

A

John Bird Sumner

S E R I E S

OF

S E R M O N S

ON THE

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND CHARACTER.



BY THE

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AND

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TO THE
HON. AND RIGHT REV.
SHUTE BARRINGTON, LL. D.

Lord Bishop of Durham.

As it was under the sanction of Your Lordship's advice that I prepared these Sermons in their present form, with the purpose of offering instruction to a school in which Your Lordship still takes all the interest of early association; it is natural that I should be anxious to send them into the world with the protection of Your Lordship's name.

But in availing myself of this privilege, I am placed under an unexpected embarrassment. To those who are aware that

I owe very valuable preferment to Your Lordship's favourable opinion of my former writings, I should justly appear deficient in common gratitude, if I neglected the present opportunity of publicly acknowledging the obligation: yet I am conscious, on the other hand, that I can hardly make this allusion to a circumstance so honourable to myself, without being exposed to the charge of a want of modesty.

Nevertheless, at any risk, I feel it due to my own feelings to return the only acknowledgment in my power for so gratifying a mark of distinction. And I may add, that a sense of duty, as well as of obligation, prevents my remaining silent on the present occasion. It cannot but encourage others to employ in the service of religion the time and talents intrusted to them, when they perceive that very humble efforts in this cause are so vigilantly observed, and so favourably regarded, by those who

superintend the interests of the Church. For although the motives are of a higher nature which afford the proper stimulus to such exertions; still the approbation of those whose good opinion is confessedly most valuable, is among the purest of those rewards with which it has pleased a merciful God to cheer and smