therefore waver hither and thither, as vessels without ballast are tossed with every wave: 2 Peter 3:16, 17, 'Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness'—ἴδιον στηριγμὸν, substantial grounds within themselves. They do not stand by the knowledge of others, or the faith of others, and consent of others: light chaff is carried about with every wind, περιφερόμενοι: Eph. 4:14, 'That ye henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.' They go through all parts of the compass; sometimes this wind of error taketh them up, sometimes that; sometimes taking up one opinion, then changing it for another: this is the fruit of half-convictions.

[2.] The other part of our basis is a resolution to adhere to the truth. What likelihood is there that we should continue, who are not so much as resolved so to do? The heart must be established by grace, as well as the mind soundly convinced: Heb. 13:9, 'Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace;' as the apostle speaketh of a purpose not to marry: 1 Cor. 7:37, 'He that standeth stedfast in his own heart,' &c. So here, Acts 21:13, 'I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.' A firm, thorough resolution is requisite to fortify us against all changes in religion; otherwise we are but as trees without a root, or a house without a foundation. Now this resolution of the heart is by faith and love. Faith: Heb. 3:12, 'Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.' Love: 2 Thes. 2:10, 'They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they shall believe a lie.' We are not only rooted and grounded in faith, but 'rooted and grounded in love:' Eph. 3:17, 'That Christ may dwell

in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love,' &c.

3. The opposite to this is levity and inconstancy of mind, that soon quitteth truth without difficulty, or without much hesitancy and resistance yields to the temptation. The scripture often taketh notice of this sudden embracing of error: Gal. 1:6, 'I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel;' and in the text, 'soon shaken in mind.' Credulity is a lightness in believing, when we are like reeds shaken with every wind, Mat. 11:7, and have a faulty easiness, ready to be carried away with every doctrine which pretendeth to truth: 'The simple believeth every word,' Prov. 14:15. There is a readiness of mind which is good, but it goeth on sufficient evidence; so 'the wisdom that is from above is gentle, and easy to be entreated,' James 3:17; and the Bereans were πρόθυμοι: Acts 17:11, 'They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures, whether these things were so or no.' But a readiness of mind differs from a weakness of mind, or a lightness in believing upon slender and insufficient grounds: they never receive the truth with thorough efficacy, and are prone to error.

4. The causes of this levity and inconstancy of mind are these:—

[1.] Want of solid rooting in the truth; they receive it hand-overhead, as the stony ground forthwith sprang up: Mat. 13:5, 20, 'Anon they receive it with joy;' they do not so soon receive the word, but they as soon quit it.

[2.] Want of mortification: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world.' Lusts are uncertain; fear of men, favour of men, carnal hopes will easily prevail.

[3.] A certain readiness of mind which disposeth men to conform and comply with their company, as the looking-glass representeth every face that looketh on it; so they are very changeable, and unstable as

water; as Zedekiah, Jer. 38:5, 'The king is not he that can say you nay;' soon turned this way and that way.

[4.] Want of a thorough inclination to God, so that they are right for a while, or in some things, yet they are not universally true to his interest: 1 Kings 2:28, 'Joab turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom;' Hosea 7:8, 'Ephraim is a cake not turned.'

[5.] Want of holiness and living up to the truths we know: 1 Tim. 3:9, 'Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience.' Choice liquors are best kept in a clean vessel; men provoke God to desert them and leave them to a vertiginous spirit.

[6.] Libertinism. Men think they may run from one sect of Christians to another, as the wind of interest bloweth. If they were to turn to Ethnicism, Turcism, or Judaism, they would die rather than change their religion; but they think the differences among Christians are not of such moment as to venture anything upon that account. Every truth is precious, and must be owned in its season, and it is damnable in itself to do anything against conscience, and he that giveth way to a small temptation will entertain a greater; as a man that hangeth over a precipice, when he lets go his hold, will sink further and further till he come to the bottom; therefore, it is good to be faithful in a little.

Use. Let us take heed of this evil credulity and lightness.

1. Till Christians get a settled and sound judgment they never have peace within themselves, for fears and scruples arise in the dark, and those that live in error are full of perplexities, and have not that tranquillity of spirit which they have who are fully persuaded in their own mind: Rom. 14:5, 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.'

2. If hardened in error, consider your opinions will ordinarily have an influence upon your whole religion, and will pervert your carriage towards God and men; your prayers will smell of your opinions, and

be like Balaam's sacrifice, offered to God to engage him against his own people; your love will be dispensed according to the interests of your faction: 1 Cor. 1:12, 13, 'Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?'

3. The danger of error to others. Vice is like a duel, error a war: 2 Tim. 2:17, 'Their word will eat as doth a canker;' 'All in Asia have turned from me,' 2 Tim. 1:15.

4. There is danger to yourselves, though the error be not damnable, 1 Cor. 3:13. You have not so full communion with God.

Thirdly, The third thing is the means which these impostors used to seduce them from the faith,—spirit, word, letter; by all which the apostle would not have them troubled and shaken in mind; none of these engines which the seducers used should draw them from the truth. What should poor Christians do thus assaulted? Ans. Stick to the apostolical doctrine. I shall observe:—

Doct. That a Christian should be so persuaded in religion that neither spirit, nor word, nor writing, should be able to shake or unsettle his mind. I shall show you:—

1. What ways or what means God hath appointed whereby a man may settle his choice as to opinions in religion.

2. That the word of God will sufficiently fortify him against all these false ways by which error is wont to be insinuated.

1. For the first, if a Christian would be established and guided aright in the choice of a religion, he must follow both the light of nature and scripture.

[1.] The light of nature, antecedently to any external revelation, will sufficiently convince us of the being of God and our dependence upon him: Rom. 1:19, 20, 'That which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it to them; for the invisible

things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.' For I must know there is a God, or else I cannot be certain that he hath given us a rule or revelation of his mind. We begin with what is natural, and then go on to what is spiritual. Nature will tell us that there is one God, the first cause of all things, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; that it is reasonable he should be served by those whom he hath made; that he will reward and punish men as they disobey or serve and please him: but how God will be served, how they shall be rewarded or punished, or how they shall escape punishment, if after a breach they are willing to return to their duty and obedience to him, this is revealed in the word of God.

[2.] The written word shows us the true way of worshipping and pleasing God, and being accepted with him; therefore it is a sufficient direction to us: there is enough to satisfy conscience, though not to please wanton curiosity; as that may quench the thirst of a sober man that will not satisfy the lust of a drunkard: there we are 'made wise unto salvation,' 2 Tim. 3:15—'Thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation;' and Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a light unto my feet, and a lanthorn to my paths.' There we have the knowledge of many things evident by the light of nature discovered with more clearness and certainty; and that which could not be found out by natural light, as salvation by a Redeemer, or the remedy of our lapsed estate, which, depending on the sole will and good pleasure of God, could not be known till it was manifested and revealed by him. When man sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, it was necessary that God should some way or other reveal his mind to him by word of mouth or by writing. By word of mouth, that is, either by oracles or extraordinary messengers. That sufficed while God saw fit to reveal but a few truths, or such as did not much burden the memory; and men were long-lived, and the church confined within a small compass of ground, and not liable to so many miseries and changes as now in the latter ages; and then he put it into writing, that men may not obtrude upon us their own conceits,

but we might have a standard or rule of faith and manners: Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule,' &c.

[3.] The natural truths contained in the word of God are evident by their own light. The supernatural truths, though they are above natural light, yet they are not against it, or contrary to it, and do fairly accord with those principles which are naturally known; and are confirmed,—partly by an antecedent testimony, which is prophecy; partly by an innate evidence in their own frame and contexture; partly by a subsequent evidence, which is valuable testimony as to matter of fact. The antecedent testimony: John 5:39, 'Search the scriptures, for in them ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me;' 2 Peter 1:19, 'We have a more sure word of prophecy, to which we do well to give heed, as to a light shining in dark places.' The innate and concomitant evidence: 2 Cor. 4:2–4, 'We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. For if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.' The subsequent testimony, the apostles: Acts 5:32, 'We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.' They were eye and ear witnesses of great fidelity and credit; their religion forbiddeth them to lie for God, and they were accompanied with the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, not only in giving them success in the face of the learned world, hunting out the devil everywhere, but also by miracles, divers signs, and wonders; and they and their followers endured all manner of torments and death to witness to the truth of these things, and transmitted them to us with assurance of God's owning this doctrine.

[4.] The word being thus stated and put into a sure record, it is intelligible enough, in all necessary matters at least; for if God should speak or write darkly to his people, especially in necessary things, it

is because he could not or would not speak otherwise. The former is direct blasphemy: Exod. 4:11, 'Who hath made man's mouth? have not I, the Lord?' The latter cannot be said, because that is contrary to his goodness: Ps. 25:8, 'Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners the way.' It is not to be imagined that the great and universal king should give a law to mankind, and speak so darkly that we should have no sure direction from thence, nor be able to know his mind in any of the duties God hath required of us, or expose us to great difficulties and hardships in the world. And if he had not plainly expressed his will to us, man would never leave writing and distinguishing himself out of his duty. Surely he that will venture his all for Christ's sake had need of a clear warrant to bear him out, for none will hazard all that is near and dear to him but for weighty reasons.

[5.] Besides, the illumination of the Holy Spirit doth accompany this word, and make it effectual to us, to show us God as revealed in Christ: 2 Cor. 4:6, 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;' and for heaven, Eph. 1:17, 18, 'Praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.' He sanctifieth and healeth our souls, and prepareth us for the entertainment of the truth, that as natural things are naturally discerned, so spiritual things are spiritually discerned: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.'

[6.] There are promises of direction made to humble and sincere minds: Ps. 25:9, 'The meek shall he guide in judgment, the meek shall he teach his way;' to the industrious: Prov. 2:4, 5, 'If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then

shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God;' to the godly and well-disposed: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself;' so to them that pray much: James 1:5, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' They that thus sincerely endeavour to know the will of God, will come to a sound, established judgment in the truth.

2. A Christian that is thus established, is fortified against spirit, word, or writing, or all suggestions that may perplex his mind.

[1.] Against pretended revelations, called here spirit.

(1.) Because having his mind thus settled, he may boldly defy all revelations pretended to the contrary: Gal. 1:8, 'Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than we have preached, let him be accursed.' Any doctrine, if diverse, or different from, or besides the written word, much more contrary to it, a Christian may reject it, and account it cursed doctrine; therefore neither church, nor angel, nor spirit is to be heard against it.

(2.) Because a Christian is upon better terms, having the written word, than if God dealt with him by way of revelations: 2 Peter 1:19, 'We have βεβαιότερον λόγον, a more sure word of prophecy;' comparing it with the voice from heaven, of which he spake before; not as if there could be any uncertainty in the Lord's voice speaking from heaven, but because a transient voice is more easily mistaken or forgotten than an authentic standing record; as Samuel thought Eli called him, when it was the Lord. It is quoad nos; though God gave evidence of the truth of such revelations as he made, yet we have more accommodate means. Our Lord intimateth such a thing: Luke 16:31, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' This is the surest ground for faith to rest upon of any that ever hath been or can be given to sinners, subject to forgetfulness, jealousies, and mistakes.

(3.) Because it is not rational to expect new revelation, now the canon and rule of faith is closed up: Heb. 2:1, 2, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip,' &c.; Mat. 28:20, 'Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you;' John 17:20 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them which shall believe on me through their word.'

(4.) Because if any such be pretended, it must be tried by the word: Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them;' so 1 John 4:1, 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone abroad into the world.'

(5.) Because they that despise ordinary means, and pretend to vision, revelation, or inspiration, are usually such as are given up by God to a vertiginous spirit, and cast into the dungeon of error, for the punishment of other sins: Micah 2:11, 'If a man walking in the spirit of falsehood do lie, he shall be the prophet of this people;' God will permit those that are both deceivers and deceived themselves to come amongst them for a plague to them. Sleidan giveth sad instances of some given up to this fantastical frenzy, that killed their own relations on pretence of inspiration, and of others that murdered fifty thousand in one day.

[2.] By word or unwritten tradition. This also should not shake the mind of a settled Christian, for this hath no constat—no evidence of its certainty, and would lay us open to the deceits of men, blinded by their own interest and passions; and if such tradition could be produced as hath unquestionable authority, it must be tried by the scripture, which is everywhere commended as the public standard, and true measure and rule, both of faith and manners.

[3.] Not by epistle as from us.

(1.) Supposititious writings, which the church in all ages hath exploded, having received only those which are unquestionably theirs whose names they bear.

(2.) False expositions. These are confuted by inspection of the context, scope of the writer, comparing of obscure places with plain and clear. Thus you see what certainty God hath provided for us to guide us in the way to eternal life.

SERMON III

Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.—2 THES. 2:3.

IN these words we have these two things:—

1. A caution against the error set afoot at that time concerning Christ's sudden coming to judgment.

2. The confutation of it. It is disproved by two antecedents and forerunners of his coming:—(1.) A general apostasy, or a defection of the visible church from the true state of Christianity; (2.) The revelation of Antichrist, described here by his names and proper titles—1st, That man of sin; and 2dly, Son of perdition.

I. Let us speak of the general apostasy that must be before Christ's coming to judgment; except there come a falling away first.

Now concerning it take these propositions:—

1. That apostasy is any defection from him to whom we owe and have performed subjection, or a falling from that lord to whom we owe fealty. I am sure, in religious matters, it importeth a defection from

our right and proper Lord. Thus the devil is an apostate, because he abode not in his first estate: Jude 6, 'And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains,' &c.; 'abode not in the truth;' John 8:44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth;' that is, forsook his obedience to God, and so became the ringleader of all rebellious creatures. So it is true of our first parents. They were apostates, they did revolt from God and their obedience to him. Therefore it is said, Rom. 5:19, 'By one man's disobedience many were made sinners.' So of their posterity; their apostasy is described by 'turning back from following the Lord,' Zeph. 1:6, and 'departing from God,' that is, his worship and service; Isa. 59:13, 'In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God.' Let us then be agreed of this notion of apostasy, which is evident, that it is a falling off from the obedience which we owe to our rightful Lord.

2. The apostasy mentioned in the text was not civil, the falling away of many kingdoms from the Roman empire; but an apostasy of the visible church from him who is Lord of the church. I prove it partly from the persons to whom the apostle wrote, who did not intermingle themselves with state affairs, or were not concerned in the interests of the Roman empire further than that they lived within the bounds of it; and this apostasy must be understood as they would conceive of apostasy with respect to the main cause wherein they were concerned and engaged, which was the profession of Christianity. Partly from the use of the word in the Christian doctrine; falling away there is certainly falling away from the faith and purity of the gospel: Luke 8:13, 'Which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.' And partly because to them it was expressly foretold that *τινες ἀποστήσονται*, 'Some shall fall away or depart from the faith,' 1 Tim. 4:1. Lastly, because those who are most concerned to maintain the notion of the civil apostasy from the Roman empire are most notorious in this defection. It is true the Roman empire lost Asia and the places adjacent by the invasion of

Eastern nations, but it was thrust out of Rome by the rebellion of its subjects, and chiefly by the influence of the Pope there, as histories manifest. So that this interpretation will not help them a jot, but hurt them not a little. So that here is a defection from our proper Lord, and a spiritual defection, not a civil.

3. The proper Lord of the Christian church is Jesus Christ, who hath purchased it with his blood, and 'died, and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord of dead and living,' Rom. 16:9; and again, Eph. 5:23, 'Christ is the head of the church, and the Saviour of the body.' He that saveth and recovereth the church out of the general apostasy of mankind, and restoreth them to their due obedience and proper happiness, he only is fit to be head of the church; and this only is Christ: we expect no opposition here.

4. The apostasy from the Lord will be determined chiefly by these two things;—(1.) By undermining his authority; (2.) Or destroying the interests of his kingdom. By these two we may understand the falling away, which is to come first.

[1.] By undermining his authority. Certainly his authority is undermined when others presume to usurp his place without his leave. Therefore, to superinduce a universal head of the visible church, which Christ never appointed, is manifestly to usurp his authority; though the party so intruding should pretend to hold his sovereignty from Christ, and under him, yet this is treason against Christ, for here is an authority set up without, and therefore against, his consent. Put the case in a temporal kingdom, and the thing will be clear. And thus the Pope is the usurping head of a rebellion against Christ. Where did Christ institute him to take this office? *Tu es Petrus* is such a stale pretence, so often baffled and defeated, and pretended upon so small grounds;—as that Christ hereby conveyed singular authority to Peter above the rest of the disciples, that from Peter it descendeth to his successors, and to those of Rome (if ever he were at Rome), and not those of Antioch;—that it is endless to pursue the absurdities of this impertinent allegation. The argument

holdeth the more strongly when the Pope condemneth all the churches that will not be his subjects, how holy, good, and obedient to the laws of Christ soever they be. Surely, if anything, this is an apostasy or a revolt from our rightful Lord; and to consent to this rebellion and usurpation is to be drawn into a conspiracy against Christ, to submit to the head of the most pernicious schism that did ever rend the church of Christ, and to betray the liberty of the people of our Lord to a tyrannical usurpation.

[2.] Or corrupting and destroying the interests of his kingdom. Certainly, wherever there is a degeneration from the purity and simplicity of the gospel, the interests of Christ's kingdom are destroyed. 'I fear,' saith the apostle, 2 Cor. 11:3, 'lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' The ancient, pure, apostolic Christianity doth only preserve the interests of Christ's kingdom in the world; there is no way of safety but by keeping there; for since godliness is a mystery, and we shall see afterwards the iniquity that is contrary is a mystery also—2 Thes. 2:7, 'The mystery of iniquity doth already work'—we need to be exactly careful to keep close to the doctrine, worship, and discipline of the first gospel church; for if these had remained pure, Antichrist had never risen. Christ's institutions would have preserved his interests in the world; but as these were corrupted, the apostasy prevailed. When the faith of the gospel was turned into dead opinions and curious questions, if not direct errors, and the worship of the gospel was corrupted by giving divine honour to saints and angels, and turned into a theatrical pomp and the pageantry of empty ceremonies, which eclipse the majesty and splendour of it; and the discipline of the church into a temporal domination, and all is carried in the world by sides and interests, that Christianity looketh like another thing, a design calculated for the present world rather than a serious preparation for the world to come; then certainly there is an apostasy and a defection from Christ; however the corrupt manners of the church be varnished over with the name of Christianity, there is a

degeneration questionless; and that is apostasy, in a mystery, such as this is, though not in open revolt from Christ.

But to make this more evident to you, let us consider what the kingdom of Christ is. The gospel kingdom is a kingdom of light, life, and love. Opposite to light is ignorance and error; to life, a religion that consists of shows, dead rites, and empty ceremonies; to love, uncharitableness, malice, and especially hatred of the power of godliness. Now where these prevail eminently, there is an opposite kingdom set up to the kingdom of Christ; certainly a falling off from his kingdom: that is to say, where, in opposition to light, error is taught, and ignorance is counted the mother of devotion, and people are restrained from the means of knowledge, as if the height of Christian faith and obedience did consist in an implicit believing what the church believeth; and where, instead of life, men place their whole religion in superficial rites and ceremonies, and some trifling acts of seeming devotion and exterior mortifications; and instead of love to God and souls, all things are sacrificed to private ambition; and forcing consciences with the highest penalties and persecutions to submit to their corruptions—there is a manifest subversion of the interests of Christ's kingdom. In short, God's witnesses were 'slain in that city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, and where our Lord was crucified,' Rev. 11:8; that city which answereth to Sodom for impurity, to Egypt for idolatry, and to Jerusalem for persecution of the saints; there may you find the great apostasy.

5. This apostasy from our Lord's authority and the interests of his kingdom is some notable and discernible apostasy, and the head patron thereof is Antichrist. The defection is not of one, or a few, or many in divers churches; there have always been backsliders from the faith: 1 John 2:19, 'They went out from us, but they were not of us;' and the spirit of Antichrist wrought in the apostles' days: 1 John 2:18, 'As you have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many Antichrists;' and again, 1 John 4:3, we are told of the spirit of Antichrist: 'And this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world;'

then described to be afterwards (ver. 5) a worldly spirit: 'They are of the world, and speak of the world, and the world heareth them.' Though they profess Christianity, carnal, worldly hypocrites, which never conquered the fleshly mind and interest, have the spirit of Antichrist; these obscure the light, and obstruct the life and love of the gospel—they that wholly affect a life of pomp and ease in the church. Now, this hath always been in all the ages. The false Christians forget their hopes are built upon a crucified Christ, and are to be derived to them from a glorified Christ in the other world—crucified in this world and glorified in the next,—which indeed are the two considerations that keep Christianity pure and lively; that all was purchased by a crucified Christ, and all is dispensed by a glorified Christ; and I wish you would oftener think of it. But the great apostasy is eminently found in some external visible church, where these corruptions are generally received and defended. For the head of that church is Antichrist, where doctrine is corrupted, and the worship mingled with idolatry, and the government a usurpation, and bent against the holy seed that desire to worship God in spirit and in truth; there is this manifest revolt from and rebellion against God and Christ, though they push with the horns of the lamb.

That the Papists are a corrupt sect of Christians is beyond dispute to any that will try their religion by the scriptures; and that they are far more corrupt than the Protestants or Reformed Churches, will also soon appear by the comparison, or a view of both churches. But whether they are so corrupt as to become the seat of Antichrist, is the matter under debate. Therefore, let any one consider where the eminent apostasy is to be found. Who are they that invade Christ's authority by setting up a universal head over all Christians? Who are they that establish the doctrine of demons, or revive the worship of a middle sort of powers between God and mortal men? 1 Tim. 4:1. Who through hypocrisy invent so many lies to maintain it, and when Christians should keep themselves from idols, 1 John 5:21, yet, in defiance of this, worship angels and other creatures: Col. 2:18, 'Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels,' &c.; and erect the images of saints,

commanding and compelling men to adore them, and pray to them? Who are they that are not contented with the one only Mediator: 1 Tim. 2:5, 'For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ;' 1 Cor. 8:5, 'For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many, and lords many), but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him,'—but set up other mediators of intercession? Who are they that plead for indulgences and the supererogatory satisfactions of the saints, as gathered into the treasury of the church, and so profitable for the remission of sins, and condemn them who think the contrary? Who are they that keep believers from reading the scriptures, when they are so expressly enjoined to do it? John 5:39, and Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' That deny one part of the Lord's Supper to his disciples, notwithstanding his institution to the contrary? 1 Cor. 11:25, 26, 'After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me; for as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come.' It were endless to instance in all: I shall speak more of it in the following verses.

6. This apostasy is not only forbidden, but foretold as a thing that would certainly come to pass. This consideration is necessary for divers reasons.

[1.] Because the Papists ask how this can be consistent with Christ's care of his church, that there should be a universal apostasy and decay of Christian religion, who hath promised 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'?

Ans. That promise is made chiefly to the invisible church, or community of the elect, not to all the visible societies of the Christians, against whom the devil can and hath prevailed, and doth

daily, to the destruction of many souls. And we say not that the whole visible church did apostatise, though all are faulty.

[2.] Because some require the time when this apostasy began to be particularly assigned and noted to them, and by what persons these corruptions were first introduced, or else deny that any such thing hath been. But the case is clear: it began to work betimes, only it wrought in a mystery. But cannot we prove a man to be old, unless we prove the first moment when his grey hairs began to appear, or his natural force to be abated? Who can tell every step of the progress of the corruption of the Jewish church? and why should the like be required of the Christian? This dunghill of corruption was not raised in one age: and suppose that in track of time authors be forgotten, matters of faith are not to be contradicted because of the defect of history. And yet histories are not altogether wanting in the case, only in things that came in by degrees they are not necessary. In the introducing of the general apostasy, some erred in the simplicity of their hearts, as the people followed Absalom, 2 Sam. 15:11. But shall we deny a thing to be done because we cannot speak the particular moments of time, and circumstances of them, when and how it was done? Shall we say the pointer in the dial passeth not, because we do not see its motion? Might not the priests judge of a leprosy, though they knew not how it was contracted? Iniquity mystical did by degrees prevail.

[3.] Because some think, if we should grant such an apostasy, it would interrupt the whole course of visible Christianity, and so deprive the world of a ministry and ordinances, till Christ send some new nuncios from heaven, or by miracle, at least, authorise a new ministry, that may be owned by the world, and received by his people. A vain conceit! for though this apostasy is foretold that it should come to pass, yet it is also foretold that Christ will be with the apostles and their successors to the end of the world, Mat. 28:20; and prayed for all them that should believe in him through their word, John 17:20; and though the church was corrupted by degrees, yet all this while it ceased not to be a church, nor the officers thereof

to be Christ's ministers. When the ten tribes fell away, yet God till their dissolution continued the spirit of prophecy amongst them; and in the Christian church a ministry, though many had their calling from such who consented to the encroachments of Antichrist. God had not so wholly cast off his people, but that there was a ministry and ordinances; their ministry was a true ministry, and the baptism a true baptism, to be owned in foro externo: for these things remain whilst anything of Christianity remaineth. In a body mangled with wounds, or all overgrown with sores, there is life remaining; and so some functions and offices of life. God called idolatrous Israel his people, and was not angry with them for circumcising their children, but for offering them to Moloch, Ezek. 16:20, 21. But of this in the next verse, where Antichrist is said to sit in the church of God.

II. The revelation of Antichrist: and that man of sin shall be revealed, the son of perdition; where two things are notable:—(1.) His rise and appearing; (2.) The names and titles given to him.

1. His rise and appearing, expressed in the word revealed; that is, that great and chief Antichrist, upon that apostasy or falling away, shall be extant and show himself to the world. A thing is said to be revealed two ways—either when it is in being, or when it is discovered; both ways are proper here. He shall publicly appear, exercising a tyranny in the world, or cast off his veil, and show himself in his colours. God by his providence permitteth him to be, and by the doctrine of the gospel discovereth his impostures to all those who have no mind to be deceived.

2. The names or titles given to him; they are two:—(1.) 'The man of sin,' wherein he is compared and likened to Antiochus; (2.) 'The son of perdition,' wherein he is compared and likened to Judas.

[1.] For the first, the Jews called Antiochus 'the man of sin:' 1 Macch. 2:48, 'They gave not the power to the sinner;' in the Greek, τὸ κέρασ ἀμαρτωλῶ, 'They gave not the horn to the sinner.' The Syriac version hath it, 'They suffered not the horn of the sinner to be lifted up;' and

ver. 62, 'Fear not the words of the man of sin,'—ἀπὸ λόγων ἀνδρὸς ἁμαρτωλοῦ μὴ φοβηθῆτε, 'From the words of the man the sinner be not afraid' Now why did they call Antiochus the man of sin? Because he sought to alter the religion of the people, and by cruelty to introduce a change of worship and idolatry, and such laws as he would set up. Now, according to this pattern, Antichrist is a man of sin; that is, either a man given up to all sin eminently, a sinner addicted unto sin, and a ringleader of others unto sin, either by fraud and violence; or as he giveth encouragements and excitements to sin; or as a special kind of sinner, a usurper and invader of the empire of the Son of God. So was Antiochus. So was Antichrist. Now, how much open sin is practised, allowed, and maintained in the Papacy, I list not now to rake into; their own stories speak enough;—the sodomy, blasphemy, incest, adulteries, sorceries, murders, treasons, parricides, which they have authorised and countenanced. Histories witness that hardly hath the world yielded a more abominable sort of men, than have sat in that chair of pestilence. This I am sure of, that a man can sin nowhere at so cheap a rate as in Popery, where, what by dividing their sins into mortal and venial, and these expiated by a little penance, accompanied with a single attrition, and bare grief and trouble, because of the punishment; what by faculties, pardons, licenses, dispensations, indulgences, sin is distinguished out of the conscience.

But because he is called the man of sin, here it cometh fitly to be inquired whether Antichrist be an individual person? for 'that man of sin' would seem to be some single person. No; he is put for a society and succession of men, that make up the head of the apostate state. As one lion figured the whole kingdom of the Babylonians, and one bear the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, and one leopard the kingdom of the Grecians, Dan. 7,—and there the fourth beast is the fourth kingdom,—so one person that succession of men that head the revolters from Christ. So Dan. 8, a goat figured a succession of kings; so the Assyrian, Isa. 10:5, several kings in that empire; so Isa. 14:9, the king of Babylon, meaning not one but many. So this man of sin doth not note a single man, but a succession of men, a body politic or

corporate, under one opposite head to the kingdom of Christ: so the 'man of God' is put for all faithful ministers, 2 Tim. 3:17; so 'honour the king,' 1 Peter 2:17, series regum. So ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς, Heb. 9:25, 'The high priest every year entereth into the holy place;' meaning not one, but the succession of the order; and in reason it must needs be so here. Because Antichrist, from his beginning to his end, from his rise and revelation, till his ruin and destruction, will take up such a long track of time, as cannot fall within the age of any one man, even from the time of the apostles till the end of the world. Antichrist is the head of the apostasy; for here the apostasy and the revelation of the man of sin are conjunct; now the mysterious apostasy could not be perfected in a short time.

[2.] The son of perdition, wherein he is likened to Judas: John 17:12, 'None of them is lost but the son of perdition.' Him he resembleth in covetousness, treachery, and final destruction. The term may be explained either passively, or actively:—(1.) Passively, as one condemned to everlasting destruction; as the 'son of death,' is one condemned to die: 2 Sam. 12:5, 'He shall be a son of death;' we translate it, 'He shall surely die.' So 'children of wrath,' Eph. 2:3; so here, 'son of perdition.' (2.) Actively, bringing destruction upon himself and others; one that shall destroy others, and so he is called 'Abaddon,' and 'Apollyon,' Rev. 9:11, and is opposite to Christ, who is 'the author of salvation,' Heb. 5:9, but Antichrist of destruction. And let us see the parallel between him and Judas; for the person is a type, as well as the name hath a significancy. Antichrist then is like Judas—in profession, a disciple of Christ; in office, a governor of the church; but in practice, a traitor. As they said of the blind man, John 9:9, 'Some said, This is he; others, He is very like him.' The Pope boasteth that his seat is apostolical, his chair is Peter's chair, and that he is the successor of the apostle. Grant it, but there is an error of the person—not of Peter, but of Judas. Let us see the parallel:—

(1.) Judas was not a stranger, but a pretended friend and apostle: Acts 1:17, 'He was numbered with us, and obtained part of this ministry.' Turks and infidels are enemies to Christ, but Antichrist

seeketh to undermine him, under a pretence of friendship; ἀντίχριστος is one in show for, and in effect against Christ, and the beast in the Revelation is said to 'push with the horns of the lamb,' Rev. 13:11. If he were a professed enemy, what mystery were there in it? But mystery was written upon the woman's forehead, Rev. 17:5; and here, ver. 7, 'The mystery of iniquity.' It is wisdom to discern the false prophet, Rev. 13:18, but there needeth no great wisdom to discover an open and professed adversary.

(2.) He sold Christ for a small matter. *Omnia Romæ venalia*: pardons, indulgences, freedom from purgatory, all to be bought with money; and it is a small matter, considering the things put to sale, the pardon of sins, the souls of men redeemed with Christ's precious blood. The antichristian state maketh a market of religion; truth is made to yield to interest and profit.

(3.) Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss, under a pretence of honouring him: Luke 22:48, 'Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?' Antichrist is a true adversary of Christ, though he pretend to adore him; as those that murdered the present prophets would by all means beautify the tombs of the prophets deceased, and bear a respect to their memories, Mat. 23:30. He pretendeth to be his servant, yea, a servant of servants, but is really his enemy. The apostle telleth us of some that were 'enemies to the cross of Christ,' Phil. 3:18. Who to appearance such friends to the cross as the rabble of nominal Christians? but they are opposers of his spiritual kingdom, the virtue and power of the cross. You have crucifixes everywhere, painted, carved, gilded; they are ready to worship the cross with a holy worship; they set it in their temples, altars, wear it in their bosoms, and wherever they meet it show it reverence, adorn it with gold, silver, and precious stones. Their popes and prelates have it carried before them; and are not these friends of the cross? No; they live a worldly, sensual life, and all their religion tendeth thereunto; therefore enemies of the cross of Christ, because they mind earthly things. This is right antichrist-like, to betray Christ under a colour of adoration.

(4.) Judas was a guide to them that came to take Christ; and one main work of Antichrist is to be a ringleader in persecuting for religion. Christ is in heaven, death hath no more power over him; his natural body is above abuse, but his mystical body still suffereth: Acts 9:6, 'Why persecutest thou me?' Antichrist is the head of the persecuting state, others are his emissaries and agents, to take Christ in his members. It is a politic religion, that must be carried on with worldly artifices, with power and cruelty.

(5.) Lastly, The covetousness of Judas is set forth. He was a thief, and one that carried the bag, John 12:6. England, to its bitter cost, knoweth the polling exactions of the Papacy; all its dealings with us were to fill the bag out of this puteus inexhaustus. Now all these things should open our eyes; we may behold the man of sin, the son of perdition; one egg is not more like to another than Judas and Antichrist.

Use. Is to persuade us to a detestation of what is antichristian, and to that end let us mark the progress of the text. (1.) The apostasy made was for Antichrist; (2.) Antichrist, rising upon the apostasy, becometh a man of sin; and (3.) The man of sin is also the son of perdition.

1. Let me begin first with the falling away. There is a twofold falling away—either from the power and practice of godliness, or from a true religion to a false, particularly to Popery.

[1.] I begin with the falling away from the power and practice of godliness, though the profession be not changed; and the rather, partly because this disposeth to the entertainment of error. When a people that are carried with great fervour and vigour of zeal for a while, lose their affections to good, and return to a worldly, sensual life, then the bias of their hearts doth easily prevail against the light of their understandings. And so unsanctified men may the sooner be drawn to apostasy; they never felt the quickening virtue of faith, and were never wrought by it to the true love of God, or an holy and

heavenly mind and life. And partly, also, because if a lively Christianity had been kept up, Antichrist had never risen in the world; and it is the way to keep him out still: 'When the servants slept, the enemy sowed tares,' Mat. 13. A sleepy religion and corruption of manners made way for corruption of doctrine, worship, and order. It was with the church according to the spouse's complaint: 'I sleep, but my heart waketh,' Cant. 5:2. Some care there was, but much drowsiness and deadness in religion; and that produced the great apostasy. Partly too, because there is such a compliance between the nature of antichristianism and the temper of a carnal heart; for superstition and profaneness grow both upon the same root. A lothness to displease the flesh, the sensual nature of man, is such, that it is loth to be crossed; and that breedeth profaneness. For wherefore do men ingulf themselves in all manner of sensualities, but because they are loth to deny their natural appetites and desires, and row against the stream of flesh and blood, but will 'walk in the way of their own heart, and in the sight of their own eyes'? Eccles. 11:9. Again, if nature be to be crossed, it is only a little; it shall only be in some external actions, and observances, and dead rudiments, which never kill our lusts, nor promote the divine life. And this pleasing superstition shall make up a religion which is a fit pillow for a carnal heart to sleep upon. Popery is the easiest religion for the flesh that can be found out, for it never biteth nor disturbeth their lusts. The duties of it are like the pharisees' fasting, which our Lord compareth to old wine, Mat. 9:17, fit for old, dried skin bottles. Well, take heed of falling away from a lively godliness. No man entereth seriously upon religion but with some tasting or rejoicing, Heb. 6; now as this decayeth, we fall off. The heavenly life is obstructed, if not choked and quite lost. Now, to prevent this, observe two things:—(1.) Your coldness in duties; (2.) Your boldness in sinning.

(1.) Coldness in duties, when the will and affections grow more remiss, and the worship of God, which keepeth up the remembrance of him, is either omitted or performed perfunctorily, and in a careless and stupid manner: Jer. 2:32, 'My people have forgotten me

days without number;' Job 27:10, 'Will he always call upon God? will he delight himself in the Almighty?' God chargeth Israel with growing weary of him; and it began in not calling upon him, Isa. 43:22. Now, when you seldom think or speak of God, and do not keep up a delightful communion with him, there is a falling away.

(2.) Boldness in sinning. When men lose their tenderness and strictness, and the awe of God is lessened in their hearts, and they do not only sin freely in thought, but freely in act, have not that hatred of sin and watchfulness as formerly, but more abandon themselves to a carnal life, they are falling off from God apace: 2 Peter 2:20, 'For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.' At first the heart checked you for sin, but you did not kindly come off, were not troubled about it, hoped God would pardon it; and then you are bold to venture again, and so by degrees are entangled in the sensual and worldly life. Now consider the causes of it:—1. Want of faith in God: Heb. 3:12, 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' You have not a sound belief of his being and presence. 2. Want of love to God: Rev. 2:4, 5, 'Nevertheless I have (somewhat) against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.' Your hearts decline from that love you had to him and his ways, and then your work is intermitted. 3. Want of a due sense of the world to come: Heb. 10:39, 'But we are not of them who draw back to perdition, but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul.' 4. The love of the present world: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.' The more that is valued, the more your hearts are taken off from things to come, and the care about them; you have too great a liking, either to the profits of the world—1 Tim. 6:10, 'The love of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith'—or else the

pleasures of the world: 2 Tim. 3:4, 'Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.' As the inclination of the heart groweth stronger to sensual pleasures, your thoughts of God are less serious and pleasing to you. Now look to these things, lest you grow quite weary of God and the holy life, which once you had an affection unto.

[2.] From a true religion to a false; which may be done two ways:—
(1.) Out of corruption of mind; (2.) Out of vile affection.

(1.) Out of weakness of mind, as those do that were never well grounded in the truth: Eph. 4:14, 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;' 2 Peter 3:16, 'In which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.' Therefore we need to be established; but the forsaking of a truth we were bred in usually cometh from some falseness of heart. Some errors are so contrary to the new nature, that they discern them by the unction: 1 John 2:20, 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.'

(2.) Out of vile affection, when they forsake the truth for the advantages of a fleshly, worldly life, some places to be gotten by it, &c., and as the whore of Babylon hath a golden cup, riches, and preferments, wherewith it inviteth its proselytes. Now these are worse than the former, for they sell the birthright: Heb. 12:16, 'Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.' O Christians! take heed to yourselves. Apostasy brought Antichrist into the church. Let it not jure postliminio, bring him back again into the land, or into your hearts.

2. The next step is the man of sin. As the first apostasy of Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, so this great apostasy brought in a deluge of sin into the church, and defiled the holy society which

Christ had gathered out of the world. Idolatry is often called adultery or fornication; spiritual uncleanness disposeth to bodily, and bodily to spiritual. Usually a corrupt state of religion and corrupt manners go together; otherwise the dance and the fiddle would not suit. The world cannot lie quiet in a course of sin, if there be not some libertine, atheistical doctrine, and carnal worship to countenance it: Rev. 11:10, 'And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.'

3. The man of sin is also the son of perdition—(1.) Actively. False religions strangely efferate the mind: Jude 11, 'These go in the way of Cain;' and Hosea 5:2, 'Revolters are profound to make slaughter.' Men think no cruelty nor dishonesty unlawful which serveth to promote the interests of their sect, and lose all charity to those that are not of their way. (2.) Passively, shall be destroyed. Sometimes grievous judgments come in this world for the corruptions of religion; but in the world to come, dreadful is the end of apostates: 2 Peter 2:20, 21, 'For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.'

SERMON IV

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.—2 THES. 2:4.

IN this matter of Antichrist we have made this progress:—First, That he arose upon, and by a falling away from, the ancient pure state of

Christianity. Secondly, That the Holy Ghost points him out by his names and titles, which are two:—'the man of sin,' wherein he is resembled to Antiochus; and 'the son of perdition,' wherein he is resembled to Judas. As Antiochus, he is one that by force and power should change the laws and ordinances, and compel men to his abominations. As Judas, he should betray Christ by a kiss for worldly gain, and be one that is in pretence an apostle, but indeed a real adversary to Christ. Now, after the apostle had pointed at him by his names and titles, he describeth him by his practices, wherein his names and titles are verified; for here he proveth that he should be as Antiochus, by his exalting himself above all that is called God, which is said of Antiochus, Dan. 11:36, 'And the king shall do according to his will, and he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods;'—and as Judas, one sitting in the temple of God; that is, he sitteth there as exercising a public ecclesiastical office, yea, challenging the highest seat in it. He sitteth there potestate regiminis, by the power of his government; he doth Cathedratica potestate præsidere (Estius). His sitting there as chief shows him as Judas; his sitting here as God, and exalting himself above all that is called God, showeth him Antiochus.

But to handle the words more closely, Antichrist is here set forth:—

I. As opposite to Christ; ὁ ἀντικείμενος, one set to the contrary, that is, in respect of pride chiefly. Christ was the pattern of humility, Antichrist is the king of pride; Christ would not so much as assume to himself an authority to divide the inheritance between two brethren—Luke 12:14, 'Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?'—but Antichrist will depose kings, and dispose of kingdoms.

II. The instances of his pride:—(1.) In exalting himself above all human power: 'Who exalteth himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped.' (2.) A usurpation of divine honour: 'He, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.'

Let us open these things more particularly:—

I. He is represented in the term ἀντικείμενος as one diametrically opposite to Christ, and contrary to him, who is the true head and Lord of the church: Acts 10:36, 'He is Lord over all;' but Antichrist opposeth himself, that is, showeth himself in a quite contrary appearance. That which is most remarkable in Christ, and should be in all his followers, is humility. He expressed a wonderful contempt of the riches and greatness of the world, and all the honour which is of man; taking the form of a servant, and making himself of no reputation, and living a mean, inferior life. He 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,' Mat. 20:28. He kept no state, nor affected pomp of attendants; though he were Lord of all, yet 'he became poor, to make us rich,' 2 Cor. 8:9. But it may be this was proper to him; doth he expect it from his servants and officers in the church? Yes; this is the grace which he hath recommended to all his followers: Mat. 11:29, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly.' But especially to the ministers of the gospel: our Lord foresaw what spirit would work in them, and therefore he forewarned them of pride and lordliness: Mat. 20:25, 26, 'Ye know that the princes of the earth do exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.' Among Christ's servants, he that is chief must be chief in service, even as a servant unto all: Luke 22:26, 'He that is chief, as he that doth serve.' Domination, greatness, principality and power, is allowed in the civil state, for there it is necessary; yet it is excluded the church. This affecting of pre-eminence and chiefness is the bane of the church—it is taxed as a great sin in Diotrephes, 3 John 9—be it either over their fellow-labourers, or the people of the Lord. You see how tender the apostles were in this point; everywhere they disclaim this affectation of lordship: 2 Cor. 1:24, 'Not that we are lords of your faith, but helpers of your joy.' And Peter recommendeth it to his fellow-elders: 1 Peter 5:3, 'Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.' And if the apostles would not assume lordship, who may? It is true, there is a government in the church, and the people are to obey their guides, Heb. 13:17, and to 'have them highly in

honour, for their works' sake,' 1 Thes. 5:13; but yet the pastors of the church should govern by light and love, not by pomp and force, and not be known by such pomp and authority as begets fear. Well, now, let us see the opposite state. If humility and meekness be in the very essence of Christianity, and woven throughout the whole frame of it, then it is antichristian to be lordly and proud, especially in them who pretend to be successors of Christ and his apostles. Now, in the Pope and his adherents, you will see the most odious pride set forth that ever the world was conscious unto, without any cloak and shame. And all their business is to get power; what designs they have for preferment in the world, how studiously they have, and do prosecute it, they blush not to own openly before angels or men. This worldly ambition to rise higher and higher is their design and trade of life. As the bishop of Rome, at first, from the chief pastor of that city, affected to be an archbishop over the suburban towns and cities; then, a patriarch over many cities; and because two opposed him in Italy a long time, Ravenna and Milan, he gets power over them, and then he must be œcumenical bishop over all the world. But Constantinople resisteth for a long time, yea, arrogateth within the empire the same titles. Who more earnest against it than Gregory, whom they call the Great, and more forward to charge the assuming of this title as antichristian? But then, when once they began, by powerful means and many indirect courses, to be owned as universal bishop, they enlarged their bounds, not only over the ecclesiastical power, but civil, and all kings and princes must stoop to them, as well as bishops. So that here was the progress and gradation:—First, from the chief presbyter, a bishop over many presbyters in the same city; then, a metropolitan over many bishops in one province; then, a patriarch over many provinces in one diocese (for in the Roman division there were seven provinces in one diocese); then, universal bishop in the whole world; then, the only shepherd and bishop, and others but his substitutes. Pretty steps of ambitious encroaching! But yet exalting himself farther, he challengeth all power in heaven and earth; and the like is practised by his followers at this day in the church of Rome. From private priests they grow up into some prelature, as archdeacons, deans; then a bishopric; then a better or

richer; then archbishops, cardinals; then pope. And the devil is grown so impudent, by the help of these churchmen, as that it is counted a great piece of spiritual wisdom, publicly owned in the world, to be able, by these steps, to get higher and higher, and lord it over God's heritage; as if ambitious affectation were the honour of Christianity, and gospel humility would expose the church to scorn, and pomp and grandeur were a greater ornament to religion than grace; when, in the meantime, they have nothing to prove them to be true pastors of the church but Judas's kiss, a little owning of Christ to countenance their ambition.

II. The particular instances wherein the pride of Antichrist is set forth are two:—

1. His exalting himself above all human powers: 'He opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped.' Here the object is set forth by two terms:—(1.) All that is called God; (2.) Or worshipped. They both belong to the same thing.

[1.] That which is called God, that is, magistrates, princes, and kings: Ps. 82:1, 'He judgeth among the gods;' and ver. 6, 'I have said, Ye are gods; all of you are children of the Most High;' and John 10:34, 35, 'It is written in your law, I said ye are gods. If he call them gods unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken,' &c. God hath clothed magistrates with his own honour so far that he hath put his name upon them; and their eminency is a part of his image, as it lieth in superiority, dominion, and power. Though magistrates be but like their brethren as to their common nature, yet in respect of their office they have the glorious title of gods conferred upon them; as being his vicegerents, and bearing his person in government, they are honoured with his name. So that, without impeachment of blasphemy, those that excel in the civil power may be called gods. Now, over these Antichrist exalteth himself, that is, above all kings and potentates.

[2.] The other notion is, ἡ σέβασμα; we render it, 'or is worshipped.' The Greek word is, whatever is held in the highest degree of reverence, whatever is august or illustrious; as the emperors of Rome were called Σεβαστοὶ: Acts 25:21, Paul 'appealed to be referred to the hearing of Augustus;' it is τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ, not Augustus Caesar, who was then dead, but his successor. Well, then, here is the character of Antichrist: that he exalteth himself above all civil authority authorised and permitted of God, not only above ordinary magistrates, but kings and emperors. Now, we find in history no less than twenty kings and emperors trampled under foot by the Pope of Rome, some of whom he had excommunicated and deposed from their kingdoms, and their people dispensed withal in denial of their subjection to them; others brought to cruel, shameful deaths, and their kingdoms miserably rent and torn, to the destruction of millions of men, by their means. He that hath any knowledge of the histories in Christendom cannot but know these things; how he treadeth on their necks, kicketh off their crowns with his feet, and hath brought them to the vilest submissions. And if kings and emperors have received more spirit and courage, and the Popes of Rome learned more modesty nowadays, thanks is due to the light of the gospel, which hath shined so far and to such a degree as to the consuming of Antichrist, though not to his utter destruction.

2. The next instance of his pride is his usurpation of divine honour, expressed in two clauses:—(1.) The one showeth the usurpation itself, 'That he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God;' (2.) The other, the degree of it, 'showing himself as God.' Both must be explained and vindicated.

[1.] For the usurpation itself, 'he sitteth as God in the temple of God.' By the temple of God is meant the church: 1 Cor. 3:16, 17, 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.' So 2 Cor. 6:16, 'What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God.' The external visible church, which professeth the

faith of Christ and beareth his name; so that the place wherein Antichrist shall arise is the visible Christian church; not Rome ethnic, but Christian.

But is, then, the church of Rome the church of Christ?

Ans. It was one part of it before it was perverted; it usurpeth still that name; it retaineth some relic of a church, mangled as it is. Saith Calvin in his Epistles: 'I think I have given some strong reasons that it yet retaineth some show of a church.' Now in this temple of God he sitteth as an officer and bishop there, as I before explained it: and whereas other princes are said to reign so many years, the Pope is said to sit so long. It is his sedes, his cathedral or seat. And again, here he is said to sit as God, that is, as God incarnate, for Christ is the true and proper Lord of the church; none should reign there but he. And the name of this man of sin is not Antitheos, but ἀντίχριστος; not one that directly invadeth the properties of the supreme God, but of God incarnate, or Christ as Mediator: he sitteth negatively, not as a minister, but positively as supreme lord upon earth, whom all must adore and worship, and kings and princes kiss his feet. In short, he usurpeth the authority due to Christ. Now I shall prove that by a double argument:—

First, By usurping the titles due to Christ; for he that will make bold with names will make bold with things; as to be sponsus ecclesiæ, the husband of the church, as Innocent called the church sponsam suam, his spouse; caput ecclesiæ, the head of the church, which is proper to the Saviour of the body; supreme, visible, and universal head, which only Christ is, who hath promised to be with her to the end of the world, and will be visible to those who do at length approach his court in heaven, where his seat is; to be chief pastor, Christ's own title: 'And when the chief shepherd shall appear,' 1 Peter 5:4; to be pontifex maximus, the greatest high priest, whereas Christ alone is called 'the high priest of our profession,' Heb. 3:1, and 'the great high priest over the house of God,' Heb. 4:14; so his vicar-general upon earth; whereas the ancient church attributed this to the Holy Ghost,

calling it *Vicariam vim Spiritus Sancti*, he supplies his room and absence. Now titles including power, certainly they are not to be usurped without warrant. Therefore to call the Pope the chief and only shepherd, and the like, it is to usurp his authority to whom these things originally belong.

Secondly, He doth usurp the thing implied by the titles—the authority over the church, which is only due to God incarnate. Supreme authority may be considered, either as to the claim, right, property, and pre-eminence which belong to it, or to the exercise.

1. The claim and right pretended. He sitteth as God in the temple of God; that is, by virtue of his office there, claimeth the same power that Christ had, which is fourfold:—

(1.) An unlimited power over all things both in heaven and earth. This was given to Christ, Mat. 28:18, and the Pope, as his vicar, challengeth it. But where is the plea and ground of the claim? For one to set up himself as a vice-god without warrant, is rebellion against Christ. To set himself in his throne without his leave, surely none is fit to have this authority that hath not his power to back and to administer and govern all things for the church's good, which power God would trust in the hands of no creature.

(2.) A universal headship and supremacy over all the churches of Christ. Now, this supreme power over all Christians is the right of God incarnate, and whosoever challengeth it sits as God in the temple of God; and it is very derogatory to the comfort of the faithful that they should in all things depend upon one man as their supreme pastor, or else be excluded from the hope of salvation. Certainly this power, as to matter of fact, is impossible to be managed by any man, considering the vast extent of the world, and the variety of governments and different interests under which the people of God find shelter and protection, and the multitude and diversity of those things which are comprised in such a government; and, as to matter of right, it is sacrilegious, for Christ never instituted any such

universal vicar and bishop. It is a dignity too high for any creature: none is fit to be universal head of the church but one that is God as well as man.

(3.) Absolute authority, so as to be above control. When a mortal man should pretend to be so absolute as to give no account of his actions, that it shall not be lawful to be said to him, What doest thou? and all his decrees must be received without examination or complaint, this is such a sovereignty as belongs to none but God: Job 9:12, 'Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?' Now, this is in their canon law, that the Pope is to be judged by no man; that though he should lead millions of souls into hell, none can say Domine, cur ita facis?

(4.) Infallibility and freedom from error, which is the property of God: he neither is deceived nor can deceive. 'Let God be true, and every man a liar.' Now, that corrupt and fallible man should arrogate this to himself, such an unerring in judgment, is to usurp divine honour in matter of right and in matter of fact. For the Pope to arrogate this is as great a contradiction to all sense and reason as if a man sick of the plague, or any other mortal disease, should say that he was immortal, and in that part wherein the disease was seated.

2. As to the exercise, there are two acts of supreme authority:—

(1.) Legislation.

(2.) Judgment.

(1.) Legislation: It is the peculiar and incommunicable property of Christ to be Lord and lawgiver to the church; Isa. 33:22, 'The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.' God alone hath such interest in his people as to prescribe supreme or universal laws to them, and we are his subjects: James 4:12, 'There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.' Now, whosoever will make laws that shall immediately bind the conscience, they invade Christ's sovereignty. This is spiritual

tyranny, and the worst sort of tyranny, to arrogate a power over the subjects of Christ and their consciences as lord of their faith. He that taketh upon him to rescind and make void his institutions and ordinances, and set his own in their place, and give that reverence and honour to them which only belongeth to the ordinances of Christ, he is Antichrist, whatever he be.

(2.) As to judgment: It is an exercising an authority no less than divine, so to take upon him to absolve man from his duty to God, or the penalty which sin hath made his due. The one is done by dispensations, the other by indulgences: and therefore whoever by dispensations antiquates and dispenses with the laws of God himself is thus guilty; as dispensing with marrying the brother's wife. Nay, one of the Popes dispensed with one that took his own sister to wife. I do not allege this so much for the particular facts, but to show the power which they challenged to be inherent in themselves. Bellarmine saith, Christ hath given Peter and his successors a power *faciendi peccatum non peccatum*—to make a sin to be no sin; and again, 'If the Pope, should err in forbidding virtues and commanding vices, the church were bound to believe vices to be good and virtues to be evil,' which certainly is to set man in the place of God. As to indulgences: as to pretend to give pardons for sin for so many years, a thing that God himself never did; to pardon the sin before it was committed, that is, to give a license to sin: so for the highest crimes to absolve men, upon a little attrition or trouble about the sin,—to do all this and more than this as of right, is to sit in the church of God as God.'

[2.] And showing himself that he is God: that is meant, not of what he professeth in words, but what he doth in deed. It is not said that he saith he is God, but ἀποδεικνύντα, he showeth himself, or sets forth himself as God. The reason of the thing showeth it:—(1.) Antichrist gets power by seduction, or the deceiveableness of unrighteousness; therefore does not openly call himself the true and only God. He is represented as a false prophet, that speaketh lies in hypocrisy. If one would openly and plainly profess himself to be God,

he might be a frantic usurper, but could not be a cunning seducer, and few would be so stupid and senseless as to be led by him. (2.) Antichrist, whoever he be, is to be a Christian by profession, and to have a high and great charge among the visible professors of Christianity. He is a secret adversary, that groweth upon the apostasy or degeneration of the Christian state. Now, such pretends observance and obedience to Christ, and therefore he would not openly declare himself to be God, and he sitteth in the temple and church of God, as before. And it is a mystery; all which imply crafty conveyance, and that he doth not openly assume the godhead, but slyly and secretly, which doth not mend the matter; for the insinuating, devouring, unsuspected enemy is the most perilous and pernicious; as Joab to Amasa, and Judas to Christ. (3.) Antichrist is plainly a man. Now, for a man to disannul all religion, and set up himself directly as God, is improbable. Nero, Nebuchadnezzar, Simon Magus would be adored as gods; they did not deny other gods, nor a greater God above them; therefore it is the arrogance of works is intended. If Antichrist will show himself as God, certainly he will sweeten his blasphemy with some hypocrisy, as that he is the vicar and vicegerent of God. (4.) His showing himself as God, is either accepting or doing such things, which if they did rightly belong to him, they would show that he is God. Two persons I find in scripture charged for usurping divine honours. The one, Herod Agrippa, who was smitten by an angel for not giving God the glory, when the people cried, 'The voice of God, and not of man,' Acts 12:22: his fault was accepting what was ascribed by others. The other is the prince of Tyre: Ezek. 28:2, 'Because thy heart is lifted up, and thou hast said I am God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seat; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thy heart as the heart of God.' His fault was taking upon him, as if he were God, to accept divine honours, to do those things which would make him equalise himself to our Lord Christ, blessed for ever. So doth he show himself that he is God. (1.) His accepting Antichrist's disciples, who call him our Lord God the Pope, supremum numen in terris, a certain deity upon earth. That the Pope hath the same consistory with God, and the same tribunal with Christ; that he is lord of heaven and earth; that

from him there are no appeals to be made, no, not to God himself; that the Pope may do all that God doth; that he is the husband of the church, and the foundation of faith (Council of Lateran, sess. 4); *Alter Deus in terra*; that the words of the Pope in cathedra are for certainty of truth equal to the scriptures; that he can change the form of sacraments delivered by Christ, or decree contrary to scripture. If any do object that these were the applauses of his flatterers and clowbacks, it is true they were so uttered; but those flatteries of the canonists and Jesuits do come to be received doctrines among them; and whereas divers popes have directed special commissions for perusal of the works of the learned, with authority to expunge and purge out whatsoever is not orthodox, many better things have come under censure, but these things stand still, as being very pleasing to his holiness's humility, and so not to be altered: besides, many of these things have been spoken to his face without rebuke.—*Conc. Latt.*, sess. 2. He is called the high priest and king that is to be adored by all, and most like unto God—(sess. 9). It is said, the aspect of thy divine majesty dazzleth our eyes, and that of the 72d Psalm applieth to him, 'All the kings of the earth shall worship him, and all nations shall serve him.' Now, to accept and approve of these flatterers is to show himself that he is God: (2.) By doing such things as if he were God, not by the usurpation of the formal name, as by arrogating to himself such things as belong to God, his right and property, to take upon himself to be lord of consciences, to command what faith is to be believed, suppressing the true doctrine of Christ, and setting up his own inventions, dispensing with God's laws, taking upon him to pardon sins. One article for which Luther was condemned is this: that it is not in the power of the church or Pope to make new articles of faith; another, that the best penitence of all is the new life. *Qui facit Deos divosque Deo major est*. The Pope doth canonise saints, and his decrees must be received as oracles, &c.

The first use is to give us a clear discovery where to find Antichrist; every tittle of this is fulfilled in the bishop of Rome, that we need no longer be in doubt, and say, 'Is this he that should come, or shall we look for another?' Who is the ἀντικείμενος, but he that opposeth

himself to that humble state and frame wherein Christ left the church, and will be prince of all pastors, and swear them to his obedience, and hath made such troubles in the world to make himself acknowledged for head and chief? Who is he that exalteth himself above all that is called God, and is august in the world, but he that takes upon him to deprive and depose emperors, kings, and princes, by his excommunications, suspensions, interdictions, and decrees, discharging subjects of their allegiance and oaths, and giving away their kingdoms; that doth crown and uncrown emperors with his feet, and tread upon them as one would do upon a viper? Who is he that sitteth as God in the temple of God—that is, affecteth the honour due to our Lord Jesus Christ—but he that doth thus imperiously aspire, *subesse Romano Pontifici definimus esse de necessitate salutis*; that takes upon him a power to make a new creed, and say we are bound to obey him; that saith he can change the things which God hath commanded in his word, and dispense with them, and so by his decrees make the commandment of God of none effect; and can forgive sins, not only already committed, but to be committed, which God himself never would do; that lords it over consciences, enslaving the world to his usurpations: in short, that will be obeyed in those things which God hath forbidden, and take upon himself an office which no human creature is capable of? Who is he that showeth himself that he is God, but he that suffereth himself to be decked with the spoils of God's own attributes; to be *optimum maximum*, the best and chiefest, our Lord God the Pope, a visible deity; and will be adored by all the potentates of the earth, with such veneration as greater could not be given to Christ himself if he were corporally present, and will have all the world to submit to his decrees as being infallible; that challengeth a power over angels, purgatory, and hell? These things are as clear as daylight, and ought to be regarded by us, partly that we may bless God, who hath freed us from this tyranny, and have a liberty of judging of truth and falsehood out his holy and blessed word; partly that we may stand fast in this liberty. Those that were never pope-bitten know not the mischiefs that attend this spiritual tyranny; and God grant that we never more know it to our bitter cost. Therefore, as Samuel dealt

with the Israelites when they would cast off the theocracy, or God's government, under which they had been well and safely governed, unless they forfeited the protection by their own sin, that they might be like all the nations round about them, 1 Sam. 8:20;—Samuel telleth them what would be the manner of the king that should reign over them: 1 Sam. 8:11–13, 'And he said, This shall be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants,' &c.;—so if such a wanton humour should possess us, that we must have the religion of the nations round about us, consider whom you receive spiritually to reign over you—the king of pride, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped, &c., one that will not only devour your substance, but lord it over your consciences, and put out the eye of your reason, that you may the better swallow his damnable errors, pestilent superstitions, and idolatries, and bold usurpation on the authority of Christ; or else burn your bodies with temporal fire, and cast out your name as one to be condemned to that which is eternal. It is easy to open the flood-gate, but when that is done, it is not so easy to call back the waters; and when you come to discern the difference between the blessed yoke of Christ and the iron yoke of Antichrist, it will be too late for a remedy to repent of your error.

The second use is to show us how things should be carried in the true and reformed Christianity.

1. With such meekness, modesty, and mortification, that our religion may be known to be established by a crucified Lord, whose doctrine and example do visibly and eminently hold forth the contempt of the

world. The pride and ambition of the pastors of the church hath been the cause of all the evil in it; therefore nothing so unsuitable to the gospel as a domineering spirit. We, that are to preach heavenly-mindedness and self-denial, should not affect the greatness of the world, lest our lives contradict our doctrine.

2. How eminent and exemplary we should be in our obedience to magistrates, for this is to be opposite to the antichristian estate. God is very tender of the honour of civil powers and authorities, and will have every soul to be subject to them: Rom. 13:1, 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God;' again, 1 Peter 2:13, 'Submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or to governors, as them that are sent by him.' Great respect and submission is due to them for God's sake, and that we may commend religion to the profane world, and live down the reproaches of the gospel. They were branded as wicked men that were not afraid to speak evil of dignities, that despise governments in their own hearts, or weaken the esteem of it in the hearts of others by their speeches: 2 Peter 2:10, 'But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government; presumptuous are they, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.'

3. What a wickedness it is to usurp divine honours! We do so when we take that praise and admiration to ourselves which is only due to God: Acts 3:12, 'And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus, &c.; and his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom we see and know; yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.'

SERMON V

Remember ye not, that, while I was with you, I told you these things? and now you know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time; for the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let till he be taken out of the way.—2 THES. 2:5–7.

IN these words is:—

First, A digression, calling them to remembrance of what he delivered by word of mouth,

Secondly, A progress in the further description of Antichrist. He had hitherto been described by—

1. His names and titles;
2. His nature and properties; now—
3. By the time of his appearing, where take notice of three things:—
 - I. That Antichrist was not then revealed, because there was an impediment hindering his revelation.
 - II. That though he was not then revealed, yet that mystery of iniquity did begin to work, but secretly.
 - III. That when that impediment shall be removed, then Antichrist shall be revealed.

First, I begin with his putting them in mind of what he had told them before by word of mouth: 'Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?' This showeth the certainty and usefulness of this doctrine; for though the event were not to be accomplished in their days, yet he taught them before when present, and now repeateth it again when absent; he preached it in private,

and now writeth it for public good, and laboureth to confirm the truth of it, and fasten it upon their memories.

Observe, then, that the doctrine of Antichrist is a profitable doctrine, and a point very necessary to be preached and known.

1. It is a point very necessary to admonish and warn the faithful, that they be not circumvented with these delusions, and be found in the opposite state to Christ Jesus, and the interests of his kingdom. God hath blown his trumpet: Rev. 18:4, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues;' God calleth his people out of spiritual Babylon; it is dangerous and unsafe being there. If we would escape Babylon's punishments we must escape her sins, not live in that communion and society where there are such temptations to idolatry and other detestable enormities. It is disputable whether the errors of Popery be damnable, or there be any possibility of salvation in that religion. Some deny all possibility; others, abating from the rigour of that opinion, assert a very great difficulty: 1 Cor. 3:13, 'Saved as by fire;' if so much Christianity left as to save them, it is with much ado. But the question is not about our benefit, but our duty; not whether possibly we may be saved? but what is the way the Lord will have us to walk in? And if there were possibility or probability of salvation in the way, in the general, yet there is very little or none for them that live in a known sin, and especially in a sin of such a dangerous nature as abetting an opposite faction to Christ, such as is that of Antichrist.

2. It is necessary to fortify and forewarn the people of God against a double temptation. (1.) Against scandal; (2.) Against persecutions.

[1.] Against scandal. It is a dangerous temptation to atheism to see Christianity so corrupted and debauched by a vile submission to serve worldly ends, and turned into the pageantry of empty and ridiculous ceremonies, which beget scorn and contempt of it in the minds of all considering beholders; and therefore there are more atheists in Rome and Italy than in other countries. Supernatural

things, disguised with a vain pomp, lose their reverence, and do not alarm the conscience, but harden the heart in a settled atheism and contempt of Christ. Now it is a mighty stay to the heart to see that this degeneration was foreseen and foretold: John 16:1, 'These things have I spoken to you, that you should not be offended;' Mat. 18:7, 'Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!'

[2.] Against persecutions; for the man of sin is also a son of perdition, a destroyer of the saints, and maketh havoc of the people of God. Now it is grievous when Christians suffer by Christians, and we may have many doubtings and misgivings about our cause; but when Antichrist is clearly discovered, we submit the more cheerfully to suffer the hardest things under his tyranny; for suffering under antichristian persecution is martyrdom and suffering for Christ, as much as suffering under Pagan persecution: Rev. 14:13, 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth,' &c. Not only the primitive martyrs, who were put to death by heathens, but those that are condemned by Christians and burned for heretics, those are martyrs also.

3. That we may the better understand true Christianity; ἀντικείμενα παραλληλεμένα μάλιστα φαίνεται, opposites illustrate each other. The two opposite states are Christianity and Antichristianity; the one is a 'mystery of godliness,' 1 Tim. 3:16; the other, 'a mystery of iniquity.' The design of the mystery of godliness is to recover men from the devil, the world, and the flesh, unto God; the other, to seduce men from God to the devil, the world, and the flesh again; and that by corrupting the former mystery, or the most excellent institution that ever the world was acquainted with for the ennobling and refining man's nature; so that Christ's religion is turned against himself, to lull men's consciences asleep, whilst they gratify the lusts of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh, or live in pride of life. The devil is gratified by all sin, but especially he is εἰδωλοχαρής, as Synesius calleth him; one that delighteth in idols, as knowing this is the best

way to make men brutish, or to live in an oblivion or neglect of God; for an idol is 'a teacher of lies,' Hab. 2:18, doth imprint upon the mind carnal and false conceptions of a deity.

4. To confirm us in the truth of the Christian faith, when we see the prophecies of it expressly fulfilled; for this is the Lord's direction to know a true prophet, Deut. 18:22, if the thing come to pass, and the event doth punctually answer the prediction; but when a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, and the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken. Now, the apostles did not only teach the church the doctrine of Christianity, but by a prophetic spirit and divine revelation foretold things to come; and among these, the great thing which is to happen and come to pass before Christ's second coming is Antichrist, or the appearing of the man of sin. Therefore, that we may not doubt of what is past, nor suspect what is further to come, it is good to study these prophecies, and know they are to be fulfilled in their time, that we may say that God, who hath kept touch with the world hitherto in all the predictions of the word, will not fail at last.

Use 1. To reprove them that think this is a curious point not to be searched into. Why then did God reveal it, and that so often by St Paul, by St John, in so many prophetic representations of it? Surely it is not curiosity to search into things revealed, but to intrude ourselves into things hidden, and which God hath put under a veil of secrecy. It is true men must know their measure, and not attempt to run before they can go, and venture upon obscure points before well versed in plain; and it is true, in more abstruse points, men must not rashly define, but soberly and modestly inquire, and compare predictions with plain events; this is no way culpable.

2. To reprove those that are so impatient of giving a little attendance to such doctrines for a while, and think at least matter more profitable should be insisted on; they are persuaded enough already. It is well if it be so; but those that stand should take heed lest they fall; and presumptuous confidence soonest giveth out, and forsaketh

Christ. I would but propound this argument to them: If it were profitable for them that were to go out of the body long before Antichrist was revealed to be taught these things again and again, and they be charged to keep these things in remembrance, certainly it is more profitable for others that live at the time when these things are in being, and the temptation is at the next door, ready to break in upon them. Surely it is profitable to discover Antichrist, to reduce those that are gone astray, much more to prevent a revolt, that we may not return to this bondage after a deliverance from it.

Secondly, I come to consider the time of his appearing, and there to observe three things:—

I. That Antichrist was not then revealed because there was an impediment hindering his revelation: 'and now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time,' that is, what keeps him back for the present, until the time that God had prefixed. The apostle doth not expressly mention what this τὸ κατέχον or impeachment was, either because he thought it enough to appeal to their memory and knowledge—now ye know what withholdeth; there was no need of repeating that which was formerly mentioned, they sufficiently knew; or partly because he would not give the heathen an occasion of raising a persecution against the Christians, if they should come to understand that one professing himself a Christian should erect a throne for himself at Rome, and that the empire should be taken away to make way for him. The Romans were very jealous, ὅτι βασιλείαν ὀνομάζομεν—because they talked of these innocent notions, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven; they were apt to accuse them læsæ majestatis, as if they would with open force and violence attack or assault the empire; therefore the apostle had spoken that which he thought not fit to write in an epistle; or, lastly, he leaveth it in this obscurity because all prophecies were but darkly uttered, that their accomplishment be not hindered, since it is the will of God that such events shall fall out in the world, and out of indulgence to his people he is pleased to foretell this. It is not meet that the prediction should either be too

clear or too dark; if too clear, the event would not follow, nor God's government of the world be carried in such a way as might suit with the liberty of mankind; if too dark, the comfort and caution of God's people would not be sufficiently provided for.

But what was this impediment? The ancients generally determined it to be the Roman empire; for so Tertullian—the empire of Rome, which was to be divided into ten kingdoms; and reason showeth it, because the man of sin could not rise to his greatness as long as the Roman empire stood. Why? Because he that was to exalt himself above all that is called God, and above all that is august, could not bring his designs to pass as long as the Roman empire retained its majesty; but when once that was eclipsed and removed, then he was to be revealed in his time: all things have their time, and so the man of sin. Well, then, it was the Roman empire that stayed the manifestation of Antichrist, he being to build his tyranny on the ruins and wreck thereof; and therefore the primitive Christians prayed *pro mora finis*, that it would please God to defer the fall of this empire, fearing worse things upon the dissolution thereof.

Now this impediment showeth both the time and place of Antichrist; and time and place, next to the nature and state of things, are the best circumstances to discover him. (1.) The place: Antichrist's seat and throne was to be there, where the seat of the Roman empire was; and St John telleth us it was situated on the city that had seven hills: Rev. 17:9, 'The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth;' and that is Rome, which is famously taken notice of to be seated on seven hills or mountains. Now Antichrist had not room as long as the seat was filled with the Roman emperor, for this seat could not be filled with two imperial powers at once, especially with such a tyrannical power as that of Antichrist is, exalting itself not only above kings and kingdoms, but *πάν σέβασμα*, the august state of the emperors themselves; there was no exalting this chair, till there was a removal of the throne; while the Roman emperor possessed Rome, the seat was full, and till it was void it could not be the seat of Antichrist.

(2.) The next circumstance is the time when the impediment is taken away, when the Roman empire is so weakened and removed from Rome that this power may grow up; and that was when the Roman empire was divided into ten kingdoms, as Tertullian saith, and is agreeable enough with the prophecy of St John, Rev. 17:12, 'And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have not received their kingdoms as yet, but receive power as kings one hour with the beast;' that is, near that time when the Roman empire was broken and divided, which began near 600 years after Christ's birth.

II. The next observation is, that though he was not revealed in the apostle's days, yet the mystery of iniquity did begin to work, but secretly; for it is said, ver. 7, beginning, 'The mystery of iniquity doth already work.' This is given as a reason why it would break out sooner; but it was kept back; there was something a-brewing that would make way for Antichrist, some disposition of the matter, some propensity thereunto, something begun, which would afterwards show itself more eminently in the great Antichrist.

Here two things must be explained:—

1. What is the mystery of iniquity.
2. How it began to work in the apostles days.

1. What is the mystery of iniquity? I answer—The design of usurping Christ's kingdom, and his dignities and prerogatives over the church, to countenance the kingdom of sin and darkness, under the mask of piety and religion. Surely it is something quite contrary to the gospel, which is the 'mystery of godliness,' 1 Tim. 3:16. So that this mystery is such a course and state design as doth frustrate the true end and purpose of the gospel, and yet carried on under a pretence of advancing and promoting it. So that to state it we must consider:—

[1.] The mystery of godliness.

[2.] The mystery of ungodliness or iniquity.

[1.] The mystery of godliness is known by the ends of God in the gospel, and the way he took to promote those ends.

(1.) The end of the gospel is to recover man out of a carnal, ungodly state, into a state of holiness and reconciliation with God. (1.) The terminus a quo:—men are carnal, ungodly. (1st.) Carnal. When man fell from God, he fell to himself; self interposed as the next heir, and that self was not the soul, but the flesh. Many wrong their souls, but no man ever yet hated his own flesh; and therefore men would rule themselves, and please themselves according to their fleshly appetite and fancy: John 3:6, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh,' and therefore love the pleasures, honours, and profits of the world, as the necessary provision to satisfy the desires of the flesh; and whosoever live thus they live in a carnal state, as all do, till grace renew them, Rom. 8:5. But this carnal estate doth break forth and bewray itself in various ways of sinning: Titus 3:3, 'For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.' All are not fornicators, drunkards, persecutors, nor live in the same way of sinning; but all are turned from God to the world, and have a 'carnal mind, which is enmity to God,' Rom. 8:7. (2dly.) The next word is ungodly Men thus constituted live either in a denial of God: Ps. 14:1, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God'—or a neglect of God: Eph. 2:12, 'Without God in the world;' without any acknowledgment or worship of him: Ps. 9:17, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God;'—or if not deprived of all sense of a deity, they worship false gods, as those, Acts 14:12, 13, the men of Lycaonia, that called Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker, and would have sacrificed to them; and the apostle saith to the Galatians, Gal. 4:8, 'When ye knew not God, ye did service to them which by nature are no gods;' they worshipped plurality of false gods; and though the wise men of the Gentiles had some confused knowledge of the true God, Rom. 1:19–21, yet they glorified him not as God, but committed idolatry by setting up a false medium of worship, an idol, which begot a brutish conception of God in their mind; so that a false

religion is so far from showing a remedy of corrupt nature that it is a great part of the disease itself. (2.) The terminus ad quem, into a state of holiness and reconciliation with God, in whom man alone can be happy. (1st.) For holiness and obedience to God. The great design of the Christian religion is to bring us back to God again. First, As we are carnal, by the denial of fleshly and worldly lusts: Titus 2:12, 'The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,' &c.; 1 Peter 2:11, 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul;' and Gal. 5:24, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.' Secondly, As we are ungodly, to bring us to the knowledge, love, worship, and obedience of the true God: Acts 14:15, 'We pray ye that you should turn from these vanities to the living God, that hath made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things therein;' and to seek after the Lord, from whom we have life, breath, and all things, Acts 17:25–28; 1 Thes. 1:9, 'How ye turned from idols to serve the living and true God.' (2dly.) Reconciliation with God, that we might have commerce with him for the present, and live forever with him hereafter: 2 Cor. 5:19, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation;' 1 Peter 1:18, 'Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation,' &c.; Heb. 7:25, 'He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God through him;' that whereas before they were alienated from the life of God, they might live in his love, and in the expectation of being admitted into his blessed presence, that they may see him as he is, and be like him, 1 John 3:2.

(2.) The way it took to obtain these ends, how God may be satisfied, man renewed and changed, God pacified by the sacrifice, merit, and intercession of Christ Jesus, who came in our flesh and nature, not only to acquaint us with the will of God and the unseen things of another world, but to suffer an accursed death for our sins; therefore the mystery of godliness is chiefly seen in 'God manifested in our

flesh,' 1 Tim. 3:16; and man must be renewed and changed, for our misery showeth what is needful to our remedy and recovery: that we be not only pardoned but sanctified, if ever we will be saved and glorified; for till men have new and holy hearts they can never see God: Heb. 12:14, 'Without holiness it is impossible to see God;' Mat. 5:8, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' &c.; nor for the present love him and delight in him, nor take him for their chief happiness. As none but Christ can satisfy justice and reconcile such a rebel to God, so none but Christ's Spirit can sanctify and renew our souls that we may live in obedience to him: 1 Cor. 6:11, 'Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' This is the mystery of godliness.

[2.] Now, for the mystery of ungodliness or iniquity: that is a quite opposite state, but carried on plausibly, and with seeming respect to the mystery which it opposeth. To know it, take these considerations:

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(1.) Where the carnal life is had in request and honour, there certainly is the mystery of iniquity to be found, whatever pretences be put upon it. Now, the carnal life is there had in request and honour,—(1.) Where all is referred to worldly gain and profit, and the whole frame of the religion tendeth that way; for certainly they are 'enemies to the cross of Christ whose god is their belly, and who mind earthly things,' Phil. 3:19. Now pardons, indulgences, purgatory, shrines of saints, what do they all tend unto but to make a merchandise of religion? It was an old byword, *Omnia Romæ venalia*—all things may be bought at Rome, even heaven and God himself, &c. And these things are used, not only to open the people's mouths in prayer, but their hands in oblations and offerings. The complexion of their religion is but a gainful trade. But the papal exactions and traffickings have been so much and so loudly insisted upon, and the evil runneth out into so many branches, that I shall forbear. (2.) Where temporal greatness is looked upon as the main prop of their religion. 'The king's daughter is glorious within,' rich in gifts and

graces, Ps. 45:13; Ps. 93:5, 'Holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, forever;' but the false church is known by pomp and external splendour. It is easy to discern the true ministers of Christ from the false; the true are known by being much in labours, much in afflictions: 2 Cor. 6:4–6, 'In all things approving ourselves the ministers of God, in much patience, afflictions, necessities, distresses, in labours and watchings, and fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,' &c.; whereas the false ministers are known by the life of pomp and ease. The rule is plain, because self-denial is one of the great lessons of Christianity, and self-seeking the bane of it: therefore where men professedly seek the greatness of the world, they serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies.

(2.) Where men are turned from God to idols, though it be not the demons of the Gentiles, but saints, as mediators of intercession, their godliness is destroyed and the mystery of iniquity set up; for the great drift of the Christian religion is to bring us to God, through Christ. So the great whore—(which imports a breach of the fundamental article of the covenant, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me), it is said, Rev. 17:5, 'Upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon, the mother of fornications and abominations upon earth,'—debaucheth nations with her idolatry, and so seduceth from God to the worship of the creature, that the great intent of the gospel is lost.

(3.) Wherever power is usurped in Christ's name, and carried on under the pretence of his authority, to the oppressing of Christ's sincere worshippers, who hate the carnal life, and would by all means keep themselves from idols, or bowing and worshipping before images, but excel in unquestionable duties, there is the mystery of iniquity; for the beast, that hath a month like a dragon, pusheth with the horns of a lamb, Rev. 13:11. The violence and persecution against the sincere, pure worshippers of Christ is nothing else but the mystery of iniquity, the enmity of the carnal seed against the holy

seed, or the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman disguised.

(4.) Where there is a lessening of the merits of Christ and his satisfaction, as if it were not sufficient for the expiation of sin without penal satisfactions of our own, there is the mystery of iniquity: 'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,' Heb. 10:14.

(5.) Where the new nature is little thought of, and all religion is made to consist in some external rites and adorations or indifferences, there the reducing of man to God is much hindered, and Christianity is adulterated, and the religion that designedly countenanceth these things is but the mystery of iniquity—To worship God, as the Papists do, with images, agnus dei's, crucifixes, crossings, spittle, oil, candles, holy water, kissing the pix, dropping beads, praying to the Virgin Mary and other saints, repeating over the name Jesus five times in a breath, repeating such and such sentences so often, praying to God in an unknown tongue, and saying to him they know not what, adoring the consecrated bread as no bread, but the very flesh of Christ himself, fasting by feasting upon fish instead of flesh, choosing a tutelary saint whose name they will invoke, offering sacrifices for quick and dead, praying for souls in purgatory, purchasing indulgences for their deliverance, carrying the bones and other relics of saints, going in pilgrimage to shrines or images, or offering before them, with a multitude more of such trashy devotions, whereby they greatly dishonour God and obstruct the motions of the heavenly life, yea, quite kill it; for instead of the power and life of grace, there are introduced beggarly rudiments or ritual observances in indifferent things, and vain traditions by which Christian liberty is restrained, and these pressed with as much severity as unquestionable duties established by God's known law for the renewing and reforming mankind. We are to 'stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage,' Gal. 5:1; Col. 2:16, 'Let no man judge you in meat or drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new

moons, or of a sabbath-day.' These things are left to arbitrament, to abstain or use them for edification. That physician may be borne with who doth only burden the sick with some needless prescriptions, if faithful in other things; but if he should tire out the patient with prescriptions which are not only altogether needless, but troublesome, costly, and nauseous, and doth extinguish and choke true religion by thousands of things indifferent, making our bondage worse than the Jews', this is the mystery of iniquity,—to cheat us of the power of godliness by the show of it, burdening of men with unnecessary observances.

2. How did this work in the apostle's time? Something there was then which did give an advantage to Antichrist, and laid the foundation of his kingdom, and did dispose men's minds to an apostasy from pure Christianity; as—

[1.] Partly the idolising of pastors by an excess of reverence, such as was prejudicial to the interests of the gospel, setting them up as heads of factions: 1 Cor. 1:12, 'Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas; 1 Cor. 3:22, 'Glory not in men, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas,' &c. This in time bred tyranny and slavery in the church.

[2.] The ambition of the pastors themselves, and the spirit of contention for rule and precedency: Acts 20:29, 30, 'There shall arise among you ravening wolves, speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them;' which within a little time began to affect not only a primacy of order, but of jurisdiction and authority; so that then Antichrist did not exist in his proper person, but in spirit and predecessors.

[3.] The errors then set afoot corrupted the simplicity of the gospel: 1 John 2:18, 'Now there are many antichrists;' 1 John 4:3, 'Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is the spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard it should come, and even now already is it in the world.' The spirit of

Antichrist is even now in the world; there was a spirit then working in the church to introduce this mystery of iniquity, only the seat was not empty, but filled by another; the seeds of this mystery were sown in ambition, avarice, haughtiness of teachers, and their carnal and corrupt doctrines.

[4.] Some kept their Jewish, others their Gentile customs, so that the Christian religion was secretly tainted and mingled with the seeds of heathenism and Judaism, which afterwards produced the great apostasy. Paul, in all his epistles, complaineth of the Judaising brethren, and seeks to reduce them to the simplicity of the gospel. In the Corinthians he complaineth of their resort to idol temples, their communion in idol-worship: 1 Cor. 10:14, 'Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry;' and ver. 20, 'But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to devils and not to God, and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils,' and 2 Cor. 6:16. The worship of angels, interdiction of certain meats, then will-worship, and shows of humility: Col. 2:16, 'Let no man judge you in meat and drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days;' and ver. 18, 'Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up with his fleshly mind;' and vers. 22, 23, 'Why are ye subject to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men? which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body.' Contempt of magistracy: 2 Peter 2:10, 'But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government; presumptuous are they, self-willed, and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.' Thus you see how it began to work, and that the devil from the beginning had sown these tares.

But was it, then, in the apostle's time that the mystery of iniquity did begin to work? Then—

1. We see what need we have to withstand the beginnings, and not give way to a further encroachment on the church of God; and—

2. That the word of God should dwell richly in us, for we have to deal with mystical iniquity.

III. Proposition: That when that impediment shall be removed, then Antichrist shall be revealed; only he that now letteth will let till he be taken out of the way. Where observe—

1. It was before, τὸ κατέχων, that which letteth; now it is ὁ κατέχων, he that letteth—the empire and the emperor. And mark, a long succession of empires is called ὁ κατέχων: why not then a long succession of popes, the man of sin, the son of perdition?

2. He that now letteth will let. Antichrist was but in fieri, and that secretly and in a mystery; there was desire of rule, some superstitious and false doctrines, some mixture of human inventions, borrowed both from Jewish and heathenish rites, mingled with the worship of God, some secret rising of antichristian dominion, some playing at lesser game, as Victor took upon him to excommunicate the Eastern churches for the matter of Easter. But before this obstacle was removed, he could not fully appear and invade the empire of God and men till the emperor was removed out of that city: while the heathen emperors prevailed, there was no place for churchmen's ambition; their times were times of persecution, and it is not persecution, but peace and plenty, that breedeth corruption in the churches.

3. He, that is, the emperor, must be taken out of the way, that is, either by the removal of his person and throne from the city of Rome, or till the Roman empire be ruined, as it was in the East by the Turk, in the West by the incursions of many barbarous nations, parting it into ten kingdoms, and then by the translation of the empire to Charles the Great.

Well, then, note three things for the time of Antichrist:—

1. Before the obstacle was removed he could not appear.

2. When this obstacle was removed, presently he appeared.

3. The degrees of the falling of the one are the degrees of the exaltation and establishment of the other, for Antichrist did grow up upon it.

But they say, the Roman empire is not quite fallen, there being a Roman emperor still. But (1.) the present empire is but inane nomen, or umbra imperii—a mere name, or a shadow of the empire. (2.) He that then let, in St Paul's time, was the succession of the Roman emperors, but this is the German empire; now, if the Roman empire were the only impediment (the apostle useth the word $\mu\acute{o}\nu\upsilon\upsilon$), therefore as soon as that should be removed, Antichrist would infallibly be revealed. (3.) Though this empire be not abolished, but removed out of Rome, it is enough to make good Paul's prophecy. Dixit apostolus, imperium esse de medio tollendum, non prorsus delendum.—(Whitaker.) Well, then, since the seat is left void, either the prophecy is not accomplished at the time, or else the Pope is Antichrist, for the nations are long since fallen away from the Roman empire, and the emperor hath no power nor authority at Rome.

Use. To give a new note to discover and descry the man of sin. Certainly Antichrist is already revealed, and we may find him somewhere. I prove it by two arguments:—(1.) The mystery began to work in the apostle's days; therefore surely it is completed by this time, and not reserved to a short space of time a little before Christ's coming to judgment; (2.) This spiritual usurped power was to break forth upon the fall of the empire; accordingly so it did, though it grew to its monstrous excess and height by degrees, as to ecclesiastical dominion, in Boniface III., who obtained from Phocas the title of universal bishop; whereas Gregory the Great called John of Constantinople the forerunner of Antichrist for arrogating the same title.

SERMON VI

And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming.—2 THES. 2:8.

THESE words contain both the rise and ruin of Antichrist, his revelation and destruction.

1. As to his revelation, there are two things:—

[1.] The title given to Antichrist: ὁ ἄνομος, the wicked.

[2.] His appearing in the world upon the taking away the impediment: shall be revealed.

2. As to his ruin, three things are observable:—

[1.] The progress of his destruction, which is here considered as begun, or as consummated.

(1.) A diminishing of antichristianism: whom the Lord shall consume.

(2.) The finishing thereof, in the word destroy.

[2.] The author, the Lord.

[3.] The means.

(1.) God's word, called his breath, or the Spirit of his mouth.

(2.) The brightness of his coming, namely, when he shall come to judge the world in the glory of the Father.

First, Of the rising of Antichrist: 'And then shall that wicked be revealed.'

1. The title given to Antichrist, ὁ ἄνομος, that lawless one, or son of Belial. It is the property of Antichrist to boast himself to be above all laws, and to be judged by no power upon earth; for therein he resembleth Antiochus, of whom it is said, 'He shall do according to his own will,' Dan. 11:36. Now if this be one of his characters, it will not be hard to find him out; for who is that infallible judge that taketh upon him to decide all controversies, and judgeth all things, and is judged of no man? and whosoever doth but mutter against his decrees and delusions, if a private person, he is to be destroyed with fire and sword; if a prince, to be excommunicated, deposed, and his subjects freed from all allegiance to him? Who is he that taketh upon him, with faculties, licenses, and pardons, to dispense with the law of God, and to allow open and notorious sins? Who is he that by his own writers is said to be *Solutus omni lege humana*, freed from all human law (*Hostiensis*), *Nec ullo jure humano ligari potest*, that hath a paramount authority to all laws, that he cannot be bound by them, whether they concern parricide, the murder of princes; or perjury, the obligation of oaths; or matrimony, the bond of conjugal relations? But one expressly saith, that he is *supra jus, contra jus, extra jus*, above law, against law, and without law; a plain description of the lawless one in the text; and another, not without some spice of blasphemy, *Apud Deum et Papam sufficit pro ratione voluntas*, God and the Pope have their will for a law. Lastly, Who is he that hath brought into the church the great impiety of worshipping of God by images, and the worship of the saints and angels, with a worship which is only due to God? which is the great ἀνομία, the lawlessness, which the pure Christian rule condemneth and brandeth for such. If there be not such a power extant in the Christian world, then I confess we are yet to seek for Antichrist; but if there be, none so wilfully blind as they that cannot see wood for trees, and know not where to fix this character.

2. His revelation: 'Then shall that wicked be revealed.' The word revealed noteth two things:—

[1.] His appearance in the world.

[2.] God's discovery of him.

[1.] Then he shall be revealed beareth this sense, He shall be in the world, and begin to lift up his head as soon as the Roman emperor and empire shall be removed; this lawless one shall begin to discover himself and set up his kingdom.

Now to understand this, consider this:—

(1.) The most learned interpreters, both ancient and modern, agree in this, that the impediment was the Roman empire, as we showed before; and therefore as the Roman empire and emperor were removed out of the way, Antichrist was to be revealed, or the predictions of the scripture are false.

(2.) Things of great moment cannot be removed nor established in a minute. The removing of the Roman empire was not all at once, nor the rising of the pontificate, but by degrees the seat began to be made void. When Constantine began to remove the imperial throne to Byzantium, though the majesty of the empire continued still at Rome, yet this was a step to the removing or the impediment, for by that means the popes grew in greatness; but as the emperor's authority was lessened, so grew that of the popes, who still encroached to themselves more and more power, and that to promote the apostasy and derogation from the pure Christian religion. But as soon as he arose, he came not to the height of his power, either ecclesiastical or temporal, nor shall he presently decay.

(3.) To state the progress of antichristian tyranny is not for a sermon, it filleth whole books; but thus in short. About the year 600, or in that century, their ecclesiastical power began to be raised, when the majesty of the empire was low and weak in Italy, and therefore then was Antichrist advanced a good step. When John of Constantinople had usurped the title of universal bishop, Gregory the Great saith, *Rex superbiæ prope adest*—the king of pride is near; *et sacerdotum exercitus ei præparatur*—an army of priests is prepared to serve him

as their general; this he—(fidenter dico, I speak confidently) and within six years or thereabouts Phocas conferred on Pope Boniface the same title, to ingratiate himself with the people of that part of the empire, after the murder of his lord and master. And then many superstitions were gotten into the church; as, about the year 688, the Pope obtained of the emperor the Pantheon, or temple of all-devils, and consecrated the same to the Virgin Mary, and all saints. The temporal monarchy was long in hatching, but yet the beginning of this mystery soon bewrayed itself. In the beginning of the seventh century, Constantine the Pope would have his foot kissed, like another Diocletian, and in defence of image-worship he openly resisted Philipppicus, the Emperor of Greece, and encouraged Justine and Anastasius, tyrants and murderers, who submitted themselves to him with adoration. Rebellion and idolatry have been ever continued since. In the year 720, or thereabouts, Gregory the Second and Third continued the same idolatry and rebellion, and caused all Italy to withdraw their obedience from the Emperor Leo, because he had commanded all images to be broken and burnt, and for the same cause excommunicated him, and took to himself the Coctian Alps as the gift of the Lombards. In the same century, 749, Zachary encourageth and assisteth Pepin to depose his master Childeric, king of France, and to take upon him that kingdom. Afterward Adrian took upon him to translate the empire of the Greeks to the Latins; and ever since deposed emperors and made broils in kingdoms.

[2.] God's discovery of him to the world; that is, when Antichrist was not only extant, but impleaded as such; and this also was by degrees, God raising up in every age witnesses against the tyranny and usurpations of Rome, as the place, and the Pope, the person, as, considered in his succession, claiming the same power. Five hundred years before Luther, Peter Bruis began, and Henry his scholar succeeded him, and both of them succeeded by the Waldenses and Albigenses; then Wicliffe, the Bohemians, who have all pleaded and proved that the Pope was the very Antichrist; then Savonarola in Italy preached this boldly. In the fifteenth century, about 1500, there were some remainder of the Albigenses about the Alps, some few

relics of the Hussites and Calixtines in Bohemia, so few and so ignorant that they had neither learning nor ability to oppose this potent tyranny. Then God raised up Luther, and many other worthies to assault the idolatry, tyranny, and errors of the church of Rome; and it is reported in history, that the angel on the top of the Tower St Angelo was beaten down by a thunderbolt; and in the very day and in the church where Pope Leo the Tenth at Rome had created thirty-one cardinals, a sudden tempest dashed the keys out of the hands of the image of St Peter, showing God would begin to take away their power.

Use. If God hath revealed Antichrist, let no man shut his eyes, but let him be shunned, forsaken, and abhorred. When Christ was to come into the world, it was a day of rumours; some sent to John Baptist, whether he were the Christ, others cried up false Christs and impostors; but the people were alarmed with a general expectation. So when Antichrist was to be revealed, it was a day of rumours; just about the time there was a great expectation: some pitched it here, some there, until the pit was discovered to the church, and the snare laid open. And now to run wilfully into these errors, how damnable is it! If Papists cleave to him, let not Protestants fall to him; to continue Papists is dangerous, for they favour Antichrist, and serve Antichrist; but to turn Papists is more dangerous, for this is a downright revolt from Christ to Antichrist. And how God may in mercy dispense with errors imbibed in our education we know not; but to turn our back on the truth, wherein we have been educated and instructed, maketh it more dangerous to our salvation.

Secondly, We now come to the more comfortable part, his ruin; where note:—

I. In the general, that the apostle, as soon as he had showed his rise, he presently foretelleth his ruin, to support the hearts of the faithful, though he hath yet more things to speak concerning his discovery, ver. 9. I cannot let this pass without an observation.

Doct. That a spiritual eye can discern the ruin of wicked instruments, even in their rise and reign: Job 5:3, 'I have seen the foolish taking root, and presently I cursed his habitation.' By the foolish, is meant the wicked; by their taking root, their seeking to fix and settle themselves in their worldly prosperity; I presently, that is, without any great deliberation, which in this matter needeth not, cursed their habitation, not as desiring, but as foreseeing and foretelling. I pronounced them accursed, or to be in a cursed condition; when carnal men seek to root and establish themselves upon earth, to a spiritual eye, their best estate is miserable and detestable. When we see their rise, we may foretell their fall.

REASONS

1. Their faith occasions such a reflection, which is 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1. They look not at things as at present they seem to shortsighted men, or as they relish to the flesh, but as they appear, and will be judged of at last; their ruin is as present before them as their rise; present time is quickly past. But now without faith this cannot be: 2 Peter 1:9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off,' *μωπάζων*, but are dazzled with present splendour, and so miscarry.

2. This faith is necessary:—(1.) Partly to prevent scandal at the prosperity of an ungodly party who obey not the gospel, but corrupt and pervert it to their worldly ends. David's steps were even gone when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, till he went into the sanctuary and understood their end, Ps. 73:17; that settled his heart, to consider what end these men were appointed unto. How prosperous soever they seem to be for the present, yet the end must put the difference; there they see the wicked in the height of their prosperity, as ready to be cut down and withered. (2.) To prevent apostasy. They choose the better part that choose the holiness and patience of the saints: 2 Cor. 4:18, 'While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are

eternal.' But things present carry away our hearts, because we have so dim and doubtful a sight of things to come; whereas, if we did look upon them as sure and near, they would fortify us against temptations: Prov. 3:31, 32, 'Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways; for the froward is abomination to the Lord, but his secret is with the righteous.'

II. More particularly the ruin of Antichrist is set forth:—

1. Partly by the manner of his fall. It is represented both as begun and finished: he shall be consumed, he shall be destroyed; the one noteth a lingering delay, the other an utter perdition, that he shall be finally rooted out.

First, Consumed; to consume is to waste and melt away by little and little.

Doct. Antichrist is not presently to be destroyed, but to waste away by a lingering consumption; as his rising was by little and little, so is his fall; he loseth his authority in Christendom by degrees.

Now the reasons may be these:—

1. God hath a ministry and use for him and the abettors of his kingdom, as he hath a use for the devil himself, therefore permitteth him some limited power; but yet he holdeth him in the chains of his invincible providence. So hath he a use for the devil's eldest son, for Antichrist, and antichristian adversaries, which, if their power were wholly gone, could not be performed; as—

[1.] To scourge his people for their sins, as their contempt of the gospel, and wantonness under the several privileges which they enjoy by it. God will not want a rod to scourge his disobedient children; as, Isa. 10:5, he calleth the Assyrian 'the rod of his anger,' the instrument that he maketh use of to punish those with whom he is angry. And again, the 'staff of his indignation,'—the staff is a heavier and sorer instrument of correction than a rod. What the Assyrian

was to the Jews, that Antichrist is to professing Christians. God useth him till he have sufficiently chastised his children, and then he will cast this rod into the fire. Heathens and Turks are at a distance from us: our miseries will come from antichristianism, who are nearer at hand to execute the Lord's vengeance when we grow wanton.

[2.] To try his people, for he expects a tried obedience; what Christianity we will accept and choose—that calculated for this world, or that which is calculated for the next. Antichristianism, in all the branches of it, is a sort of religion suited to worldly interests: 1 John 4:5, 'They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them;' but true Christianity is for the kingdom of heaven: 1 Cor. 2:12, 'Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God.' Therefore God will try who are the formal and pretended Christians, that serve their own bellies, and the sincere Christians, who look to an unseen world, and are willing to hazard their own interests out of their fidelity to Christ; therefore, when the saints under the altar groaned: Rev. 6:10, 'How long, Lord, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?' the answer given was, ver. 11, 'that they should rest for a season until their fellow-servants, and also their brethren that should be killed, as they were, should be fulfilled.' In every age God will have his witnesses, who by their faith and patience, and not loving their lives to the death, should promote the Lamb's kingdom before they receive their crown; and therefore, though Antichrist be consumed more and more, yet he hath so many abettors of his kingdom left as may try the faith and patience of the saints.

[3.] To cure our divisions. Nazianzen called the enemies κοινοὶ διαλλακταί, the common reconcilers. The dog is let loose to make the sheep flock together. We are hardened in our strifes against each other till a common danger unite us. It is noted that when there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abraham's cattle and Lot's cattle, the Canaanite and Perizzite were yet in the land, Gen. 13:7. God will

unite those in common sufferings whose stubborn humours will not suffer them to meet upon other terms.

[4.] To keep up a remembrance of his mercies: Ps. 59:11, 'Slay them not, lest my people forget; scatter them by thy power, and bring them down, O Lord, our shield.' God maketh us sensible of the care he hath over us, not by the utter destruction of the enemies of his people, but by lingering judgments on them, which affect us more than if they were cut off suddenly.

2. Many other reasons may be given, because it serveth the beauty and harmony of his providence to cut them off in their time, and by such means as he hath appointed, and in such a way as shall most conduce unto his glory. But I pass them by; we must tarry his leisure, and not question his truth and care over us, and be content that our faith and patience be exercised. If God should bring a sudden destruction upon a power and tyranny so supported by the combined interests of the world, we were not able to bear it. Thorns serve for a fence to a garden of roses. God would not destroy the Canaanites at once, lest the beasts of the field should increase upon them, Deut. 7:22; nor all abettors of antichristianism, lest his people should lie open to such evils as they cannot bear.

[1.] Observe this consumption, how it is accomplished. If we find Antichrist risen, discovered, and consumed, why should we be in doubt any longer? The pomp and height was much about 1500 years after Christ; what a consumption hath happened since, by the reviving religion and learning, the Christian world should with thankfulness take notice of, by the falling of Germany, England, France, and Hungary in a great part, together with Denmark, Sweden, Poland, and other countries; and by what means hath this been but by the Spirit of his mouth? It is profitable to know Antichrist by his rise and description; but it is comfortable to know him by his discovery and consumption, and God's blessing such unlikely means at the beginning to such a wonderful effect. When Luther first appeared, the bishop of Strasburg told him, Abi in

coelum, mi fraler, et dic, miserere nostri. But God hath done great things for us too: when he first turned the captivity of his churches, we were like unto those that dream.

[2.] Caution. Antichrist is consumed, but he is not yet dead. What strength he may recover before his last destruction, God knoweth. Popery after it was cast out, hath re-entered Bohemia and Austria, and the emperor's hereditary countries; and what havoc hath been made of the evangelical churches, the book of Caraffa, the bishop and legate of the Pope, called *Germania sacra restaurata*, showeth, wherein many notable things concerning their artifices to replant Popery are set down. As to England, some hope his consumption is not desperate, and many fear that Popery may recover again, unless God in mercy prevent it. We know not what is in the womb of providence, or how far the prerogative of free grace may interpose in our behalf—whether England shall be made a theatre of mercy once more, or the seat of idolatry, and superstition, and blood. But though we do not know what God hath determined, yet we may soon know what England hath deserved. And that is enough to quicken us to watchfulness and prayer, and expectation, and serious preparation for the day of evil; and by these things, if it cometh to pass, it will do us no harm.

(1.) When God hath laid in great store of comforts against sufferings, usually there is a time of expense to lay them out again. Christ warned his hearers to make use of the light, because of the darkness coming upon them, John 12:35, 36. You never knew the gospel powerfully preached, but trials came: Heb. 10:32–34, 'For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' Castles are first victualled, then besieged: the ministry is consolatory mostly.

(2.) When men can neither bear our vices nor their proper remedies: Ezek. 24:13, 'In thy filthiness is lewdness; because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy

filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee;' Hosea 7:1, 'When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria, for they commit falsehood,' &c.

(3.) When there are great differences amongst God's own people, the end is bitter; we warp in the sunshine, will not know the way of peace. Eusebius says, before Diocletian's persecution, φιλονεικίαις ἀνεφλέγοντο—the church was torn with intestine broils, pastors against pastors, and people against people. Ease begets pride and wantonness, and that maketh way for contention.

(4.) When profaneness increaseth, and men do not walk becoming the gospel, God taketh the gospel from them. The apostasy from the power and purity of religion first made way for Antichrist, and is most likely to let him in again.

(5.) When a people are prepared for such impressions, there is a party formed, partly by opinions that symbolise with Popery, partly by doting on the pomp and outside of religion, and neglecting the life and power of it; and partly when indifferent and atheistical conceits do dispose their minds no more to one religion than another: usually then is a nation fitted for such a change.

Now what shall we do?

1. Watch and pray. A people well awaked will not change their religion. The envious man sowed tares while the servants slept, Mat. 13:25. Be instant with God in prayer, as all good Christians should be, when the church is in danger; as David, Ps. 59:13, 'Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be, that they may know that God rules in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah.' The consumption is at hand: Luke 21:36, 'Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be counted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass.'

2. Reform and repent: Rev. 2:5, 'Repent, or I will remove thy candlestick out of his place.' Our disorders must be bewailed and redressed. There are two stumbling-blocks—the idolatry of the Romish synagogue, and the evil manners of the Reformed Churches.

3. Be fortified and established:—

[1.] By knowledge. If we have not ἴδιον στηριγμὸν, a stedfastness of our own, we shall fall, 2 Peter 3:17; in a time of long peace, arms hang up a-rusting; and so we are not prepared to resist temptations.

[2.] By grace: 'It is good the heart should be established by grace,' Heb. 13:9. The new nature will caution men against many popish errors: 1 John 2:20, 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.' A child of God hath something in his bosom that will not permit him to hearken to Popery; the very life in us is opposite to this dead show and mummery of trashy devotions.

Now I come to the author, with the means of consuming: 'The Lord shall consume him with the spirit of his mouth.' The Lord, that is the Lord Christ. But what is meant by the spirit of his mouth, or the breath of his mouth, as some render it? Two things may be meant hereby—either his providential word, or his gospel, accompanied by his Spirit.

1. His providential word; that is, when Christ saith, Let it be done, it shall be done: Isa. 11:4, 'He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.' Those that are called wicked, they are also called the earth, because they are earthly-minded, and have their portion here, and possess much on earth, and have great power, by the advantage of which they oppress his people. Now, to execute judgment upon them, Christ needeth no more than the rod of his mouth, that powerful word whereby he created all things: Ps. 33:6, 'By the words of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth;' upholdeth all things: Heb. 1:3, 'Upholding all things by the word of

his power;' and brings all things to nothing again: John 18:6, 'As soon as he had said to them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground;'—one word of his powerful providence is enough. Or, secondly—

2. It is meant of the efficacy of his gospel, as it is accompanied by his Spirit, called 'The sword of the Spirit,' Eph. 6:17. And it is said to be 'quick and powerful,' Heb. 4:12; and Rev. 2:16, 'Repent, or I will come against thee quickly, and smite thee with the sword of my mouth.' By this word he shall confound the falsehood and cunning practices which are carried on under this mystery of iniquity, and give it such a deadly and incurable wound, that it shall languish before it be utterly destroyed.

Doct. That Antichrist's destruction is by the preaching of the gospel, and the victorious evidence of truth. It must needs be so, for his kingdom and tyranny is upheld by darkness, which is dispelled by the light of the truth; and, therefore, the Papists, as all other heretics, are *lucifugæ scripturarum Dei*—cannot endure the scriptures, deny them to the people, and seek to make them contemptible by all the means they can. Again, his kingdom is carried on by falsehood; and his cheats, and impostures, and wickedness, and usurpation, and false interpretations and delusions are discovered by the truth and simplicity of the gospel, and so is consumed yet more and more. Lastly, Popery is a dead form of religion, and there is not only truth in the word of God, but life; we are not only enlightened, but quickened by it, and converted to God, and made partakers of his Spirit; and these will go against their own experience and inclination, if they should sit down with such empty, beggarly rudiments.

But here ariseth a question, Shall Antichrist be consumed no other way but by the spirit of his mouth? We read in the prophecy of wars, by which the antichristian state is brought to nought. I answer—The pure and powerful preaching of the gospel is the principal means whereby the Spirit of the Lord consumeth Antichrist in the hearts of men; but this is not exclusive of other means which God, in the ways

of his providence, may use to weaken his worldly interest. But we must distinguish between the means God may use and we must use. Simply to put down a religion by force of arms is not our way; it is not lawful certainly to invade other nations upon the pure and sole title of religion; but if they invade us on that account, no doubt a prince and people so invaded may defend themselves. But when a war is commenced on other occasions, it is the most cheerful cause to engage in. When we war against the abettors of Antichrist, we war against an enemy whom God will consume. Constantine warred against Licinius, his colleague, not because an infidel, but because he persecuted the Christians, contrary to their capitulations. Lewis XII. caused it to be disputed in a synod at Tours, Num liceret Papæ absque causa principi bellum inferre? when it was answered, Non licet; a second question, Num tali principi sua defensione fas sit eum invadere? Their answers were Licet, which he undertook, and caused money to be stamped with this inscription—Perdam Babylonem.

Use 1. We learn hence not to be discouraged in our greatest extremities, when all temporal hopes seem to fail, and we have nothing left us but the word of our testimony. Let us not distrust our spiritual weapons, for they are mighty through God to bring down all the strongholds of sin and Antichrist, 2 Cor. 10:4, 5. Oh, encourage yourselves in the Lord; you have the merit of his humiliation, and the power of his exaltation. Merit, what cannot the blood of Christ do to fetch off men from their inveterate prejudices and superstitions? 1 Peter 1:18, 'We are redeemed by the blood of Christ from our vain conversation.' So, for the power of his exaltation, there is his Spirit. The success of his Spirit on the pouring out of the first sermon, Acts 2:41, fetched in 3000 souls that had imbrued their hands in the blood of their Saviour, and were in no very devout posture at that time. His word, that is, 'The rod of his strength,' Ps. 110:2, which hath a mighty power to convince, transform, and convert souls: Rom. 1:16, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation.' Then there is the power of providence; all judgment is put into Christ's hands for the advancement of his

own kingdom, John 5:22. If all be in Christ's hands, why should you distrust your cause, or the success of it?

2. If you would defend yourselves, and wound the enemy, be much acquainted with 'the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit,' Eph. 6:17; thereby you may ward off every blow of a temptation. Surely then we should be much acquainted with this word, that it may dwell in us richly, that we may have it ready; this is enough to make wise the simple for all necessary duties and defence.

3. Pray heartily that the word of God may have a free course, 2 Thes. 3:1, and that God would send forth labourers into his harvest, Mat. 9:38.

Secondly, The final destruction of Antichrist: and destroy him by the brightness of his coming. This coming is most likely to be the coming of Christ, so often mentioned: 2 Thes. 1:7, 8, 'When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;' 2 Thes. 2:1–3, 'Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, nor be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.' Others conceive some notable manifestation of his presence and power in his church; but this would engage us in many dark prophecies, which I shall not meddle withal (intending only a doctrinal discovery of Antichrist), as how long before his coming, by what means. Sure I am, that at his coming, 'The beast and false prophet shall be slain, and cast into the lake of fire,' Rev. 19:20; but for other things, I have not light enough certainly to define that the utter ruin of Antichrist is not to be expected till the second coming of Christ.

Use. Be not discouraged though Antichrist yet remain after all the endeavours against him.

It is enough that antichristianism shall be finished and finally destroyed; and for the time refer it to God. If it be not till the day of judgment, or Christ's final conquest over all his adversaries, you must be contented to tarry for that, as well as for other things.

SERMON VII

Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.—2 THESS. 2:9, 10.

WE have considered the titles of Antichrist, his nature and properties, the time of his rise, and with it his ruin; now we are to consider the way and means how he doth acquire and keep up this power in the world. The means are—(1.) Principal; (2.) Instrumental.

1. Principal: κατ' ἐνέργειαν τοῦ Σατανᾶ,—after the working of Satan.
2. Instrumental, which are also two:—

[1.] Pretence of miracles: with all power, signs, and lying wonders.

[2.] Other cheats and impostures: with all deceivableness of unrighteousness; their general way of dealing being sophistical and fallacious. Let us a little explain these things.

1. The great agent in setting up this kingdom: 'After the working of Satan.' It may note the manner, as we render after, that is, in such a way as Satan deceived our first parents, 'for he was a murderer and a liar from the beginning,' John 8:44; 'I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve by his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ,' 2 Cor. 11:3. So all this mystery of iniquity shall be carried on after this manner: by deceit, by the tricks of lying men, and the works of deceiving spirits. Rather it noteth Satan's agency and influence, and after, or according to the working of Satan, is as much as by the working of Satan, noting not only his pattern, but his influence; so is κατὰ often rendered, and the energy of the devil, and influence upon all

wickedness is spoken of elsewhere: Eph. 2:2, 'The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.' The devil hath a great hand over wicked men in the world; his way of dealing with them is most efficacious and powerful, and certainly he is the first founder and main supporter of the antichristian state.

2. The instrumental means.

[1.] By pretence of miracles: 'With all power, and signs, and lying wonders.' These three words signify the same thing, and are often joined when true miracles are spoken of; as 2 Cor. 12:12, 'Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all places, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds,'—δυνάμεις, σήματα, τέρατα. So Acts 2:22, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, wonders, and signs;' so Heb. 2:4, 'God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles;' Rom. 15:19, 'Through mighty signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God.' Powers they are called, because they issue from power divine and extraordinary; signs, from their use, because they serve to seal and signify the doctrine to which they are applied; wonders, from their effect, because they breed astonishment in the minds of the beholders: these were the true miracles. Now, Antichrist, to countenance his false doctrines and superstitions, would ape and imitate Christ, and pretendeth to powers, signs, and wonders: as Jannes and Jambres sought to imitate Moses, God permitting it in some degree; so Antichrist seeks to promote his kingdom the same way which Christ took to promote evangelical truth. But they are called powers, and signs, and lying wonders, i.e., lying powers, lying signs, and lying wonders, for it agreeth to all the words, though affixed only to one of them. But why lying wonders? Partly because the greatest number of them are mere fables, notorious impostures, and forgeries; partly because others are diabolical illusions, things beyond human, but not angelical power. If they are θαύματα,—wonders, they are not σημεῖα, as Chrysostom distinguisheth, fit signs to signify the truth of the doctrines; partly from the end and scope, for that must also be regarded. God

cautioneth his people, that if they gave them a sign and wonder, though it came to pass, if it were to draw them to other gods, it was to be rejected, Deut. 13:1–3; the spirits must be tried whether they be of God, 1 John 4:1; 1 Cor. 12:3, 'No man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed.' If a wonder be wrought, or pretended to be wrought, to draw us off from Christ, or to promote things clearly forbidden by the word of God, it is a lying wonder, as all Antichrist's are; for their end is to confirm the Pope's dominion and false doctrine. The sum is this, then: that many things are pretended, not really done,—impostures and forgeries, not miracles; other things, done by diabolical illusions, as there may be apparitions, visions, spectres, for Satan will bestir himself to keep up the credit of his ministers. Lastly, if we cannot otherwise disprove them, if they tend to false doctrine and worship, they are to be rejected, whatever extraordinary appearance there be in them.

[2.] The other expression concerning the means is general: 'With all deceivableness of unrighteousness;' which compriseth—

(1.) Their sophistical reasoning from antiquity, unity, infallibility, without coming to the intrinsic merits of the cause, but condemning the truth rather by prejudice.

(2.) Their practical acts and feats to beguile souls, by fawning or threatening, or preferment and persecutions; these are the arts by which Antichrist shall deceive men into unrighteousness, that is, to bring this corruption into the church, and acquire this power to himself.

Now I shall observe some points.

Doct. 1. The devil hath a great hand in setting up Antichrist's kingdom, as he hath a great interest by it; his coming shall be by, or after the working of Satan. He is the raiser and supporter of that estate, and he is the great seducer, opposer, and adversary of the gospel. This will appear, if you consider, first, the properties of the

devil—how the devil is set forth in scripture, and secondly, by what ways he promoteth his own kingdom.

First. 1. By ignorance; for the devils are called, Eph. 6:12, 'The rulers of the darkness of this world,' and his kingdom is called 'the kingdom of darkness,' Col. 1:13. The prince-like authority and government which by God's permission he exerciseth in the world, is over those who remain in a state of darkness and ignorance. Well, then, necessarily the devil must be a great friend to Popery, where ignorance not only reigneth, but is commended as the mother of devotion; it is into the ignorant part of the world and the church that the devil hath brought in errors in doctrine, formality and superstition in worship, and tyranny and usurpation in government.

2. The next thing ascribed to him is error; so it is said, John 8:44, 'He abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.' He soon apostatised from God and his way, and ever since is an enemy of all truth and goodness; he turned from God, and is a deceiver of others. To our first parents he called the truth of God in question, and was the inventor and beginner of all errors that have since fallen out in the world. Well, then, where should his eminent power and residence be, but in that society of professed Christians where most errors and corruptions in doctrine and worship have been introduced, where they teach men to pray to and for the dead, to adore the bread and worship it with divine worship, and to worship images, and to pray to God in a language which they understand not, and maim the Lord's Supper, and profess they can live perfectly without sin, and meritoriously and supererogate besides, and lay up a treasury of merits to redeem souls from purgatory? &c. There will be errors and mistakes in religion, while men are men; but where there is a wilful opposing of evident truths, and an obstinate refusing of all healing means, and men will abide in their errors rather than acknowledge that they have erred, surely they are governed by the influence of his counsels who abode not in

the truth, and seeketh what he can to hinder the prevalency of it in the world.

3. That which is ascribed to Satan is idolatry. This was his first and great endeavour in the world, to bring man to worship other gods rather than the true, or the true God by an idol. So he prevailed among the heathen; they thought their images did represent their gods, and that their gods dwelt in them, as our souls do in our bodies; therefore the Psalmist saith, 'all the gods of the nations are idols' or devils, Ps. 96:5, and the devil was the great master and contriver of this idolatry; therefore it is said, Ps. 106:37, 'They sacrificed their sons and daughters unto devils.' The service done to idols or images of man's devising is not done to God, as men pretend who worship them, but to devils, who are the devisers, suggesters, and enticers of men unto all sorts of unlawful worship, and are in effect served and obeyed by a false religion: Deut. 32:17, 'They sacrificed unto devils, not unto God;' 1 Cor. 10:20, 'The things which the Gentiles sacrificed, they sacrificed unto devils, not unto God;' 2 Chron. 11:15, 'And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made;'—they otherwise meant it: Jeroboam intended it to the true God Jehovah, but it was of the devil's invention. Now if the devil can get such a party in the church as shall not only set up but be mad upon image-worship, who can more serve his turn among professing Christians than they who have consented to and continued in idolatrous worship? Surely then Satan is concerned to befriend their usurpations, and uphold their interests; for what will more conduce to the ruin of Christianity, or at least the decay of the power thereof?

4. That which is ascribed to Satan is bloody cruelty, or seeking the destruction of Christ's most faithful servants; for he is called a 'murderer from the beginning,' John 8:44; and Cain is said to be 'of that wicked one, because he slew his brother; and wherefore slew he him? because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous,' 1 John 3:12. Enmity to the power of godliness came from Satan; and wherever it is encouraged, and notoriously practised, they are a party

of men governed and influenced by Satan. Now, where shall we find this character but in Antichrist's confederacy? In the prophecy of him, Rev. 13:15, he caused as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed; and again, Rev. 17:5, 'The woman, whose name was Mystery, was drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus;' and it hath been eminently fulfilled in the blood shed in Germany, France, and England, and other nations; and all this to extinguish the light of, and suppress the Reformation. The world is no stranger to their bloody persecutions. Oh, how many seeming Christians hath Satan employed in these works of cruelty! When once he had seduced the church to so many errors, and corrupted the doctrine and worship of Christ, he presently maketh the erroneous party his instruments of as cruel and bloody persecutions as were ever commenced by infidels and Mahometans; witness their murders upon so many thousands of the Waldenses and Albigenses, whom they not only spoiled, but slaughtered with all manner of hellish cruelty. Some of their own bishops complained they could not find lime and stone to build prisons for them, nor defray the charges of their food. The world was even amazed at their unheard-of cruelties, smoking and burning thousands of men, women, and children in caves, others at stakes, and many ways butchering them; proclaiming croisados, and preaching up the merit of paradise to such bloody cut-throats as had a mind to root them out, driving multitudes to perish in snowy mountains. What desolations they wrought in Bohemia, what horrible massacres in France, what fires they kindled in England, and of late, what cruelties they exercised in Ireland, Piedmont! &c. Histories will tell you, and will tell all generations to come, what principles Rome is acted by, and how insatiable their thirst is for the blood of upright righteous men. And after all this, tell me, who is he whose coming is after the working of Satan? and whether we have cause to be enamoured of blood, and fires, and inquisitions?

5. That which is ascribed to Satan is, that he is 'the God of this world,' 2 Cor. 4:4; and again, 'the prince of this world,' John 12:31. He playeth the god here; the riches, honours, and wealth of this world

are the great instruments of his kingdom; and the men of this world, whose portion is in this life, are the proper subjects of his kingdom. Of the saints, Christ is their head; but of the wicked, ungodly, ambitious world, surely Satan is the head. There are two cities (as Austin distinguisheth them): Jerusalem is the city of God, and Babylon, that incorporation which belongeth to Satan. Now, then, where shall we find him whose coming is after the working of Satan, but with him who, with the loss of Christianity, exalteth himself, and affecteth an ambitious tyranny and domineering over the Christian world, both princes, pastors, and people; and to uphold the tyranny, careth not what havoc he maketh of the church; and the whole frame of their religion is calculated for secular honour, worldly pomp, and greatness?

Secondly, By the visible appearances of the devil, and where he is most conversant, as in his own kingdom. Before Christ's kingdom was set up, the devil did often visibly appear; but since, he playeth least in sight; when God openly manifested his presence by appearing to the fathers in sundry ways and manners, as he did before he spake to us by his Son, Heb. 1:1, 2, so did Satan; visions, apparitions, and oracles, were more frequent; and where Christ's spiritual kingdom prevaieth, the world heareth less of these things; but where it is obstructed, more. Now, two instances in Popery:—(1.) In their chiefs: how many conjurers and necromancers (who expressly consulted and contracted with the devil), from the year 600 to the year 1500, the chair of pestilence yielded, the histories tell us. (2.) In other duties, the devil had formerly, in the times of Popery, and still where it is allowed, incomparably more power among men to appear to them, and haunt their houses, and vex them, than now he hath; all that I say is, haunting of houses and apparitions were much more common.

Uses. 1. A detestation of Popery; whatever is of the devil should be hated by us, for we are Christ's soldiers, listed in his warfare in baptism: Rom. 6:13, 'Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of

righteousness unto God; but yield not your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin;' Rom. 13:12, 'Let us cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light.' Now, after our military oath, should we revolt to them that join with the devil and his angels, to make war against Michael and his angels?

2. To be more careful to be completely armed, 'For we fight not against flesh and blood, but principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places,' Eph. 6:11, 12; that is, not only with the one, but the other. The abettors of Popery are Satan's auxiliary forces, whom he stirreth up and employeth. Now, the devils are of great cunning and strength, and by God's permission exercise great authority in the world, and the matter about which we contend with them is the honour of God and Christ, and our eternal salvation. Therefore, since the subtlety, power, and strength of the enemy are so great, we had need to be the better prepared, and put on the whole armour of God. That bodily and human power that befriendeth the kingdom of Satan is formidable, and that can only reach the outward man; but devils and damned spirits are a more terrible and dangerous party, who secretly blind our minds and weaken our courage, and strangely and imperceptibly, by our own carnal affections, promote our eternal ruin.

3. It showeth us the folly of reconciling Babel and Sion—Rome, as it is, and the Reformed Churches: 'For what concord hath Christ with Belial?' 2 Cor. 6:15, 16; 'What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?' You can never reconcile God and Satan, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. I speak not of holy endeavours to adjust the controversies, and reclaim papists from their errors; that must be pursued, how fruitless soever the attempt be; but to hope for an agreement, as things now stand, is impossible.

4. Caution, that the devil prevail not against us; he once surprised Peter: Mat. 16:23, 'Get thee behind me, Satan;' he hath prevailed over them that usurp the highest chair in the Christian church. Let him not blind your eyes in whole or in part; though you be not drawn

to antichristianism, do not live in a carnal, worldly course: 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil,' 1 John 3:8. Every wicked act is Satan's invention; he stirreth it up, is served by it, delights in it, his kingdom goeth forward by it: he gaineth by every wicked action. Show plainly that you are not of his party, nor ever mean to be. Give way to fleshly and worldly lusts, and you are very prone to entertain the grossest temptations; and by subtle evasions will wriggle and distort yourselves out of your duty, as the papists do.

I come now to the second means.

Doct. That Antichrist doth uphold his kingdom by a false show of signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. To evidence this—

I. We must inquire what is a miracle? Miracles are works extraordinary, exceeding the ability of second causes, and done to confirm the truth. Where we may observe:—

1. The general nature of them.

2. Their author.

3. Their use.

1. Their general nature and kinds: extraordinary works. Some are either besides nature, when the course of nature is changed, as the standing still of the sun in Joshua's days, the going back of the shadow on Ahaz's dial in Hezekiah's time; above nature, as the opening of the eyes of a man born blind by Christ, John 9; against nature, when the operation of it is obstructed, as when the three children remained untouched in the fiery furnace, Dan. 3: the fire had not lost its property to burn, for those that cast them in were singed and scorched.

2. The author: they are works exceeding the ability of second causes, and therefore are always done by the power of God, either

immediately or mediately, using some creature in the performing of them, as the apostles of Christ. Well, then, the primary efficient cause is God, and the manner of working is extraordinary and unusual, exceeding the power and force of any creature.

3. The end and use is to confirm some truth. When they are done for curiosity, ostentation, and delight, they are but juggling tricks, and have not God for their author; much less when they are pretended to confirm a false doctrine or evil end. But real miracles do oblige by way of sign, declaring God's interest in or owning of the truth and testimony to which they are annexed. For God, being the ruler of the world, good, merciful, just, it is not to be supposed he will co-operate to a lie or cheat, or leave such a stumbling-block before his creatures.

II. That the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles did sufficiently prove that they were teachers sent from God, for Christ often appealeth to his works: John 5:36, 'For the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me;' and John 10:38, 'Though ye believe not me,' that is, his personal verbal testimony, 'believe the works,' that is, his miracles, 'that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him.' And when John sent his disciples to know whether he were the Messiah or no (not so much for his own confirmation as their satisfaction): Mat. 11:4, 'Go, show him what ye hear and see;' and what was that? 'The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up,' &c. So Nicodemus was convinced by these: John 3:2, 'We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for none can do the works that thou dost, except God were with him.' To improve these scriptures, let us consider:—

1. The necessity of this attestation.

2. The sufficiency of it.

1. The necessity there was that Christ's person and office should be thus attested. He had the law of Moses to repeal, which was well known to be God's own law; a new law to promulgate, which is the law of faith, or the gospel; and before this could be received, it was needful for him to manifest his authority. Besides, he came to redeem and recover sinners to God from the devil, world, and flesh. And that he might be more readily and cheerfully entertained, it was necessary to be evidenced that he came not only by God's permission, but commission. 'For him hath the Father sealed,' John 6:27, that is, authorised by miracles. Look, as in the first institution of the Aaronical priesthood, fire came from heaven to consume the sacrifices, whereas afterwards the high priests were consecrated and admitted by the ordinary rites, without any such attestation; so there was a greater necessity then, when God brought forth his Son into the world, and did first set up the gospel state, than there was afterwards, when the course and order of it was settled, and received in the world.

2. The sufficiency of it. The miracles then wrought were numerous, evident, and undeniable, being done publicly in the sight of all, and therefore the clearest attestation to his doctrine, that flesh and blood could expect; such a stream of holy, necessary miracles, that were for the most part not acts of pomp, but of succour and relief, and such as could be done by no power less than divine; not like those ludicrous miracles they talk of in Popery, which look like a cheat rather than a sign from heaven. These miracles of Christ could no way be impeached; for either it must be by some truth of God, which the new revelation did contradict, and delivered by more certain means than those miracles were—but no such revelation was there; all fairly accorded with those former revelations of his mind given to the ancient church; and Christ and his apostles preached no other things than what suited with Moses and the prophets, Acts 26:22—or else by some greater works which should contradict the testimony of these wonders, as Moses did the magicians of Egypt, Exod. 7:18; but no such thing could be alleged, or was pretended, therefore these were sufficient.

2. After the faith of Christ was sufficiently confirmed, miracles ceased; and it was fit they should cease, for God doth nothing unnecessarily. The Christian doctrine is the same that it was, and is to be the same till the end of the world; we have a sure and authentic record of it, which is the holy scriptures. The truth of Christ's office and doctrine is fully proved, and cometh transmitted to us by the consent of many successions of ages, in whose experience God hath blessed it to the converting, comforting, and saving of many a soul. Look, as the Jews, every time the law was brought forth, were not to expect the thunderings and lightnings, and the voice of the terrible trumpet, with which it was given at first on Mount Sinai (one solemn confirmation served for after ages); they knew it was a law given by the ministry of angels, and so entertained it with veneration and respect; so Christianity needed to be once solemnly confirmed (after ages have the use of the first miracles); for the apostle compareth these two things, the giving of the law and the gospel: Heb. 2:2–4, 'For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward: how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them that heard him?' we must be contented with God's owning it now only in the way of his Spirit and providence.

3. That upon the ceasing of miracles, or their growing to be unnecessary, we have the more cause to suspect them who will revive this pretence of a power to work miracles; especially after we are cautioned against these delusions, as here in the text against the lying wonders of Antichrist, and elsewhere: Mat. 24:24, 'For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect;' and again, Rev. 13:13, 'He doth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven upon earth in the sight of men.' But herein they triumph, when did they ever pretend to do so? Ans. This is not to be taken literally, for the whole chapter is mystical; none can be so ignorant that Antichrist shall arise as a beast out of the sea, with seven heads and ten horns; therefore, to

fetch fire from heaven is only an allusion to Elias, that he should pretend to work miracles, as did Elias, who brought fire from heaven, 1 Kings 18:24; and yet, in the letter, it was fulfilled in Pope Hildebrand, or Gregory VII., as one Paulus, who wrote his life, testifieth, who mentioneth divers wonders of fire wrought by him, and sundry times resembles him to Elias. The meaning is, he shall make his followers as confident of their errors as if they saw fire come from heaven to confirm them. But to return. We being thus cautioned and forewarned, miracles thus performed are deceitful. But you will say, though miracles are not necessary to confirm the faith, yet they are necessary to convince the falsehood of heresies. Ans. Heresies being a corruption of the faith once received, are to be confuted by arguments, not miracles; by evidence of doctrine, not wonders: partly lest the people be deceived by magical impostures, for it requireth some skill to distinguish true miracles from those that are deceitful, and done by the power of the devil; partly because *verum est index sui et obliqui*—faith stated and confirmed showeth what is error; so that to confute error by miracles is nothing but to confirm truth by miracles.

4. Whosoever teach false doctrine, not consonant to the truth of scriptures, or that faith of Christ which was confirmed by miracles, their wonders are lying wonders, and, how plausible soever they seem, are lying wonders, and not to be believed. Surely miracles must needs be false and pretended which are brought to confirm a doctrine contrary to that which is already confirmed by miracles; for God is faithful, and cannot deny himself, and therefore he cannot be the author of miracles whereby things contrary to each other may be confirmed. If the faith once be established by other miracles, we are to believe the latter miracles to be a mere imposture; for Christ is not yea, and nay, but 'yea, and Amen,' 1 Cor. 1:19, 20. The apparition of an angel is a great miracle, but 'if an angel preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed,' Gal. 1:8. It is a supposition of an impossible case, necessary to forewarn the people of God against the delusions of the

devil, changing himself into an angel of light. Surely God will never contradict himself.

5. The miracles wrought by Antichrist and his adherents are mira, but not miracula, some wonderful things, but no true and proper miracles; else, as Austin saith, *Figmenta mendacium hominum, portenta fallacium spirituum*—either the fictions of lying men, or the illusions of deceiving spirits. Many times the matter of fact is not true; at other times the thing done is but some illusion of the senses by the devil, or something taken for a miracle which doth not exceed the power of nature. Either way it is an imposture; and, indeed, the miracles of the legends are so false, so ridiculous, so light and trivial, that they expose Christianity to contempt; or else, if there be anything in it, it giveth suspicions of magical illusion and converse with the devil which, among their votaries and recluses, is no unusual thing.

6. There are seven points in Popery which they seek to confirm by miracles; and which, being senseless in themselves, do most scandalise Protestants.

[1.] Pilgrimages. They show the shrine, and also the chamber of the house of the blessed Virgin; how the Virgin at Loretto was transported out of Galilee into Dalmatia, and by angels in the air, to the remote parts of Italy, and settled there after some removes.

The story is ridiculous, and I am serious; yet this draweth an infinite company of pilgrims there, where new miracles are pretended to be wrought continually.

[2.] Prayers for the dead. Bellarmine allegeth, out of Gregory, the miraculous apparition of Paschal's ghost, beseeching St Germanus to pray for him.

[3.] Purgatory. All their miracles are framed especially for the establishing of this point, which is of such gain to them; as that a

dead man's skull spake to Mercarias praying, 'When thou dost offer prayer for the dead, then do we feel a little consolation.'

[4.] The invocation of saints. Alypius, a grammarian, being forsaken of his physicians, St Tiola appeared to him by night, demanding what he ailed, or what he would have? He answered (to show a touch of his art) in Achilles's speech to his mother Thetis, in Homer, &c. 'Thou knowest; why should I tell thee that knowest all?' Whereupon she conveyed a round stone to him, with the touch of which he was presently healed.

[5.] The adoration of images, but especially of the cross, crucifix, and image of Christ. Malvenda saith, that at Meliapore, in the East Indies, where St Thomas was killed by those barbarous people, digging, to lay a foundation, they found a square stone, in it a bloody cross, and an inscription implying the saint was slain in the very act of adoring and kissing the cross; hereupon on went the building, and the chapel being finished, in the beginning of the gospel, in sight of the whole multitude, the cross did sweat abundantly; the sweat wiped off, drops of blood appeared in the linen with which they wiped it, till at length it returned to its own colour.

[6.] The adoration of the host is made good by such a number of miracles as fill whole volumes. Bellarmine himself telleth us of a hungry mare, kept three days without meat, yet when provender was poured to her in the presence of the host, she, forgetting her meat, with bowed head and bended knees adored the sacrament.

[7.] The primacy of the Pope hath been the beginning and is the end of all popish legends. A bishop, being excommunicated by Pope Hildebrand, and inveighing against his pride, was smitten with a thunderclap. Baronius relates, that while Pope Eugenius the Third was celebrating the mass, a beam of the sun shone upon his head, in which were seen two doves, ascending and descending, which an Eastern legate seeing, submitted instantly to the primacy.

Use. Another note of Antichrist: these impostures are not only countenanced and encouraged in that church, but made a mark of it. The power of miracles: When Antichrist first appeared, ridiculous miracles of all sorts began to be cried up and established; yea, and to this day, these are pleaded, challenging us for the want of them. What they cannot prove by the oracles of God, they endeavour to prove by miracles of Satan.

SERMON VIII

With all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.—2 THESS. 2:10.

WE have described unto you the head of the antichristian state; we come now to the subjects, especially the zealous abettors and promoters of this kingdom. They are described:—(1.) By the means how they are drawn into this apostasy and defection, ἐν πάσῃ ἀπάτῃ τῆς ἀδικίας. (2.) By their doom or misery; they are in a state of perdition: in them that perish. (3.) By their sin, which is the cause and reason of this doom: because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

1. The means: 'With all deceivableness of unrighteousness.' That Antichrist shall be a deceiver, and that he deceiveth by lying miracles, we have seen already, and is foretold: Rev. 13:14, 'And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast,' &c.; but the deceived are not altogether guiltless, for the fraud would soon be discovered by a holy and pure soul. His great engine is either the baits of lust and sin, which work on none but those that have pleasure in unrighteousness, ver. 12: the generality of wicked and carnal Christians are easily drawn from God's pure worship, and true

godliness; either by worldly means, as by the offers of preferment, riches, dignities, or else terrors of the flesh. Now, none catch at these worldly baits but whose eyes the god of this world hath blinded, 2 Cor. 4:4.

2. Their misery: they are said to be 'those that perish.' That beareth three senses:—(1.) That they are worthy to perish, because they do not use care and diligence to understand their duty, being blinded by their worldly affections. That is the mildest sense we can put upon it; they deserve to perish. No man perisheth but for his own fault: Hosea 13:9, 'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.' Now, they that will yield to the deceivableness of unrighteousness, justly perish; though there be deceit in the case, yet there is unrighteousness in the case also. Fraudulent dealing should not so cozen us, as apparent unrighteousness or unfaithfulness to Christ should warn us. (2.) That they are in an actual state of perdition, and, unless they come out of it, are undone for ever. The apostles, when they propounded Christian doctrine, at first did use this term to distinguish impenitent unbelievers from those that received the gospel: as 1 Cor. 1:18, 'The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us that are saved the power of God:' so 2 Cor. 2:15, 'We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that perish, and in them that are saved.' So he distinguished them that receive the faith, and them that receive it not; penitent believers are those that are saved, but impenitent unbelievers are those that perish, that is, are for the present, during their infidelity and impenitency, in an actual state of perdition; so 2 Cor. 4:3, 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to those that are lost;' that is, who are for the present in a lost condition. We know not God's secret decrees, but those that refuse and oppose the only remedy, to all appearance, are lost men. Now, this he applieth to those that yield to Antichrist, showing them that though they are Christians, yet they have no more benefit by the gospel than infidels; they receive not the truth—these revolt from the owning of it upon carnal reasons: and therefore it is foretold, Rev. 14:9, 10, 'If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall

drink of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and the presence of the Lamb;' that is, all those that give up themselves as servants and soldiers to the antichristian estate, and obstinately adhere to and promote that profession, they shall taste of the Mediator's vengeance, which will be very sore and severe: Luke 19:27, 'These mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them forth, and slay them before me.' Popery is the highway to damnation. (3.) It beareth this sense, that they are fore-appointed to perish who are left to these delusions; they are such as God hath passed by, and not chosen to life. This is to be considered also; for damnable errors take not effect on God's elect: Mat. 24:24, 'If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.' The elect cannot altogether be seduced and drawn away from Christ, for God taketh them into his protection, and guardeth them against the delusions of false prophets, that, if they be for a time, they shall not always be deceived. So it is said, Rev. 9:4, 'The locusts shall hurt none of those that had the seal of God in their foreheads.' The delusions of Antichrist have only their full effect on those who are not elected and sealed, upon the hypocritical professors that live in the visible church. So it is said again, Rev. 13:8, 'All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life;' and again, Rev. 17:8, 'And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.' The elect are still excepted, which is much for the comfort of the godly, who belong to God's election, that he shall not prevail over them totally, finally. God hath chosen you to life.

3. The reason of this doom: 'Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.' By the truth is meant the gospel, the chief truth revealed in God's word, and the only means of salvation: Eph. 1:13, 'In whom also ye trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.' This is the truth most profitable to lost sinners; receiving is put for entertaining, or believing the

word; as Acts 8:14, 'When they heard that Samaria had received the word of God;' and Acts 11:1, 'That the Gentiles had received the word,' and elsewhere. This reception must be with love: Acts 2:41, 'As many as received the word gladly;' and Acts 17:11, 'They received the word with readiness of mind.' And this affection must produce its effect, so as to convert them unto God. Now, this is denied of them who are seduced by Antichrist, that they ever had any true love to the truth, or minded it in order to their salvation. Now, the business is, whether the clause concerned only the Jews, or can be applied to Christians? The Jews clearly received not the love of the truth, but did refuse Christ and his salvation. And herein the papists glory of an advantage of turning off this prophecy from themselves. But the apostle speaketh not of rejecting the truth, but of not receiving the love of the truth, which is not proper to the Jews but to false Christians. The Jews' company rejected Christ, and Antichrist was not sent to them for a punishment, but wrath came upon them to the uttermost, to the excision and cutting off their nation. But here is rendered the reason not of other judgments, but why men are captives to Antichrist. Therefore it is not so to be confined.

Doct. 1. The subjects of Antichrist's power and seduction are those that perish.

2. The great reason why God sent this judgment on the Christian world, is because they received not the love of the truth.

Doct. 1. That the subjects of Antichrist's power and seduction are those that perish.

It is a dreadful argument we are upon, yet necessary to be known for our caution, however to be handled warily. (1.) It is certainly more meet for us to have a regard of our own estate, than curiously to inquire what becometh of others. The apostle waiveth judging them that are without, 1 Cor. 5:12. I know he meaneth it of the censures of the church, which are not exercised upon infidels, but Christians; but so far we may apply it to this case, that we should not rashly judge of

the eternal state of other persons, but rather of things wherein ourselves are concerned. If the inquiry were only matter of curiosity, surely Christ's rebuke would silence it, 'What is that to thee?' John 21:22; for Christ is ill pleased with curiosity about the state of other men; but it is fit we should know our own duty and danger, and to that end it must be discussed. (2.) That there is a great difficulty of the salvation of papists so living and dying, if not an utter impossibility. Partly because, though it should be supposed that they retain the foundation, yet they build such hay and stubble upon it, so many errors in doctrine, corruptions in worship, and tyranny in government, that if a man could be saved, he is saved but as by fire, 1 Cor. 3:13; and no man that hath a care of his soul will either embrace Popery or continue in it. Where the way is plainest there are difficulties enough, and the righteous are scarcely saved; and, therefore, in a questionable way, none should venture. Worshipping of angels and saints departed, and images, are no light thing. Nor will a serious Christian choose that way where the doctrines of the gospel are so exceedingly corrupted, and there is such a manifest invasion of the authority of Christ, by challenging a universal headship over his church without his leave, and this maintained by errors and persecutions. (3.) We must distinguish of those that lived under Popery, rather as captives under this tyranny, than voluntary subjects of this kingdom of Antichrist; as many holy men did in former times, groaning and mourning under the abominations, rather than countenancing and promoting them. To these God speaketh when he saith, Rev. 18:4, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.' They were his people while they were there. These were as those 'seven thousand in Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal,' Rom. 11:4. (4.) There is a difference to be put between those that err in the simplicity of their hearts, knowing no better, and those that withstand the light upon carnal reasons, and will not retract their errors, though convinced of the degeneration of Christianity; for simple ignorance is not so damning as obstinate error: Luke 12:48, 'But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes,' &c.; and 1 Tim. 1:13, 'But I obtained

mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.' The scriptures many times condemn a way as a way of ruin, but all in that way are not damned; as John 4:22, 'Salvation is of the Jews.' There it is eminently dispensed, and yet therefore it followeth not that all the Samaritans were damned. Some among them, though tainted with the errors of their country, might have such knowledge of the law of God, and love to him, as might be effectual to salvation. (5.) We must distinguish between papists so living and so dying; many, by God's grace, may have repentance conferred upon them at death; and though they lived papists, might die as reformed Christians, seeking salvation by Christ alone, in the way of true faith and repentance, and so the Lord may manifest his compassion to them, pardoning the errors of their lives. (6.) We must distinguish times. God might dispense with many in the times of universal darkness and captivity, more than he doth afterwards, when the light of the gospel breaketh forth, and his trumpet is sounded to call them forth. Whosoever shall compare John Fierus and John Calvin will find they were assisted by the same Holy Spirit of God, though the one lived and died a papist, and the other was an eminent instrument in reforming the church of God; but an ignorant fear of separation from the catholic church caused many to do as they did; but much more doth it hold good in the times before. Our fathers, if alive, would not have condemned us, nor should we condemn them, being dead, before they had these advantages which we now enjoy. Illi si reviviscerent, &c., saith Austin in a like case. (7.) We must distinguish between Popish errors: some are more capital, as adoration of images, invocation of saints, justification by the merit of works, inhibition of the scriptures, &c.; others not so deadly, as when too much reverence is given to ecclesiastical orders and constitutions, penance, auricular confession, fasting, &c. Now though the case of a real papist, who is complete in this mystery of iniquity, and refuseth, hateth, persecuteth the truth offered, be desperate, yet the Lord may in tender mercy accept of other devout souls who yet live in that way, if they hold the head and the foundation.

Use 1. Let us not think Popery a light thing, which the Lord so peremptorily threateneth. Surely it is no little mercy that we are freed from it. Therefore we should be thankful for the light we have, and improve it well while we have it, and hold it fast. What hope soever we may have of men living in former times, and foreign countries, where they know no better, but after such express warnings, what hope can we have of English papists, considering the time, when Rome is not grown better but worse, and what was common opinion is now made an article of faith, and when the truth is taught and so clearly manifested; so that for any, by their own voluntary choice, to run into Popery, is a plain defection from Christ to Antichrist, and wilfully to drink that poison which will be the bane and ruin of their souls!

Doct. 2. The great reason why God sent this judgment upon the Christian world, is to punish those that received not the love of the truth.

Here I shall inquire—(1.) How many ways men may be said not to receive the love of the truth. (2.) How just their punishment is for such a sin.

[1.] In stating this sin—(1.) It is supposed that the truth and doctrine of Christ is made known to a people; yea, cometh among them with great evidence, conviction, and authority. For it is not the want of means, but want of love, that it is charged on them; and the plenty of means aggravateth their fault, and maketh their condemnation the more just: John 3:19, 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness more than light.' The truth was not for their turns, but was contrary to their lusts, and passions, and prejudices; and these they preferred before the light of the gospel shining to them.

(2.) That as in evidence of doctrine was not the cause of not receiving the truth, so not bare weakness of understanding. No; it is not weakness, but wilfulness which is here intimated; not a defect of

their minds, but their hearts: John 8:45, 'Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.' It was not weakness but prejudice hindered their believing. They despised the grace of God; yea, hated it for their lust's sake. Their lusts lie more in opposition to the truth than speculative doubts and errors: Luke 16:14, 'And the pharisees, who were covetous, when they heard all these things, derided him;' the words are, 'blew their noses at him.' The sensual, carnal, and ungodly world scorneth heavenly doctrine, and pure Christianity is distasted by false Christians. Err in mind, err in heart.

(3.) It is not enough to receive the truth in the light of it, but we must also receive it in the love of it, or it will do us no good. To make the truth operative:—(1.) Knowledge is necessary, and also faith, and then love. Knowledge, for 'without knowledge the heart is not good,' Prov. 19:2. Nothing can come to the heart but by the mind; the will is ὄρεξις μετὰ λόγου—a choice or desire, guided by reason, and the gospel doth not work as a charm, whether it be or be not understood. No; the purport or drift of it must be known, or how can it have any effect upon us? Next to knowledge, to make it work, there must be faith. When we apprehend a thing, we must judge of it, whether it be true or false; how else can it make any challenge, or lay claim to our respect? 1 Thes. 2:13, 'Ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which worketh effectually in you, as it doth in all them that believe.' Faith doth enliven our actions about religion; to hear of God, and Christ, and heaven, doth not stir us unless we believe these things. Well, next to faith there must be love, for apprehension and dijudication are acts of the understanding only, but love belongeth to the will, and we must believe with all the heart, Acts 8:37. There may be knowledge without faith, as an heathen may understand the Christian religion, though he believe it not, profess it not. And there may be faith without love, for there is a 'dead faith,' James 2:20, which rests in cold opinions, without any affection to the truth believed. Love pierceth deeper into the truth, and maketh it pierce deeper into us. As a red-hot iron, though never so blunt, will run farther into an inch board than a cold tool, though never so sharp. And love maketh it more operative; there is notitia

per visum, et notitia per gustum—a knowledge by sight, and a knowledge by taste. A man may guess at the goodness of wine by the colour, but more by the taste; that is a more refreshing apprehension; and Augustine prayeth, *Fac me, Domine, gustare per amorem quod gusto per cognitionem*—Lord, make me taste that by love which I taste by knowledge. Surely we are never sound in Christianity till all the light that we receive be turned into love. These great things are revealed and represented to our faith, not to please our minds by knowing them, but to quicken our love. Faith alone is but as sight, and faith with love is as taste. Now, it is more easy to dispute a man out of his belief that only seeth, than it is him that tasteth, and knoweth the grace of God in truth. This is the true reason of the steadfastness of weak and unlearned Christians; though they have not such distinct conceptions and reasonings as many learned men have, yet their faith is turned into love, and a man is better held by the heart than by the head. And though they cannot dispute for Christ (as one of the martyrs said), they can die for Christ. But alas! many receive the truth in the light thereof, but few receive it in the love of it, and so lie open to deceit.

(4.) This love must not be a slight affection, for that will soon vanish; but we must be rooted and well grounded, and have a good strength. The stony ground had some love to the word: *Mat. 13:20, 21, 'But he that receiveth the seed in stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet he hath not root in himself, but dureth but a while; for when tribulation or persecution riseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.'* So also of the thorny ground: 'He heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful,' *ver. 22*. Now what are the defects of this love? (1.) It is not radicated—a pang of love or flash of zeal; whereas we should be 'rooted and grounded in love,' *Eph. 3:17*. Hypocrites had a taste: *Heb. 6:4, 5, 'For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew*

them again unto repentance.' Tasted, but did but taste; did escape μιάσματα κόσμου, 2 Peter 2:20; yet, not having a good conscience, may make shipwreck of faith, 1 Tim. 1:19. (2.) It is partial. The gospel offereth great privileges, and it is also a pure, holy rule of obedience, Acts 2:41. The word of God is made up of precepts and promises. God offereth in the covenant excellent benefits, upon gracious terms and conditions: there must be a consent to the terms, as well as an acceptance of the privileges. The confidence of the privileges serveth to wean us from the false happiness, therefore that must be kept up: Heb. 3:6, 'But Christ, as a son over his own house, whose are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.' And the consent to the terms bindeth our duty upon us, Isa. 56:4. Now as willingly as we yielded at first, we must keep up the same fervour still: Deut. 5:29, 'Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always; that it might be well with them and with their children for ever.' But whole, pure Christianity is not loved by false Christians; therefore, when religion crosseth their interests and the bent of their lusts, they seek to bring religion to their hearts, not their hearts to religion. (3.) It is not strong, and in such a prevalent degree as to control other affections; it is but a passion, a pleasure, and a delight they take on for a time, not the effect of solid judgment and resolution—a joy easily controlled and overcome with other delights; therefore Christ requireth a denial of all things, for a close adherence to him and his doctrine, and hath told us, Mat. 10:37, 'He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me,' and Luke 14:26, 'cannot be my disciple.' This is a love to which all other loves must give way and he subordinate. Many love the truth a little, but love other things more, will be at no cost for it. Solomon giveth advice, Prov. 23:23, 'Buy the truth and sell it not.' In lesser points we must do nothing against the truth, for though the matter contended for be never so small, yet sincerity is a great point; but in the greater truths we should purchase the knowledge of them at any rate, and be faithful to Christ whatever it costs us. (4.) This slight love may arise from worldly respects. Now in the text it is said, 'They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.' It should arise upon

eternal reasons and considerations of the other world, which only produce abiding affections: Heb. 10:39, 'We are not of them that draw back to perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.' In closing with Christianity, that must be fixed as our scope, not to spare the flesh, but to save the soul, and to save the soul with the loss of other things; and that will make us true to Christ. But there are many foreign reasons for which men may show some love to religion. As, first, policy; as Jehu took up Jehonadab into the chariot with him, 2 Kings 10:15—there is his compliment to him. Jehonadab was a good man, and this honoured him before the people, to see Jehu and Jehonadab so well acquainted. Sometimes respect to others upon whom we depend. Many seem to be good because they dare not displease others that have authority over them, or an interest in them; as Joash was religious all the days of Jehoiada, for he stood in awe of him, 2 Chron. 24:2. Now such sorry religion dependeth on foreign accidents, the life of others or presence of others, and therefore it cannot be durable; whereas, in presence or absence, we should 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling,' Phil. 2:12; otherwise men only keep within compass for a while, but they have the root of sin within them still. Or it may be novelty, as our Lord telleth the Jews, 'John was a burning and shining light, and ye were willing to rejoice in his light for a season.' John was an eminent man for pureness of doctrine and vigour of zeal, and the more corrupt sort of Jews, pharisees as well as others, admired him for a while, but they soon grew weary of him—it was a fit of zeal for the present. Lastly, This love may be to the excellency of gifts bestowed upon some minister or instrument whom God raiseth up, or some countenance of great men given to their ministry may stir up some love and attendance on their ministry; and some respect is given for their sakes when men have no sound grace in their hearts. There is a receiving of the word as the word of man, and a receiving of the word as the word of God, as the apostle intimateth, 1 Thes. 2:13. The receiving of the word as the word of man, so it worketh only a human passion, a delight in the gifts of the ministry used: Ezek. 33:32, 'Thou art to them as a lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice.' Then there is a receiving it as the word of God, and

then we receive it with much assurance and joy in the Holy Ghost: 1 Thes. 1:5, 'Our gospel came to you, not in word, but in power, and much assurance, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' Now if we do not receive the truth upon God's recommendation and confirmation, we do not love truth as truth; our contest is not who hath most wit and parts, but most grace. (5.) They do not receive the love of the truth, when it doth not produce its solid effects, which is a change of heart and life, and they are not brought by the gospel to a sincere repentance and conversion to God, or receive the truth so as to live by it; but whilst they have the names of Christians, have the lives and hearts of atheists and infidels. These were those that debauched Christianity, and meritoriè and effectivè, by their provocations and negligence, brought this degeneracy into the church and judgment on the Christian world. Certainly a man hateth that religion which he doth profess when he will not live by it. This perfidiousness and breach of covenant was that which provoked God to permit these delusions in the church; the worldly, sensual, carnal Christians, that hate that life which their religion calleth for. The godly Christian and the carnal Christian have the same Bible, the same creed, the same baptism, yet they hate one another as if they were of different religions, and confound the distinction between the world and the church, because the world is in the church. And of sensual and godless men we must speak as heathens, as if they were without God: they abhor that religion which they do profess; that is, they abhor not the name, but they abhor those that are faithful to it and serious in it, who desire to know God in Christ, and desire to love him, and live to him. It was that Christ taxed in the pharisees; they honoured the dead saints and abhorred the living: Mat. 23:29–31, 'Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.' Christ hath not worse enemies in the world than those that usurp his name, and pretend to be his officers, and yet eat and drink with the drunken, and beat their fellow-servants, Mat. 24:49. Christ

will disown such at the day of judgment: Mat. 7:22, 23, 'Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' And such do most dishonour him in the world. A righteous, sober, godly life is the best evidence of our love to the truth.

[2.] How just this punishment is:—(1.) Because God hath ever held this course on the pagan world, who kept not the natural knowledge of God: 'He gave them up to vile affections,' Rom. 1:28. The Jews who rejected Christ: John 5:43, 'I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: another will come in his own name, and him will ye receive.' When Christ cometh merely for our benefit, the unthankful world will not make him welcome, but they will take worse in his room. So towards Christians. At first men would not receive the gospel while it was pure and in its simplicity, as taught by Christ and his apostles, and sealed by the blood of the martyrs, till it was backed by a worldly interest, and corrupted into a worldly design; and then they had it and all manner of superstitions together, and with these strong delusions there came just damnation. So still the pure gospel is refused, and God sendeth popish seducers as a just judgment; men only prize the light as it may serve their turn. (2.) The neglect and contempt of the truth is so heinous a sin that it deserveth the greatest punishment: Heb. 2:3, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' Now it is revenged by these errors as a just judgment on the perverseness and unthankfulness of the world. The duties of the gospel being so unquestionable, shows their perverseness. The privileges of the gospel being so excellent, their unthankfulness is more intolerable.

Use 1 is to show us what cause we have to fear a return of Popery. Alas! where is this love of the truth? (1.) Some are gospel-gluttled, loathe manna: a full-fed people must expect a famine, Amos 8:2. In differences between God and Baal, Christ and Antichrist, few are valiant for the truth: Jer. 9:3, 'And they bend their tongue like their

bow for lies, but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord.' Contend earnestly: Jude 3, 'It was needful for me to write unto you, and to exhort you, that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.' Again (2.) There are many sensualists, unclean and carnal gospellers; to these God oweth a judgment. Usually the gospel is removed and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits thereof. They that use the truth only or principally for their own turns, hate to be reformed; God will reckon with them: Ps. 50:16, 17, 'But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes? or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?'

Use 2 shows you indeed that you love the gospel. *Carentia remedii* is a grievous misery, or else Christ had not come as a great blessing. *Neglectus remedii* is a grievous sin, to be lazy in a matter of such moment: those that never set their hearts to obey the truth. *Crassa negligentia dolus est*: There should be constant purpose, endeavour, striving, and not cease striving, till we in some measure prevail. *Rejectio* or *contemptio remedii*, if we put away the word of God from us: Acts 13:46, 'Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.' God will be gone, if not from the land, from thy soul. This is the most heinous iniquity of all: Heb. 10:28, 29, 'He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?' So Esau's despising his birthright: Heb. 12:16, 17, 'Lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright; for ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was

rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.'

SERMON IX

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.—2 THESS. 2:11, 12.

WE have considered the sin of those seduced by Antichrist; now the judgment. It is twofold:—(1.) Delusion in this world, ver. 11; (2.) Damnation in the next, ver. 12.

1. Delusion in this world; where take notice of three things:—

(1.) The author of it: God shall send it; (2.) The degree or nature of the punishment: strong delusion; (3.) The issue of it: that they should believe a lie.

2. Their punishment in the next world: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness; where take notice:—(1.) Of the terribleness of it, it is no less than everlasting damnation: κριθῶσι for κατακριθῶσι; (2.) The justice and equity of it: 'They believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.'

1. I begin with their judgment in this world: 'For this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie.'

Doct. That by God's just judgment there is an infatuation upon the followers and abettors of Antichrist, that they swallow the grossest

errors to their own destruction.

To clear this I shall speak:—(1.) To the author; (2.) The degree or kind of the punishment; (3.) The effect and issue.

1. As to the author: πέμψει αὐτοῖς ὁ Θεός. Here a difficulty ariseth; for God is not, and cannot be, the author of sin. He that is essentially good cannot be the cause of evil; and he that is ultor peccati, the avenger of sin, cannot be auctor peccati, the author of it. If he should cause man to sin, how will his punishment of it be just? I answer—As it is a sin, God hath no hand in it; but as it is a punishment of sin, God hath to do in it.

To clear this to you, consider—

[1.] He that is the supreme Lord and Governor of his creatures is also their Judge; for legislation and judgment belong to the same authority. And therefore God is called sometimes our King, and sometimes our Judge: Gen. 18:25, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Rom. 3:5, 6, 'Is God unrighteous? how then shall he judge the world?' That is his office and prerogative.

[2.] God's way of judging for the present is either external or internal. As, for instance, there are two acts of judicature—reward and punishment. In rewarding, God's external government is seen in dispensing outward blessings to his people, as the fruit of their obedience: Micah 2:7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' His promises speak good, and as fulfilled do good, yield protection, maintenance, and such a measure of outward prosperity as supporteth and maintaineth them during their service. David owned God's dealing with him in this sort: Ps. 119:56, 'This I had, because I kept thy precepts.' So as to his internal government, in giving them peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost: Rom. 15:17, 'For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;' Prov. 3:17, 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' These are

the internal rewards of obedience. And so also God often rewardeth grace with grace; as Isa. 58:13, 14, 'If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thy own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it;' Ps. 31:24, 'Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.' Proficiency in the same grace is a reward of the several acts and exercise of it. So in punishing, sometimes he useth the way of external government, by the terrible judgments exercised upon men for the breach of his law: Rom. 1:18, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness;' Heb. 2:2, 'Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;' sometimes the way of internal government, by terrors of conscience, or punishing sin committed with sin permitted. Both these parts are seen in punishing both the godly and the wicked; as, for instance, in the godly, in the way of external government: 1 Cor. 11:32, 'But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.' In the way of internal government, the lesser penal withdrawings of the Spirit, which God's people find in themselves after some sins and neglects of grace, are grievous. But the judgments upon the souls of the ungodly are most dreadful, when the sinner is either terrified or stupefied; terrified by horrors of conscience: 1 Cor. 15:56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law;' or stupefied by being given up to their own hearts' counsels: Ps. 81:12, 'So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.' So that the sinner is left dull and senseless and past feeling: Eph. 4:18, 'Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' By the first, by horrors of conscience, they are made to feel God's displeasure at the courses they walk in; but when that is long

despised, and men sin on still, then the other and more terrible judgment cometh; for the giving up a sinner to his own lusts, and his losing all remorse, is the last and sorest judgment on this side hell.

[3.] As to God's internal judgments, the scripture chiefly insists upon two parts of this internal dispensation—blindness of mind and hardness of heart; they usually go together. Blindness of mind is spoken of, John 12:39, 40, 'Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.' All passages are obstructed whereby the word might enter and work conversion unto God. It was God laid this punishment of blindness upon them. Hardness of heart, in that famous instance, Exod. 4:21, 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart.' God doth not make them that see, blind, nor them that are soft, hard; but leaveth them to their own prejudice, obstinacy, and unpersuadableness, and that when highly provoked. The former is under our consideration.

[4.] To understand God's concurrence as a judge, we must not say too much of it or too little. We must not say too much of it, lest we leave a stain and blemish upon the divine glory. God iufuseth no sin, no blindness nor hardness, into the hearts of men; all influences from heaven are good: he conveyeth no deceit into the minds of men immediately, nor doth he command or persuade men to oppose the truth. Nor doth he impel or excite their inward propensions so to do. All this belongeth not to God, but either to man or Satan. Nor must we say too little; as, for instance, God is not said to blind or harden by bare prescience or foresight, that they will be blinded or hardened; because God foreseeeth other things, and yet they are not ascribed unto God; as that men will kill, or steal, or do wrong, and yet God is not said to kill or steal, as he is said to blind and harden; and therefore there is a difference between God's concurrence to this effect and other sins. Nor only by way of manifestation, as if this were all the sense, that in the course of his providence God doth in the issue declare how blind and hard they are. That some other thing

is meant by it is seen in the prayers by which we deprecate this heavy judgment. As when the saints pray, Isa. 63:17, 'Lord, harden not our hearts from thy fear;' or David, Ps. 119:19, 'Lord, hide not thy commandments from me.' They mean not thus, Lord, show not to the world how hard and blind I am, but cure my blindness and hardness of heart; keep back this judgment from me. Again, we must not say that all that God doth is a bare, naked, and idle permission, as if it happened besides his will and intention, and God had no more to do in it than a man that standeth on the shore and seeth a ship ready to be drowned: he might have helped it, but permitted it. No; besides all this, there is not a bare permission only, but a permissive intention and a judicial sentence, which is seconded by an active providence. Many things concur to the blinding of the mind and hardening of the heart, all which God willeth, but justly. The wicked take occasions of their own accord to blind and harden themselves. Satan tempteth of his own malice, but all this could not be done with effect and success without the will of God. There is a supreme power overruling, and ordering all that is done in the world.

[5.] God's concurrence may be stated by these things:—

(1.) His withdrawing or taking away the light and direction of his Holy Spirit: Deut. 29:4, 'The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear, unto this day.' Now, when God lets them loose to their own hearts' counsels, then they fall into damnable errors. A greyhound held in by a slip or collar runneth violently after the hare when it is in sight; as soon as the slip and collar are taken away, the restraint is gone, and his inbred disposition carrieth him. So men that are greedy of worldly things are powerfully drawn into errors countenanced by the world, when God taketh off the restraint of his grace, and giveth them up to their own lusts. Now herein God is not to be blamed, for he is debtor to none, and the grace of his Spirit is forfeited by their not receiving the love of the truth. He is so far from being bound to give grace, that he seemeth to be bound in justice to withdraw what is given already by men's wickedness and ingratitude. Voluntary blindness bringeth

penal blindness; and because men will not see, they shall not see. And when they wink hard, and shut their eyes against the light of the gospel, it is just with God in this manner to smite them with blindness: and since they had no love to the truth, they are given up to errors and deceits. And because they despise the holy scriptures, and dote on vain fables, and would not take up a course of sound godliness and holiness, he suffereth them to weary themselves with sundry superstitions.

(2.) Not only by desertion, but by tradition, delivering them up to the power of Satan: 2 Cor. 4:4, 'The God of this world hath blinded their eyes.' Satan, as the executioner of God's curse, worketh upon the corrupt nature of man, and deceiveth them. It is said, 1 Chron. 21:1, 'Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel;' but it is said, 2 Sam. 24:1, 'And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.' How shall we reconcile these two places? God gave him over to be tempted by Satan—by God as a judge, by Satan as an executioner. Temptations to sin come immediately from the devil, but they are governed by God for holy and righteous ends. So again, 1 Kings 22:22, the evil spirit had leave and commission to be a lying spirit in Ahab's prophets: 'Go forth and do so, and thou shalt prevail with him.' There is a permissive intention, not an affective. When they grieve his Spirit, God withdraweth and leaveth them to the evil spirit, who works by their fleshly and worldly lusts, and then they are easily seduced who prefer worldly things before heavenly.

(3.) There is an active providence which raiseth such instruments and propoundeth such objects as, meeting with a naughty heart, do sore blind it. (1.) For instruments: Job 12:16, 'The deceived and the deceiver are his.' Take it in worldly, or take it in religious, matters, man's deceiving others, or being deceived by others, is of God; for it is said, both are his; not only as his creatures, but subject to the government and disposal of providence, how and whom they shall deceive, and how far they shall deceive. So Ezek. 14:9, 'If the prophet be deceived that hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived him.'

This is a great transaction in the world, a sad judgment, not to be cavilled but trembled at. For man's ingratitude, God raiseth up false prophets to seduce them that delight in lies rather than in the truths of God. (2.) For objects: wicked instruments varnish and dress up this cause with all the art they can to make it a powerful deceit, and then it is befriended and countenanced by the powers of the world, and so easily prevaieth with them who are moved either with worldly hopes or fears, and have debauched their conscience by worldly respects. God saith, Jer. 6:21, 'I will lay stumbling-blocks before this people.' If we will find the sin, God will find the occasion. If Judas hath a mind to sell his Master, he shall not want chapmen to bargain with him. The priests were consulting to destroy Christ at the same time that the devil put it into his heart, Mat. 26:3, being alarmed by the miracle of raising Lazarus. Birds and fishes are easily deceived with such baits as they greedily catch at, so God by his just vengeance ordereth such occurrences and occasions as take with a naughty and carnal heart.

2. The degree or kind of the punishment, ἐνέργειαν πλάνης; we render it 'strong delusion,' or 'the efficacy of error;' that is, such delusion as shall have a most efficacious force to deceive them. The prevalency and strength of the delusion is seen in two things:—(1.) The absurdity of the errors; (2.) The obstinacy wherewith they cleave to them.

[1.] The absurdity of the errors. I will instance in three things—False image worship and bread worship, invocation of saints, and supererogation of works.

(1.) Adoration of images. Idolaters are usually represented as sottish; as Ps. 115:8, 'They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.' He had described the senselessness of the idols before. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; noses have they, but they smell not, &c. Now as idols are senseless, so the idolaters are brutish; that is, the makers, worshippers, and servers of them,

are as void of true wisdom as the images are of sense and motion: Isa. 44:18, 'They have not known, nor understood; for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand.' There is a fatal obduration upon them all along there. Their senselessness is set forth from ver. 9 to ver. 20; they that worship the work of their own hands are themselves but stocks and stones, being blinded by the just judgment of God. If it be said this is meant of the idols of the Gentiles, not of the images of God, and Christ, and the Virgin Mary, and saints; still God will not be worshipped by an idol, and there is no difference between the images of the papists and the heathens, but only in the name.

(2.) Another thing that I will instance in is the invocation of saints—a sottish error, and respect paid to them that are so far out of the reach of our commerce; and a thing not only without precept, promise, or precedent in scripture, but also against scripture, which always directeth to God by one Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. The scripture saith, Go to God if you lack anything, and they say, Go to the saints; if they say, not as authors of grace, or any divine blessing, but as intercessors, though that be not true, yet that derogateth from Christ, whose office it is to intercede with the Father. So that this is to put the creature in the place of God. But it is not only contrary to scripture, but the very motion and inclination of the Spirit when he stirreth us or moveth us to pray: Rom. 8:15, 'Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;' Gal. 4:6, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father;' he inclineth us to come to God, and yet this they will leave.

(3.) A third error that I shall instance in is, that man may supererogate, not only merit for himself, but lay in an overplus to increase the treasure of the church; when the scripture telleth us that our best works are imperfect, yea, polluted; and our Lord himself hath told us that 'when ye have done all, say ye, We are unprofitable servants,' Luke 17:10. But what will not men believe that can believe

these things? There are other absurdities as gross as these, but this sufficeth for a taste.

[2.] The obstinacy wherewith they cleave to them. Nothing will reclaim them; not scripture, nor reason, nor evidence of truth, but they still cry the opinion of the church, and the faith of their forefathers, and will invent any paltry shift and distinction, rather recede from anything than once admit that the church hath erred; like the obstinate Jews in Christ's time, that denied apparent matter of fact, John 8:33, 'We were never in bondage to any man,' though they were in Egypt and Babylon, and were now under servitude and the power of the Romans. Though we prove they have erred, and do err, still the church cannot err; or rather, like the elder Jews in the prophet Jeremiah's time, Jer. 44:16–19, 'As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever goeth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings to her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, and our kings, and our princes: for then we had plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we have left off burning incense to the queen of heaven, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and the famine.' Such sottish obstinacy is there in men that dote upon their own invented superstitious and idolatrous services, custom, antiquity, practice of their ancestors, the authority and usage of their great ones, their rulers, the generality of observance. This is their knot of arguments by which they confirm themselves; just as the papists plead for their superstitions at this day; and to make the mess more complete, they add the plenty and prosperity they enjoyed—what a merry world it was before the new gospel came in, when they had nothing but mass and matins; and all the calamities that have fallen out they impute not to their own sins, but to the gospel. Now, when a people are thus obstinate, and measure religion not by reasons of conscience, but the interests of the belly, it is a sign that they are under the power of delusion, and error hath more efficacy with such corrupt minds than the truth.

[3.] The causes of it show the efficacy of error. (1.) The sinning of their learned to keep out all instructions, allowing the vulgar only prayers in a strange tongue, and the scriptures in no tongue, and teaching them implicitly to believe as the church believeth. When the Lord permitteth such guides to order the affairs of his church, his great judgment of occecation and obduration is upon them: Jer. 5:31, 'The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so.' (2.) When gain, interest, and ambition move them thereunto; as those masters in the Acts exclaim against Paul and Silas, when they saw their hope of gain was gone, Acts 16:19–21, 'These men do exceedingly trouble the city;' and Demetrius, Acts 19:25, 'Ye know by this craft we have our wealth.' This is a tender point to touch interest, and when once it cometh to this, they will proceed in their folly, and defend one falsehood with another; for the great idol of the world is gain or love of money: 1 Tim. 6:10, 'For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith.' It were a happiness if such kind of arguments did only prevail with us to embrace a religion that might convince others that it was religion itself that we loved; that our interests did not keep others from their duty, and that we could embrace a religion for the goodness of it, even to our own loss. (3.) Another cause is pride of themselves, and prejudice to others; lest they should seem to be in an error and wrong, and to learn of a few novelists—shall they teach them? No; rather they will remain ignorant still. Alas! it is not easy to strike sail, and submit to the teaching of those whom they hate; therefore men continue those first prejudices they have imbibed, and will rather live and die in their errors than give God glory by a submission to truth, such a proud opinion and conceit have they of their own learning and knowledge. This cause also conduceth to make the resolution more strong—pre-engagement in a contrary way. It is disgraceful to change; men think it is taken notice of as a great wonder, Acts 6:7, 'that a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.' But such wonders are not wrought every day; they of all men are most pertinacious; but God can of stones raise up children to Abraham. Now, would to God these causes of error were only found in the

antichristian estate. They are everywhere, but these cause strong delusion.

3. The issue and effect; that they should believe a lie. Two things must be explained:—(1.) The object; (2.) The act.

[1.] The object: a lie; that is, either—(1.) False doctrines: 1 Tim. 4:2, 'Speaking lies in hypocrisy,' when palpable errors are taken for truths. A man given over by God to delusion will swallow the grossest errors and fictions, and that in matters dangerous and destructive to salvation. False doctrines are often called a lie in scripture, as opposite to the truth; and yet such things are received by those from whose parts the world could expect better things. (2.) False miracles in their legends. A man would wonder any should have the face to obtrude such ridiculous stories, and scandalous to religion, upon the world. (3.) False calumnies against those instruments whom God employed in the Reformation. Popery is a religion supported by lies; as that Calvin was a sodomite, and burnt in the shoulder at Noyon for that crime, and the Popish dean and chapter of that place have published his vindicate; that Luther was an incarnate devil, begotten by an incubus. I should weary you to rake in this dunghill; but I must close it with the general observation that antichristians will lie; some among them call them pious frauds, but they are diabolical forgeries.

[2.] The act is, that they are given up to believe a lie. This must be applied to their erroneous doctrines, as common to them all; to their false miracles and calumnies; not to the inventors, but to the seduced, who swallow these things. All that oppose the truth do not go apparently against conscience, but being given up to the efficacy of error, they may believe that false religion wherein they live. Let us open the term believe. What is it to believe a thing? You may know by the opposites. Now, opposite to faith there is—(1.) Doubtfulness, when men halt between two opinions: 1 Kings 18:21, 'If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.' This doubtfulness proceedeth from want of bringing the case to a trial and thorough hearing. (2.) Conjecture: Acts 26:28, almost persuaded—'Almost

thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' (3.) Opinion: Mat. 13:4, 'Hath not root in himself, but dureth for a while,' &c. (4.) Firm persuasion. They will censure nothing; for if of truth, John 6:69, 'We believe and are sure,' &c.; if of error, Acts 26:9, 'I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.' (5.) Resolved adherence. If to the truth, that is called 'receiving the truth in the love of it;' if to error, it is seen in men's obstinacy and zeal suffering in it: 1 Kings 18:28, 'Cutting themselves with knives and lances, till blood gushed out.' Suffering for it; for a man may give his body to be burned for an error, a man may sacrifice a strong body to a stubborn mind: 1 Cor. 13:3, 'Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth nothing.' And persecuting the contrary: John 16:2, 'They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.' To apply this:—Many that live within the kingdom of Antichrist, some are doubtful, some almost persuaded, some espouse the common prevailing opinions, others adhere to them with much false zeal and superstition; these are those who are given up to believe a lie.

Use 1. Information.

1. To show us the reason why so many learned men are captivated by Antichrist, and live yet in the popish religion, for this is a great scruple to many. The answer is ready: The Lord hath suffered them to be deluded by him whose coming is after the working of Satan in all power, &c.: Rev. 17:2, 'The inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.' It is an intoxication; the errors of that state are plausibly defended and supported by worldly interests. There is the witchery of worldly allurements, and the intoxicating wine of errors defended and owned within their bounds and places of their education and abode; so that men have seemed to lose their understandings, and not have that advisedness which well becomes a man. Possibly they may have doubts and checks of conscience, but the name of the church charmeth them, and worldly magnificence strangely inveigleth them. They may know

that the religion professed by Protestants is sincere, holy, and saving; but being allured by licentiousness, or entangled by covetousness, or puffed up with pride, are loth to change, or are vanquished and astonished with fear of death, and other inconveniencies; or, it may be, do not use that advised and serious deliberation, which a matter of salvation requireth. Four causes may be given:—(1.) Self-confidence. God will show the folly of those that depend on the strength of their own wit: Prov. 3:5, 6, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths;' and therefore will bring to nought the wisdom of the wise, and destroy the understanding of the prudent, when it is lifted up against the interests of Christ's kingdom, 1 Cor. 1:19. (2.) Prejudice. The priests and scribes could readily tell that Christ was to be born in Bethlehem when Herod sent to consult them, Mat. 2:4–6; yet who more obstinate against him that was born there? They expected a temporal Messiah, and therefore could not see what they saw. What was apparent to children was a riddle to the rabbis. So they expect some open enemy of the church to attack it by power and force, little dreaming of a bishop, &c. (3.) Pride. Many of the Jewish church believed in Christ, but they did not profess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: John 12:42, 43, 'They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' They loved not an hated opinion. Many may fear the Pope to be Antichrist, but pride and interest will not let them submit to a change. (4.) The judgment of God is the great cause that men do not, or will not, know Antichrist; God hath not given them eyes to see, as Christ was not received in Jerusalem; the things of their peace were hid from their eyes: Luke 19:41, 42, 'He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'

2. It showeth us that the prevalency of this wicked one should be no blemish to providence; for the permission of him is one of God's dreadful providential dispensations. That it should have such success, it raiseth atheistical thoughts in weak spirits; yea, it is an

offence to the godly, as it is a prejudice to the truth. But God hereby will show us:—(1.) That there are deceits and errors as well as truth in the world; much of choice, not chance; and lest we should think this an antiquated dispensation, to try the professors of the gospel who lived in the midst of pagans; it cometh nearer to us. But he that condemneth all religion on this account, judgeth one man for another's crime, which is unjust—doth as foolishly as he that thinketh there is no true money because there are some counterfeit pieces. (2.) That God, in concomitancy with the gospel, will discover his dreadful justice as well as his wonderful mercy by it, that we may tremble whilst we admire grace. (3.) That it is a great evil to be deceivers or active promoters of delusions, and it will not wholly excuse us that we are deceived, Mat. 15:14. (4.) What need all serious Christians have to pray to God not to be led into temptation. Alas! what would become of us if left to ourselves in an hour of temptation? (5.) Let us fear to slight the grace offered. Among other threatenings, God threateneth to smite his people with blindness: Deut. 28:28, 'The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart.' (6.) What a ready way to destruction it is to measure religion by worldly interests. This bred Antichrist, kept him up in the world, and blindeth his seduced proselytes to this day.

Use 2. Is caution to take heed of spiritual blindness and infatuation, that this judgment fall not upon us; that God leave us not to our own lusts, hearts, and counsels, without check and restraint. It may in part befall God's people. What shall we do to avoid it? (1.) Take heed of sinning against light, either by sins of omission or commission: James 4:17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' They will find it to be sin in the sad effects. (2.) Take heed of hypocrisy in the profession of the truth. God oweth the hypocrite an ill turn, and seemeth to be engaged to discover him before the congregation: Prov. 26:26, 'Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation;' and usually it is by giving him up to some licentious practice or strong delusion, by which he breaketh the neck of his profession. (3.) Take heed of pride and carnal self-sufficiency. God

may leave his people to dangerous falls when they make their bosom their oracle, and think to carry all by the strength of their own understanding: 2 Chron. 32:31, 'God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.' It is good to consult with God continually. (4.) Take heed of following the rabble: John 4:20, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship,' &c. But learn to see by your own eyes, that you may have sure evidence you are in God's way, Prov. 24:13, 14.

SERMON X

That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.—2 THESS. 2:12.

THEIR punishment in the other world. Where—(1.) The terribleness of it; (2.) The righteousness and justice of it.

1. The terribleness: that they all might be damned; that is, filling up the measure of their obduration, they may at length fall into just condemnation.

2. The justice and equity of it, which is two ways expressed:—

[1.] Negatively: they believed not the truth; that is, received not the gospel in the simplicity of it, as revealed by Christ and his apostles, and recorded in the scriptures, but wilfully, and for their interest's sake, gave up themselves to these corruptions.

[2.] Positively: had pleasure in unrighteousness. In the 10th verse it was, 'They received not the love of the truth;' now when the meritorious cause is repeated, there is something more added: they had a love to, and delight in, other things, εὐδοκήσαντες ἐν τῇ ἀδικίᾳ. Here two things must be explained.

1. What is ἀδικία—unrighteousness?

2. What is εὐδοκία—taking pleasure in unrighteousness?

1. What is ἀδικία—unrighteousness? Righteousness is giving every one his due; and denying them their due is unrighteousness. There is a giving man his due, and a giving God his due: Mat. 22:21, 'Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.' Righteousness is often put for giving man his due: Titus 2:12, 'That we should live soberly, righteously,' &c.; and giving God his due, which is worship and reverence: Ps. 29:2, 'Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name;' and again, Ps. 96:8, 'Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.' Now this unrighteousness here spoken of is principally meant in the latter sense. False ways of worship are the greatest unrighteousness that can be practised; for the duty that we owe to God is the most righteous thing in the world. Now, by false worship you withdraw the glory of God from him, and communicate it to another. Worship is his own proper due, both by the light of nature and scripture; and therefore the Gentiles, which had the light of nature, are said to 'detain the truth, ἐν ἀδικίᾳ,' Rom. 1:18. Why? The reason is rendered in the after verses. Ver. 23, 'They changed the glory of God into an image made like a corruptible man.' Ver. 25, 'They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.' This was their ἀδικία, their unrighteousness, or injurious dealing with God. So the antichristians that had the light of scripture, though under palliated pretences, changed the truth of God into a lie, loved their own errors more than simple and plain Christianity, or the true knowledge of God, and diverted the worship from himself unto an idol.

2. They had 'pleasure in unrighteousness;' in these things they please themselves, not lapse into it out of simple ignorance and error of mind. And so the apostle parallels the two great apostasies: that from the light of nature, and that from the light of the gospel. Light of nature: Rom. 1:32, 'Not only do these things, but have pleasure in

them that do them.' Light of scripture: 'Have pleasure in unrighteousness.' They are mad upon their idols and images; not only are idolaters, but delight in idolatry and image-worship: Ps. 97:7, 'That boast themselves of idols.'

Now to observe some things.

1. Errors of judgment, as well as sins of practice, may bring damnation upon the souls of men. All sins do in their own nature tend to damnation: Rom. 6:23, 'For the wages of sin is death.' And errors of judgment are sins, for they are contrary to the rule or law of God: 1 John 3:4, 'Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law.' Any swerving from the law is sin; and they are inductive of other sins; for 'if the eye be blind, the whole body is full of darkness,' Mat. 6:23; it perverts our zeal. There is nothing so mischievous, wicked, and cruel, that a man blinded with error will not attempt against those that differ from him: John 16:2, 'They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.' A blind horse is full of mettle, but ever and anon stumbleth. Therefore, if a man be not guided by sound judgment, his zealous affections will precipitate him into mischief. As the Jews, that persecuted Christ and his apostles, had a 'zeal of God, but not according to knowledge,' Rom. 10:2, so the Popish zealots; with what fury have they persecuted the innocent and sincere servants of Christ! The papists would be angry if we should not reckon St Dominic a zealous man; and the poor Albigenses felt the bitter effects of that zeal, in the destruction of many thousands by inhuman butcheries and villanies about Toulouse, &c. The Lord deliver us from the furies of transported, brain-sick zealots!

2. Though all errors may bring damnation upon the souls of men, yet some more especially than others may be said to be damning; as 2 Peter 2:1, 'Some shall bring in damnable heresies.' Now, this may be either from the matter or manner of holding them:—

[1.] From the matter, if destructive of the way of salvation by Christ. Some are utterly inconsistent with salvation and eternal life, as errors in the fundamentals in religion. As suppose that a man should reject or refuse Christ after a sufficient proposal of the gospel to him, there is no question but this is damning unbelief: John 3:19, 'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.' But yet we are not to say that alone damneth. There are other things necessary to salvation contained under that general truth. The scripture saith, John 17:3, 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' There is the sum of what is necessary to salvation: that God is to be known, loved, obeyed, worshipped, and enjoyed; and the Lord Jesus to be owned as our Redeemer and Saviour, to bring us home to God, and to procure for us the gifts of pardon and life, and this life to be begun here, and perfected in heaven. Other things are of moment to clear these necessary truths, but they may be all reduced thereunto. The truth is, the question about the matter to be believed is not what divine revelations are necessary to be believed or rejected, when sufficiently proposed, for all points, without exception, are so; but what are simply and absolutely necessary to eternal life, and these are points of faith, and practice, and obedience. The points of faith are a knowledge of God in Christ; and practice, that we be regenerated: John 3:5, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' And live a holy life: Heb. 12:14, 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.'

[2.] From the manner. (1.) When men profess what they believe not, and voluntarily choose error for worldly ends, though it be a less error against the scripture, and consistent with the main tenor of salvation, yet, if taken up against, conscience, for by-ends, it is a matter of sad consequence; for this is living in a known sin. Some may be blinded for a time, out of terror and compassion, and their case is sad till they express solemn repentance; but when there is a reluctance against clear light, and an obstinacy in that reluctance,

this man is condemned in himself: Titus 3:11, 'Such a man is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.' There cannot be a greater argument of a will unsubdued to God, than to stand out against conviction out of secular respects. This is to love darkness more than light, and argueth such pravity of heart as is inconsistent with faith and salvation. Some ignorant souls may hold dangerous errors, and which to others would be damnable; yet they may not actually damn them, because they do not rebel against the light; and may be retracted by a general repentance or seeking of pardon for all their known or unknown sins: Ps. 19:12, 13, 'Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults: keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.'

(2.) When they are vented by some professor of Christianity, to the seducing of others, and rending of the church, and drawing disciples after them, this addeth a new guilt to their errors, and maketh them the more damnable: Acts 20:30, 'Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.' These are properly heretics and ringleaders of sects; therefore heresies are reckoned among the works of the flesh: Gal. 5:20, 'Emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies;' increasing their own doom and judgment. These, under a Christian name, seduce and lead away the church from Christ; they pervert the holy ways of God, and draw his people from serving him in spirit and truth.

(3.) When, though they should not err fundamentally, they so far debauch Christianity, as that God giveth them up to believe a lie, and to take pleasure in unrighteousness, that is, to defend and maintain apparent corruptions of Christian doctrine and worship. Of doctrine, for it is here said they believe a lie, and they believe not the truth. Of worship, for it is said they take pleasure in unrighteousness. A party thus given up by God we should shun, as we would shun a plague or come out of Bedlam; for these men have lost their spiritual wits, and see not that which the common light of Christianity doth disprove,

however they retain the name of Christians, and make a cry of the church! the church! as the Jews did of the temple of the Lord, and retain some truth among them; for such a party is here described.

(4.) When there is gross negligence, or not taking pains to know better, it is equivalent to reluctance or standing out against light; *crassa negligentia dolus est*—there is a deceit in laziness or affected ignorance: John 3:20, 'They will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved;' 2 Peter 3:5, 'They are willingly ignorant.' Those that please themselves in the ignorance of any truth, err not only in their minds, but their hearts. It is the duty of God's people to understand what is his will: Eph. 5:17, 'Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' And it is their practice: Rom. 12:2, 'That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God;' Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and therein doth he meditate day and night.' We should be searching still. But when men will not know what they have a mind to hate, it argueth a secret sore, and suspicion of the truth, and are loth to follow it too close, lest it cross their lusts and interests.

3. That the way and errors of Popery are damnable, and it is very unsafe living in that society and combination. I prove it—(1.) Because they live in wilful disobedience to God. They violate the manifest commandments of God, while they hold it lawful to worship pictures and images, to make pictures of the Trinity, to invoke saints and angels, to deny laymen the cup in the sacrament, to adore the sacrament, to prohibit certain orders of men and women to marry, to celebrate the public service in a language which ordinarily men and women that assist understand not. In all these things they offer apparent violence to God's precepts. And that their whole worship is polluted with a gross superstition; as, for instance, to worship images is expressly against God's word: Ps. 97:7, 'Confounded be all they that worship graven images, that boast themselves of idols. Worship him, all ye gods.' The scripture, you see, denounceth confusion to all worshippers of images, and they are reckoned as enemies of Christ's kingdom (for it is applied to Christ, Heb. 1:6, 'And let all the angels of

God worship him') that would set up the worship and service of them in his church, in the exercise of their religion, especially those who glory in them, and boast of them, and set them forth as the glory of their way and worship. No; he disdaineth all this relative worship at or before images, which men would give unto him, and showeth that all the powers of this world and the other, angels and potentates, should immediately worship Christ. For the second point, picturing the Trinity, God hath not only forbidden it, but argued against it: Deut. 4:15, 16, 'Take therefore good heed unto yourselves, for ye saw no similitude, when the Lord spake to you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire; lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of anything male or female.' See how cautelous God is to prevent this abuse, and yet how boldly men practise it. For the third instance, the invocation of saints and angels, our Lord hath taught us how to repel that temptation: Mat. 4:10, 'It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve;' that religious service and worship is due only to God. No creature can claim it without sacrilege, nor can we give it to them without idolatry. And God being so jealous of his honour, every Christian should be careful that he doth not divert it from him. They have many distinctions to excuse themselves to the world, but I doubt how they will excuse themselves to God. For the fourth particular, adoring the sacrament, I shall speak to again anon; that is a mean, not an object of worship. The fifth, prohibiting certain orders of men and women to marry, which the apostle calleth doctrines of devils: 1 Tim. 4:1, 2, 'In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry,' &c. For the sixth, celebrating public service in an unknown tongue, it is contrary to the apostle's reasoning: 1 Cor. 14:14–17, 'For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also; else, when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou

sayest? for thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.' For the seventh, communion in one kind, this is against Christ's express institution: Mat. 26:26, 27, 'Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it.' The apostle supposeth that every one can examine himself: 1 Cor. 11:28, 'But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.' Now for this usurping synagogue to come as they do, with a non obstante to the statutes of God, who can join with them in these corruptions and usurpations without peril of salvation? (2.) That the way of Popery is damnable, because they deprive the people of the means of salvation, contrary to the express injunctions from God: John 5:39, 'Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me;' Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns.' The saints are commended, Acts 17:11, 'In that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so;' and 2 Tim. 3:15, that he 'knew the scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' This is the seed of life, food of souls, rule of faith and manners, our strength against temptations: 1 John 2:14, 'I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' Now to deprive the Lord's people of the bread of life, and word of life, what is it but to leave them to perish?

The great charge is, they have pleasure in unrighteousness, that is, delight in idolatry, and corrupt or false worship, which is the greatest unrighteousness man can be guilty of. To evidence this, let us inquire —(1.) What is idolatry? (2.) Prove how notoriously they are guilty of it.

First, What is idolatry? It is a worshipping of a creature with divine worship, and whosoever giveth divine worship to a creature committeth idolatry. This proposition is evident in the scripture; as

when the Israelites worshipped the calf, literal or metaphorical idolatry, they are called idolaters: 1 Cor. 10:7, 'Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.' And the covetous, that giveth that delight and trust to his wealth which is only due to God, is called an idolater: Eph. 5:5, 'Nor covetous man, who is an idolater;' and in many other places.

Secondly, Now, that the papists are guilty of this, I prove:—

1. By the several kinds of their idolatry: they have more variety of objects of worship than any society of men that ever lived in the world.

First, Angels are creatures, and that they worship angels themselves confess. They consecrate churches unto them, offer solemn prayers unto them, and own the adoring them, though an angel forbiddeth this adoration: Rev. 19:10, 'And he said unto me, See thou do it not, I am thy fellow-servant,' &c. And St Paul telleth us, that they that worship angels do not hold the head, Col. 1:18, 19. So that angel-worship proveth to be a damnable error.

Secondly, The adoration of saints, to whom they give religious worship, and invoke them as helpers, and honour them with fastings, watchings, and prayers, as Suarez acknowledgeth; and yet God is express that he 'will not give his glory to another,' Isa. 42:8. They are to be honoured indeed for imitation, but not adored for religion.

The third object is the Virgin Mary, to whom they pray more than they do to God. In the rosary there is this prayer: *Beata Maria, salva omnes qui te glorificant*—and we beseech thee to hear us, good Lady; that address, *Monstra te esse matrem*, and one divided, *inter ubera et vulnera*, the breasts of the Virgin and wounds of Christ, as if the milk of the one were as sovereign and as precious as the blood of the other. It were endless to rake in this filthy puddle: how many books are there concluded with *Laus Deo et Virgini Deiparæ*?—that

sometimes there is a more present relief by commemorating the name of Mary than by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus;—in their exclamations, Jesu! Maria!—how often in their Te Deum, We praise thee, O Lady?

Fourthly, Adoration of images. This is more foul than all the former, because directed to a more gross object. This is prophesied of Antichrist, that he and his abettors shall 'worship idols of silver, and gold, and brass, and wood, and stone,' Rev. 9:20. Now tell a papist of this, and they say they do not terminate their worship in the image, but in the party whom it representeth; the same said the pagan, Non lapidem sed Jovem in lapide (Julian the apostate). But God hath forbidden bowing to or before an image.

Fifthly, The worshipping of the cross, not only by cupping, that is, bowing, cringing, but prayers. O crux, ave! spes unica hoc passionis tempore, auge piis justitiam reisque dona veniam—All hail, O cross! our only hope this time of passion; augment the godly's devotion, and forgive the transgression of the guilty.

Sixthly, The bread in the sacrament; the papists give it *cultum patriæ*, that worship which is due to God. Those heathens worshipped living animals, but these adore a piece of bread, kneel to it in their chapels and oratories, yea, in the midst of the streets when it is carried in procession. These are the idols whom they worship; and what hope of salvation is there in a religion where the heart is turned so much from God to the creature?

2. That they are more culpable than the heathens. (1.) As to their hypocrisy, by distinctions and veil of piety wherewith they disguise all this; for this delight in unrighteousness was called before, 'the deceivableness of unrighteousness.' They profess to abhor idols, and yet worship images, and make that a point of Christianity which is directly contrary to the drift of it, which is to teach us to worship God in the Spirit. (2.) As to their helps against it, the pagans were never taught to do better; though they sinned against the light of nature in

worshipping God by images, yet they had no scripture, no such express prohibitions to caution them as we have from God. They pretend to believe the scriptures, yet how do they seek to evade the force of them by crafty distinctions that will never satisfy conscience, though they help to blind the mind and harden the heart. That which I urge is this, they were never interdicted this kind of worship by their gods; but these know that it is severely forbidden by our God, and the second commandment so stareth in their faces that it is expunged out of their catechisms; and Vasquez is bold to affirm that the second commandment is ceremonial. Lactantius of old said, *Non est dubium, religio nulla est ubi cujusque simulachrum est.* (3.) The Pagans did adore their gods in their images, but never was any so sottish among them to imagine that an image was to be adored with the same degree of worship as God himself; but this is the corrupt doctrine of the papists, that an image is to be worshipped with the same worship wherewith God himself is worshipped. *Imagini Christi latria debetur* (Aquinas); that is, the proper worship of God.

Use 1. To show how necessary it is to take heed that we be not found among the followers of Antichrist, since these errors are damnable. Salvation and damnation are not trifles, nor matters to be played withal. Surely we need have our eyes in our head, and not to be hoodwinked, when we are upon the brink of a bottomless gulf. Both sides lay damnation at one another's door: they, for our departing from the catholic church, out of which is no salvation, as they pretend; we, upon their departing from the catholic faith and simplicity of the gospel. Now external order is not of such consideration as faith; but when they will be able to prove that Christ hath settled this order in the church, that all his subjects should be obedient to one universal visible head, and that this head is the Pope, and therefore when their very order is an encroachment and usurpation, to depart from them is to return to Christ. Again, where is salvation most likely to be found? rather with them who seek all their religion in the scriptures, and stick there, or with those who, not contented with the apostolical doctrine contained in the scriptures, have brought in unwritten traditions as an equal rule of

faith with scripture, and the sacrifice of the mass and purgatory, the religious invocations of saints, and many other enormities, and uphold these innovations with all manner of tyranny and cruelty exercised upon Christ's faithful servants? If men go to heaven without prayers which they understand, and scriptures, half Christ's sacrament, a piece of his merits, and some superstitious observances, yea, plain idolatry, then the way to heaven is sooner to be had in Popery. But he that hath but half an eye may soon see which is the surer side. Surely the surest way to avoid damnation is to avoid sin. Now, where are souls so much in danger of sin as in the Roman society, where so little is given to internal life and piety, and so much to external pomp and service; and where errors are so palpable, that either men do not believe them with their hearts, or, if their hearts were upright and not perverse and obstinate, could not believe them? But just so is the way of Popery to true Christianity. Surely whatever it be to papists, it would be absolutely damnable to us, as wilfully to thrust ourselves upon apparent ruin. There is a cavil or pretence which I shall speak unto on this occasion: that many Protestants confess papists may be saved in their faith; whereas they hold Protestants and other heretics may not be saved out of the catholic church; and therefore it is safe to enter into that way which is safe by the consent of both parts.

Ans. (1.) Men's opinions are no ground of faith. Persons may be in a sad, woeful case, that men speak well of: Luke 6:26, 'Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!' It is not what man saith, but what the word of God saith. Now the word speaketh terrible things to them: Them that perish, and that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, &c. (2.) The word of God teacheth us to judge of the way, rather than persons, who stand or fall to their own master. The way is damnable. If, on the one side, there be charity to some persons that sin of invincible ignorance, and are 'saved as by fire,' 1 Cor. 3:13, which the other side will not grant to a contrary persuasion; it argueth charity on one side, which hopeth all things; malice on the other, who rashly condemn men without evidence, yea, against it. (3.) If this argument would hold good, it had been better,

in Christ and the apostles' time, to be a Jewish proselyte than a Christian. Christ acknowledged 'salvation is of the Jews,'—their promises of adoption and glory; but the Jews pronounced him and his followers accursed—scourged, imprisoned them; yet did not get so far as papists, to murder and butcher them. Suppose a little time that Catholics owned Donatists as brethren, allowed their baptism; but Donatists are re-baptised, and upon pain of damnation require all so to be, and say, Save thy soul, become a Christian. Now a pagan should rather by this argument join himself to Donatists than Catholics. Lastly, the argument may be retorted—A Protestant keepeth himself to his Bible, baptismal covenant, creed, but denieth many things which papists believe and practise, as papal infallibility, transubstantiation, purgatory, invocation of saints, worshipping of images. They cannot but say Protestants are in the right.

Use 2. Observe the degrees of obduration, not receiving the truth in the love of it, believing a lie, discarding truth, and then taking pleasure in unrighteousness, and then cometh damnation.

SERMON XI

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because the Lord hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.—2 THESS. 2:13.

THE adversative particle but showeth what respect these words have to what went before. He had spoken of God's direful judgment, of sending strong delusion on them that had no love to the pure truth, but sinned against light, and had pleasure in the false worship and superstitions countenanced by the world. Now, lest the Thessalonians should be troubled at this sad prediction, he showeth

what cause he had to bless God in their behalf. The subjoining of this consolation doth teach us three things:—

1. That it is a great favour of God to us to escape antichristian errors. They are so dangerous in their own nature, so insinuating and inveigling by plausible appearance, and accompanied with such worldly baits and advantages, that it is a great mercy that God hath taught us better things. But then be sure you be in the right out of conscience and evidence, not out of faction and interest; and that you hate Popery out of the love of the truth, rather than because you are out of the reach of the temptation. However, it is a great mercy that God keepeth off the temptation till we are better settled in religion.

2. That the election of God giveth a people great advantages against errors, especially against the impostures of Antichrist; for when he speaketh of the sad estate of those who are seduced by the man of sin, he presently addeth, 'But we are bound to give thanks to God for you, for he hath chosen you to salvation.' You will say the Thessalonians received the gospel before these corruptions were brought into the church; but, though Antichrist was not then in being, and this corrupt Christianity not then set afoot, yet there were some preparations for it. The mystery of iniquity already worketh, and they were preserved from the taint of it by the election of God; for either God suffereth not the elect to be deceived in momentous points, or sooner or later he reduceth them: 'The purpose of God according to election must stand,' Rom. 9:11; and Rom. 11:7, 'The election hath obtained, and the rest were blinded;' so 2 Tim. 2:18, 19, 'They have overthrown the faith of some, nevertheless the foundation of the Lord standeth sure.' Still the elect of God escape the seduction, and especially antichristian error: Rev. 13:8, 'The dwellers upon earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life.'

3. How careful we should be to support the hearts of God's people, when we speak of his terrible judgments on the wicked. This was the practice of the apostles everywhere; as when the author to the

Hebrews had spoken of the dreadful estate of apostates, 'whose end is to be burned:' Heb. 6:9, 'But we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak;' he did not condemn them all as apostates, nor would discourage them by that terrible threatening, So again, after another terrible passage: Heb. 10:39, 'But we are not of them that draw back to perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.' Once more, when another apostle had spoken of the sin unto death, which is not to be prayed for, he presently addeth, 1 John 5:18, 19, 'Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.' Zuinglius saith, Bone Christiane, hæc nihil ad te, &c.—Good Christian, this is not thy portion, when he had flashed the terrors of the Lord in the face of sinners. The reasons of this are partly with respect to the saints, who, sometimes out of weakness and infirmity, and sometimes out of tenderness of conscience, are apt to be startled, *electorum corda semper ad se sollicite pudeant* (Gregor.) We deserve such dreadful judgments, and therefore fear them; partly, with respect to ourselves, that we may rightly divide the word of truth: 2 Tim. 2:15, 'Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' Give every one his portion; make not their hearts sad whom God would not make sad; and, therefore, they are much to blame who, in reprovng sinners, stab a saint at the heart, and take the doctrine but for a colour to make a perverse application. The apostle here useth more tenderness: 'God shall send them strong delusion. But we are bound always to give thanks for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord; because the Lord hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.'

In the words are two things:—

1. An acknowledgment of this obligation to give thanks for them: but we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, &c.

2. The matter or particular cause of his thanksgiving: because the Lord hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, &c.

First, There are—(1.) The titles he giveth: 'brethren,' and 'beloved of the Lord.' They were not only beloved of the apostle, but the Lord himself; both with an antecedent love, bestowing grace upon them, and also a consequent love, they believing in his name, living according to his precepts, suffering for the truth. (2.) His obligation to bless God in their behalf: 'We are bound to give thanks to God always for you.' There is—First, 'Giving thanks,' which showeth his esteem of the blessing. Secondly, 'Always,' which showeth how deeply he was affected with it. (3.) Ὁφείλομεν, 'We are bound;' he acknowledged a debt and bond of duty. We must not only give thanks to God for our own election, but the election of others, out of the law of brotherly love, we loving them as our own souls, and respect to the glory of God, which is promoted by the salvation of others as well as ourselves.

Secondly, The matter of the thanksgiving, their election to salvation, which is two ways amplified:—(1.) By the antiquity of it: 'from the beginning;' that is, from everlasting, for so it is taken sometimes; as John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God;' that is, before the first point of time, before God began to create all things. (2.) From the means of its accomplishment. Two are mentioned—one on God's part, 'the sanctification of the Spirit;' the other on ours, 'the belief of the truth.' From the whole observe:—

Doct. That the great matter of our thanksgiving to God is his eternal election of us, whether for ourselves or others; this is that which leaveth a debt, or an indispensable obligation, always to bless and praise his name.

In pursuing this point I shall first consider how election is here set forth; secondly, give you the reasons why this is the great matter of thanksgiving:—

1. How it is here set forth.

[1.] By the rise of it, which is the mere love of God; for he calleth these 'brethren, beloved of the Lord;' and that the only original cause and motive of election is God's love and grace. This is asserted in other scriptures; as, for instance, in the types of election and reprobation: Rom. 9:13, 'Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.' God's respect to Jacob above Esau is ascribed to his love. So to the posterity of Jacob, whom he distinguished from other nations: Deut. 7:7, 8, 'The Lord did not set his love upon you, and choose you, because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you.' And still the Lord's election is an election of grace. There is no antecedent worthiness in the people whom he chooseth: 2 Tim. 1:9, 'Not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given in Christ Jesus, before the world began.' Now grace is nothing but the love of God working freely and of its own inclination.

[2.] The act itself: he 'hath chosen you;' making a distinction between them and others. Upon them he shall send strong delusion, but you hath he chosen to salvation through the belief of the truth. Those whom God hath chosen he separates from the world of the ungodly, or the corrupt heap of mankind, and consecrateth them unto himself; so that election is not a taking all, but some, and passing by others: 1 John 5:19, 'We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.' A choice implieth a setting apart some for objects of his grace and instruments of his glory in the world, Ps. 4:3. And the number is certain, for their names are said to be written in the rolls and records of heaven, when others are not written: Luke 10:20, 'Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven:' Phil. 4:3, 'Whose names are written in the book of life.' And others are said not to be written: Rev. 17:8, 'And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.' And Rev. 20:15, 'And whosoever was not found written in the

book of life was cast into the lake of fire;' namely, those that perish by these delusions.

[3.] It is set forth by the antiquity of it: 'from the beginning.' Eph. 1:4, 'He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world;' and Mat. 25:34, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;' namely, as they belonged to his choice election. Love in God is of an old standing, even from all eternity. His thoughts and purposes of love were towards us a long time before they were discovered. Surely the ancientness of his love should beget an honourable esteem of it in our hearts; for who are we, that the thoughts of God should be taken up about us so long ago? And what is from everlasting is to everlasting, Ps. 103:17; for what is from eternity is to eternity, and dependeth not upon the accidents of time.

[4.] By the means of its accomplishment. Two are mentioned, one on God's part, the other on ours—'the sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth.' Where note:—

(1.) That God's decree is both of ends and means, for all his purposes are executed by fit means. He that hath chosen us to salvation hath also chosen us to be holy, and to believe the truth. And without the means the end cannot be obtained; for without faith and holiness no grown person shall see God or escape condemnation. As to faith, it is clear: John 3:36, 'He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him.' And holiness is indispensably necessary: Heb. 12:14, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' God had assured Paul, Acts 27:22, 'That there should be no loss of any man's life amongst them, except of the ship;' and afterwards, ver. 31, Paul telleth them, 'Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved.' How could the assurance given to Paul from God, and Paul's caution to the mariners stand together? Doth the purpose of God depend upon the will and actions of men? I answer—Not as a cause from whence it receiveth its force and strength, but as a means appointed also by God to the execution of his decree. For by the same decree God appointeth the event, what

he will do, and the means by which he will have it to be done; and the Lord revealing by his word this conjunction of end and means, there is a necessity of duty lying upon man to use these means, and not to expect the end without them. God intended to save all in the ship, and yet the mariners must abide in the ship. And therefore, what God hath joined together let no man separate. If we separate these things, God doth not change his counsel, but we subvert his order to our own destruction. The scripture maketh it a grievous sin, a tempting of God, to expect the end without the use of means. In vain is the cavil, then, of those who would impeach the doctrine of God's free and unchangeable will concerning the salvation of the elect, upon the pretence that it taketh away the duty of man, and the necessity of our faith and obedience. No; God executeth his decree by the proper means. And wretched is their inference who say, If I be elected I shall be saved. No salvation can be obtained but by the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth. And worse is their confidence who profess assurance of their election, and yet walk after the flesh. No; till a man purge himself from youthful lusts he is not a vessel of honour sanctified and set apart for God, 2 Tim. 2:21. And in vain do we hope to go to heaven till we take the way that leadeth thither. Devils have been cast out thence for unholiness, and therefore unholy men shall never be taken in there.

(2.) That these things are not causes of election, but fruits of election, and means of execution of God's decree about our salvation. Sanctification is not a cause, but a subordinate end or means: Eph. 1:4, 'He hath chosen us to be holy;' not because we are holy, but that we might be holy. So 1 Peter 1:2, 'Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.' Not elected for it, but through it. When God had all mankind in his prospect and view, he freely chose out some to be sanctified and saved. We come to the possession of it through sanctification, that is, by it as a means. So for the other; faith is a fruit of election, not a foreseen cause: Acts 2:47, 'The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.' None cometh to the church but those whom God draweth, and they are actually added to the

church by a profession of faith; and such as should be saved were as many as were ordained to salvation Acts 13:48, 'And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.' The whole city were met together to hear, but as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. It is not said, as many as believed were ordained to eternal life, but the contrary; faith is not the cause of election, but election is the cause of faith.

(3.) That being the necessary fruits, they are also evidences of our election. All that are sanctified by the Spirit and believe the truth belong to the election of God. Election itself is a secret in God's bosom, and is only manifested to us by the effects; and what are the necessary effects but sanctification by the Spirit, and a sound belief of the gospel?

First, The sanctification of the Spirit is not only an external dedication to God, but an internal and real change. Some are externally dedicated, and may trample under foot the blood of the covenant whereby they are sanctified: Heb. 10:29, 'Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God; and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?' That is, were in external covenant with God, and visibly dedicated. But there is another sanctification, which is the fruit of the Spirit, working a real change in them: 1 Cor. 6:11, 'And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' Find this, and you find a sufficient evidence, namely, if you become new creatures, and be enabled to forsake sin, and follow after that which is pleasing in the sight of God. Sanctification of the Spirit is not so much known by dedication and profession, but by the real and fixed inclination of your souls to God and heaven, and living accordingly; you are turned to God, and live to God.

Secondly, Your belief of the truth, that is, of the gospel. Now this is meant not of a dead faith, or such a cold assent as only begets an

opinion in us of the truth of Christian religion, but such a lively faith as bringeth us under the power of it; for it is opposed to them that do not receive the truth in the love of it, ver. 10: 'To them that believed not the truth, because they had pleasure in unrighteousness,' ver. 12; that lived under the power of fleshly and worldly lusts. And it is spoken of them who had received the truth, so as to obey it and suffer for it, as the Thessalonians are described all along; and in short, such a belief of the truth as caused them to enter into covenant with Christ, and make conscience of their fidelity to him. And here in this verse we learn that a bare belief of the truth doth not save, unless accompanied with the sanctification of the Spirit; and therefore both must be taken together. When the word cometh to us, 'not in word only, but in power and much assurance, and joy in the Holy Ghost,' it is an infallible evidence of our election of God, 1 Thes. 1:5. Alas! many have a general cold belief of the gospel, that never felt the effect of it upon their hearts.

(4.) Observe the necessary connection that is between both these means, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth.

First, There is a necessary connection between them, as between the cause and the effect; for none are powerfully drawn to believe in Christ but such as are sanctified by his Spirit. It is not in the power of any creature to incline us to God, or bring us to come to him by Christ. But this work is wholly reserved to the Spirit. And so the Lord himself doth powerfully bring to pass his own decrees, as by Christ redeeming, so by the Spirit sanctifying. The Spirit is the author both of faith and holiness. Saving grace is called a new creature: 2 Cor. 5:17, 'Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; Eph. 2:10, 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them.' And to create is the work of a divine power. Creature and creator are relatives. And certainly the noblest creature, such as the new creature is, cannot be framed by any but God. It is called a new birth, and the new birth is only from the Spirit, John 3:5, 6. Well,

then, these are fitly coupled, the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, that God's work may make way for ours.

Secondly, There is the connection of concomitancy between the gospel and the Spirit. The Spirit only goeth along with the gospel, and no Other doctrine; and so both external and internal grace are of God: John 17:17, 'Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth.' It was fit that a supernatural doctrine should be accompanied with a supernatural operation and power. How else should it be known to be of God? The truth and the Spirit are inseparable companions. Where there is little of God known, there is little of his Spirit. As in the natural truth revealed to the heathens, somewhat God showed unto them, Rom. 1:19. In the darker revelation to the Jews there is but a fainter degree of the Spirit; but 'grace and truth come by Jesus Christ.' There goeth along with the doctrine of the gospel a mighty spirit of holiness; for thereby God would prove the verity and truth of this religion, and suitably to the rich mercy prepared for us in Christ.

Thirdly, There is a subordination of faith to this work of the Spirit by the truth; for the greatest things work not till they be considered and believed: 1 Thes. 2:13, 'Ye received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which worketh effectually also in you that believe.' A sound belief produceth strong affections, and strong affections govern our practice and conversation. So that fitly are these things united, as the fruits of our election and means of salvation.

2. Why this is the great matter of our thanksgiving to God. That I shall evidence in the following considerations:—

[1.] That thanksgiving to God is a great and necessary duty, expressly enjoined by him, and expected from us: 1 Thes. 5:18, 'In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God concerning you in Christ Jesus.' When God hath interposed his will, all debates are silenced. If there were nothing else in the case, this is motive enough to a gracious heart; for the fundamental reason of all obedience is the will

of God. Our thankfulness is no benefit to God, yet he is pleased with it, as it showeth our honesty and ingenuity. And to us Christians, the very life and soul of our religion is thankfulness; therefore, God will have us continually exercised in it: Heb. 13:15, 'Let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks unto his name.' As our understanding was given us to think of God, and know him; so our speech was given us to speak of God, and praise him. We praise God for all his works, we give him thanks for such as are beneficial to us. In praise, we ascribe all honour, excellency, and perfection unto him. In giving thanks, we express what he hath done for ourselves or others. Now this must be done continually, for God is continually beneficial unto us, by daily mercies giving us new matter of praise and thanksgiving. Besides, there are some mercies so great, that they should never be forgotten.

[2.] That we are to give thanks chiefly for spiritual and eternal mercies: Eph. 1:3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' For we cannot give thanks rightly without a just esteem of the mercy we give thanks for. But spiritual and eternal mercies do much excel those that are temporal and transitory. We are bound to bless the Lord for temporal favours and the comforts of this life, but a renewed heart is most taken up with spiritual and heavenly blessings. A man may give thanks carnally as well as pray carnally. A carnal man in prayer giveth vent to the desires of the flesh, James 4:3. So in blessing God he may speak from the relish of the flesh; though usually carnal men seldom give thanks to God: Hosea 12:8, 'I am become rich, I have found me out substance,' &c. Surely spiritual blessings should have the pre-eminence, because they concern our well-being, and they discriminate us from others, which temporal mercies do not: Eccles. 9:1, 2, 'For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that

sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.' The wicked have many of these mercies: Ps. 17:14, 'From men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure; they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.' And they may own God in them as pleased, and well satisfied with the prosperity of the flesh, or as desirous to have more.

[3.] That the best prospect we have of God's goodness to us, as to those spiritual mercies, is in election.

(1.) There we see all our blessings in their rise, fountain, and bosom cause, which is the eternal love and grace of God. Dulcius ex ipso fonte—waters are sweetest and freshest in their fountain. There we see that antecedent love which provided a Redeemer for us, which should be matter of continual love and reverence to us, John 3:16. There we see the rich preparations of grace in the new covenant, which could never have entered into our hearts if elective love had not provided them for us, 1 Cor. 2:9. There we see what it was that disposed all those providences that conduced to our good birth, education, acquaintance, relations. Alas! we knew not the means of all these things, but elective love was at work for us, to cast all circumstances, that we might be best taken in our month, Rom. 8:28. There we see what it was that made all the means effectual to draw us unto God: Jer. 31:3, 'He loved us with an everlasting love.'

(2.) It showeth us the Lord's distinguishing grace, and who it was that made us differ from others, who are left to perish in their sins. All are not called, and why we? John 14:22, 'Judas saith unto him (not Iscariot), Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?' Yea, many mighty and many noble are not called, 1 Cor. 1:26. God taketh not all, nor many of the highest in esteem among men, not many wise and prudent: Mat. 11:25, 26, 'At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise

and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.' Yea, many others are left to perish by their own delusions. The reprobates are specula judicii divini. The judgments of God on the wicked do exceedingly amplify his mercies towards us. It was the mere elective love of God, issuing forth by his powerful and differencing grace, that put the distinction between us and others. Surely his peculiar love to ourselves doth most affect us.

(3.) There we see that grace that doth take off all self-boasting: Eph. 2:8, 9, 'For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.' Elective love prevented all actual or foreseen worth in us; and from first to last it is carried on in a way of grace; the means, the efficacy, all is of grace. This was God's great end, that grace might be admired and esteemed by us, and be matter of eternal praise and thanksgiving: Eph. 1:6, 'To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.' The whole design is to show us how we are beloved of God, and that we may love him again.

Use 1. If election be the great matter of thanksgiving to God, then surely this doctrine should be heard in the church; for the life and soul of Christian religion is gratitude; and what feedeth gratitude is of great use unto us. Our gratitude doth not rise high enough till it come to the first cause that stirred and set all the wheels a-work in the business of our salvation. Surely this is a very profitable point.

1. To detect the pride of man, for here we see the true and proper cause of difference between us and others: 1 Cor. 4:7, 'Who maketh thee to differ?' The differencing grace of God, proceeding from his election, is the only true grace.

2. Nothing more extolleth the glory of God in our salvation; for if man can assume nothing to himself, the glory alone redoundeth to God. The mere reason and cause why some are chosen and others passed by, is God's good pleasure: Mat. 11:26, 'Even so, Father,

because it pleased thee.' Christ himself consents to it, giveth thanks for it, as an act of free and undeserved mercy.

3. No greater incentive to holiness; for here we see the absolute necessity of it, together with the strongest, sweetest motive to enforce it. (1.) The absolute necessity of it; because it is a necessary means to bring God's purposes to pass: Eph. 1:4, 'He hath chosen us, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love.' He hath chosen none to enjoy everlasting glory after this life, but such as he hath chosen to be holy here. First, They must be sanctified and renewed by the Spirit, and then walk in all holy conversation and godliness. And whatever assurance of election is pretended unto them who lead an unholy life, it is but a vain presumption or ungrounded persuasion; yea, a strong delusion. Secondly, Here is the sweetest and strongest motive to enforce it, and that is the singular love of God, which breedeth in us a sincere love to God again, and all serious endeavours to approve ourselves to him in purity of living. There is no such constraining force in anything as there is in love: 2 Cor. 5:14, 'For the love of God constraineth us,' &c. And no such holiness as that which floweth from it; this is thankful and evangelical obedience.

4. It is the ground of our solid comfort, in the midst of all the calamities and temptations of the present life; because our final happiness is appointed to us by God's electing love: Luke 12:32, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' And this is accompanied with his active providence and care over us all the way thither. So that all things are sanctified to us, that we may be sanctified to God: Rom. 8:28, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.'

Use 2. It showeth us that the elect have cause to bless God if they be chosen to salvation, though not to wealth, pleasure, and honour. These Thessalonians endured great afflictions for the gospel's sake, yet Paul looked upon himself as bound to give thanks always to God

for them, because he had chosen them to salvation. God dispenseth his gifts variously. Some are, shall I say, chosen—or condemned rather?—to worldly felicity. It is the will of God they should attain great wealth and honour here; and will you envy them and repine against providence, though God hath reserved you for a better estate hereafter? Compare two places; one is Jer. 17:13, 'All that forsake thee shall be written in the earth;' the other is Luke 10:20, 'Rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven.' Which is the better privilege—to be written in earth, or to be written in heaven? to have a great name in the subsidy-book, or to have our names written in the book of life? The one is their punishment, the other your blessedness.

Second use is exhortation. It presseth you to two things:—

1. Put in for a share and interest in this mercy; that is to say, in the apostle's words, 2 Peter 1:10, 'Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.' God hath not told us who are elected and who are not; therefore our way is to accept of the general grace offered, and to devote and resign ourselves to God, and to depend upon the merits of our Redeemer, and put ourselves under the discipline of his Spirit in the use of the appointed means, humbly waiting for his renewing and reconciling grace, and every day more and more, by diligence in the holy and heavenly life, getting your interest more assured; for by this means do we come to know the purposed love of God, and that 'he hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain eternal salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.' We need not say, Who shall go up to heaven to know the mind of God? Our election is known to us by our vocation, and our vocation by the fruits—our walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days. Surely the knowledge of our election is a thing greatly to be desired, because our eternal happiness and all spiritual good things depend upon it. Election is the free love of God, by which he intendeth these blessings to us. This is manifested by calling, by which they begin to be applied to us; then the effectual operation which these blessings have in us discovereth

calling, when we 'call on the name of Christ,' and 'depart from iniquity,' 2 Tim. 2:19.

2. We should praise, and admire, and esteem this glorious grace, and show our thankfulness both in word and deed.

[1.] In word; because that is a means to kindle in our hearts the love of God, and to stir up a spiritual rejoicing in him: Ps. 103:1–3, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases,' &c.

[2.] But chiefly in deed: you are more obliged to live to God than other men, when, passing by thousands who, in outward respects, were better than you, and you as deep in sin as they, he, not only without, but against, all merit of yours, by his singular grace set you apart for himself. Shall I sin against God, and grieve his Spirit? No; let me glorify him as long as I have a day to live.

SERMON XII

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.—2 THESS. 2:14.

AFTER the doctrine of Antichrist, and God's dreadful spiritual judgments on his abettors and followers, the apostle interposeth some matter of consolation to the Thessalonians; as before he comforted them from their election, so now from their vocation. Therefore, as we saw the doctrine of election set forth in the former verse, with all its appendant branches and circumstances, so now the doctrine of vocation, with what belongeth to it. Here calling is set forth—(1.) By the author of it: he calleth you; that is, God, who from the beginning hath chosen you to salvation. (2.) The outward means: by our gospel. (3.) The end, which is double:—First, Subordinate, in

the word whereunto, viz., to faith and holiness; Secondly, Ultimate: to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 'Whereunto he called you,' &c.

Doct. All that are elected by God are in time effectually called by faith and holiness to obtain eternal life.

1. I shall open effectual calling by what is said of it in the text.

2. That all chosen by God are called in this way.

1. Let me explain effectual calling. The author of it: 'he called you;' namely, God, spoken of in the former verse. I prove it by these two reasons:—(1.) None else hath authority to call; (2.) None else hath power to call.

[1.] Authority to call, either to duties or privileges; for calling is an earnest invitation to duties upon the offer of several privileges.

(1.) Duties: God is our proper Lord and rightful sovereign. He may justly challenge our obedience. Being our Creator, he is our owner; and being our owner, he is our sovereign and lawgiver, and may enact what laws he pleaseth. Certainly creation giveth him an interest in us; for every man taketh himself to have an authority over what he hath made, to dispose of it as he pleaseth. Now he that properly made all things is God. Man is said to make a thing as he bestoweth art upon it, but God bestoweth being upon it. A potter may form his clay into what vessel he pleaseth, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour, Rom. 9:21; that is, either a dish for food or a vessel to serve the vilest uses of nature, for meat or excrements. But we speak of rational creatures that are capable of proper government. Surely God made us, and hath a right to govern us. Our parents are but instruments of his providence; they know not how the child is framed in the womb, &c. Now he calleth upon us to do our duty with original supreme authority. We may refuse others; if they speak not to us in his name, they have no right over our consciences, to impose new duties upon us: James 4:12, 'There is one

lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.' Now his calling being a powerful excitation to do our duty, it originally belongeth to God.

(2.) As to privileges: The blessings God offereth are so great and glorious, that none else can give us a right to them but God; and the soul can have no security that it doth not usurp and intrude upon the possession of things that belong not to us till we have his warrant. As the apostle speaketh of an office, Heb. 5:4, 'No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron;' so it is true of all prerogatives; we have no leave to assume and take the honour of them to ourselves till we are called of God: that is our warrant. None came to the wedding-feast till they were bidden, Mat. 22, or went into the vineyard till they were hired, Mat. 20. This is the difference between duties and privileges: that any man, who will prefer that office of charity and love to us, may excite us to our duties, to unquestionable duties, due from the creature to the Creator; but no man can assure us of right to privileges without the Creator's leave. Man cannot make that to be a necessary duty to the Creator which is not. But man may warn us of our danger when we disobey God; but man cannot assure us of our right to such privileges without God's grant. Therefore certainly it is God that must call us.

[2.] None else can have power; for to calling there is necessary not only the invitations of the word, but also the effectual operation of the Spirit. None else can change the heart. A Christian is nothing, and hath nothing, but what God is pleased to work in him by his divine power: 2 Peter 1:3, 'According as his divine power hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.' It is a work of an infinite power to give grace to graceless souls, to make those that are sensual and worldly to become spiritual and heavenly, there being so much opposition to hinder that work; for such is the corruption of men's hearts, the power of Satan over us, that he keepeth possession till a stronger than he overcometh him, Luke 11:21. Therefore it is always made the work of his power, 'who calleth the things that are not as though they were,' Rom. 4:17. It is still

ascribed to his creating power; either the illumination of the mind, 2 Cor. 4:6, 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;' or inclinations of the heart, Eph. 2:10. We can neither think, nor effect, nor pursue spiritual and heavenly things without it. Therefore certainly it is God that calleth us.

2. The outward means: 'by our gospel.' Where—(1.) Consider the means itself: the gospel; (2.) The interest which the apostle challengeth in it: our gospel.

[1.] The means itself: the gospel. This God useth:—

(1.) Because if God will call and invite the creature by his duty to his happiness, it is necessary that his call should be evident to the creature by some visible sign. Now, the natural duty of man is much seen by the creation: Rom. 1:19, 'Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them;' Ps. 19:1, 2, 'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork: day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge.' But this call is made to man fallen, as a remedy to his lapsed estate, which, depending on the free grace of God, can only be known by his revelation, conveyed to us by extraordinary messengers, such as Christ, who was the principal revealer of the doctrine of God for the saving of the world, and him God authorised and sealed to this end: John 6:27, 'Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed.' And then by the apostles, who were instituted by Christ, and sent forth to proselytise the world to the obedience of God; and they were also authorised from heaven by divers signs and wonders, as long as it was necessary to use that dispensation for the confirmation of their message, and to show how dangerous it was to neglect a doctrine so useful to mankind, and

suitable to their great necessities, and so owned by God, Heb. 2:3, 4. Therefore by the gospel God called them to this grace.

(2.) To convince and stop their mouths that refuse this calling, for the gospel bringeth grace home to us, and leaveth it upon our choice. If we will accept it, well and good; if not, we justly deserve to be rejected for ever: Acts 13:26, 'To you is this word of salvation sent.' What say you to it? God hath sent a gracious message to you in particular; will you accept or refuse? Acts 3:26, 'He hath sent him to you, to bless every one of you,' &c. It doth excite all, and every man, to look after the recovery of his lapsed estate; surely God doth you no wrong if he severely punish your refusal after he hath invited you to his grace in Christ. Great is the misery of those that refuse this call: 'None of those that were bidden shall taste of my supper,' Luke 14:24. They are not only excluded from happiness, but they incur extreme wrath and misery: Prov. 1:24–26, 'Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh.'

(3.) Because to the elect he will deal congruously, and preserve the liberty of his own workmanship, and therefore dealeth with man as man; doth not compel us to be good whether we will or no, but doth at the same time teach and draw us: John 6:44, 45, 'No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me; sweetly attempering the means to our liberty, but accompanying them with his powerful grace: Acts 11:21, 'The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord.' It is God doth all, prospering the labours of his servants. So Acts 16:14, 'God opened the heart of Lydia, so that she attended unto the things spoken by Paul.' God opened her heart, but by the things spoken by Paul. And

God loveth to associate or accompany his power with his own means: Rom 1:16, 'It is the power of God unto salvation.'

[2.] The interest the apostle challengeth in it: our gospel. Doth it not derogate from the authority of it to appropriate it to any man? I answer—No. Elsewhere it is called God's gospel: 'The glorious gospel of the blessed God,' 1 Tim. 1:11. He is the author. It is not an invention of man, but a secret that came from the bosom of God. Again, it is called Christ's gospel: 'The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,' 2 Thes. 1:8; as the principal sub-revealer, who made known unto us most fully the mind of God. And then on the apostles, who were instruments chosen and intrusted by Christ to declare it to the world both by word and writing. The scripture is an authentic record, wherein all things are delivered to us both concerning our duties and privileges. Therefore, when he saith our gospel, he doth not mean it of principal revelation, but in regard of dispensation and trust: 1 Tim. 1:11, 'The glorious gospel of the blessed God is committed to my trust.' Therefore this word our gospel is—(1.) A word of fidelity, that argued the conscience to this duty, that owneth the trust committed to him, and that this was his chief work and charge: 1 Cor. 9:17, 'A dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.' (2.) It is a word of esteem, love, and affection; what we love we call ours: Rom. 16:25, 'Now to him that is able to stablish you according to my gospel.' Paul was glad he had such interest in it as to be a preacher of it; and believers should be glad they are partakers of the benefit: Eph. 1:13, 'In whom ye trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.' It is theirs and ours. Oh, blessed be God for this! (3.) It is a word importing diligence—our gospel; that which he preached with so much labour and hazard: he followed this work close: Acts 20:24, 'I count not my life dear, that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.' He was willing to die and suffer anything for the gospel's sake. (4.) The consent and harmony between him and the rest of the apostles. Sometimes he calleth it my gospel, to assert his own apostolical authority, as Rom. 2:16; sometimes our gospel, 2 Cor. 4:3, to note their common consent,

who were the authorised messengers of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is our gospel, the same jointly attested by all Christ's chosen messengers.

3. The ends of this calling. They are either subordinate or ultimate.

First, Subordinate: in the word 'Whereunto he hath called you;' that is, to faith, holiness, and salvation; we are called to all.

[1.] God calleth us to the faith of the gospel; he hath not only ordained us to believe, but called us to believe. Without calling there can be no faith: Rom. 10:14, 'How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' But upon calling there must be faith, or else we make void the dispensation of God which we are under.

(1.) There must be a belief of the gospel in general. The voice of the creatures calleth upon the Gentiles to believe an infinite, eternal power, that made man and all things; and the condemnation of the Gentile world is that they know not God, and glorify not God as God, after this revelation made to them. But to believe in Christ is a mystery to nature, and dependeth upon God's special revelation in the gospel. Therefore the external and internal power of the Spirit accompanieth it, to convince the world that it is sin not to believe in Christ—the external power in miracles, and the internal in the illumination of the mind: John 16:9, 'The Spirit shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not in me;' that is, receive not the faith of the gospel, or believe not that Christ was the true Messiah, the great prophet and doctor of the church.

(2.) This call doth aim at not only a belief of the truth of the gospel in general, but also a particular affiance in Christ according to the terms of the new covenant. General assent to the truth of the gospel is only considerable as it leadeth on other things, Now, that I may not wander, I will refer them to two things—(1.) A fiducial assent; (2.) An obediencial confidence. This is the belief of the truth we are called unto.

(1st.) The assent must be fiducial, or accompanied with a trust in Christ: Eph. 1:13, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.' The meaning is, the Gentiles, after they heard the gospel and believed the truth, they did trust themselves in the hands of Christ, to be brought by his saving and healing methods to eternal happiness. It is a mighty thing to have such a belief as may produce trust, or a venturing ourselves in the hands of Christ against all hazards, and, whatever befalleth us, be content to save our souls on his terms. This breedeth holy security or courage: 2 Tim. 1:12, 'For I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.'

(2dly.) This confidence must be obediential, not a devout sloth or carelessness. To trust in his mercies and neglect his precepts crosseth the tenor of his covenant: Ps. 119:60, 'I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.' It is true religion when faith, hope, and love concur: Jude, vers. 20, 21, 'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.' I know there is a trusting in his pardon for our failings, and that justification is a great privilege, as well as salvation; but pardon is promised to the sincere, that with an honest heart perform their duty: Ps. 32:2, 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile;' and Rom. 8:1, 'There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.' So that still our confidence in Christ must be obediential.

[2.] We are called to holiness; this is everywhere asserted in the scripture: 1 Thes. 4:7, 'For God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness.' And it enforceth it on several grounds; as—

(1.) That there may be a likeness between the person calling and the persons called: 1 Peter 1:15, 'But as he that called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.' It is true religion to imitate what

we worship; for knowledge and esteem always work an assimilation; and therefore, if we know the true God, and love him, we will study to be like him. Certainly, we have not a true knowledge of God if we do not know him to be a pure and holy God. He hath showed it in his laws, showed in his providence, and showed in his gospel by which we are called. The gods of the heathen taught sin by their own example. Their impure lives are recorded by their poets. Austin telleth us of a young man who was incited to wantonness by seeing the picture of Jupiter on the wall committing adultery. Quo pacto non faceret, cum in templo adorare cogeretur Jovem potius Catonem quam? But our God is pure, as appeareth by his laws, which are all 'holy, just, and good,' Ps. 119:140. Surely such holy precepts could come from none but a pure and holy God. As also by the work of his Spirit on his people: Eph. 4:24, 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;' and 2 Cor. 3:18, 'We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' He puts us into a nature that is very tender and shy of sin, troubled at it in others: 2 Peter 2:7, 8, 'And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling amongst them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.' He that made the eye, shall not he see? He that put into us a clean heart, is not he pure and holy? This appeareth also by the dispensations of his providence: Hab. 1:13, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue, when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?' Judgments on sinners, so on his own people: Prov. 11:31, 'Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in earth; much more the wicked and the sinner.' As, for instance, in David: the child died, his daughter is deflowered, Amnon slain, Absalom is in rebellion, his wives ravished, himself banished from his house and kingdom. Eli's sons slain, the ark taken, his daughter-in-law died, himself brake his neck. But chiefly in the very foundation of the gospel: the Son of God dieth a shameful, painful, accursed death before God would relax the rigour

of his law and set afoot the gospel, and all that there might be a perfect demonstration of his justice and holiness, and displeasure against sin: Rom. 8:3, 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin, in the flesh.'

(2.) The very nature of this calling enforceth this sanctification, or setting man apart from a common to a sacred use; for it is a calling us not only from misery to happiness, but from sin to holiness, and the one is indispensably necessary to the other; for none but those who are in a holy estate can be in a blessed condition. Our calling is sometimes called 'a heavenly calling,' Heb. 3:1; sometimes 'an holy calling,' 2 Tim. 1:9. Therefore the chief subordinate end is holiness: Rom. 1:7, 'Called to be saints,'—from the devil, the world, and the flesh, to God.

(3.) The grace and favour which is showed in our calling obligeth us to be holy in point of gratitude; for when we consider in what a sinful estate God found us, how freely he loved us, and that with a discriminating, differencing love, when he passed by others worthier than we, and to what estate he is ready to advance us—to the enjoyment of himself, amongst all those that are sanctified by faith;—all these are as so many strong bonds and obligations upon us to 'walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory in Jesus Christ,' 1 Thes. 2:12—worthy of his grace in calling; worthy of the glory to which we are called; that is, with the worthiness of condecency, not of condignity. We cannot fully answer this grace, but we must do that which will become it.

(4.) This calling enableth us to be holy, because it giveth us all things necessary both to holiness of heart and life: 2 Peter 1:3, 'According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.' Now this grace must not lie idle, otherwise we receive the Spirit in vain.

Secondly, The ultimate end: 'To obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The same expression in 1 Peter 5:10, 'The God of all grace, who hath called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus.' It is 'his glory.' Mark—(1.) Here is glory; (2.) It is the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1.] It is glory for body and soul. The glory is so great we cannot utter it, and conceive it. Now a little is revealed to us, but then it shall be revealed in us. (1.) The soul is not annihilated after death, nor doth it sleep till the resurrection, nor is it detained by the way from immediate passing into glory; but as soon as it is loosed from the body, is admitted into God's presence, and gathered unto the souls of just men made perfect, where it seeth God and loveth him, and enjoyeth what it seeth and loveth; for as soon as we are loosed from the body, we are present with the Lord. And therefore the first benefit we receive in the other world is the salvation of the soul: 1 Peter 1:9, 'Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.' It flitteth hence to God. (2.) The body hath its glory also in due time; for when it is raised up out of the grave, it will be another kind of body than we now have, both for impassibility, clarity, agility—for impassibility, called incorruption; clarity, called glory; agility, called power; subtilty, called a spiritual body by the apostle: 1 Cor. 15:42, 43, 'It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body':—

(1.) Impassability doth not only exclude corruption, for so the bodies of the damned are preserved for ever; but all grievances and pain: Rev. 21:4, 'There shall not be any more pain.'

(2.) For glory, a shining brightness: Mat. 13:43, 'The righteous shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of the Father.' Stephen's face shone, in this life, 'as it were the face of an angel,' Acts 6:15. And Moses' face shone by converse with God in the mount, Exod. 34:30. Our bodies shall be 'likened unto his glorious body,' Phil. 3:21. In the

transfiguration, 'His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment did shine as the light.'

(3.) For vigour, activity, and strength. It shall always be in the height and excellency of it. God preserved Moses' natural vigour for a long time, Deut. 34:7; but glorified bodies shall for ever remain in an eternal spring of youth.

(4.) Subtilty, a spiritual body. Here we live an animal life, after the manner of sensitive creatures, maintained by meat, drink, sleep; but hereafter the body shall live after the manner of spirits, having no need or use of these things. There we are ἰσάγγελοι, 'as the angels of God,' Mat. 22:30; and 1 Cor. 6:19, 'Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost.' Well, then, this is the glory put upon us.

[2.] Why is it called 'the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ?'

(1.) It is purchased by Christ. We were redeemed or bought by the price of his blood, that we might attain to this glory: Eph. 1:7, 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.'

(2.) It is promised by Christ: John 10:28, 'I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.' All that obey this call have eternal life already begun, nay, completed: 1 John 2:25, 'And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.'

(3.) It is prayed for by Christ, which is a copy of his intercession: John 17:14, 'Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.'

(4.) It is actually bestowed by Christ on his followers and called people. He receiveth our departing souls as soon as they flit out of the body: Acts 7:59, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' They are with him: Phil. 1:23, and 2 Cor. 5:8, when 'absent from the body,' they are 'present with the Lord,' which is a mighty comfort to us. At the last

day he will solemnly introduce us into heaven: John 14:3, 'I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.' The great shepherd of the sheep will lead the flock into their everlasting fold.

(5.) We have not only glory by Christ, but with Christ. We shall have the same glory Christ now hath, but in our measure; the same glory in kind whereunto Christ's humanity is advanced, referring to him only his privilege in the degree. So Rom. 8:17, 'And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together;' Rev. 3:21, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.' We share with him in his own blessedness, so far as we are capable.

II. That all those who are elected and chosen by God are thus called. Election and vocation have a great respect one to another; and though we cannot say that none are called that are not elected, for the Lord calleth others not only by the voice of nature, but the gospel: Mat. 22:14, 'Many are called, but few are chosen;' yet we may say that none are chosen, but they are in time called, so that vocation is, as it were, actual election. They are often put one for another; as John 15:19, 'I have chosen you out of the world; therefore the world hateth you;' that is, called them, or pursued his choice. So 1 Cor. 1:26, 'Ye see your calling, brethren, that not many wise men after the flesh, not many noble, not many mighty are called: for God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,' ver. 27; as if choosing and calling were all one. So Rom. 11:28, 29, 'As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sake; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sake: for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.' So that calling is an infallible consequent of election. And Rom. 8:30, 'Whom he did predestinate, them he also called.' Reason showeth it. (1.) Effectual calling is that powerful operation of God, wherein he beginneth to execute the purposes of his grace: Rom. 8:28, 'And we

know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose' (κατὰ πρόθεσιν). The first discovery of it to the creature is by drawing us to himself. (2.) This act proceedeth immediately from his choice, as antecedent all that we can do, all worthiness of ours, or supposed worthiness: 2 Tim. 1:9, 'Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began.' Nothing induced God to do it on our part, for what good thing could we do before we were made good by calling? (3.) The effect doth infallibly follow: John 6:37, 'All that the Father hath given me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' In due time they are called, and are obedient to the call, Rom. 8:28.

Use 1. If it be so, then here is advice to all.

1. Let us apply ourselves to the means with reverence and seriousness; because God's power is shown in them, in converting souls to himself: Ps. 65:4, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to draw nigh unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts.' It is a good thing to be in grace's way. The means have a ministerial efficacy: Acts 14:1, 'They so spake, that a great multitude of the Jews and Greeks believed;' with such clearness and force; so far God is with the minister. A dart flung by a skilful hand will pierce deeper than by its own weight. But yet, if you can but tarry, the hand of the Lord may be with you also. You do not know the seasons of the Lord's grace; all are not called at the first hour; some lie long at the pool, but yet wait still. Ere ever you are aware, the Holy Ghost may fall upon you and open your hearts. That heavenly doctrine may have its effect upon you.

2. Let us mind not only privileges, but duties. We have great privileges; we are called to enjoy sweet fellowship with Christ here: 1 Cor. 1:9, 'Faithful is he who hath called you to the communion of Christ Jesus our Lord,' and to a glorious estate hereafter. But we are also called to the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the

truth; and we cannot obtain the one without the other. Do not so mind comfort as to slight holiness, and divide one part of your calling from the other. Comfort is consequent to holiness, and followeth it as heat doth fire. The Spirit is more necessarily a sanctifier than a comforter; for our duty and obedience to God is a greater thing than our own peace. Holiness is the image of God upon the soul, and the blessed perfection wherein we were created: Gen. 1:27, 'So God created man in his own image.' And when it was lost by sin, Christ came and paid our ransom, that he might renew us by his Spirit. Titus 3:5, 'According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' Yea, much of our everlasting blessedness lieth in it. For heaven is to be looked upon not only as a state of complete felicity, but exact holiness: 1 John 3:2, 'We know that when he doth appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is;' Eph. 5:27, 'That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.' Then it is a glorious church. Christ hath done his whole work. Holiness is the beauty of God himself, Exod. 15:11, and puts an excellency on us, if we love it, and imitate it: Prov. 12:26, 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them.' We do not only excel other men, but we are more amiable in the sight of God: Prov. 11:20, 'The upright is his delight.' In short, it is a part of salvation itself, and a means to that which remaineth: Acts 26:18, 'Inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus.'

3. Let us reflect upon ourselves. Have we God's call? Have we obeyed the gospel? This will clear up your election to you: 2 Peter 1:10, 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.' Do you find such a belief wrought in you by the Spirit as begins in brokenness of heart, and ends in holiness? For Christ came to 'call sinners to repentance,' Mat. 9:13; that is, men sensible of sin to holiness of heart and life; to return to God, that we may first live to him, and then with him.

4. To improve the belief of the glory promised. (1.) To sweeten obedience, or a cause of holiness which for the present is so tedious to the flesh. Now here is our labour, hereafter our recompense, 1 Cor. 15:58. Every day we should grow more meet for his glory, Col. 1:12. (2.) To a contempt of all worldly things, good or evil. If good, many are pleased with this world's good things, but have no affection to spiritual and heavenly things; like the rebellious Israelites, who more desired the onions and garlic of Egypt than the milk and honey of the promised land, or the celestial manna, Num. 11:5, 6; worse than prodigals, that rest more satisfied with husks of swine, than bread which is in their father's house: they have their good things. Now, we should remember we are called off from these things, from dreggy contentments, base enjoyments, to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (3.) The evils of the world—crosses, afflictions: 'After ye have suffered a while, the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you;' and 2 Tim. 2:11, 12, 'It is a faithful saying: for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him.' Our afflictions are both breves and leves, light and momentary: 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' Our sufferings are small if compared with the reward; the time short, if compared with eternity. There is a twofold eternity—that eternal death which the wicked must endure; that eternal life which we enter into. This should sweeten all bitter waters. (4.) To dispose and prepare us for death. The contemplation of immortality hath left strong impressions on the hearts, of heathens; some burnt themselves as impatient to tarry longer. If a dark view, vain hope cause this, what should a sure promise and earnest of the Spirit do?

Use 2. To the called. (1.) Bless God for this calling. The woful estate out of which we are called, and the blessed estate into which we are entered, compared together, should make us wonder: 1 Peter 2:9, 'Ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' (2.) Walk answerably: Eph. 4:1, 'I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy

of the vocation wherewith ye are called.' And 1 Thes. 2:12, 'That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.'

SERMON XIII

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.—2 THES. 2:15.

THE apostle, after he had comforted the Thessalonians, he exhorteth them to constancy in the truth, whatever temptations they had to the contrary. The comforts he propoundeth to them were taken—(1.) From their election, ver. 13; (2.) From their vocation, ver. 14. His exhortation is to perseverance: 'Therefore, brethren,' &c.

In the words observe:—

1. The illative particle, therefore; because God hath chosen you and called you, and given you such advantages against error and seduction.
2. The duty inferred: στήκετε, stand fast. It is a military word; you have the same in other places: 1 Cor. 16:13, 'Watch ye, stand ye fast,' &c.; Eph. 6:14, 'Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.' The word intimateth perseverance.
3. The means of perseverance: hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

Where observe:—(1.) The act; (2.) The object.

1. The act: κρατεῖτε, hold with strong hand. The word implieth a forcible holding against assaults, whether of error or persecution. The Thessalonians were assaulted in both kinds; the heathens persecuted them, and some were gone abroad that began the mystery of iniquity, and were ready to pervert them.

2. The object, which is propounded—(1.) By a common and general term: 'The traditions which ye have been taught.' (2.) By a distribution: 'Whether by word, or our epistle.'

1. The common and general term, 'The traditions which ye have been taught.' There are two sorts of traditions—human and divine.

First, Human traditions are certain external observances instituted by men, and delivered from hand to hand, from progenitors to their posterity. These may be either besides or contrary to the word of God. (1.) Beside the word, as the institutions of the family of the Rechabites, in the observance of which, from father to son, they were so exact and punctual, that God produceth their example to shame the disobedience of his people; Jer. 35:6, 7, 'Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, nor build houses, nor plant vineyards,' &c. (2.) Contrary to the word of God, such as were those of the pharisees: Mat. 15:3, 'Why transgress ye the commandment of God by your traditions?' Human inventions in religion are contrary to, and destructive of, divine laws.

Secondly, Traditions divine are either heavenly doctrines revealed by God, or institutions and ordinances appointed by him for the use of the church. These are the rule and ground of our faith, worship, and obedience. The whole doctrine of the gospel is a tradition delivered and conveyed to us by fit messengers, such as the apostles were: 1 Cor. 11:2, 'Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances [marg. traditions] as I delivered them to you.' So that holding the traditions is nothing else but perseverance in apostolical doctrine.

2. The distribution, that no cheats might be put upon them under any pretence; therefore he saith, 'Whether by word, or our epistle;' that is, by word of mouth when present, or by epistle when absent; and he saith, not epistles, but epistle, as alluding to the former he wrote unto them. They were bound to yield to both alike credence and obedience; for, whether in speaking or writing, the apostolical

authority was the same. To improve this verse for your benefit, I shall lay down several propositions.

I. That whatever assurance we have of God's preserving us in the truth, yet we are bound to use diligence and caution.

II. Our diligence and caution is to be employed about this, that we may stand fast in the faith of Christ, and the profession and practice of godliness.

III. That the means of standing fast in the faith of Christ, and the profession and practice of godliness, is by holding the traditions which were taught by the holy apostles.

IV. That while the apostles were in being, there were two ways of delivering the truth—by word of mouth and writing.

V. That now when they are long since gone to God, and we cannot receive from them the doctrine of life by word of mouth, we must stick to the scriptures or written word.

I. That whatever assurance we have of God's preserving us in the truth, yet we are bound to use diligence and caution. For the apostle had said that 'God had chosen and called them to the belief of the truth,' and yet saith, 'Therefore, brethren, stand fast.'

First, Reason will tell us that when we intend an end, we must use the means; otherwise the bare intention and desire would suffice, and to the accomplishing of any effect, we need no more than to will it; and the sluggard would be the wisest man in the world, who is full of wishings and wouldings, though his hands refuse to labour. But common experience showeth that the end cannot be obtained without a diligent use of the means: Prov. 13:4, 'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat;' that is, rewarded with the intended benefit.

Secondly, The business in hand is, whether God's election, calling, or promise, doth so secure the end to us, as that we need not be so careful in the diligent use of means? Such a notion or conceit there may be in the hearts of men, therefore let us attack it a little by these considerations:—

1. God's decree is both of end and means, for all his purposes are executed by fit means. He that hath chosen us to salvation, bringeth it about by the belief of the truth, and sanctification of the Spirit, 2 Thes. 2:13; and without faith and holiness no man shall see God, and escape condemnation. God had assured Paul that there should be 'no loss of any man's life among them, except of the ship,' Acts 27:22. And yet afterwards, ver. 31, Paul telleth them, 'Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.' How could that assurance given to Paul from God, and Paul's caution to the mariners, stand together? Doth the purpose of God depend upon the uncertain will and actions of men? I answer—Not as a cause, from whence it receiveth its force and strength; but as a means, appointed also by God to the execution of his decree. For by the same decree God appointeth the event, what he will do, and the means by which he will have it to be done: and the Lord revealing by his word this conjunction of end and means, there is a necessity of duty lying upon man to use these means, and not to expect the end without them. God intended to save all in the ship, and yet the mariners must abide in the ship; therefore, what God hath joined together, let no man separate. If we separate these things, God doth not change his counsel, but we pervert his order to our own destruction.

2. God, that hath bidden us to believe his promises, hath forbidden us to tempt his providence, Mat. 4:7. Now we tempt God when we desire him to give an extraordinary proof of his care over us, when ordinary means will serve the turn, or be useful to us.

3. Though the means seem to have no connection with the end, yet, if God hath enjoined them for that end, we must use them. As in the instance of Naaman; God was resolved to cure him, but Naaman

must take his prescribed way, though against his own fancy and conceit: 2 Kings 5:10, 'Wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean;' compare ver. 13, 'If the prophet had bidden thee to do some great thing,' &c. So John 13:6, 7, Peter must submit to be washed, though he could not see the benefit of it. So John 9:6, 7, the blind man must submit to have his eyes anointed with clay, and wash in the pool of Siloam; though the clay seemed to put out his eyes, rather than cure them, and the pool could not wash away his blindness; but means appointed by God must be used, whatever improbabilities are apprehended by us.

4. That when God's will is expressly declared concerning the event, yet he will have the means used. As, for instance, 2 Kings 20:5–7; God was absolutely resolved to add fifteen years more to Hezekiah's life, yet he must take a lump of figs and lay it on the boil; which plainly showeth that no promise on God's part, nor assurance on ours, hindereth the use of means. God will work by them, not without them.

5. In spiritual things, assurance of the event is an encouragement to industry, not a pretence to sloth: 1 John 2:27, 28, 'Ye shall abide in him: and now, little children, abide in him.' The promise of perseverance doth encourage us to use endeavours that we may persevere, and quicken diligence rather than nourish security, or open a gap to carnal liberty: 1 Cor. 9:26, 'I run not as one that is uncertain.' We are the more earnest, because we are assured the means shall not be uneffectual.

II. Our duty is to stand fast in the faith of Christ and profession of godliness, whatever temptations we have to the contrary. Stand fast being a military word, it alludeth to a soldier's keeping his ground, and is opposed to two things:—(1.) A cowardly flight; (2.) A treacherous revolt.

1. A cowardly flight implieth our being overcome in the evil day, by the many afflictions that befall us for the truth's sake: Eph. 6:13,

'Wherefore take to you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day;' that after ye have done all things, ye may stand. Their temptation was the many troubles and persecutions that befell them, called there 'the evil day.' Their defence lay in 'the whole armour of God,' which is there made of six pieces:—The girdle of truth or sincerity, which is a strength to us as a girdle to the loins; the breastplate of righteousness, or a holy inclination and desire to perform our duty to God in all things; and the shield of faith, or a steadfast adhering to the truths of the gospel, whether delivered in a way of command, promise, or threatening; the helmet of hope, or a certain and desirous expectation of the promised glory; the shoe of the preparation of the gospel of peace, which is a readiness to endure all encounters for Christ's sake, who hath made our peace with God; and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Now, if we take this armour and use it in our conflicts, what doth it serve for? To withstand and stand. The first is the act of a soldier, the second is the posture of a conqueror. Here is withstanding till the field be won, and then standing when the day of evil is over. Here we make our way to heaven by conflict and conquest, and hereafter we triumph.

2. A treacherous revolt, or yielding to the enemy, by complying with those things which are against the interest of Christ and his kingdom for advantage-sake: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken us, and loved the present world.' Backsliders in heart are the worst sort of apostates. Such as lose their affection to God, and delight in his ways, and esteem not of his glorious recompenses, for a little pleasure, profit, or pomp of living; sell their birthright for one morsel of meat, Heb. 12:15, 16. Some fail in their understandings, but most miscarry by the perverse inclination of their wills; they are carnal worldly hypocrites that never thoroughly mortified the fleshly mind, prize things as they are commodious to the flesh, and will save them from sufferings. The bias of such men's hearts doth easily prevail against the light of their understandings.

III. The means of standing fast is, by holding the traditions which were taught by the holy apostles. Here I will prove—(1.) That the doctrine of Christianity taught by the apostles is a tradition; (2.) That holding this tradition by strong hand, when others wrest it from us, is the means of our perseverance.

1. That the doctrine of Christianity is a tradition, I prove it by two arguments:—

First, Matters not evident by the light of nature, nor immediately revealed to us by God, must be either an invention or a tradition. An invention is something in religion not evident by natural light, nor agreeable to sound reason, but is some cunningly-devised fable, invented by one or more, and obtruded by various artifices upon the belief of the world. Inventions in this kind were man's disease, not his remedy: Eccles. 7:29, 'God made man upright, but they sought out many inventions.' As when the philosophers sat a-brood upon religion, a goodly chimera it was they hatched and brought forth: Rom. 1:21, 22, 'They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened;' and 'professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.' The inventions little became the nature of God; nor were they profitable to man, for still the great sore of nature was unhealed, which is a fear of death and the righteous wrath of God, Rom. 1:32. So that neither man's comfort nor duty was well provided for. Surely the gospel is none of this sort, not an invention of men, but a revelation of God; and a revelation not made to us in person, but brought out of the bosom of God by Jesus Christ, and by him manifested to chosen witnesses, who might publish this mystery and secret to others. Well, then, since the gospel is not an invention; it is a tradition, or a delivery of the truth upon the testimony of one that came from God, to instruct the world, or reduce it to him; not an invention of man, but a secret brought out of the bosom of God by our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore it is said, Heb. 2:3, 4, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, first spoken by the Lord himself, and then confirmed to us by them that heard him, the Lord bearing them witness?' &c. Christ delivered it to the apostles, and the

apostles delivered it to others: 2 Tim. 2:2, 'Those things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.' The apostles received the gospel from Christ, and the churches and ministers from the apostles, and they delivered it down to others until it came to us, which is the means of our believing the truth, and confessing the name of Christ. This testimony, delivered and conveyed to us by the most credible means, and which we have no reason to doubt of, is as binding as if we had heard Christ and his apostles in person; for we have their word in writing, though we did not hear them preach and publish it with the lively voice; their authority is the same, delivered either way. And that these are their writings appeareth by the constant tradition of the church, and the acknowledgment of friends and enemies, who still appeal to them as a public authentic record. And as they have been attested by the church, they have been owned by God, and blessed by him to the conversion and sanctifying of many souls throughout all successions of ages: and by this tradition Christianity hath held up the head against all encounters of time; and the persecutions of adverse powers have not suppressed it, nor the disputes of enemies silenced the profession of it, but from age to age it hath been received, and transmitted to future generations, though sometimes at a very dear rate. And this is binding to us, though we saw not the persons and miracles by which they confirmed their message, and heard not the first report. Yet the universal tradition having handed it to us, is a sufficient ground of faith, and so we believe through their word, and are concerned in Christ's prayers, John 17:20; for with them and their successors, as to these necessary things, Christ hath promised to be to the end of the world, Mat. 28:20.

Secondly, My next argument is—Because Christian religion must needs be a tradition, partly because matter of fact is the foundation of it, and it is in itself matter of faith. (1.) Because it is built upon matter of fact: that the Son of God came from God, to bring us to God; that is to say, appeared in human nature, instructed the world by his doctrine and example, and at length died for sinners,

confirming both in life and death the truth of his mission, by such unquestionable miracles as showed him to be the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Now, a testimony, tradition, or report, is necessary in matters of fact, which of necessity must be confined to some determinate time and place. It was not fit that Christ should be always working miracles, always dying, always rising, and ascending in every place, and in the view of every man; but those things were to be once done in one place of the world, in sight of some particular and competent witnesses. But because the knowledge of them concerned all the rest of the world, they were by them to be attested to others; matters of fact can only be proved by credible witnesses, and this was the great office put upon the apostles, Acts 1:8–22; 2:32; 3:15; 10:39–41. (2.) As it is matter of faith, or the doctrine built upon this matter of fact. We cannot properly be said to believe a thing but upon a report and testimony. I may know a thing by sense or reason, but I cannot believe it, but as it is affirmed or brought to me by credible testimony. As we are said to see those things which we perceive by the eye, or the sense of seeing, and to know those things which we receive by reason, or sure demonstration; so we are said to believe those things which are brought to us by valuable testimony, tradition, and report. As, for instance, if any one ask you, Do you believe the sun shineth at noonday? You will answer, I do not believe it, but see it. So if any one ask you, Do you believe that twice two make four, and twice three make six? You will say, I do not believe it, but know it, because certain and evident reason telleth me that two is the half of four, and three of six; and every whole consisteth of two halves or moieties. But if he should ask you, Do you believe that the sun is bigger than the earth? You will say, I believe it; for though your eye doth not discover it, nor doth an ignorant man know any certain demonstration of it, yet, having the authority of learned men, who are competent judges in the case, you judge it a rash and foolish obstinacy not to believe it. Apply it now to the mysteries of godliness revealed in the gospel. They cannot be seen with the eye, for they are invisible; nor found out and comprehended by any human understanding, because they exceed the reach of man's reason, and depend upon the love and arbitrary will of God,

John 3:16; yet you believe them, because God hath revealed them to the prophets and apostles: and God, being truth and wisdom itself, cannot deceive or be deceived; and therefore you believe them with the certainty of divine faith, and do no more doubt of them than you do of those things which you see with your eyes, and know and understand by a sure demonstration. The sense of seeing may be deceived, and human reason may err, but it is impossible God should deceive or be deceived. It oftentimes falleth out that men do prefer the authority and report of a man whom they judge to be wise and good before their own sense and reason. As, for instance, that man who by his eye judges the sun to be less than the earth, yet doth not obstinately stand in his opinion when he hears a knowing and skilful philosopher assert the contrary. Now, 'If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater,' 1 John 5:9. And this testimony of God is brought to us by his authorised messengers as the ground of faith: and what is that but tradition? We believe in God by hearing of him; and we hear by a preacher, Rom. 10:14. Ordinary common preachers give us notice; but Christ and his apostles give us assurance; and by their testimony and tradition our faith is ultimately resolved into the veracity of God.

2. That holding this tradition is the great means of standing fast in the faith of Christ and the confession of his name. For in the word of God delivered by Christ and his apostles, there is sure direction to walk by, and sure promises to build upon. For whatever they made known of Christ was not a fable but a certain truth; for they had the testimony of sense, 2 Peter 1:16, 17; 1 John 1:2–4, and so could plead both the authority of his command and the certainty of his promise, and that with uncontrollable evidence; and without this relation there can be neither faith nor obedience, nor sure expectation of happiness. For we cannot trust God for what he hath not promised, nor obey God in what he hath not commanded; nor in our difficulties and distresses expect happiness from him without his warrant and assurance. But by this doctrine delivered to us, we have all that belongeth to faith, obedience, and happiness, and beyond that the creature can desire no more. (1.) There can be no faith till we have a

sure testimony of God's revelation; for faith is a believing such things as God hath revealed, because he hath revealed them. It is not faith but fancy to believe such things as God hath never revealed; nor is it trust and a regular confidence to think that he will certainly give us what he hath never promised; this were to lay us open to all manner of delusion; and therefore we are never upon sure and stable ground but by sticking to such a tradition as may justly entitle itself to God. (2.) Nor obedience: for obedience is a doing what God hath commanded, because he hath commanded it. The fundamental reason of obedience is the sight of God's will, 1 Thes. 4:3, 5:18; 1 Peter 2:15. To do what God never commanded, or not to do it upon that account, but for other reasons, is not obedience; and in difficult cases the soul can never be held to its duty till we are persuaded that so is God's will concerning us. Now to know his will concerning us, we are often bidden to search the scripture; but never bidden to consult with the church, to know what unwritten traditions she hath in her keeping to instruct us in our duty. (3.) No certain expectation of happiness. We are never safe till we know by what rule Christ will judge us; that is, reward or punish men at the last day. Now he will judge us according to the gospel, Rom. 2:16; 1 Thes. 1:8. Obey the gospel, and you have a perfect rule to guide you to happiness; but if you neglect this great salvation, or be unfaithful in the profession of it, this word condemneth you, and God will ratify the sentence of it.

IV. That whilst the apostles were in being, there were two ways of delivering the truth, and that was by word of mouth and writing. So in the text: 'Whether by word or our epistle.' The apostles went up and down and preached Christ everywhere; that needeth no proof, unless you would have me to produce the whole book of the Acts of the Apostles. But they did not preach only, but write; and both by the instinct of the Holy Spirit, who guided their journeys, and moved them to write epistles. For being often absent from churches newly planted, and heresies arising, or some contentions, which could not be avoided among weak Christians, God overruled these occasions for the profit of the church in after ages: upon one occasion or another they saw a necessity to write; ἀνάγκη ἔσχον: Jude ver. 3, 'It

was needful for me to write unto you.' As, in the Old Testament, God himself delivered the law with great majesty and terror, and afterwards caused the same to be written in tables of stone, for the constant use of his people; and the prophets first uttered their prophecies, and then wrote unto them; so the apostles first preached evangelical doctrine, and then consigned it to writing for the use of all ages. And though all things delivered by them were not delivered in one sermon or one epistle, yet by degrees the canon of the New Testament was constituted and made perfect by the writings of the evangelists and apostles.

V. That now, when they are long since gone to God, and we cannot receive from them the doctrine of life by word of mouth, we must stick to the scriptures or written word. (1.) Because we are taught to do so by Christ and his apostles. Christ always appealeth to the writings of the Old Testament, both against traditions, which he condemneth, Mat. 15:2, and against pretended revelations: Luke 16:31, 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded to repent, if one should come from the dead.' And the apostles still have recourse to this proof: Acts 26:22, 'Witnessing no other things than the prophets and Moses did say should come to pass.' And when they pleaded they were eye and ear witnesses, and so their testimony was valuable; yet they say we have βεβαιότερον λόγον, 'A surer word of prophecy, whereunto ye shall do well to take heed,' 2 Peter 1:19. Now, how can we do better than to imitate these great examples? (2.) Because those things were written for our sakes: 1 John 1:4, 'These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.' The apostles, being to leave the world, did know the slipperiness of man's memory, and the danger of corrupting Christian doctrine, if there were not a sure authentic record left; therefore they wrote, and so fully, that nothing is wanting to complete our joy and happiness. (3.) Because the scriptures are perfect. The perfection of scripture is known by its end and intended use, which is to give us a knowledge of those things which concern our faith, duty, and happiness. (1st.) Our faith in Christ. If there be enough written for that end, we need not unwritten traditions to complete our rule. Now, St John telleth

us he might have written more things: 'But these things are written that ye might believe in the Son of God, and have life through his name,' John 20:30, 31. Certainly nothing is wanting to beget a faith in Christ. The object is sufficiently propounded; the warrant or claim is laid down in the new covenant, and the encouragements to believe it are clear and strong. What would men have more? So that here is a perfect rule, perfect in its kind, and for its proper use. (2dly.) For our duty; that is sufficiently provided for. The apostle telleth us that 'the grace of God'—take it objectively for the grace of the gospel, or subjectively for grace in our hearts—'teacheth us;'—if you mean objective grace, it prescribeth, directeth; if subjective grace, it persuadeth and exciteth; what to do? 'To live soberly, righteously, godly in the present world,' Titus 2:12. There are all the branches of man's duty enumerated: sobriety relateth to self-government; righteously, to our carriage towards our neighbour; godly, to our commerce and communion with God. What is there wanting that belongeth either to worship, or justice, or personal holiness? Therefore certainly we need no other rule; for it layeth down whatsoever men are bound to do in all ages and places of the world, and in whatsoever circumstances God shall put them. And so it is fit to be the law of the universal King and Lawgiver; yea, it is so perfect, that whatever other way is set up, it presently dasheth against those notions that we have, or should have, of God, his service and worship; or it infringeth or perverteth the liberty and nature of man. (3dly.) For our happiness. That doctrine and institution which is able to make us wise unto salvation is enough for us; but so the holy scriptures are said to do: 2 Tim. 3:15, 'And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through the faith which is in Christ Jesus.' Nay, afterwards, ver. 17, 'The man of God is by them made perfect, and thoroughly furnished to every good work.'

If the scriptures do thoroughly direct men to know God in Christ, and save their own souls, why should we look any further? Now, they do not only furnish every private Christian with this knowledge, but 'the man of God,' who is to instruct others, he needeth look no

further, but is furnished out of the scripture with all things necessary to discharge his office. Therefore here we fix and rest; we have a sufficient rule, and a full record of all necessary Christian doctrine.

Use 1. The use of all is: Let us not seek another rule than the word of God. Papists cry up unwritten traditions to be received with equal respect and reverence, as we receive the holy scriptures. But you, brethren, stand fast, holding the apostolical tradition. You cannot have it by word of mouth from them now; therefore you must stick to what is written, or else you cannot preserve yourselves from the frauds and impostures of Antichrist. These apostolical writings have been received in all ages and times of the church from the beginning; and all disputes among Christians have been tried by them. None were allowed good or sincere Christians who doubted of the truth of them. But because we have to do with a people that will sacrifice all to the honour and interest of their church, and knowing they are not able to stand before the light of scriptures, have, to the no little prejudice of the Christian cause, done all they can to weaken the authority, sufficiency, and perspicuity of them, that we might have no religion without the testimony and recommendation of their church; therefore I shall resume the matter and declare it afresh.

1. Mankind lying in darkness and in the shadow of death, it was necessary that one way or another God should reveal his mind to them, that we may have what belongeth to our duty and happiness, for our chief good and last end. Being altered by sin, we strangely mistake things, and put light for darkness and darkness for light, good for evil and evil for good, weighing all things in the balance of the flesh, which we seek to please. We confound both the names and natures of things, and wander in a maze of a thousand perplexities; therefore God, in pity to mankind, hath given us a sure direction in his word, which is 'a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths,' Ps. 119:105. Mark the words of light and lamp. The use of a lamp is by night, and in the day we have the light of the sun: whether it be day or night with us, here we are taught how to carry ourselves. Mark again the words of path and feet. The one signifieth our way and

general course, the other all our particular actions; so far as religion is concerned in them, we have directions in the word about them. Besides, man's condition is such, that he needeth a supernatural remedy by a Redeemer; which, depending upon the mere love and free grace of God, cannot be found out by natural light left to us; for that only can judge of things necessary, but not of such things as depend upon the mere pleasure of God; therefore a divine revelation there must be.

2. Since it is necessary that God should some way or other reveal his mind to his people, it must be done by oracles, visions, dreams, or by extraordinary messengers, who by word of mouth might convey it to us; or else by writing, or by ordinary teachers, whose lips may preserve knowledge in the church. The former ways might suffice while God saw fit to reveal but a few truths, and such as do not burden the memory, and men were long-lived, and of great simplicity, and the church was confined within a small compass of ground, and not liable to so many miseries and changes as now in the latter ages; but when once God had spoken to us by his Son, those extraordinary ways ceased: Heb. 1:1, 2, 'God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past to the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last times spoken to us by his Son.' As formerly God did speak *πολυτρόπως*, in divers manners,—that is to say, by visions, oracles, dreams; and so *πολυμερῶς*, at sundry times, by several steps and degrees, he acquainted the world with the truths necessary for man to know, delivering them out by portions, not altogether at once, till he came who had 'The Spirit without measure,' John 3:34. The prophets to whom God revealed himself before by visions, oracles, dreams, or the coming of the Spirit upon them, had the spirit *ἐκ μέτρου*, by measure, to fit them for some particular errand or message on which God sent them. But when God sent his Son out of his bosom to reveal the whole doctrine of faith at once, and to declare his Father's will with full authority and power, he fixed and closed up the rule of faith. So it was not fit that after him there should come any extraordinary nuncios and ambassadors from heaven, or any other should be owned as infallible messengers, but

such as he immediately sent abroad in the world to disciple the nations. Therefore all former extraordinary ways ceased, and we are left to the ordinary rule stated by Christ.

3. Being left to the ordinary rule, it was necessary it should be taught, not only by word of mouth, but committed to writing; for Christ is ascended into heaven, and the apostles do not live for ever; and we have no men now that are immediately and divinely inspired; and ordinary pastors and teachers cannot make more articles of faith, but do only build on the apostles' foundation, 1 Cor. 3:10, or that divinely-inspired doctrine which they delivered to the church. Yea, that doctrine cannot well be preserved from oblivion and corruption without writing. Therefore God accounted this the safest way: those things that are only delivered by word of mouth, or from hand to hand, may easily be changed, corrupted, or utterly lost. Certainly, if you consider man's sloth, treachery, levity, and the many vile affections which may easily induce him to extinguish or corrupt the truth, which is contrary to them, you will see that it is necessary there should be an authentic record by which truth and error might be tried and distinguished; yea, that the church, which is dispersed throughout the world, might have truth at hand, and particular believers have this doctrine ever by them for their comfort and use, it being the property of a blessed man to 'delight in the law of God,' and to 'exercise himself therein day and night,' Ps. 1:2. In short, while the apostles were living, it was good to take the tradition from their mouth, but, now they are dead, we take it from their writings. Surely if God saw some writing necessary when those extraordinary ways we spake of before were in use, and the church of the Old Testament was in a much quieter estate than the church of the New, I say, if some writing were necessary then, it is more necessary now, for the Christian church is more exposed to dreadful storms of persecution, the deceits of heretics of all sorts, especially to the frauds of Antichrist, which we are forewarned of in this chapter, and are detected and discovered by their contrariety to the written word.

4. This truth being written, it is both a safe and a full rule for us to walk by. It is a safe rule, because it is written by the apostles and evangelists, holy men moved by the Holy Ghost. The apostles did not lose their infallibility when they committed what they preached to writing. The same Spirit that assisted them in delivering the doctrine by word of mouth, assisted them also when they delivered it by writing. And it is a full and sufficient rule, because it containeth all things which are necessary for men to believe and do in order to eternal life. Let them name what is necessary, beyond what is recommended there or may be delivered from thence. Yea, it doth contain not only all the essential, but also the integral parts of the Christian religion; and therefore nothing can be any part of our religion which is not there. The direction of old was, Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Everything was then tried by Moses and the prophets; everything must be now tried by the prophets and apostles, which is our foundation of faith, worship, and obedience, Eph. 2:20.

5. That which we blame in the papists is, that they cry up a private, unproved, unwritten tradition of their own, as of equal authority with this safe and full rule which is contained in this written word of God. Their crime and fault may be considered partly with respect to the object and matter—that these traditions are not indifferent customs, but essential points necessary to faith and Christian practice. And so, though a Christian be never so thorough and sound in his obedience to the word of God, and true to the baptismal covenant, yet, if he submitteth not to these unwritten traditions, he wants some point necessary to faith and practice, and so to life eternal, which is contrary to Mark 16:16, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned;' and John 17:3, 'This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.' Partly as to the subject, as they make their own faction to be the only keepers of these things, and that nothing is to be owned as apostolical tradition but what is delivered as such by their authority; which is to leave the church to

the tyranny and usurpation of a corrupt faction, to declare for apostolical tradition anything which serveth their end and interest, and for which no true historical evidence is produced. Now the unjust and fraudulent practices which they have used to promote this usurpation over the churches of Christ render them false men, most unfit to be trusted in this kind. Partly with respect to the manner: they will have these things to be received *pari reverentia et pietatis affectu*—with the same reverence and pious affection with which we receive the holy scriptures; and so man's post is set by God's, and unproved traditions equalled with doctrines of faith. Their opinion is bad enough, but their practice is worse; for there they show they value these things more than the scriptures; as superstition always aboundeth in its own things. Did ever any of their doctors say the same things of traditions which they take the boldness to say of scripture? Did they ever call them pen and inkhorn, or parchment divinity, a nose of wax, a dumb rule, an obscure and ambiguous doctrine? These blasphemies they vent boldly against the scriptures; but did they ever speak these of traditions? And again, their common people are a thousand times better instructed in their traditions than in the doctrine of salvation. They skill more of Lent and Ember-weeks, &c., than they truly understand the doctrine of man's misery and remedy. And call you this reverence and pious affection to the scriptures and traditions? Partly because they would never give us a catalogue of unwritten traditions necessary to be observed by all Christians. It may be lest they should amaze the people with the multitude of them, or else that the people may not know how many of their doctrines are destitute of scripture proof, and so they plainly be discovered to be imposers on the belief of the Christian world.

6. Though we blame this in papists, yet we reject not all traditions:—

[1.] Because scripture itself is a tradition, as we proved before, and is conveyed to us by the most credible means, which we have no reason to doubt of. The scriptures of the Old Testament were preserved by the Jews, 'to whom were committed the oracles of God,' Rom. 3:2. Protestants received all the books which they admitted into their

canon. And for the books of the New Testament, the Christian church hath received them as the writings of those whose names they bear. And by the constant universal tradition of the church they are transmitted to us; and we have no more reason to doubt of them than we do of statutes and laws made by kings and parliaments who lived long before we had a being. Yea; we may be much more confident, as the matter is of greater weight and consequence, and these writings have the signature and stamp of God's Spirit on them, and have been blessed by God to the converting and sanctifying of many souls; and have been delivered down to us by a succession of believers unto this very clay. And by them Christianity hath been preserved in the world, notwithstanding the wickedness of it, and hath held up head against all the encounters of time. The persecutions of adverse powers have not suppressed it, nor the disputes of enemies silenced the profession of it; but still from age to age God's truth is received and transmitted to posterity.

[2.] Because the truth of Christianity depending upon matter of fact, chiefly Christ's rising from the dead, it can only be proved by a testimony which, in so extraordinary a case, must be made valuable, and authorised to the world by the miracles accompanying it. Now the notice of these things is brought to us by tradition, which, being unquestionable, giveth us as good ground of faith as it did to them that lived in the apostles' time, and heard their doctrine and saw their miracles. God's wonderful works were never intended for the benefit of that age only in which they were done, but for the benefit also of those that should hear of them by any credible means whatsoever, Ps. 145:4; Joel 1:3; Ps. 78:3–7: these things were told them 'that they might set their hope in God,' &c.

[3.] Because there are some doctrines drawn by just consequence from scripture, but are the more confirmed to us when they are backed with constant church usage and practice; as baptism of infants, Lord's-day, singing of psalms in our public worship, &c.

[4.] Because there are certain words which are not found in scripture indeed, yet agreeable thereto, and are very useful to discover the frauds of heretics; as Trinity, divine providence, consubstantial, procession of the Holy Ghost, satisfaction, &c.

[5.] We reject not all church history, or the records of ancient writers concerning the providences of God in their days in owning the gospel, which make much for our instruction in manners, and help to encourage us to put our trust in God.

[6.] There are certain usages and innocent customs or circumstances, common to sacred and other actions, which we despise not, but acknowledge and receive as far as their own variable nature and condition requireth; not rejecting them, because anciently practised; nor regarding them, when the general law of edification requireth the omission of them. But that which we detest is, that the traditions of men should be made equal in dignity and authority with the express revelation of God; yea, that manifest corruptions and usurpations,—as making Rome the mistress of other churches, and superinducing the Pope as the head of the universal visible church, and the vicar of Christ, without his leave and appointment, and such like other points,—should be obtruded upon the world as apostolical traditions, and to be received with like religious reverence as we do articles of faith set down in scripture. This is that we cannot sufficiently abhor, as apparently false, and destructive to Christianity.

SERMON XIV

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope, through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.—2 THES. 2:16, 17.

THE apostle—1. Giveth thanks for their election and vocation, vers. 13, 14.

2. Exhorteth them to stick fast to the truths delivered by epistles, or word of mouth, ver. 15.

3. Prayeth for them, in the words now read. So that is the third means of confirming their faith in the truth of the gospel; prayer to God for them. Now in a prayer all things are plain; we must put off our shoes when we draw nigh to God, appear before the Lord with naked and bare feet. Therefore here nothing of difficulty will occur; our prayers, the more simply and plainly they are expressed, the more sincere they are.

In this prayer observe:—

I. The persons to whom this prayer is addressed: now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father.

II. The grounds of audience and success are intimated, which are two:—(1.) God's love: which hath loved us. (2.) The pledges of his love; which are also two:—First, Without us; Secondly, Within us.

1. He hath given us everlasting consolation.

2. Good hope through grace.

III. The blessings prayed for.

1. Increase of comfort: comfort your hearts.

2. Perseverance or establishment: and stablish you in every good word and work; where, by 'every good word' is meant the sound doctrine of the gospel; by 'every good work,' holiness of life.

So that here is a great harvest of matter, but we must gather it in by degrees, for all cannot be spoken of at once.

First, We begin with the persons to whom the prayer is addressed: 'Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father;' that is, I beseech the Lord our Saviour, and God our Father, to comfort and stablish you. The observations for this branch shall be brief and short, because the proper seat of them lieth elsewhere.

I. That exhortations prevail little without prayer. He had exhorted them to hold fast the traditions, and presently addeth, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father stablish you in every good word and work.' It is good to observe how all the parts of the apostle's discourse cohere and agree together. He first blesseth God for their election, and then showeth how it is accomplished by vocation or effectual calling. Yet the effectually called need quickening and exhortation, that we may concur to our salvation in that way which is proper to us. But lest the business should seem wholly to rest upon our will, he carrieth up the matter to God again by prayer. Election doth not exclude God's means, which is vocation, nor man's means, which is exhortation; but that availeth little unless the matter be brought before God again by prayer.

Now this method is necessary:—

1. Because all from first to last come from God; he is Alpha and Omega, first and last; all things are from him, through him, and to him. The business began with God in his election, and is still carried on through God, not only by effectual calling, but actual assistance, which giveth success and blessing; and then the glory of all redoundeth to him.

2. Because what cometh from God must be sought of God: Ezek. 36:37, 'I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them;' compared with the 26th verse, 'A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.' We must express our desires to God for things agreeable to his will, for God will not force spiritual blessings upon us, nor give them to us, unless we desire them. Some things he gave us unasked, and without our desire, consent, or

knowledge, as a Mediator, a new covenant, or offers of grace, yea, the first gift of the Spirit; but in other things we are obliged to ask.

3. A great part of man's duty dependeth on prayer seriously performed. There is nothing so conducive to the maintaining of communion between us and God as a daily sense of our emptiness, and God's both fulness and readiness to supply all our wants.

[1.] That it is so, that we are empty, and God is all-sufficient, otherwise there would not be a foundation for practical godliness. That we are empty: John 15:5, 'Without me ye can do nothing.' Not only nihil magnum, but nihil. So 2 Cor. 3:5, 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves, for our sufficiency is of God;' that is, we are not able to think anything in order to the conversion of other men or ourselves; we cannot imagine to enter upon this design with any hope of success without God. That there is a fulness in God to supply all our wants: Eph. 3:20, 'Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think;' that is, above what we can imagine and pray for. If any man seriously address himself to any serious business, he is full of imaginations—may it be effected, yea, or no? Alas! God outworketh their thoughts and prayers, and doth things which never entered into our hearts to conceive. That there is a readiness in God to supply all our wants, otherwise our prayers would be little encouraged, and be dead in the mouth. Now James 1:5, 'It any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.' You need not make scruple, or be ashamed to consult with God upon every occasion, for he is ready, and hath not a confined bounty like ours, who waste by giving, and give from ourselves what we impart to others.

[2.] That without this, communion with God would be interrupted, and all religion would die and languish; for if we had the stock in our hands, we would forget and forsake our Father. But when still we must be enabled by God to every good work, and we cannot have it unless we acknowledge him, and seek it of him by prayer, this

keepeth up a sensible dependence of the creature upon God; this dependence begets observance, Phil. 2:12; and they that continually receive their dole and portion from him are obliged to please him in all things.

Use of direction. When you come to wait on the word, or receive here any quickening exhortation, call God into the business, that the thing may not die away in your hearts. Make conscience of praying as well as hearing. You hear from man in God's name, but carry it again to God, that he may bless it. All religion is carried on between the pulpit and the throne of grace. You will thrive if you conscientiously make use of both ordinances—if you hear of Christ in the word, and make use of him in prayer.

II. Observation. That prayer must be made to God alone: Ps. 65:2, 'O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.' The apostle here addresseth himself to God, and so must all flesh.

1. He alone is capable of hearing prayers. We conceive of God as an infinite being, wise, powerful, and good; as knowing all things, as able to do all things, as willing to give all things that we can in reason and righteousness ask of him.

[1.] He knoweth all things, our persons, wants, necessities, prayers. Our persons: God knoweth that there is such a creature in the world as thou art; for surely God knoweth whom he hath made, and whom he supporteth and governeth. A notable instance we have: Acts 9:11, 'And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street that is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for behold he prayeth.' What a description is here of God's particular providence!—the city of Damascus; the street called Straight; the house of one Judas; the person (a lodger there), one Saul of Tarsus; the action he was employed in, behold, he prayeth! He knoweth our wants and necessities: Mat. 6:8, 'Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask him.' He observed every weary step of David in the wilderness, and all his

tears and sorrows: Ps. 56:8, 'Thou tellest my wanderings; put thou my tears in thy bottle: are they not in thy book?' He particularly took notice of all the troubles and sorrows of his exile and wandering condition, as if his tears had been preserved in a bottle, and his troubles registered or recorded in a book. The doctrine of the Gentiles was, *Dii magna curant, parva negligunt*—that great and weighty matters the Lord took into his care, but left other things to their own event and chance; but the doctrine of the scripture is otherwise; God taketh notice of every particular person. For our prayers: Ps. 34:6, 'This poor man cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.' How obscure soever the worshipper be in the account of the world, if he depend on God, the Lord will regard him.

[2.] For his power. He is able to do all things: Mark 14:36, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee.'

[3.] For his goodness. He relieveth all his creatures; heareth the moans of the beasts, much more the prayers of the saints: Ps. 145:15, 16, 'The eyes of all things wait upon the Lord, and thou givest them their meat in due season,' &c. Now this he makes a ground of 'fulfilling the desires of them that fear him, and being near to all that call upon him,' vers. 18, 19. He that feedeth a kite, will he not provide for a child? Surely we have more reason to trust in God than they, if you think this belongeth to his common bounty. But in spiritual things it is otherwise; he is most pleased when we ask spiritual blessings: 1 Kings 3:10, 'It pleased the Lord that Solomon asked this thing.' Well, then, since none other is capable, and God is, to him must we come.

2. The scriptures, which are the proper rule of worship, direct us to no other. When Christ taught his disciples to pray, he directed them to God: Luke 11:2, 'When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven.' Invocation is divine worship, and so done to God alone.

3. When the Spirit moveth us to pray, he inclineth us to come to God: Rom. 8:15, 'Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;' Gal. 4:5, 6, 'Because ye are sons, he hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' He doth not move us to go to the saints, but to God.

The use. Well, then, if any trouble befall us, let us call on God, unbosom ourselves to him: Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' If we want any grace, let us go to the God of all grace, in the name of Christ: Heb. 4:16, 'Seeing, therefore, we have a great high priest that is entered into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in a time of need.' We can pray to none but to him in whom we trust: Ps. 62:8, 'Trust in the Lord at all times; pour out your hearts before him.' Trust is the foundation of prayer. They that look to God for all will frequently apply themselves to him. Our necessities and wants are continual, both as to the temporal and spiritual things. We need not only daily bread, but daily pardon, daily strength against temptations; therefore let us often come to God.

III. Observation. That Jesus Christ is invoked together with the Father as an author of grace, and thereby his Godhead is proved; for he that is an object both of internal and external worship is God. Now such is Christ. Of internal worship: 'John 14:1, 'Ye believe in God, believe also in me.' Though Christ died as man, yet he is God equal with the Father, and an object of faith and trust. For external worship, or prayer, the text is clear: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even our Father.' That is much for the comfort of the faithful, that we have God to trust in, and Christ to trust in; that we that have sinned with both hands earnestly, have a double ground of our comfort and hope—the infinite mercy and power of God, and the infinite merit of a mediator. There is a great latitude in the object of faith, and so of invocation: 'The Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father.' There is no pain so great that God in Christ cannot remove; no danger so dreadful but he can prevent; no misery so deep but he can

deliver from it; no enemy so strong, but he can vanquish them; no want that he cannot supply. When we have a want that he cannot supply, or a sickness that he cannot cure, or a danger that he cannot prevent, or a misery that he cannot remove, or enemies that are too hard for him, then we may sit down and despair, and die. I speak of both as one, for God and Christ are here joined as to the same effect: 'Comforting their hearts, and stablishing them in every good word and work.'

IV. Observation. We can obtain nothing from God unless we seek it in Jesus Christ. Therefore the apostle beginneth his prayer, 'Now our Lord Christ, and God,' &c. God alone is abundantly enough for our happiness, for there is in him more than abundantly enough to satisfy all the capacities of the creature; but without a mediator how shall we come to receive of his fulness? If man had kept innocent, God had been enough to us, for in innocency there was no mediator; but to man fallen a mediator is necessary.

1. I shall state the necessity of it. Because of distance and difference; we are unworthy to approach his holy presence; and God hath a quarrel and controversy with us, which till it be taken up, we can expect no good thing from him.

[1.] Distance. We are estranged from God by the fall, and have lost his image, lost his favour and fellowship, and all communion with him, so that God now is looked upon by us as out of the reach of our commerce, which hindereth our love and confidence in him; for we can hardly depend upon one so far above us that he will take notice of us, or take care for us, so as to relieve us in our necessities, or help us in our miseries, and give us the blessings we ask of him; or that we shall be welcome to him, when we come with our prayers and supplications. God taught the Israelites their distance; and the apostle telleth us that all that dispensation 'the Holy Ghost did signify, that the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was standing,' Heb. 9:8. They could not come

near God without danger of death; he would not have them so familiar with him.

[2.] Difference, or controversy. A mediator is used only between disagreeing parties. When man was guilty, God was angry. Conscience of sin presents God terrible, and taketh away all confidence from us, so that we are obnoxious to his wrath and righteous vengeance: 1 Sam. 6:20, 'Who is able to stand before this Holy God?' Isa. 33:14, 'And who can dwell with everlasting burnings?' We cannot approach God in any friendly manner.

2. I shall show what provision God hath made for us. The Lord Jesus took this office at God's appointment, of reconciling God to us, and appeasing his wrath, and us to God, by bringing us back again, our alienated and estranged affections to God. How so? what hath he done?

[1.] The distance is in truth taken away by his very person. He is God-man; God and man meet together in the person of Christ. God doth condescend and come down to man, and man is encouraged to ascend to God. God in Christ is nearer to man than he was before, that we may have more familiar thoughts of him. The pure Deity is at so vast a distance from us, that we are amazed and confounded when we think of it, and cannot conceive an hope that he should concern himself in our affairs. But the Son of God is come in our nature: John 1:14, 'The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us;' 1 Tim. 3:16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh;' so that he is more accessible to us, and nearer at hand, and more readily inclined to help us, for he will not be strange to his own flesh.

[2.] The difference and controversy is taken up by the work of his redemption; for 'God hath set him forth to be a propitiation,' or a means of appeasing his wrath, Rom. 3:25, and to be the foundation of that new covenant wherein pardon and life is offered to us. It is not enough to our recovery that God be reconciled, but man must be renewed, otherwise we remain for ever under the displeasure of God.

Now he hath purchased the grace of the Spirit, to be dispensed by the covenant, to bring us home to God: Titus 3:5, 6, 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;' and Rom. 8:2, 'For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.'

Use. Let us be sensible of this unspeakable mercy, that God hath provided a Mediator for us, that we may come to God by him: Heb. 7:25, 'Wherefore he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us;' that the legal exclusion is removed, and a way opened to the Father: John 14:6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me;' otherwise we could not immediately converse with God, nor trust in him.

1. We see God in our nature as near at hand, and ready to help us; he came down amongst us, and became one of us; was 'bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.' And though he hath removed his dwelling into heaven again, it is for our sakes; he hath carried our nature thither, to take possession of that blessed place in our name, if we have a mind to follow him: John 14:2, 'I go to prepare a place for you.'

2. Here we see the means of appeasing God's wrath: 2 Cor. 5:19, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.' There is a full ransom paid; all that enter into God's peace shall have the benefit of it.

3. By him we are encouraged to come to pray for every blessing we stand in need of: Eph. 2:18, 'Through him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.' Liberty to approach unto God is a privilege which we cannot enough value; the wall of partition between God and us is broken down by Christ; he hath completely satisfied God's justice, Heb. 10:19. He is now at the right hand of God

interceding for us: 1 Tim. 2:5, 'There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus;' and remaineth with God as the great agent of the saints: Heb. 8:1, 2, 'We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary,' &c. Perfuming their prayers with the smoke of his incense: Rev. 8:3, 4, 'And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.'

V. Observation. Mark the distinct titles given to God and the Mediator: Christ is called our Lord, and God our Father. Let us see what these titles import, of Lord and Father.

1. Christ is represented to us as the Lord; so he was set forth by the apostles at the first preaching of the gospel: Acts 10:36, 'We preach peace by Christ Jesus, he is Lord of all;' 2 Cor. 4:5, 'We preach Christ Jesus the Lord;' Col. 2:6, 'If ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.' Christ is Lord two ways:—

[1.] By that right which belongeth to him as Creator, and is common and equal to him with the Father and the Spirit. Surely the Creator of the world is the sovereign of it. This right continueth still, and shall continue while man receiveth his being from God by creation, and the continuance of his being by daily preservation and providence.

[2.] There is *novum jus dominii et imperii*—a new right of empire and government which belongeth to him as Redeemer, and this accrueth to him:—

(1.) Partly by the donation of God: Acts 2:36, 'Let all the house of Israel know that this Jesus, whom ye have crucified, is made Lord and Christ.' This office of Lord is derivative, and cannot be supreme, but subordinate; it is derived from God: 'All power is given to me,

both in heaven and earth,' Mat. 28:18; and it is referred to him: Phil. 2:11, 'That every tongue should confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' The supreme right of governing is still in God, and subjection to him is not vacated, but established and reserved.

(2.) It is acquired by his own purchase: Rom. 14:9, 'For this end Christ both died and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of dead and living;' 1 Cor. 6:19, 20, 'Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.' He had a full right in us before, but this lordship and dominion which the Redeemer is possessed of is comfortable and beneficial to us, and the end of it is to effect man's cure and recovery. We could not by our sin make void God's right and title to govern us; but yet it was not comfortable to us, it was but such a right as a prince hath to chastise his rebellious subjects. We forfeited our interest in his gracious protection, therefore was this new interest set afoot to save and recover fallen man; therefore this lordship is spoken of as medicinal and restorative, to reduce man to the obedience of God that made him: Acts 10:38, 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil.' It is a lordship that conduceth to make peace between God and man, that we may again enjoy his favour, and live in his obedience: Acts 5:31, 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins.' This new Lord hath made a new law of grace, which is *lex remedians*, a remedy propounded for the recovering the lapsed world of mankind. The great benefit is remission of sins; the great duty, repentance.

Use 1. To persuade us to submit ourselves to this blessed Lord by our voluntary consent: Ps. 45:11, 'He is thy Lord; worship thou him.' There is a passive subjection and a voluntary submission. By a passive subjection all creatures are under the power of the Son of God and our Redeemer; and amongst the rest, the devils themselves,

though grievous revolters and rebels, are not exempted; every knee is forced to bow to Christ. By voluntary submission: Those are Christ's subjects, and admitted into his kingdom, who willingly give up themselves to the Redeemer to be saved upon his own terms: 2 Cor. 8:5, 'They first gave their own selves to the Lord.' The devils and wicked men are his against their wills; but all Christ's people are his by their own consent.

Use 2. Let us perform the duties which this title calleth for; our obedience is the best testimony of our subjection to him. Many seem to like Christ as a Saviour, but refuse him as a Lord; whereas Christ is not only a Saviour to bless, but a Lord to rule and command. Therefore if we catch at comforts and neglect duty, we do not own Christ's authority. The libertine, yokeless spirit is very natural to all: Luke 19:14, 'We will not have this man to reign over us;' Ps. 12:4, 'With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?' Ps. 2:3, 'Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.' Some are so in opinion, but most in practice. We would not be under command; we love privileges, but decline duties. But he is the 'head of the church' who is 'the Saviour of the body,' Eph. 5:23. If we would have privileges by him, we must set ourselves to obey his laws. If thou hast no care to obey him as a lord, thy esteem of Christ is but imaginary, thy knowledge but partial, thy application of him unsound. But we will own him as lord. How is that understood? Will you give him an empty title, or some superficial compliments and observances? Luke 6:46, 'And why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?' It is a mockage. Or will you please yourselves with strict opinions? Mat. 6:21, 22, 'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; if therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!' No; nothing less than a thorough subjection to his holy laws, forsaking all other lords: Isa. 26:13, 'O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.' And then a strict observance: Col.

1:11, 'Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness.'

Use 3. Depend upon Christ for the effects of his love to you, which are the privileges of his kingdom, which are pardon of sins: Col. 1:14, 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins.' The sanctification of the Spirit; Heb. 8:10, 'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.' Assistance in carrying on the spiritual life; that here surely our Lord will not desert us, but help us in our obedience to him. Finally, everlasting life: Heb. 5:9, 'And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.' When the devil and his instruments are cast into hell, Christ's faithful subjects and servants are advanced into eternal glory and blessedness.

Secondly, God is represented under the title of a father: 'And God, even our Father.' God is a word of power; Father expresseth his good-will and love. God standeth in both relations to us, as he did also to Christ: John 20:17, 'I go to my God and your God, my Father and your Father.' Both joined together signify his power and readiness to do good. He that is our Father is true God also, and he that is true God is also our Father; and therefore we may depend on him. That which we are to open is the term Father, which speaketh both comfort and duty to us.

1. Comfort. For God's dealing with us will be very fatherly; as a father loveth his children, so will God love his people: 2 Cor. 6:18, 'I will be a father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord.'

[1.] He will pardon our sins and frailties, and spare us and pity us, notwithstanding our ill-deservings: Ps. 103:13, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him;' Mal. 3:17, 'They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I

make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.' Surely this is a grace we stand in need of, because of our manifold infirmities and daily failings.

[2.] He will give grace, that we may serve him better: Luke 11:13, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' Do but cry to him, as an hungry child to his father for bread, and God will not deny this great gift to you.

[3.] God will provide for us, and give such an allowance of temporal mercies as are convenient: Mat. 6:25, 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on;' and ver. 32, 'For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' The belief of adoption and particular providence kills all distrustful fears and cares at the very root.

[4.] He will protect you and preserve you against temptations: 1 Peter 1:3, 5, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, &c., who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.'

[5.] He will give you the kingdom: Luke 12:32, 'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'

2. On the other side, this relation bespeaketh duty. For if God be a father, we must carry ourselves as children by our subjection, to him; that is, by submission to his disposing will, and obedience to his governing will.

[1.] By an absolute submission to his disposing will. For if you would enjoy the privileges of God's family, you must submit to the discipline of his family: Heb. 12:6–9, 'For whom God loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son

is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if you are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which chastened us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?' In heaven, where there is no danger of sin, there is no use of the rod; but while we are in the flesh, we need correction, and if God should not give it us, we are νόθοι, not legitimate, but degenerate sons. But in the 10th verse, the apostle argueth from God's paternal authority: 'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' Children, though they take it ill to be beaten by others, yet not by their parents, who (under God) are the cause of their being, and love them, and in correction of them seek their good; much more do we owe this respect to our heavenly Father, who hath a more absolute right over us. Parents may err through want of wisdom—their chastisements may be arbitrary and irregular; do much in passion rather than compassion; but all God's chastisements come from purest love, and are regulated by perfect wisdom, and tend to and end in holiness and happiness.

[2.] Obedience to his governing will. The great duty of children is to love, please, obey, and honour their father: Mal. 1:6, 'A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master. If I be a father, where is mine honour? If I be a master, where is my fear?' 1 Peter 1:14, 15, 'As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;' John 15:8, 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.' There should be a great tenderness upon us not to do anything that may be a breach of God's law, or tend to God's dishonour. What diligent observers were the Rechabites of the institutions of their family: Jer. 35:6, 'But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever.'

VI. Observation. They to whom Christ is a lord, to them God is a father. His special fatherly love floweth in the channel of redemption, and is brought about by the gospel. The Lord, from all eternity, predetermined some to the adoption of sons: Eph. 1:5, 'Having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.' But how doth he bring to pass this decree? By the redemption of Christ. It is no mean privilege, Christians, that needeth so much ado to establish it: Gal. 4:4, 5, 'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.' Christ came to be the foundation of a new covenant, before we could have this privilege. Well, but whence ariseth our actual interest? I answer—By accepting the offer of the gospel, or receiving and owning Christ to the ends for which he came into the world, or God sent him into the world: John 1:12, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;' that is, by depending on his merits for our reconciliation with God, and submitting to his laws, that he might reduce us to our primitive obedience and love to them.

Use. Therefore, if you would have a share in this blessed privilege:—

1. You must be regenerated by his Spirit; for the relative change dependeth on the real: our state is not changed till our natures be changed: John 1:12, 13, 'Being born again of the will of God.' If you would enter into God's family, and enjoy the privileges thereof, you must be changed by the Spirit.

2. There is required on our part an entrance into the kingdom of the Mediator by faith and repentance: Mat. 18:3, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God.' As little children are newly entered into the world and beginning their life, all things are become new to them; so those that have the privileges of God's children must become as little children, enter into a new state, carry on a new life and trade, with

which they were not acquainted before. Our first admission is by a consent to the new covenant: Gal. 3:26, 'Ye are all made children of God by faith in Christ;' depending on the merit of Christ's sacrifice, and binding ourselves by a solemn word to perform the duties required of us, which we renew again in the Lord's Supper.

VII. That we most comfortably come to God by Christ for grace, when we consider our interest in him and relation to him. Our relation is here intimated, for Jesus Christ is our Lord, and God is our Father; and surely our Lord will not refuse his own subjects, nor our Father be strange to his own children.

1. It is certain that among men relation to any person or thing endeareth them to us. Τὸ ἀντῶν παῖσιν ἡ δὲα φιλότεκνοι, men love their own children; though not so fair and good as others, yet they are their own. And is it not so as to God? See John 13:1, 'Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end;' and John 17:6, 'I have manifested thy name to the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word.'

2. Interest giveth us more encouragement: Isa. 63:19, 'We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were never called by thy name;' that is, we are thy people, thy subjects, so called, so accounted. That interest giveth some hope and confidence is evident, because sometimes the saints plead the common relation that they are the workmanship of his hands: Ps. 119:73, 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.' They will not quit their interest in God; if they cannot come as his special servants, yet as his creatures, one way or another, they will entitle themselves to him.

Use. To direct the servants of God, when they ask any grace of him, to bring it to this still, 'Our Lord and our Father.' But how shall they do so, if they have no assurance? I answer:—

1. There are some titles which imply a claim to benefits and privileges; others that infer an obligation to duty: these latter may be used without any usurpation: John 20:28, 'My Lord, and my God.'

2. Resignation of yourselves to him showeth you are his, and in time you will come to know that he is yours, if you make it good: Ps. 119:94, 'I am thine; save me, for I have sought thy precepts.' Resolve to obey him, and serve him, however he deal with you. Choice of God for our portion, and Christ for our Lord, showeth you are resolved to be his.

3. Speak as the covenant speaketh that you are under, till your sincerity be more unquestionable. God offers himself to be our God, and Redeemer, and Father; Christ to be our Lord and Saviour: Isa. 63:16, 'Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.' God offered himself to be so, and God is angry for not owning it: Jer. 3:4, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?'

SERMON XV

Which hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.—2 THESS. 2:16.

WE come now to the second branch, the ground of audience and success in prayer: 'Which hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.' Where three grounds of acceptance are intimated:—

I. The first is taken from the rise and foundation of all the love of God: he hath loved us.

II. From the matter of our comfort: he hath given us everlasting consolation.

III. From the way whereby we receive it and entertain it: and good hope through grace.

The first relateth to our redemption by Christ.

The second to the new covenant.

The third to the disposition of our hearts, and how we are affected in the reception of these things, as will appear more in the explication of each branch.

First, I begin with the rise and foundation of that grace which we expect and beg of God in prayer: he 'hath loved us.'

Doct. That God's love to sinners, manifested in our redemption by Christ, giveth great boldness and encouragement in prayer.

1. I shall prove this is the love here intended.
2. That this giveth boldness in prayer.

I. That this is the love here intended, for these reasons:—

1. This is a visible effect and demonstration of his love to us: 1 John 3:16, 'Hereby perceive we the love of God to us, in that he laid down his life for us;' and 1 John 4:9, 10, 'In this was manifested the love of God towards us, in that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live by him. Herein was love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.' From these places I gather, that to found our confidence and hope, it was needful that the love God had to us should show itself by some manifest and real proof. How can we tell how God's heart standeth affected to mankind but by the effects? Whatever benevolence or good-will he has towards us, it is not evident to us till

it break forth into some action, and real performance of some great thing for us. Now this was fully manifested in giving his Son to die for a sinful world, that he hath a love for us, and doth really desire our salvation. There is a hidden love of God, which is his eternal purpose and decree; and there is an open and declared love, and that is first and most seen in our redemption by Christ. In predestination his love was conceived in his heart; in redemption it is manifested in the effects; that was the rise, this the visible demonstration and sign of it. Now the apostle would not reason from what was hidden and secret, but from what is open and manifest.

2. This is not only the demonstration and visible proof of the reality of his love, but an ample representation and commendation of the greatness of his love: Rom. 5:8, 'But God commendeth his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' A thing may be demonstrated to be real that yet is not commended or set forth as great and glorious. But God would express his love in such an astonishing instance, that we might admire the greatness as well as believe the reality of it: John 3:16, 'God so loved the world,' &c.; that is, so unspeakably, so inconceivably would he express his love to mankind, as to send his Son to assume our nature, and die for our transgressions. He doth not tell you how, but leaveth you to admire at it, and rejoice in it. What may we not expect from this love, this great love? If God loveth us at such a rate, surely he is in good earnest; his heart is set upon our salvation, or else he would never have taken this course of giving his only Son to suffer an accursed and shameful death. Now when the apostle saith 'God hath loved us,' he meaneth it of the great instance of his love. *Analogum per se positum, stat pro suo significatu famosiori*—words not restrained by the context must be interpreted in the most famous and known sense.

3. This is the first motive to draw our hearts to him: 1 John 4:19, 'We loved him, because he loved us first.' The first motive of our affection is not his special electing love to us above others, for that we cannot know before we love him; but his common love and mercy to sinners,

and that was manifested in Christ's being sent to be a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. This is that which is propounded to us to recover and reconcile our alienated and estranged affections to God: 2 Cor. 5:19, 20, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto him.' This grace God offereth to us, as well as others; namely, that for Christ's sake he will pardon our sins, if we will lay down our weapons and enter into his peace. None are bound to believe that God specially loveth them, but those that are specially beloved by him, for none are bound to believe a falsehood, and a falsehood it is to us, till we have the saving effects and benefits. Therefore, it is not the special, but the general love which first draweth in our hearts to God; yea, the saints, after some testimonies received of God's special love, still make this to be the great engaging motive: Gal. 2:20, 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' Well, then, this is most likely to be meant by the apostle.

II. This must needs give great boldness in prayer.

1. By this we see that God's love is not a cold, ineffectual love, that consists only in raw wishes, but an operative, active love, that issueth forth to accomplish what he intendeth to us, though by the most costly means, and acted at the dearest rate. God 'is good, and doth good,' Ps. 119:68. He hath a love to us, and will do good to us. Our love many times goes no further than good wishes or good words—be warmed, be clothed, but giveth not those things which are needful to the body, James 2:16; but God resteth not in kind wishes, but giveth a full demonstration of it. If Christ be needful to the saints, they shall have him; 'if God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'

2. It is an act of such infinite love in God to give us Christ to die for us, such as may raise our wonder and astonishment. God's love is an immeasurable love, and so enlargeth our expectations and capacity for the reception of other things: Eph. 3:18, 19, 'That ye may

comprehend with all saints to know what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.' There is such an immensity in the love of Christ as raiseth our desires and hopes to expect all other things from God that belong to our duty and happiness. If God will do this, what will he not do for those whom he loveth? He that hath given the greatest gift will not stick at lesser things. He that hath given a talent, shall he not give a penny? He that hath given Christ, will he not give pardon to cancel our debts, grace to do our duty, comfort to support us in afflictions, supplies to maintain and protect us during our service? Finally, will he not reward us when our work is over? Reconciliation by his death is propounded as more difficult than salvation by his life: Rom. 5:10, 'For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.'

3. It is a gift in order to other things, and therefore he will complete that gift. Christ came to purchase all manner of blessings for us: the favour of God, the fruition of God, the everlasting fruition of God in glory, and all things by the way necessary thereunto. There are two arguments implied:—

[1.] That God may now do us good without any impeachment of his honour. His justice and holiness is sufficiently demonstrated, the authority of his law, and truth of his threatenings kept up: Rom. 3:25, 26, 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.'

[2.] That after God by an antecedent bounty hath laid the foundation so broad and deep, the consequent bounty, which is as the upper building for which this foundation was intended, will be laid on also. It was said of the foolish builder, that he began and was not able to

finish. Surely the wise God, if we be qualified, and put no impediment on our part, will finish what he hath begun.

4. Because the giving of Christ showeth how freely God will give all things to us. He gave Christ unasked, unsought too; in this instance we see his free and undeserved love. This was love to rebels and enemies. When the world had corrupted their way and cast off God, then Christ died for us; a consideration which serveth to support our confidence, notwithstanding the sense of our unworthiness. In the covenant of grace, great and wonderful mercies are given out to a world of sinners, and to ourselves among the rest. We see how loth God is sinners should perish; that sins may be pardoned if we will accept God's terms, that hath given such general testimony of his love to mankind, his love to miserable sinners, that is willing they should be reconciled; that there is not so much difference between us and others as between him and all. Now this encourageth us to fulfil the conditions of the gospel, notwithstanding our unworthiness of the privileges thereof.

Use 1. Is caution. Let us not have wrong thoughts of God when we come to him. We think of God the Father as one that is all wrath and justice, and unwilling to be reconciled to man, or brought to it with much difficulty. No; Christ came on purpose to show the love and loveliness of God to us; for our redemption came first out of the bosom of God; and Christ's mission into the world, and dying for sinners, was the fruit of his love; and mainly for this end, to give us a full demonstration of the love of God, and his pity to the lost world of sinners, that when our guilt had made him frightful to us, we might not fly from him as a condemning God, but love him, and serve him, and pray to him, as one willing to be reconciled to us: therefore take heed what picture of God you draw in your minds. Light and heat are not more abundant in the sun than love is in God.

Use 2. Of direction to us how to conceive of God in prayer, as one that loveth us. We have gained a great point when we are persuaded of this, and can come with this thought into his presence, that I am

praying to a God that loveth me, and will do me good. You will say, If I could come to that, I have gained a great point indeed. But what hindereth? There is, I confess, a twofold love,—his general love, and his special love. His general love, which intendeth benefits to us; and his special love, which hath already put us in possession of them. His general love to the lost world; and his love and mercy to us in particular, putting us in possession of the saving benefits purchased and intended.

1. The general love to the lost world, that is a great thing the devil seeketh to hide and obscure, the wonderful love of God revealed in our Redeemer, that we may still fly from God, as more willing to punish than to save; and many poor dark creatures gratify his design. We are still seeking signs and tokens of God's love, something to warrant us to come to God by Christ, and to persuade us that we shall be welcome if we do so; and because we cannot find anything in ourselves that he will admit us, we are troubled. But all this while we are but seeking the sun with a candle. What greater evidence of God's willingness to receive you than the death of Christ, than the institutions of the gospel? This is above all evidences, that he sent his Son to die for us. This is like the Jews, who, when they had seen many wonders wrought by Christ, would still have a new sign: the greatest sign is given already, Christ dying for a sinful world. Men and angels cannot find out a sign, pledge, and confirmation of the love of God above that. Yet, if that be not enough, we have another sign, the promises and invitations of the gospel, which show his willingness to welcome sinners. Salvation is offered, but not to named, but described persons. Therefore, if we are willing to come under these hopes upon God's terms, this may satisfy our scrupulous minds; there is no bar put to us but what we put to ourselves by our refusing the grace as God offereth it. Certainly God's love and mercy to lost mankind is our first motive, and his willingness to impart good things to them upon his own terms; and surely he is well pleased with our acceptance of them.

2. There is special love where this grace is applied to us: Eph. 2:4, 5, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, hath quickened us, when we were dead in trespasses and sins.' He did not begin to love us when we were converted—that is of a more ancient and eternal rise—but then he did begin to apply his love to us; and this is no ordinary, but great love, when God was angry with us, and pronounced wrath on us in the sentence of the law, and appeared as an enemy in the course of his providence, and the apprehensions of our guilty fears, then to be reconciled; and surely this is a great advantage to draw nigh to God as a reconciled Father. This is the object of our everlasting love and joy: Rom. 5:11, 'And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.' And this is a prop of confidence in prayer. Could we once believe that he dearly loves us, and is reconciled to us, and taketh us for his children, that he delighteth in our prosperity; oh, how cheerfully could we come into his presence! John 16:27, 'The Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me, and believe that I came out from God.' They have not only his intercession, but the Father's especial love, which is the ground and hope of audience. Now this particular interest dependeth on something wrought in our souls by the Holy Spirit. Our Lord mentioneth two things—their faith in Christ, and love to God. (1.) Faith in Christ, or a thankful acceptance of him as our Lord and Saviour, therefore called receiving Christ, and entitling us to the privileges of Christ's children: John 1:12, 'To as many as received him, to them gave he liberty to become the children of God, even to as many as believe in his name.' (2.) Love to God: John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him;' and ver. 23, 'If any man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' We cannot perceive our interest in the special love of God but by our sincerity, faith in Christ, and love to God. When we see God's love taken in our hearts, we may know that he loveth us, especially the latter; for by the latter the former is manifested also: Gal. 5:6, 'Faith worketh by love.' Now

the evidences of sincere love to God are seeking after God and delighting in him; if you cannot find the latter, the former will evidence it to you: Prov. 8:17, 'I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.' The desiderium unionis, the desiring, seeking love, if it be serious and earnest, it is sincere, though you find not such delightful apprehensions of his grace to you. Clear that once, and when you come to prayer, you may know God loveth you; and the dearest friend we have in the world hath not the thousandth part so much as he: yea, the highest angel doth not love God so much as he loveth the lowest saint. God loveth like himself, becoming the greatness and infiniteness of his own being; and with this persuasion pray to him.

Secondly, The second ground of audience is from the fruit of his love, as demonstrated in the new covenant, wherein we have the matter of everlasting consolation. Surely this clause respects not the effect and sense in our own hearts, but respects the matter and object of our comfort; for he prayeth for the application of it afterwards: 'Comfort your hearts,' &c. And besides, nothing is more fleeting and oftener interrupted than our comfort in this life. It would contradict plain sense to call that comfort which Christians feel, and actually enjoy, everlasting comfort. Therefore I understand it of the matter, and observe this doctrine:—

That God hath given all true believers solid ground of perpetual and endless comfort.

I will prove it by three arguments:—

1. The comforts propounded are of an everlasting tendency and benefit—pardon and life, to free us from everlasting death, and to bring us into the possession of everlasting happiness, when our souls and bodies shall be for ever glorified in heaven. Now the consolation grounded on the promise of eternal life, whatever it be in our feeling, is in its causes and foundation eternal. The scripture often insists upon this: 1 John 2:25, 'And this is the promise that he hath

promised us, even eternal life;' Heb. 5:9, 'And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.' We have by Christ deliverance from sin, and all the consequents of it, not only for a time, but for ever; eternal peace and felicity is our portion. So it is said, Ps. 119:111, 'Thy testimonies have I taken for an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.' It is not an heritage to lean upon for a while, as all our worldly comforts are, but for ever: so Ps. 73:26, 'God is my portion for ever;' that is, when all other things fail, have spent their allowance, can afford us no more relief, then we begin to enjoy our true and proper portion. It were endless to heap up places. Man for his sin was cast out of paradise; but surely in the other world there is no change of estate: for men are past their trial, and must be what they are for ever. If you could imagine (as some have had the large charity to conceit it) that the condition of the wicked should be changed, yet there is no reason at all why the state of the godly should be changed, who have passed the pikes, and are triumphing with God, that they should ever lose that estate again.

2. They depend on everlasting foundations, such as are these:—

[1.] The everlasting love of God: Ps. 103:17, 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on them that fear him.' Not only from the beginning of the world to the end of the world, but from eternity to eternity. It was an ordinary form of praising God in the Old Testament: 'For his mercy endureth for ever.'

[2.] The everlasting merit of Christ, which never loseth its force and effect: Heb. 9:12, 'He hath obtained eternal redemption for us.' Not that Christ is always propitiating. No; the work was performed in a short time, but the virtue of it is of everlasting continuance.

[3.] There is an eternal and unchangeable covenant: Heb. 13:20, 'Through the blood of the everlasting covenant.' Though the covenant made with Israel was abolished, yet this is everlasting, and continueth for ever, and shall never be altered; because it was able to

reach the end for which it was appointed, which is the eternal salvation of man. That was a temporary covenant, this eternal. Now, because this is the main circumstance, and the next ground of our eternal consolation, the covenant of life and peace that God hath made with us in Christ, I shall prove the eternal truth and immutable constancy of this covenant. That a promise be immutable, certain, and firm, three things are required:—

(1.) That it be seriously and heartily made, with a purpose to perform it.

(2.) That he that hath promised continue in his purpose without change of mind.

(3.) That it be in the power of him that promiseth to perform what he hath promised. Now, of all these things there can be no doubt.

(1.) God meaneth as he speaketh when he promiseth to give eternal life to those that believe and obey the gospel. There is no question but he is so minded, when he sent the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven to assure us of it by his doctrine, to die the death to purchase it for us, and afterward to rise again and enter into that happiness that he spake of; and as soon as he was ascended up on high, gave gifts to men to give notice of this blessed estate to be had upon the terms of his new covenant, his Spirit attesting the truth of it by divers signs and wonders, partly to alarm the drowsy world to regard it, and assure the incredulous world that it is no fable; and because they live not for ever, did inspire those holy men, before they went out of the body, to write a book of this salvation for the use of the world in all ages. To think that God is not serious in all this, is to make him a liar indeed; yea, to establish a falsehood with the greatest solemnity and demonstration that can be offered to mankind; yea, to make a lie necessary, not only to the governing, but sanctifying of the world. Surely, then, there is a truth in that great promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life.

(2.) That God doth continue in his purpose without change of mind. There is no doubt of it, if we consider his eternal and unchangeable nature: Mal. 3:6, 'I am the Lord, I change not;' James 1:17, 'With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' And what should alter his purpose? Doth he meet with anything that he foresaw not, or knew not before? No; this is a weakness incident to man; God doth never repent and call back his grant, which he hath by this condescending act of grace insured to the heirs of promise. 1 Sam. 15:29, 'The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not as man, that he should repent;' Ps. 110:4, 'I have sworn, and will not repent; thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.' Christ is by oath instated in full power of entertaining and blessing his faithful servants, which shall never be retracted and reversed. To take off all doubt, he hath given double assurance—his word and his oath: Heb. 6:17, 18, 'God, being willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it with an oath; that by two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope that is set before us.' That we might know that the new covenant is unchangeable and irrevocable, and so our comfort be the more strong, certain, and stable, God was pleased to give sincere believers this double assurance, by his word and oath, having regard to our infirmity, and those many doubts wherewith we are haunted about the world to come. God hath ever been tender of his word; above all that is famed or believed of him, this is most conspicuous: Ps. 138:2, 'Thou has magnified thy word above all thy name;' and Mat. 24:35, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away;' and an oath is *μεγίστη παρ' ἀνθρώποις πίστις*; and the apostle tells us it is *πέρας ἀντιλογίας*. It is interposed usually indeed in a doubtful matter. But though here it needed not, God would show his extraordinary care for our salvation; we see his good-will in the promise, his solicitude in the oath; in short, God would never be so fast bound, but that he doth and will still continue his purpose.

(3.) That he is able to perform it. Faith looks to that also; for this was the ground and prop of Abraham's faith: Rom. 4:21, 'Being fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform;' so must all Abraham's children that would give glory to God in believing. The way of salvation is so rare and mysterious, and so many difficulties object themselves to our view, that we are soon puddled, unless we reflect upon the power of God. God is able to find out a way whereby sinners may be reconciled, our corrupt hearts sanctified, and our sins subdued by his Spirit, whereby his interest in us may be preserved against the assaults and temptations of the devil, world, and flesh; he is able to receive our souls to himself after they flit out of the body; and finally, he is able to raise our vile bodies after they are eaten out by worms, and turned into dust: Phil. 3:21, 'Who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be like unto his own glorious body; according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.' Matters of faith being wholly or mainly future or to come, and difficult to be performed, and in the meantime, we being exercised with so many trials, an express belief of God's power is necessary to convert such an obstinate creature as man is: to sanctify such a sinful creature, to preserve us in the midst of temptations, to raise the dead, are no slight things.

3. It is called 'everlasting consolation,' because it is sufficient to do its work; that is to say—

[1.] To reduce us from temporal and flesh-pleasing vanities. Alas! the pleasures of sin are but for a season, not worthy to be compared to the recompense of reward which Christ hath promised: Heb. 11:25, 26, 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect to the recompense of reward.' Whatever is temporal, we may soon see the end of it. All carnal enjoyments, like flowers, wither while we smell on them; and the most shining glory in the world is soon burned to a snuff; but eternal life, and eternal glory, and eternal pleasure, are secured to us by Christ's promise; all the delights in the

world are but a May-game to these eternal pleasures, which we shall have at God's right hand for evermore: Ps. 16:11, 'Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.' Now, will you sell your birthright for one morsel of meat? part with your eternal inheritance for a little carnal satisfaction? We have souls that will not perish; and shall we spend our whole time in seeking after things that perish in the using? Temporal things carry no proportion with an immortal spirit. We shall live for ever; we should look after things that will abide for ever: 1 John 2:17, 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever.' Otherwise what will you do when the soul shall be turned out of doors? To what regions must the poor shiftless, harbourless soul betake itself? Surely then this consolation, though we feel it not always, and it be frequently interrupted, may be well called eternal consolation, because it affordeth argument enough to check our worldly and sensual inclinations, and to call us off from time to eternity.

[2.] To make us stedfast in the truth, and cheerful under sufferings, for he saith here, 'The Lord, that hath given us everlasting consolation, comfort your hearts and establish you.' The great use of everlasting consolation is to comfort and stablish us in a suffering condition. The loss of temporal comforts is grievous, but it is recompensed with the promise of eternal joys revealed in the gospel: Heb. 10:34, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that in heaven ye have a better and an enduring substance; cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.' And all our pains and afflictions are sweetened, so far as to keep us from fainting: 2 Cor. 4:17, 18, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things that are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.' The end of God's covenant and promises is to give us strong consolation in the midst of temptations, persecutions, and trials. Worldly joys appear and vanish in a moment, every blast of

temptation scattereth them. It is eternal blessedness which is the cause of solid comfort in all dangers, storms, and tempests; hither we retreat as to our sanctuary, and find relief. In the world all is unstable and uncertain, but the covenant provideth for us eternal joy and bliss.

[3.] The third effect which it is to produce in us, is an increase of holiness, to stablish us in every good word; that is, not only in sound doctrine, but in every good work. In holiness of life, our endeavours should answer our motives and ends: 'Abound in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as your labour is not in vain in the Lord,' 1 Cor. 15:58. Diligence should not be grievous to us when there is everlasting consolation at the back of it; surely this should put life into all our endeavours. Should we trifle away that time which we are to improve for eternity? John 6:27, 'Labour not for the meat that perishes, but for that which is to endure to everlasting life.' Faith in Christ, joined with solid goodness, will lead you to eternal life. There should be in the saints an eternal principle, which is the grace of the Holy Spirit; and an eternal end, which is the pleasing, glorifying, and enjoying of God; and an eternal rule, which is the will of God; and they will have eternal consolation and reward.

Use, of exhortation:—

1. Look upon the new covenant as it is in itself, as containing the only solid grounds of rejoicing; the blessings of it are real, certain, stable, and suitable to the great necessities of mankind. The blessings are pardon and life; they are real, no fancies or chimeras. The gospel is not a dream or well-devised fable, but the greatest reality in the world; it speaketh much for itself, commending itself to the conscience by rational evidence: 2 Cor. 4:2, 'By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God;' but more by the authority of the Son of God, who came from heaven to show us the way thither; and if it had not been so, he would have told us, John 14:2; for he used great plainness of speech and fidelity; and is more fully ratified by the Spirit: John 16:8–11, 'He

will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.' They are stable and unchangeable, as appeareth by the covenant form, in which the conveyance is so strong and firm as will make a plea in law: 2 Sam. 23:5, 'He hath made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things, and sure,' in which is all my hope and desire, and suitable to many necessities. Here is a cure for our great sore by pardon, and satisfaction to our desires by a fit happiness.

2. Let it be so to you; do you fulfil the duties required; if there be any room for doubting, it must be of your qualification; therefore that must be made more explicit: 1 John 3:19 'Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.' We miss much of this everlasting consolation, because we are upon such loose terms with God: never hope to have peace upon cheaper terms than clear and undoubted holiness. You are not to model God's covenant and new make it, and bring it down to your humour and liking. No; the covenant is unalterable and eternal; so the duties, as well as the privileges. You must take it as you find it, and choose the things that please God, Isa. 56:4. There is your claim; follow that close: 'Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing.'

3. Carry it so as those to whom God hath given grounds of everlasting consolation. We are up when we have the world with us, but dead in the nest when our temporal dependences are broken. The covenant is the same still; and there should be your hope and your joy: 2 Cor. 1:20, 'All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us;' 2 Sam. 23:5, 'Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.' Heaven is where it was; the world cannot make void your interest in it; therefore you should rejoice in the Lord always: Phil. 4:4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say rejoice.'

SERMON XVI

And good hope through grace.—2 THESS. 2:16.

WE now come to the third ground of audience and acceptance. He hath given us 'good hope through grace.' This showeth how we entertain the everlasting consolation offered in the gospel—with good hope, and this wrought in us by God. Here is—

1. The gift: good hope.
2. The moving cause: through grace.

Doct. That it is a great advantage, when we pray for consolation and confirmation in holiness, to consider that God hath already given us the hope of eternal life.

Here I shall—

- I. Open the gift.
- II. Show what encouragement this is in prayer.

I. In the opening the gift, let me inquire:—

1. What is this good hope mentioned, and what are the properties of it?
2. That this is the free gift of God.
 1. What is this good hope?

[1.] Hope is sometimes put for the object or thing hoped for; as Prov. 13:12, 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sad;' that is, the delay of the good expected is very tedious and troublesome to us. So in Christian hope: Col. 1:5, 'For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven;' where hope is put for the object of it, the blessed and glorious estate which is reserved for us hereafter. The great objects of hope, which yet do not exclude intervening blessings, are these:—

(1.) The coming of Christ to our comfort: Titus 2:13, 'Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;' 1 Peter 1:13, 'Gird up the loins of your minds, and be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Hope is there described by its singular object, the coming of Christ, called there the revelation of Christ. Christ is now under a veil, his bodily presence being removed, and his spiritual glory seen but darkly, as in a glass; but then he shall appear in person and in his glory. When Christ withdrew out of sight, our comfort seemed to be gone with him; but he will come again. He is not gone in anger, but about business, to set all things at rights against the day of solemn espousals; and then he cometh to possess what he hath purchased, and to carry the church into the everlasting place of her abode. This is the great hope of Christians, and a blessed and good hope it is indeed.

(2.) The resurrection of the dead: Acts 2:26, 'My flesh shall rest in hope;' Acts 24:15, 'I have hope towards God that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust;' Acts 26:6–8, 'Now I stand judged for the hope of the promise made unto the fathers, unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. Why should it be thought an incredible thing with you that God should raise the dead?' Death seemeth to make void all the promises at once; but there is an estate after death; the dead shall rise; and to men bred up in the bosom of the church this should not seem incredible. It is not incredible in itself, considering the justice and power of God. But why to you, since all religion tendeth to it? But it is a matter of undoubted certainty all believers

do look for, long for, and prepare for this blessedness, otherwise why should they trouble themselves about religion, which abridgeth us of present delights, and exposeth us to great difficulties and sufferings? But there is another life after this, where all is happy and joyful, and therefore we 'serve God instantly day and night.'

(3.) The vision of God, that at length we shall be admitted into his blessed presence, and see him as he is, and be made like him both for holiness and happiness, 1 John 3:2.

(4.) Our heavenly inheritance: 1 Peter 1:4, 'An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us.' Called eternal life: Titus 1:2, 'In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised us.' The glory of God: Rom. 5:2, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' Well, then, all this is a good hope, if there be the things hoped for; for the object of our hope is the chiefest good, the eternal vision and fruition of God; this is that we must aim at as our happiness: Ps. 17:15, 'As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' We must seek after it and make it our constant work: Heb. 11:6, 'God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' This is that we must take hold of, as having a right and title to it: Heb. 6:18, 'Who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.' We challenge it by the law of grace; as we fulfil the conditions, our hold is more strong, right more evident; as we get greater measures of the first-fruits, we gain more security and confidence in the spiritual conflict: ver. 19, 'Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast.' By good works we enter upon the possession of it, in part, as we get the first-fruits of the Spirit: Rom. 8:23, 'We ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body;' 2 Cor. 5:5, 'Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.' In whole, when we come to heaven, for then we 'enter into our Master's joy,' Mat. 25:21. When we die our souls enter into that blessed place, where the spirits of just men are made perfect; not only preserved in

manu Dei, but admitted in conspectum Dei: 1 Peter 1:9, 'Receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.' But after the resurrection and general judgment: John 14:3, 'I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.' Then, in body and soul, we enter into our everlasting mansions.

[2.] Sometimes hope is put for the reasons and causes of hoping; and so he that giveth me solid reasons of hoping, giveth me good hope. In this sense it is taken, Heb. 7:19, 'The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, whereby we draw nigh to God.' By the better hope is meant the sure and comfortable promises of the gospel, depending merely on the grace of God, which gives hope to lost sinners of recovering commerce and communion with God; that is, solid grounds upon which they may expect the pardon of their sins and eternal life. In this sense, good hope is hope well warranted. The solid reasons are contained in the word of God: Rom. 15:4, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.' The great end of the scriptures is, that we might have a sure hope in God—quod agit tota scriptura, ut credamus in Deum. The business of the scripture is to bring us to believe in God, and wait upon him for eternal salvation. There the rule of commerce between God and us is stated; whatever is promised is sure. There may be reason to expect some things from God's merciful nature, though we have no promise about them; but the sure and certain hope is grounded on the promise; that is an express ground of confidence and hope that will never leave us ashamed; it is well-grounded hope, therefore good hope, built on the promise and word of the eternal God.

[3.] By the act or grace of hope itself. This may be called good either in itself or with respect to the degree.

(1.) In itself: 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord,' Lam. 3:26. Bonum is either honestum, jucundum, or utile: it is good in all regards. It is our duty to rest

assured in God's promise. It is pleasant to anticipate and forecast a blessing to come. Surely it is delightful to live in the foresight of endless glory. It is profitable to support our hearts under present difficulties and troubles, and the uncertainties of the present life.

(2.) In respect of the degree and measure of it. That is good hope which is most able to do its office, when it is lively hope: 1 Peter 1:3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope;' such as doth most support and quicken us. The more serious and earnest our reflections are upon eternal life, the better is the hope: Heb. 6:11, 'Show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' We should still keep up this sure and desirous expectation. Briefly, hope the grace is twofold.

(1st.) There is a hope which is the immediate effect of regeneration, and is a constitutive part of the new creature. Of that the apostle speaketh, 1 Peter 1:3, 'Begotten to a lively hope.' This merely floweth from our acceptance of the new covenant, and dependeth upon the conditional offer of eternal life. We take it for our happiness, resolving to seek it in God's way; without this a man cannot be a Christian, till he hope for eternal life to be given him upon Christ's terms.

(2dly.) There is a hope which is the fruit of experience, and belongeth to the seasoned and tried Christian, who hath approved his own fidelity to God, and hath much trial of God's fidelity and faithfulness to him. Of this it is said, Rom. 5:4, that 'Experience worketh hope.' It differeth from the former, because it produceth not only a conditional certainty, but an actual confidence of our own salvation. The former is necessary, for we live and act by it; the other is very comfortable, for it facilitateth all our acts when we know 'there is reserved for us a crown of life, which the righteous Judge will give in that day;' and do not only believe 'a resurrection both of the just and unjust,' but our own resurrection unto eternal life.

But now for the effects. I shall instance in two which suit with the prayer in the text—consolation in troubles, and confirmation in holiness.

First, Support in troubles. When we are certainly persuaded of a happy issue, we are the better kept from fainting: Phil. 1:19, 'I know that this shall turn to my salvation,' &c. He speaketh it of his troubles, and the machinations of his adversaries; and this knowledge he calleth in the 20th verse, 'his earnest expectation and his hope,' The bitterest cross is sweetened by hope. This carried him through his sufferings, not only with patience, but comfort; as men in a storm, when they see land, take courage; it is but enduring a little more tempest and they shall be safe on shore. To a hoping Christian, his whole life is a rough voyage, but a short one.

Secondly, To encourage us in working. It is hope sets the whole world a-work: 1 Cor. 9:10, 'That he that plougheth should plough in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.' Certainly it is hope sets the Christian a-work: Acts 26:7, 'Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.' Why are God's children so hard at work for God, but out of love to him, and hope to enjoy him for ever? Oh! let us continually be serving God. Let us live always either for heaven, as seeking it, or upon heaven, as solacing ourselves with the hopes of it; do whatever we do in order to eternal life, and not be taken up with trifles, and this will put life into our endeavours. It is for a glorious and blessed estate on which we employ all this labour.

2. That this is the free gift of God. I must prove two things:—

[1.] That good hope is his gift. He doth not only give us objective grace,—this is the free and undeserved mercy of the gospel, or a sufficient warrant to hope for it, which are his gracious promises; but subjective grace: the hope by which we expect this blessedness is freely wrought in us by his Holy Spirit, which is a further confirmation of his love to us, that he hath not only given us the

blessedness we hope for, but the very hope itself. The Spirit's work is necessary—

(1.) By way of illumination, to open the eyes of our minds, that we 'may see what is the hope of his calling,' Eph. 1:18. Alas! otherwise our sight cannot pierce so far, nor discern any reality in a happiness that lieth in an unseen and an unknown world, so as to venture and forsake all that we see and love for a God and a glory that we never saw. Nature, if it be not blind in discerning the duty of man, yet it is purblind; it cannot foresee the happiness of man, which lieth afar off from us: 2 Peter 1:9, 'But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.' A short-sighted man cannot see things at a distance from him: not from any defect in the object, but through the fault in his eyes. So the natural man, blinded by delusions, doth either not believe, or forget the world to come; though these things be set before him in the promises of the gospel, they leave no impression upon his heart. There needeth a very quick sight to be able to look from earth to heaven; therefore, till we are enlightened by the Spirit, we can have no saving knowledge of those things which pertain to the kingdom of God or eternal life.

(2.) By way of inclination. The Spirit doth not only open the eyes of our mind, but he doth also incline our hearts to mind and seek after these things as our portion and happiness: Acts 16:14, 'God opened the heart of Lydia.' There is an opening of our mind, and an opening of our hearts necessary; for the wisdom of the flesh is kneaded into our natures, and we are prepossessed and entangled with divers foolish and hurtful lusts. Though we know these things, we regard them not, and therefore the work of the Spirit is necessary to incline us earnestly to look and long, and patiently to wait, for blessedness to come: Gal. 5:5, 'For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.' Alas! otherwise we should never regard these things, certainly we would not wait for them with so much patience and self-denial, and solace our hearts with these hopes in the midst of all our labours, adversities, and troubles, when all is in expectation, and so little in possession.

(3.) By way of excitation, he doth quicken us and comfort us, by raising our thoughts, desires, and endeavours after the promised glory and blessedness: Rom. 15:13, 'Now, the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.' It is by his lively impressions that this grace is acted in us with any profit; our hope is acted and increased by his power, blessing the promises of the gospel to this end.

[2.] That it is his free gift. That which moveth God to give us this hope is his mere love and grace.

(1.) The matter of hope is God's free, undeserved mercy. The mercy of God is everywhere made the great invitation of hope to the fallen creature: Ps. 130:7, 'Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is mercy and plenteous redemption.' Without this there were no hope for us, and therefore the saints make this their anchor-hold: Ps. 13:5, 'I have trusted in thy mercy, therefore my soul shall rejoice in thy salvation;' let others trust in what they will, Lord, I will trust in thy mercy. This is that which maketh hope lift up the head: Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life;' there is our best and strongest plea. But—

(2.) For the grace of hope, it is the mere fruit of the Lord's mercy; such are our undeservings and ill-deservings, that nothing else could incline him to give us this hope. He was not induced by any merits of ours, which are none; nor hindered by any demerits or sins of ours, which were many and great; only his grace moved him to bring us under the hopes of the gospel, that we might set ourselves with longing and certain expectation in the way of holiness, to seek after the eternal enjoyment of himself: 1 Peter 1:3, 'Of his abundant mercy he hath begotten us to a lively hope.' There were so many provocations on our part, such great privileges to be enjoyed, that nothing but abundant mercy could give us this hope.

II. What encouragement is this in prayer, if God hath given us good hope through grace?

1. God would not invite and raise a hope to disappoint it; for surely the Lord will not deceive his creature that dependeth upon his word, and therefore we are allowed to challenge him: Ps. 119:49, 'Remember thy word unto thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope.' The words contain a double argument: the promise was of God's making, and the hope of his operation,—it is thy word, and thou hast caused me to hope; his grant in the new covenant, and his influence by the Spirit. We have a strong tie upon him, as he giveth us the promise, which is a ground of hope. Surely we may put his bonds in suit, *Chirographa tua tibi injiciebat, Domine*. But when his Spirit hath caused us to hope, it is not with a purpose to defeat it; and therefore we may expect necessary blessings, such as are support and establishment in holiness. Sometimes God promiseth that we may believe, and then promiseth again because we do believe and trust in him: Isa. 26:3, 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.' Actual hope and trust giveth a fresh claim or new interest, for God will not fail a trusting soul, as a generous man will not fail his friend if he rely on him. We count this to be the strongest bond we can lay upon another, to be mindful of us, and faithful to us—I wholly trust upon you. Now, much more will God do so: when he hath sent his work before, he will bring his reward with him; when he hath invited hope by his promise, and caused hope by his Spirit, he will give the mercy you hope for, for he hath prepared you for it by his preventing grace. I remember the prophet telleth God, Jer. 20:7, 'O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived;' words that seem to intrench upon the honour of God. Some interpret them as if they were spoken by the prophet in a passion; others soften them by another rendering, 'Thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded,' that is, to undertake the prophetic office, to which I was nothing forward of myself, and have found it more troublesome than I expected. But why may not the words be spoken as a supposition: 'If I be deceived, thou hast deceived me'? God had told him that he would make him as a brazen

wall, and had raised a faith and hope in him that he would bear him out in his work; and so it signifies no more but 'I cannot be deceived.' When you have God's word, and a well-grounded hope, it is not a foolish imagination or vain expectation. God will not deceive a poor creature that trusts in him for necessary things, such as perseverance and establishment in holiness.

2. He that giveth us hope will give us all things necessary to the thing hoped for; therefore when God hath called us to the hope of eternal glory by Jesus Christ, we may with the more confidence pray for necessary support and establishment in the way. This argument seemeth to be urged by the apostle: 1 Peter 5:10, 'The God of all grace, who called you to his heavenly glory by Jesus Christ, after ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.' God, that called us to eternal glory, foresaw the difficulties and troubles we should meet with by the way, and therefore provided grace answerable, which we are to sue out by prayer. Surely he that called them to the possession of everlasting blessedness by the Mediator, did not flatter them into a vain hope, as it will prove, if he help us not. Therefore he will assist us in these difficulties, and though he will not exempt us from the conflict, yet he will not deny strength. When we consent to his calling, it is a sure ground to our faith that he that hath called will give us all things necessary to our perseverance; for his calling, when it is effectual, will not be in vain and to no purpose: 1 Cor. 1:9, 'God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;' 1 Cor. 10:13, 'There hath no temptation taken you but what is common to men: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' The intent of his calling is to bring them to the possession of what he hath called them to. If he would at first take us with all our faults, and put us under the hopes of the gospel when we were sinners, he will follow the first grace with continual aids and supports, until he hath perfected his work; and therefore, when a people are sincere, and willing to run all hazards for Christ, God will not only give them glory at the end of their

journey, but bear their expenses by the way; and therefore we need not be discouraged, and say, How shall we hold out? God, that hath given such hope as to venture upon the difficulties, will support you under them; he will add more grace to that grace that we have received.

3. They that have received good hope through grace, have God's nature and promise to rest upon; his nature, as he is a gracious God, and his promise, as he is a faithful God.

[1.] His nature, as he is a God merciful and gracious. That former experience doth fully manifest; he is sufficiently inclined to do us good, and therefore will not fail us in our necessities. He hath ever Rome us good-will, never discovered any backwardness to help us, thought of us before the world was, sent his Son to die for us before we were born or had a being in the world, called us when we were unworthy, warned us of our danger when we did not fear it, offered happiness to us when we had no thought of it; and lest we should turn our backs upon it, followed us with an earnest and incessant importunity, till we came to anxious thoughts about Christ, and began to make it our business to seek after it; by the secret drawings of his Spirit, inclined us to choose him for our portion, and to rejoice in the hopes offered. How many contradictions and strugglings of heart were we conscious to ere we were brought to this! Ever since he hath been tender of us in the whole conduct of his providence; afflicted us when we needed it, delivered us when we were ready to sink; hath pardoned our failings, visited us in ordinances, supported us in doubts, helped us in temptations, and is still mindful of us at every turn, as if he would not lose us; and shall not we hope in him to the last? We may reason as they, Judges 13:23, 'If the Lord had a mind to destroy us, he would not have received a sacrifice at our hands.' And so if God had no mind to save us, he would not use such methods of grace about us.

[2.] His promise, so that we must trust his faithfulness, after we come under the hopes of the gospel. There are two great promises to

support us: his presence with us in the midst of our afflictions, and our being ever present with the Lord in eternal glory. This is that we have hope of; all the difficulty is, how far God hath promised his presence with us. Certainly he hath promised it: Ps. 91:15, 'I will be with them in troubles;' and again, 'I will be with them in fire and water.' And again, certain it is, that God is most with his afflicted people, as the mother keepeth most with the sick child, or the blood runneth to comfort the wounded part. And again, that he will never leave us to unsupportable difficulties: Heb. 13:5, 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you;' a negative gradation. And besides, there is a general promise, though the particulars be not absolutely made certain to us; namely, that 'all shall work together for good,' Rom. 8:28. That giveth us but a probability of health, and outward protection, and deliverance, of a ready support in every temptation, because we are uncertain how far they are for our good; but for necessary grace to our preservation, there is express provision in the covenant: Jer. 32:40, 'I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good,' &c.

4. It giveth us encouragement in prayer; because they that have this hope are so much exposed to the scorn of the world, because they trust in an invisible God, and look for all their recompense in a world to come. They think Christians are a company of credulous fools, that please themselves with dreams and fancies: Ps. 22:7, 8, 'They laugh me to scorn, because, they say, he trusted in the Lord;' 1 Tim. 4:10, 'We therefore labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God.' Christians thought their reward sure, and therefore endured all things; but atheists and infidels scoff at them, and at all their comforts, as fanatical illusions, and persecute them. Therefore God is in point of honour engaged to stand by them, and to justify their hope and trust; not always by temporal deliverance, but by spiritual support and establishment; that it may be seen there is a Spirit of God and glory resteth upon them, that is glorified by him, however he be evil spoken of in the world, 1 Peter 4:14. God will do so in condescension to his people. Nothing goeth so near their hearts as a disappointment of their hope in God. It is a mighty damp to

their spirits when God doth as it were spit in their faces, and reject their prayers: Ps. 25:2, 'O my God! I trust in thee; let me not be ashamed.' At such times the Lord seemeth to countenance the slanders of their enemies, and to cover their faces with shame.

Use 1. To persuade you to get this hope of eternal life wrought in your hearts.

1. This is the characteristic and note of difference betwixt God's people and others. By this we are distinguished from pagans, who are described to be such as 'Have no hope, and without God in the world,' Eph. 2:12; and 1 Thes. 4:13, 'Sorrow not as them without hope.' But Christians are such as have 'good hope through grace;' and by this we are distinguished from temporary and slight believers: Heb. 3:6, 'His house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end;' so also ver. 14, 'If we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.' Their hope is slight and fluid: the temporary loseth his joy and comfort, which he conceived in the offers of the gospel, and so either casts off the profession of godliness, or neglecteth the power and practice of it; but the true Christian is serious, patient, heavenly, and holy; because he is always looking to his end, and sweeteneth his work by his great hope, keeping up his taste or lively expectation of the mercy of Christ to everlasting life. Nay, this differenceth the children of God, those that are in their conflict from those that are in their triumph, the sanctified and glorified; those that are in their way, and those that are at home. They that are at home are enjoying what we expect, and in possession of that supreme good that we yet hope for; they have neither miseries to fear nor blessings to desire beyond what they do enjoy; they see what they love, and possess what they see. But the time of our advancement is not yet come, and therefore we can only look and long for it; this is our work and present happiness.

2. Now the covenant of God is contrived to raise hope in us. The Jachin and Boaz, the two pillars that support it, are mercy and truth: Micah 7:20, 'Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to

Abraham;' Ps. 25:10, 'All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies;' and Ps. 138:2, 'I will praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and truth; for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name;' and in many other scriptures.

[1.] The mercy and grace of the covenant.

(1.) In the frame of it, where excellent benefits are dispensed upon free terms, that our faith and hope may be in God. The Lord would not leave the sinful creature under despair, but hath provided a way how we may be reconciled and glorified: Ps. 130:4, 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' Mercy opens the door for us; the very offer speaks much mercy, the terms are mercy. So much duty is required as is necessary, and doth arise from the nature of the thing. Violence would be offered to the reason of a serious creature, if such things were not required.

(2.) In the dispensations of the blessings of the covenant. Now, Gal. 6:16, 'To as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and on the Israel of God.' There are many infirmities and frailties, but God passeth them by when there is sincerity. Our faith is weak, and mingled with doubtings, our love to God clogged with much inordinate self-love, our obedience often interrupted, too much deadness and coldness in holy things; yet these do not cast us out of the favour of God, nor make void our interest in the covenant, where the heart for the main is set to serve him, and please him: Mal. 3:17, 'I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.'

(3.) At the very close of all it is grace: 'Hope unto the end, for the grace that is brought unto you at the revelation of Christ,' 1 Peter 1:13. Then there will be the fullest and largest manifestation of God's love and free grace. There is grace brought to us now, by the revelation of Jesus Christ in the gospel; but when his person shall be revealed, grace shall be seen in all its graciousness. We see his grace

in the pardon of sins, and that measure of sanctification which now we attain unto, that he is pleased to pass by our offences, and take us into his family, and give us right to his heavenly kingdom, and some taste of his love and remote service. But when pardon shall be pronounced by the judge's mouth, when he shall take us not only into his family, but into his palace and Father's house, and give us not right only, but possession, and we shall be admitted to the immediate vision and fruition of God, and be everlastingly employed in heavenly praising and delighting in him, then grace will be grace indeed.

[2.] His truth and mercy openeth the door for us. Truth keepeth it open; mercy is the pipe; truth is the conveyance. Now God bindeth himself by promise, and hath ever been tender of his word. We may see for the present that a covenant-interest is no fruitless thing. He hath confirmed this hope to the world by miracles; to us within the church by the seal and earnest of his Spirit, or the impression of his image, preparing the hearts of the faithful for this blessed estate: Eph. 4:30, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption;' 2 Cor. 5:5, 'Who hath given us the earnest of his Spirit.' He hath appointed ordinances to revive our hopes: 1 Cor. 11:26, 'For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.' By daily experience we see many of God's children have gone out of the world cheerfully professing this hope; we have the same Father, 'of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,' Eph. 3:15; are reconciled to him by the same Christ: Col. 1:20, 'Having made peace through the blood of the cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.' If he be so good to that part of the family that is now in heaven, he will be good to them also that are working out their salvation with fear and trembling.

[3.] What an advantage it is to the spiritual life to have good hope wrought in us through grace.

(1.) It maketh us diligent and serious. Christianity implieth a serious application of our heart and mind to do what Christ requireth, that we may obtain what he hath offered; to do it as our first work and chief business: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;' Heb. 4:1, 'Let us labour to enter into that rest;' that is, employ our utmost care and diligence. Now all the executive powers are fortified and strengthened in their operation by hope.

(2.) To be patient and mortified, that we subdue our lusts, and bear the loss of our interests with an humble and quiet mind: Rom. 12:12, 'Patient in tribulation, rejoicing in hope.' And for lusts: 1 John 3:3, 'He that hath this hope, purifieth himself even as he is pure.'

(3.) To be heavenly and holy; the one respects our end, the other our race. For it is not a few dead lifeless thoughts now and then, but the continual and delightful foresight of eternal bliss. What is the way to heaven but hope? And who more pure and holy than they that look for such things? 2 Peter 3:14, 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, be diligent that ye be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.'

Use 2. Well, then, get this hope. But what must we do? You will say, It is God's gift: yet you are bound to use the means.

1. Remove the impediments: 1 Peter 1:13, 'Be sober, and hope to the end.' Draw off the affections from carnal vanities, and the delights of the senses, and consider what God offereth to you in the gospel: there can be no certain and desirous expectation of better things, while the mind and heart is so occupied and thronged with vanity, and deadened by carnal satisfaction.

2. Wait on all the opportunities of profiting, and use the known means of grace more conscionably. Certain it is that the grace of hope is of God, not acquired, but infused; but God will bless his own means. The propounding of the object, the offering of the solid grounds, maketh way for the infusing of the grace: Titus 1:1, 2, Paul

was the apostle to 'bring them to the acknowledgment of the truth, for the hope of eternal life.' And it is called, 'the hope of the gospel,' Col. 1:23, because it is wrought by the preaching of the gospel.

SERMON XVII

Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.—2 THES. 2:17.

WE come now, thirdly, to the prayer itself. He asketh two benefits:—

1. Comfort.

2. Establishment.

First, Comfort: 'Comfort your hearts.' But why doth the apostle pray for that which they had already? He had told them, in the former verse, that God had given them everlasting consolation, and now he prayeth that God would comfort them. The answer given by some is, that he prayeth that God would give them an increase of comfort; by others, that God would give them the continuance of it. Rather, by everlasting consolation is meant the solid matter of comfort; by his prayer, now the effectual application of it; for though sufficient matter of comfort be provided for us, yet God must powerfully apply it. The gospel is a sovereign plaster, yet God's hand must make it stick. Observe here:—

Doct. That all true and solid and heart-comfort is of God. He is called 'the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort,' 2 Cor. 1:3; and again, 'The God of patience and consolation,' Rom. 15:5. His Spirit taketh an office upon him to accomplish this effect in us, therefore called the Comforter.

1. I shall inquire what comfort is.

2. Show why it is of God.

3. What advantage we have thereby.

I. What comfort is. Three things are to be explained:—

1. Comfort.

2. Comforting.

3. In what sense it is of God.

I. 1. What comfort is. We call two things by that name:—

[1.] Our natural refreshment.

[2.] Our support in troubles.

[1.] Our natural refreshment, or the benefit that we have by the creatures for the support of nature. We cannot enjoy our temporal mercies with any delight and pleasure without God's leave and blessing; as to eat and drink with comfort, that the soul may enjoy good by its labour. In one place it is said, it is 'by the hand of God,' Eccles. 2:24. In another place it is said to be 'the gift of God,' Eccles. 3:13. It is by his power and his grace that the comfort of the creature is not in man's hands but God's; nor can the creature yield to us any comfort without his gift or grant. And because of our forfeiture by sin, we have neither these mercies from ourselves, nor the use; nor the natural benefit from the bare creature, which is health, strength, and cheerfulness. All goodness resideth chiefly in God, and it is to be found in the creatures only by participation, and that at his pleasure: Acts 14:17, 'He gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness;' that is, for the comfortable use of food, we must still look to the giver. But the apostle here doth not speak of the comfort of the creatures, but the comfort of the scriptures; not the supply of the body, but the support of the soul.

[2.] Comfort is taken for support in troubles. The Thessalonians were now under great persecutions. Comfort is a strengthening of the mind when it is in danger to be weakened by fears and sorrows, or the strength and stay of the heart in trouble: Ps. 119:50, 'This is my comfort in my afflictions, thy word hath quickened me;' and 2 Cor. 1:4, 'Who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God.' As cordials are for a fainting time, so are comforts for a time of afflictions. Indeed spiritual comfort is never out of season; because we are now in the house of our pilgrimage, and our chief good is at a distance from us; and because of the labours and difficulties of the spiritual life: therefore it is said, Acts 9:31, 'When the churches had rest, they walked in the fear of God, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost.' But the great need of comfort is in our afflictions, therefore here I shall show three things:—

(1.) That God can give his people comfort in the greatest tribulation: his favour is enough to support them against the frowns of all the world: Isa. 51:12, 'I, even I, am he that comforteth thee. Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be made as the grass?' As long as we have the almighty and immortal God to stand by us, and the promise of eternal life, it will counterbalance all our trouble: Rom. 5:2, 3, 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God: and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also;' 2 Cor. 4:17, 'This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' There is everlasting joy against a heaviness for a season, and everlasting ease and rest against a little present pain; there is enough to outweigh all that we can suffer for and from God. So the pardon of sin: Isa. 40:1, 2, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith my God.' Why? 'Because her iniquity is pardoned.' Mat. 9:2, 'Be of good cheer; thy sin is forgiven thee.' Here is sound comfort, the sting of all our troubles is taken away. Well, then, this the people of God have to support them in all their tribulation. They can set God against the creature, heaven against earth, pardon of sins against all the bitterness they meet with in the world.

(2.) That there is a special allowance of comfort for God's children in their afflictions. The Lord is more tender of his people then, when they want comfort, than at another time; they have a more plentiful measure of the supporting operations of his Spirit then: as 1 Peter 4:14, 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.' As the mother keepeth most with the sick child, so God looketh to the afflicted. This is the difference between God and the world: the world ever runneth most after those that are prosperous, and flourish and rejoice, as rivers into the sea, where there is water enough; but forsaketh those that are in poverty, disgrace, and want; but God is most mindful of his afflicted people, visiteth them most, vouchsafeth most of his comfortable presence to those that holily and meekly bear the afflictions he layeth upon them: 'He comforteth us in all our tribulations,' 2 Cor. 1:4. The soul is then more capable of spiritual comforts, because their taste is more purged and refined from the dregs of sense, and grace is more lively and exercised now; the more grace, the more comfort. And prayers are more frequent; and prayers are seldom in vain.

(3.) That our comforts carry proportion with our sorrows: 2 Cor. 1:5, 'As our afflictions abound, so do our consolations.' This cometh from the wisdom of God, that the evil may not be greater than our support; and from the faithfulness of God, 'who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear,' 1 Cor. 10:13. And therefore, if he bring on heavy troubles, he puts a suitable measure of comfort and cheerfulness into our hearts. This is comfort.

2. What it is to have our hearts comforted. It showeth that the heart is the proper seat of spiritual comfort: Ps. 4:7, 'Thou hast put gladness into my heart.' God's comfort is like a soaking shower, that goes to the root, and refresheth the plants of the earth more than a morning dew, that wets only the surface. Other comforts tickle the senses and refresh the outward man, but this penetrateth to the very heart. Christ prayeth, John 17:13, 'That they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.' Christ's comforts are not reported to the ear

only, but felt in the heart. The joy of the world maketh a great noise, but in the midst of it the heart is sorrowful. But God feasts his children with hidden manna; they have meat and drink which the world knoweth not of. In their outward man they are exposed to great difficulties, but their hearts are filled with 'joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' The joy of the carnal in outward things is foreign; and as much as their senses are pleased, their hearts are full of tormenting fears and secret disgusts. They may put a good face upon it, but dig the most jovial of them to the bottom, they have their inward stings and secret horrors of conscience. But in comforting his children God chiefly deals with the heart: Rom. 5:5, 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us;' and 2 Cor. 1:22, 'He hath given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.' In establishing this comfort, God doth immediately work upon the soul. He useth means indeed; as the word: Rom. 15:4, 'That you through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.' There we have the grounds of comfort set forth—Christ's redemption, the promises of the gospel, both of pardon and life and. the ordinances, as the sacraments; as the eunuch after his baptism: Acts 8:39, 'He went away rejoicing.' So in the Lord's Supper, we come to eat of Christ's peace-offerings that we may rejoice in God: Ps. 22:26, 'The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.' But his Spirit worketh immediately upon the soul; either—(1.) By opening the understanding to see the grounds and reasons of comfort: Rom. 15:13, 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost;' or (2.) By raising the heart to the lively act of joy: Acts 13:52, 'The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.' Certainly God comforteth the heart both ways by seeing the grounds as he worketh faith. Man is a reasonable creature, and it is not imaginable that the Holy Ghost should comfort us we know not why: he revealeth indeed supernatural grounds of comfort; but if they be not evident to reason, they are evident to faith. But then the very joy is executed by the efficacy of his impression. But of that more anon.

3. In what sense comfort may be said to be of God? I answer—Three ways:—

[1.] When it is allowed by him.

[2.] When the matter is provided by him.

[3.] When it is wrought by him.

[1.] When it is allowed by him, and warranted by him. Every man affects comfort and oblectation of mind; for otherwise they could never be pleased in that condition they are in, nor satisfy themselves. It would much undeceive the carnal world, and make them see the folly of their unreasonable joy and quiet, if they would put conscience to the question, Is our joy from God or no? that is, Doth God allow it me? Certainly God doth allow us to rejoice in our outward portion: Eccles. 5:18, 'It is good and comely for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labours that he taketh under the sun, all the days of his life which God giveth him, for it is his portion;' but so that his favour may be the matter of our chief joy, for otherwise it is exceeding folly and gross carnality to rejoice in the creature apart from God. And in the midst of the greatest soul-dangers, you must first inquire, Are all things right between God and me? It is a mighty contempt of God, yea, brutish atheism, to sit down contented with anything on this side God, Luke 12:19, and to say, 'Soul, take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years.' To sing lullabies to our souls when God is angry for sin, this comfort is not allowed by God: 'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,' Isa. 57:21. It is spiritual madness to dance about the brink of hell.

[2.] When the matter is provided by him. God in the new covenant hath propounded excellent grounds of comfort: John 14:1, 'Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.' The two great general grounds of support against heart-trouble are God's merciful nature and Christ's mediation; more particularly in the new covenant, the promises of pardon and life,—of pardon of sin: Rom.

5:1–3, 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' &c.; and of life eternal: 1 Thes. 4:18, 'And so shall we ever be with the Lord; wherefore comfort one another with these words.' It is good to see what comforts we live upon and propound to ourselves and others, more expressly as to afflictions, God's particular providence, that nothing falleth out without God's appointment: 1 Thes. 3:3, 'That no man should be moved with these afflictions, for yourselves know that we were appointed thereunto.' It is not chance or a natural accident, but that which God hath appointed. If any Shimei rail, the Lord hath bid him curse. If any evil come to us, is it without God's fatherly care over his people, who ordereth all things for their profit? Heb. 12:10, 'They verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' And his unchangeable love, which doth not vary and alter with our condition: Heb. 12:6, 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' He is our God still, though he seemeth to deal hardly with us. We learn of Christ on the very cross to cry, 'My God,' Mat. 27:46; and if we cannot find enough in him when the creatures and our natural comforts fail, it is meet we should lose them: Hab. 3:18, 'Though the fig-tree should not blossom, &c., yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' This is the sum of God's comforts; and when these things are suggested to us, God comforteth our hearts.

[3.] When by these means God worketh comfort in us. Joy is often called 'the comfort of the Spirit,' and 'joy in the Holy Ghost,' Rom. 14:17. Now all the Spirit's works are singular, and do much exceed the natural work of man's heart. The groans which he stirreth up in prayer are 'unutterable,' Rom. 8:26; his joys 'unspeakable and glorious,' 1 Peter 1:8. The heathens counted that fire more fit and pure for their altars which was enkindled by a sunbeam rather than a coal taken from a common hearth. So this comfort which is raised in us by the Holy Ghost is more rich and glorious and effective than that which is the fruit of our bare reason, or the mere working of our human spirit, even in the common grounds of Christian comfort; or

as elementary fire differeth from culinary and kitchen fire, and is much more pure, so doth this joy, which is immediately wrought in us by the Spirit, from all joy that we can work by ourselves, out of the scriptural grounds of comfort. Carnal men have their joy at the second or third hand, as God blesseth the order and influence of inferior causes; it comes to them from creature to creature, so as they discern not the work of God in it; yea, the joy of common Christians in the proper grounds of comfort is not so strong as that which is raised in us by the immediate impression of the comforting Spirit.

II. Why this is of God.

1. Because God challengeth this as his own right to comfort the heart of man; and therefore, whatever the means of the comfort be, God will be owned as the spring and fountain of it. He keepeth this as his great bridle upon the world, to govern the hearts of men: Job 34:29, 'When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.' Our peace and trouble is in God's hands, and at his disposing. It is true he exerciseth his sovereignty according to law, and in his internal government according to the law of grace, penally withdrawing his comforting Spirit, and leaving us to our doubts, and troubles, and fears; by the rewarding our obedience and faithfulness with the manifest tokens of his love, as the matter shall require. It is enough for the point in hand that God alone doth powerfully dispense peace or trouble. And when he will give comfort, none can make his gift void; for it is at his command; and in both, a nation is all one with a particular person as to any ability to resist God.

2. Though grounds of comfort be never so clear, yet if God concur not, we find not the effect; therefore it is his Spirit that can only comfort the heart. To have God's warrant for our comfort is much, but to have his impression is more; both must concur, or the soul will not be comforted. It falleth out many ways, sometimes out of ignorance. When a well of comfort was near, poor Hagar saw it not,

and was almost famished with thirst, until 'God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water,' Gen. 21:19. We know not the grounds of our comfort. Sometimes out of passion; grief is obstinate, and will admit no remedy: as 'Rachel would not be comforted,' Jer. 31:15. They are so peevishly addicted to their worldly comforts, that if they be crossed in them, they will not admit of God's comforts, though they are evident, clear, and pertinent. Sometimes out of forgetfulness: Heb. 12:5, 'Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children.' And oblivion is an ignorance for the present. Had they remembered, they would not have fainted and waxed weary. It is a great work of the Spirit to bring to remembrance. Sometimes questioning their interest in comfort; besides that, there are general comforts, when interest is not clear. Now the Spirit, that showeth us the things given us of God, doth also reveal and evidence our right to them. What is wrought in our hearts—that is to say, by quickening us to exercise grace,—he evidenceth the truth of grace; and in our afflictions by patience maketh out our comfort: Rom. 5:3–5, 'We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.' From the whole, there can be no true solid comfort but what God bestoweth; his favour, and our interest in his favour, is manifested to us by his Spirit.

III. What advantages we have by this, that all solid comfort is of God.

1. It assureth us of God's readiness to comfort poor afflicted creatures that humbly submit to him. He that is the God of all comfort is also the Father of mercies; his mercy and compassion inclineth him to comfort us. God hath his name from this effect—*Nomina sunt a notioribus*—'God that comforteth those that are cast down,' 2 Cor. 7:6. He is very tender of all afflicted creatures, much more of his people.

2. God's comforts come with more authority, and silence all our doubts and fears: Ps. 94:19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.' We have many intricate, perplexing thoughts, out of which we cannot disentangle ourselves; no comforts come with such authority and power as God's comforts. In the comfort we have it is good to consider whence it cometh: Is it God's comfort, or a fancy of our own? If it be made up by our own fancy, it will be like a spider's web, that is weaved out of its own bowels, but is gone and swept away with the least turn of a besom; but God's comforts are more durable: they flow from the true fountain of comfort, upon whose frowns or smiles our happiness and misery dependeth. There is little warmth in a fire of our own kindling. God's comforts are built on his covenant, and have a commanding force and overpowering efficacy on the soul. God in his word speaketh by sovereign authority; in our hearts he worketh by powerful efficacy. The authority of his word we own when we speak to others or to ourselves, when we know trouble but in supposition or imagination. The efficacy of his grace we feel when trouble comes actually upon us; many that strengthen others, when it cometh upon them faint themselves: Job 4:4, 5, 'Thy words have upholden him that is falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.' Which showeth that not only the matter of comfort, but the effectual blessing cometh from God, or comforting of souls is his work.

3. That God's comforts are full and strong. For he worketh like himself, and therefore can and will support his people in the greatest difficulties. It is sometimes represented as full: Acts 13:52, 'The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost;' and, 'I am filled with comfort, and am exceeding joyful in all our tribulations,' 2 Cor. 7:4: ὑπερπερισσεύομαι τῇ χαρᾷ. And our Lord Jesus, when he took care for our comfort, took care for our full comfort: John 15:11, 'These things have I spoken, that my joy may remain in you, and your joy might be full.' Thus we see the joy of believers is a full joy, that no other joy needeth to be added to it; it is a full joy to bear us

out under all discouragements. For what is wanting to them who have God for their portion, and the promised glory for their inheritance, and God's providence engaged for their protection, safety, and comfort, while they are here by the way? And it is strong as well as full: Heb. 6:18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' Other comforts are weak and of little force; they are not affliction-proof, much less are they death-proof, and judgment-proof; they cannot stand before a few serious, sober thoughts of the world to come. The comforts of the world cannot stay and revive the heart; for every blast of a temptation scattereth them.

Use 1. To reprove Christians for their over-much dejection and fainting in troubles. Why are we so much cast down? Is there no balm in Gilead, nor comfort in God? Why hath God taken the name upon him of being the God of all comfort, and put this office upon his Spirit to be the comforter? Hath he not made sufficient provision in the new covenant? Is there any evil which the promise of eternal life cannot countervail? Is God backward to give you comfort? Why, then, did he send Christ, write scriptures, appoint a ministry and ordinances, seek to prepare you for it by the seal and earnest of his Spirit, and invite you so earnestly to trust in him, to cast all your care upon him, and so often forbid your fear and sorrow?

Use 2. If all comfort be of God, let us go to God for it. But then take these three directions:—

1. See you be qualified for it. Comfort follows holiness, as heat doth fire: the Spirit is first a sanctifier and then a comforter; and according to God's promise, is more necessarily a sanctifier than a comforter: Eph. 1:13, 14, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.' Comfort is our happiness; but we are made holy before happy. Hereafter we enter

into our master's joy, we have a taste of it in the world. But who have this taste but the sanctified and self-denying Christians? The work of sanctification is carried on more certainly, but his comforting work is many times obscure and interrupted. Do your work thoroughly and faithfully, and you may refer yourselves to God for comfort.

2. Expect not a singular way of comfort besides the word. It was Eliphaz's charge upon Job, chap. 15:11, 'Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?' The charge is, that he undervalued the common consolation of God, and looked for some secret way peculiar to himself of getting comfort, besides humbling of himself, and turning unto God. No; God hath sufficiently provided for the comfort of his people, and we must not expect singular manifestations of his love, and special signs and tokens, beyond the common allowance given to the whole family. It is a thousand to one but it is some false consolation and dream of comfort which they affect and cry up, beyond or besides the usual comforts of his word.

3. Do not compare lower discoveries of God with that great revelation he hath made of his mind in the word, for the comfort of his people; for this argueth great unthankfulness, and a secret desire to set up man's comfort against those which are unquestionably of the Lord. Sure it is, that whatever good is in nature, is from God; but it is mingled with so many weaknesses, that what is of God can scarce be seen in it. I speak of those that cry up heathen philosophy, to the disparagement of the word of God, as if it were a better institution to quiet the mind, and fortify it against all troubles, than Christianity. But alas! they neither know the true ground of misery, which is sin, nor the true ground of comfort, which is Christ, And that which mere man offereth can neither come with such authority and blessing as what cometh immediately from God. This is a moonlight that rotteth things before it ripeneth them. In short, philosophers were never acquainted with Christ, the foundation of comfort; nor the Spirit, the efficient cause of comfort; nor the promise of pardon and life, which is the matter of comfort; nor faith,

which is the light by which we know things that depend upon divine revelation, and so the proper instrument of comfort. This I thought good to say, because comfort and rest for souls is one of the great benefits of our religion: Jer. 6:16, 'Stand in the way and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your souls;' Mat. 6:28, 29, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

Use 3. Seek it in the use of means and ordinances which God hath appointed for the raising of comfort in us, as the word, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. In solemn duties God reneweth the pledges of his love to us, exciteth grace, and by grace comfort. It must needs be so, because then the grounds of comfort are anew laid in the view of conscience; graces are in their lively exercise, and God is not wanting to his own institution. Take all these three together, and the reverent use of the Lord's Supper must needs increase our comfort. The ground of comfort is reconciliation with God by Christ, Rom. 5:11, 'We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.' And here we raise up our faith and love: Cant. 1:4, 'The King hath brought me into his chamber. We will be glad and rejoice in thee; we will remember thy love more than wine. The upright love thee.' God's ordinances are not empty; there is some participation: 1 Cor. 10:16, 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?'

Use 4. Consider the ends why God giveth us comfort. It is to fortify us against the enemies of our salvation, so far as they are vexing, and troubling, and molesting us in the way to heaven. The Spirit hath two great offices—to be a sanctifier and comforter; and both serve all the needs of Christians. When we are enticed to sin, he helps us as a sanctifier; when we are discouraged in God's service, he helps us a comforter. And therefore Christians are to consider their condition, and what their present state requireth; for God dispenseth his grace according to the assaults made upon them by the enemies of their salvation. As for instance, our enemies are the devil, the world, and

the flesh. These we renounced in baptism; and in the progress of Christianity, these are those with whom we conflict and must overcome. As for instance, the devil is a tempting devil, who seeketh to draw away the saints from God, and, by the love of the flesh, to weaken our love and obedience to our proper and our rightful Lord. Now what are we to do in this case? To beg comfort and peace, that we may not be troubled, though we yield unto his temptations? Alas! this were to turn the grace of God into wantonness. No; we are to be 'sober and watchful,' 1 Peter 5:8—to use all the rules of sobriety and vigilancy, that our worldly comforts may not be a snare to us (sobriety is a holy moderation in the use of all earthly things: vigilancy is a holy diligence and seriousness in the use of means); and also add to both the help of the sanctifying Spirit, that we may keep up our love to God, and be faithful in our obedience to him. But the devil is not only a tempting devil, but a vexing and disquieting devil, who 'accuseth us before God day and night,' Rev. 12:10, raiseth in us many troublesome fears to make our service uncomfortable, and tire us and clog us. What is our duty then? To beg the help of the Comforter, not only to show love to God, but that we may have some persuasion of his love to us, and quench his fiery darts, that we may go on cheerfully in our work, because 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,' Rom. 16:20. So for the world. The world is a tempting world, drawing our affections from God and heaven to present things; and when it smileth on us, encroaches upon our hearts more and more: 2 Tim. 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.' Now what is our business then? To beg comfort and assurance of God's love? No; that would be our bane; there is work for the Sanctifier rather than the Comforter, that the worldly spirit may be subdued in us; there is need of mortification rather than assurance, that we may be 'crucified to the world,' Gal. 6:14. But sometimes the world is a persecuting world, and reproacheth and troubleth us with all manner of vexations; then there is work for the Comforter, to seal up to our souls the love of God, our interest in Christ: John 16:33, 'These things have I spoken to you, that in me ye might have peace; in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world;' and to

become to our souls the earnest of eternal glory. Comfort is for tribulation; at other times we are glutted with it, but then it is our great support. When all things fail, we feel the great necessity of the joys of faith. It is good to time well our duties. David saith, Ps. 56:3, 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' So for the flesh; it enticeth us: James 1:14, 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.' Many times it draweth to actual sin by indulgence to its desires; yea, disposeth us often to apostasy and falseness of heart; for apostasy usually begins at falseness of heart, when the fleshly mind and interest is not thoroughly overcome. Well, when we are conscious to this, what shall we do in such a case? Certainly the great and proper work is to beg the Spirit, and implore the Spirit as a sanctifier, and to be more obedient to his sanctifying motions. Comfort will come in time. Well, but the flesh is not only enticing, but troublesome and grievous to the saints; witness Paul's groans: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' We are quite wearied and tired out with the importunity of its motions; we would serve God more purely and perfectly. Then there is work for the Comforter, and confidence in his operations to help the faithful soul: Phil. 1:6, 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.' Then it is seasonable to remember the covenant we are under: Rom. 6:14, 'For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.' The serious, striving soul will not be left destitute. Thus must we expect comfort.

Use 5. Remember that comfort hath a latitude in it, and is expressed by divers words.

1. Sometimes by its support is implied, when the sense of sin and fear of God's wrath is not altogether removed and taken away, but so mitigated and abated, that hope doth more easily prevail in the soul than fear; and we resolve to wait on God, though we cannot so fully clear up our interest in him. You have many conflicts and fears, yet some hope and expectation towards God: Jonah 2:4, 5, 'I am cast out

of thy sight, yet will I look again to thy holy temple.' Resolute adherence giveth great support: Job 13:15, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; I will maintain my own ways before him.' He dependeth merely on the covenant.

2. Peace, or some rest from troubles and accusations of conscience. There is some calm and quiet of soul: Rom. 5:1, 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God;' Gal. 6:16, 'As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy.' Assaulted with none or light fears: John 16:33, 'In me ye shall have peace.' I will give you peace, though not full spiritual suavities.

3. The third word is joy: 1 Peter 1:8, 'Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' In peace all things are quiet, they have no anxious thoughts; but in joy there is a sensible motion of pleasure and delight. They are feasted with the pleasures of faith, love, and hope. Let us then bless God for any degree of comfort.

SERMON XVIII

And stablish you in every good word and work.—2 THES. 2:17.

WE come now to the apostle's second request for them: 'And stablish you in every good word and work.' By 'every good word' is meant sound doctrine; by 'every good work,' holiness of life.

Doct. Establishment in faith and holiness is a needful blessing, and earnestly to be sought of God.

1. What this establishment is.
2. How needful.
3. Why it is to be sought of God.

I. What this establishment is? Ans. Confirmation in the grace that we have received. Now this confirmation must be distinguished.

1. With respect to the power wherewith we are assisted; there is habitual confirmation, and actual confirmation.

[1.] The habitual confirmation is when the habits of grace are more settled and increased: 1 Peter 5:10, 'The God of all grace strengthen, stablish, settle you.' God hath effectually called and converted them, and he beggeth the strengthening of the grace which they had received. Now thus we are established, when faith, love and hope are increased in us; for these are the principles of all spiritual operations; and when they have gotten good strength in us, a Christian is more established. (1.) Faith is necessary, for we stand by faith: Rom. 11:20, 'Because of unbelief they were broken off, but thou standest by faith.' We do not only live by it, but stand by it, and are kept by it: 1 Peter 1:5, 'Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' He is strong that is strong in faith, as Abraham was, that believeth the gospel, and can venture his all upon it, and trust himself in God's hands, whatever befalleth him: Luke 22:32, 'I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.' That was the grace likely to be assaulted, and would most keep him; had he been persuaded that Jesus was the Son of God, would he have denied him with oaths and execrations? (2.) Love is strong. We are told, Cant. 8:6, 7, 'That love is as strong as death; many waters cannot quench it: if a man would give all the substance of his house, it would utterly be contemned.' It will not be bribed or quenched. Our backsliding cometh from losing our complacency in or desire of God: there is an averseness from sin and zeal against it; as long as we have a sense of our obligations to God, and a value and esteem of his grace in Christ, then we continue in delightful obedience to him, and level and direct our actions to his glory. (3.) Hope is necessary to stablish the soul on the promise of eternal life; for this is the sure and stedfast anchor of the soul: Heb. 6:19, 'Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.' If hope be strong and lively, present things do not greatly move us.

[2.] Actual establishment, when these habits are fortified and quickened by the actual influence of God. As God doth establish by these habitual principles, so by the actual motions of his Spirit; for otherwise neither the stability of our resolutions nor of gracious habits will support us. Not stability of resolutions: Ps. 73:2, 'As for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped.' Not habit: Rev. 3:2, 'Be watchful, and strengthen those things which remain, that are ready to die.' It is true, God ordinarily worketh most strongly with strongest graces, because their hearts are most prepared; yet sometimes weak Christians have gone through great temptations when strong ones have failed: Rev. 3:8, 'Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.' Sometimes the strong Christian stumbleth and falleth when the weak standeth. God may in an instant confirm a weak person in some particular temptation, by his free assistance, but ordinarily concurrereth with the strongest grace. Thus with respect to the power wherewith we are assisted.

2. With respect to the object or matter about which it is conversant: stablished in every good word and work; stability in the doctrine of faith and practice of godliness.

[1.] In the doctrine of faith. It is a great advantage in the spiritual life to have a sound judgment. Some men are never well grounded in the truth, and in the nature and reasons of that religion which they do profess, and then are always left to a wandering uncertainty, because they resolve not upon evidence; as men ordinarily abide not in the place to which they are driven by a tempest, or the current of the tides, rather than by aim and choice, though they take shelter there for the present: 1 Thes. 5:21, 'Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.' Certainly religion in the general must be taken up by choice, and not by chance; not because we know no other, but because we know no better: as Jer. 6:16, 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.' And the same is true of particular opinions and controversies about religion, till we have ἴδιον στήριγμα, 'our own stedfastness,' 2 Peter 3:17. We

stand by the steadfastness of others, when we profess the truth merely because of company; and when the chain is broken, we all fall to pieces. Now we ought to be well settled, lest we appear to the world with a various face, which breedeth atheism in others, and shame to ourselves. It is possible, in particular things, future light may disprove present practice; but then we must be able to give a very sufficient account of it. Luther, when he was charged with apostasy, *Confitetur se esse apostatam, sed beatum et sanctum, qui fidem Diabolo datam non servavit*. While we cry up constancy, we must not cherish stubborn prejudice, which shuts the door upon truth. However, to avoid the opinion of lightness, before religious persons profess anything, their warrant need to be very clear, both for the world's sake and their own, that they may not make needless troubles, and afterwards change their mind, to the scandalising of others: and their own sake: *δίψυχος ἀνὴρ*, James 1:8, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' And we had need to take care to be right, because every error hath an influence upon the heart and practice: upon the heart, as it weakeneth faith and love; and practice: some opinions have no malignity in themselves, yet the profession of them may divide the church, and make us by contentions enemies of the growth and progress of Christ's kingdom. Now, if we would be established in the truth, we must see what influence every truth hath upon the new nature, either as it worketh towards God by faith, to keep up our respects to him, or men by love, as it furthereth our duties to them. A man will not easily let go truth that is wont to turn it into practice, and to live as he believeth. Once more, we need to be established in the present truth; it is no zeal to fight with ghosts and antiquated errors, but to take God's part in our time; but usually the orthodoxy of the world is an age too short, men please themselves in things received.

[2.] In every good work, or in holiness of life. Here needeth the greatest establishment, that we may hold on our course to heaven; and the usual apostasy and backsliding that men are guilty of is from the practice of religion. It is ill when the mind is tainted, but worse when the heart is alienated from God; and commonly it is the

perverse inclination of the will that tainteth the mind. Therefore the great establishment is to be settled in a course of godliness: 1 Thes. 3:13, 'That he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all his saints.' Now this establishment is very difficult.

First, Because of the contrariety of the principles that are within us: Gal. 5:17, 'For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.' The garrison is not free from danger that hath an enemy lodged within. The love of the world and the flesh was in the heart before the love of God and holiness, and these are not wholly rooted out. Yea, these are natural to us, whereas grace is a plant planted in us contrary to nature; and the ground that bringeth forth weeds and thistles of its own accord, but the flowers and good herbs with much tillage and cultivation, if it be neglected, the weeds will soon overgrow the flowers.

Secondly, Because it is more hard to continue in conversion than to convert ourselves at first. In our first conversion we are more passive; it is God that converteth us, and draweth us to himself, and quickens and plants us into Christ; but in perseverance and fulfilling our covenanting duty, we are more active; it is our work, though we perform it by God's grace. An infant in the mother's womb is nourished by the nourishment of the mother, but afterwards he must suck and seek his own nourishment; and the older he groweth, the more care of his life is devolved upon himself. Now, that which is more our work is more difficult. It is true that God, that hath begun a good work, doth perfect it, but not without our care, Phil. 1:6. When we are fitted and prepared unto good works, God expecteth from us that we should walk in them. God stablisheth us in the text, but it is in every good work. Besides, in conversion, we make covenant with God, but by perseverance we keep covenant with him. Now it is easier to consent to conditions than it is to fulfil them; the ceremonies, at first consent of marriage, are not so difficult as to perform the duties of the marriage covenant. It is more easy to build

a castle in a time of peace than to keep it in a time of war. Peter more easily consented to come to Christ upon the water; but when he began to try it, his feet were ready to sink, Mat. 14:29, 30. When winds and waves are against us, alas! how soon do we fail! Therefore, a good spring doth not always foreshow a fruitful harvest, nor plenty of blossoms store of fruit. We are carried on with great life and earnestness for a while in the profession of religion, we consent to follow Christ; but when we meet with difficulties not foreseen or allowed for, we faint and are discouraged.

3. With respect to the subject in which it is seated, which is the soul with its faculties. The strength of the body is known by experience rather than by description; but the strength of the soul must be determined by its right constitution towards good and evil. The faculties of the soul are either the understanding, wherein lieth the directive counsel, or the will, wherein lieth the imperial power, or the affections, wherein lieth the executive power of the soul.

[1.] The mind or understanding is established when we have a clear, certain, and full apprehension of the truth of the gospel; it is called knowledge; the sure, and sound, and certain apprehension of them is called faith, or intellectual assent, or 'the full assurance of understanding,' Col. 2:2, when there is a due knowledge of what God hath revealed, with a certain persuasion of the truth of it, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. Now, the more clearly, and orderly, and certainly we know these things, the more powerfully do they affect the heart, and the more we are established. He that hath little knowledge and little certainty is called weak in the faith: Rom. 14:1, 'Him that is weak in the faith receive, but not to doubtful disputations.' And those that have a clearer understanding are called strong; as Rom. 15:1, 'We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak;' meaning strong in knowledge. So also for certainty of persuasion, it is said, Rom. 4:20, Abraham was 'strong in faith, giving glory to God;' when in all his trials he bore up himself upon the confidence of God's word and promise. Well, then, the mind is confirmed and established when we have a good stock of knowledge,

and do firmly believe what we know of God and Christ and eternal salvation. But alas! how few truths do many Christians know, especially in their order, and as to their worth, and weight, and certainty, and so that, if we know these things, we know them not as we ought to know them: 1 Cor. 8:2, 'If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know them.' If we know them speculatively, we know them not practically. If we are able to discourse of these things, we do not live by them. If we know them generally, we do not know them particularly, to direct us in all cases wherein they concern us, but are blinded with temptations. If we know them comprehensively, so as to look about the compass of them, yet not certainly, John 17:8, 'And have known surely that I came out from thee—' so as to venture our interests upon them. If we know them darkly, and with a half light, we do not know them clearly and with a full light. There is many times conviction in the ore, which is not refined into a clear and distinct knowledge, such as may awe the heart. If we know these things habitually, we know them not actually, when we should remember them in their season; and oblivion is a sort of ignorance. Hence come the many doubts we are assaulted with, and all the unevenness and uncertainty of our lives, so that the mind needeth to be established in grace.

[2.] The will, which is the imperial power of the soul. Now, the will's establishment is known by its firm and thorough resolution for God and against sin. For God: as Acts 11:23, Barnabas, 'when he had seen the grace of God, was very glad, and exhorted them all that, with full purpose of heart, they would cleave to the Lord.' First choosing, then cleaving, and this with full purpose, when the will is so fixed in the knowledge and faith of the gospel that they resolve to abide by their choice: Ps. 27:4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord; this will I seek after.' When spiritual resolution carrieth the force and authority of a principle in the soul, and nothing can break it: 1 Peter 4:1 'Arm yourselves with the same mind.' As constantly as Christ persevered in the work of mediation, so be you in the work of obedience, notwithstanding the difficulties of it. This powerful will, that beareth

down oppositions and temptations, and the greatest impediments in the way to heaven, so that you rather make advantage of opposition than are discouraged by it, when sensual or carnal good is of little force to you, and you can despise the most pleasing baits of sin.

[3.] The affections are the executive power, and do excite and stir us up to do what the mind is convinced of and the will resolved upon as to the necessary duties of the gospel in order to eternal happiness. There is a backwardness within and many temptations without; but a holy delight overcometh the unwilling backwardness within, and overbalanceth either worldly fear or worldly hope without, that the soul is carried on powerfully towards God. We never work better than when we work in the strength of some eminent affection, when the heart is enlarged: Ps. 119:32, 'I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart.' Either love or hope. Love filleth us with delight, overcoming our natural slackness and sluggishness in the ways of God: Ps. 40:8, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy love is within my heart;' 1 John 5:3, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous;' Ps. 112:1, 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.' Hope beareth us up in contempt of present delights and terrors of sense: Heb. 3:6, 'Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end;' so that we serve God with vigour and alacrity. When our affections are damped, grace falleth into a consumption; and if you lose your taste, your practice will languish, your service of God will not be so uniform. It is a great part of our establishment to keep up the vigour and fervency of our affections.

4. With respect to the uses for which it serveth, as to duties, sufferings, conflicts.

[1.] Doing the will of God, or discharging our doings with delight, cheerfulness, and constancy; for all strength is for work: Eph. 3:16, 'That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be

strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.' That we may do our work with that readiness of mind which becomes faith in Christ and love to God. This is often spoken of in scripture: Phil. 2:13, 'For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure,' τὸ θελεῖν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν; and Heb. 13:21, 'Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well pleasing in his sight.' It is of great use to our establishment that the soul be kept doing; for as wells are the sweeter for draining, so are we the more lively for exercise. Frequent omission of good duties, or seldom exercise of grace, necessarily produceth a decay; as a key rusteth that is seldom turned in the lock; thereby we lose the life and comfort of religion, and at length cast it off as a needless and unprofitable thing.

[2.] For bearing afflictions, and passing through all conditions with honour to God and safety to ourselves: Phil. 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me;' Col. 1:11, 'Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, with all patience.' The great use of establishment is to fortify us against all the evils and inconveniences of the present life, that we may hold on our course to heaven in fair way or foul, and not be greatly moved by anything that befalleth us within time.

[3.] For conflicts with temptations from the devil, the world, and the flesh. The world is round about us, and we are accustomed to these inveigling objects whose importunity prevaieth at length. The devil seeketh to work upon our affections and inclinations, and the flesh urgeth us to gratify them. How, then, is a Christian safe? God establisheth him: Eph. 6:10, 'Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' A Christian here is in a military state, and we of ourselves, left unto ourselves, are like reeds shaken with every wind; we have need of establishment in regard of our own feebleness, and the force of our enemies. We must be established against the devil soliciting; against the world, the silent argument by which he soliciteth us and draweth us from God and heaven; against the flesh, the rebelling principle which is apt to be wrought upon by Satan.

Well, then, this establishment is that grace which enableth us to carry on the duties of religion with constancy, frequency, and delight; to bear all the inconveniences of religion with patience and fortitude; to be more deaf and resolute against all the suggestions of the devil, or the machinations of the flesh, stirred up by the world.

5. With respect to the degree, it is such a strengthening of the soul as doth prevent not only our fall, but our shaking. Before falling away, or our being drawn to apostasy, there may be a shaking, a doubtfulness, and wavering of mind with respect to the truth, and much inconstancy and unevenness of life with respect to practice. Now, Christians, as they must not draw back to perdition, so they must not be always fluctuating and unfixed, either in matters of opinion, but settled in the truth, or in matters of practice; there must be a strength and stability of holy inclinations and resolutions for God and the world to come still kept up, or else there will be no evenness or uniformity in the course of our lives. And though we avoid apostasy, yet we cannot avoid scandal; though there be no falling back, there is a stepping out into bypaths: 1 Cor. 15:58, 'Be stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;' and Eph. 3:17, 'That ye being rooted and grounded in love,' &c.; and Col. 1:23, 'If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.' If we do not look to the degree, our weakness and instability groweth upon us; as in matters of opinion, some have an unsettled head of a vertiginous spirit: Eph. 4:14, 'Carried about with every wind of doctrine.' They never were well grounded in the truth, nor took up the ways they are engaged in upon sufficient evidence; and therefore, by their own weakness, and the cunning and diligence of the seducers, are drawn into error. Light chaff is blown up and down by every wind, when solid grain hitcheth in, and resteth in the floor where it is winnowed. A half light maketh us uncertain in our course. For matter of practice, if we allow ourselves in our first declinings, the evil will grow upon us; when the judgment reasoneth more remissly against sin than it did before, and the will doth oppose it with less resolution, or with greater faintness and indifferency, or when opposition doth more discourage us. No;

there must be a resolved conquest of temptations that would pervert you; this will only serve our turn: Heb. 12:3, 'Consider him that endured such contradictions, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds.' Weariness is a lesser degree of deficiency. Many a man is weary that is not faint or quite spent; so with the practice of godliness, when the heart begins to be alienated and estranged from God, and the life of duty doth decay. When our first love is gone, our first works will in a great measure cease: Rev. 2:4, 5, 'Nevertheless I have something against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works.' Well, then, the degree must be minded; for though a man may be stedfast in the main, yet he may be somewhat moved and shaken; but a Christian should not only be stedfast, but unmoveable; otherwise we shall be very uncertain in our motions.

II. How needful it is: this is in a great measure showed already. But yet more fully.

1. Man at best is but a creature. The new creation doth carry a great correspondence with the old and first creation. It is not enough that the creature be, but he must be sustained in being; we have our being in God still: Acts 17:28, 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.' As providence is a continual creation, so stablishing grace is the continuance of the new creation. The same grace that sets us in the state of the new creation, the same stablisheth us. God found no stability in the angels, therefore it is said he trusteth them not: Job 15:15, 'Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.' They stand by the grace and favour of God. Take the best creatures even as creatures, they are defective and unstable in themselves; for God will have the creature, as a creature, to be a dependent thing on the Creator, who only is a being of himself. Man at his best estate was but an unstable creature—for Adam gave out at the first assault—and since, we are very unstable, blown down with the blast of every little temptation. Even in the state of grace, we are like a glass without a bottom, broken as soon as out of hand; and, therefore, God alone is able to make us stand, and

persevere in this grace that we have received: 2 Cor. 1:21, 'Now, he that stablisheth us with you in Christ is God.' After we are in Christ, our stability is in God alone.

2. The indisposition of our natures both to every good word and work. (1.) To every good word. The truths of the gospel are supernatural. Now, things that are planted in us contrary to nature can hardly subsist and maintain themselves. We have some seeds of the law yet left in our hearts, Rom. 2:14. But the gospel dependeth on sure revelation; therefore are there so many heresies against the gospel, but none against the law. Therefore, as they depend upon a divine revelation, they must be settled in our hearts by a divine power, and by a divine power preserved there; that as the doctrine is supernatural, so the grace may be also by which we do receive it. Faith is the gift of God: Eph. 2:8, 'For by grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;' both as to its beginning, so to its preservation and increase. (2.) To every good work. There is not only slowness and backwardness of heart to the duties of the gospel, but somewhat of the old enmity and averseness remaineth still. Our hearts are not only inconstant and unsettled, but very wayward: Jer. 14:10, 'Thus saith the Lord to this people, Thus have they loved to wander;' Ps. 95:10, 'It is a people that do err in their heart.' Moses was no sooner gone aside with God in the mount, but the Israelites, after their solemn covenant, fell to idolatry. Before the law could be written, they brake it. Now, we that have a warring principle within, how can we stand unless God establish us? There is a back-bias, there are the seeds of wantonness, anger, revenge, envy, impatience, worldliness, ambition, and sensuality. God knoweth how little the fleshly mind and interest is conquered in us; and therefore, if he did not establish us, we should soon show ourselves.

3. In regard of those oppositions that are made against us after once we be in Christ. It is not enough that we are brought out of the kingdom of Satan, but after we are rescued out of his hand and power, he pursueth us with continual malice; therefore there must be the same power to stablish us still in grace that first brought us into

the state of grace: Col. 1:13, 'Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son;' compared with 1 John 4:4, 'Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.' The world runneth a quite contrary course than those do that set their faces heavenward, and therefore maligns them, and pursues them with reproaches and troubles: 1 Peter 4:4, 5, 'Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you; who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.' And most commonly our supports are invisible, and we have no temporal interest to leant to; but, 2 Tim. 1:12, 'For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' We bear these afflictions by the power of God.

4. We see here the saints miscarry when God withdraweth his supporting grace but in part, as Peter, David. Peter was in the state of grace, and Christ prayed that his faith might not utterly fail; yet, when God did not establish him, you see what sins he was guilty of in that combat. David was 'a man after God's own heart;' but how did he fall when God upheld him not! Ps. 51. Hezekiah; 2 Chron. 32:31, 'Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.' Thus is God fain to humble his children, to teach them dependence, and to put them in mind that they do not stand by their own strength.

III. Why it is to be sought of God?

1. He only is able: Rom. 16:25, 'Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ,' &c. Surely God never made a creature too hard for himself. He is able to defeat the power of enemies, and to preserve his people

in the midst of temptations. So Jude, ver. 24, 'To him that is able to keep you from falling,' &c.; and 'He is able to keep that which I have committed to him,' 2 Tim. 1:12. The saints gather much comfort from this, for it is a relief to their thoughts against the dreadful and powerful opposition of the world; they have no reason to doubt of their Father's love. That which surpriseth them is to see all the world against them. It is the dreadfulness of power in the temptation and sense of their own weakness; therefore the power of God is a fit relief to them.

2. God is not very forward to cast you off, when he hath a just cause to do it. Your constant experience evidenceth this. If he here had done so, what had become of you long ago? For you have given him abundant occasion, you have wearied him with your sins, abused his mercies; and yet he hath not cast you off. He hath not utterly forsaken you, when you have turned the back upon him and have been ready to forsake him, but hath kept you from dangers and in dangers; yea, called you to his grace, confirmed you hitherto. Why should you doubt of his grace for the future? 2 Cor. 1:10, 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;' 2 Tim. 4:17, 18, 'Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'

3. He hath made promises of sustentation and preservation: Ps. 73:23, 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand.' Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for God upholdeth him with his hand. If God hath promised to preserve that grace which he hath once given, should not we pray for the continuance of it with the more encouragement?

4. The experience of the saints: Ps. 94:18, 'When I said my foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up,' God's manutenance is there

asserted.

Use. Is to press us at all times to look up to God for establishment; but especially in two seasons:—

1. When we begin to decline, and grow more remiss and indifferent in the practice of godliness. If grace be weak, you must get it strengthened. When you grow bolder in sin, and more strange to God and Jesus Christ, and have little converse with him in the Spirit, oh! it is time to be instant and earnest with God, that he would recover you. Though you have embezzled your strength, yet you have to do with a merciful God; go to him for help: Ps. 17:5, 'Hold up my goings in thy path, that my footsteps slip not.' You have forfeited the more plentiful aids of grace; but beg him not to forsake you utterly. You must confess the sin, but God must remedy the evil: Ps. 119:133, 'Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' Lord, I am apt to be led away with worldly allurements; my spiritual taste is distempered with carnal vanities: but, 'let not iniquity have dominion over me.'

2. In unsettled times, when we are full of fears, and think we shall never hold out in a holy course. God, that keepeth us in times of peace, will hold us up in times of trouble: Ps. 16:8, 'I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.'

MONERGISM BOOKS

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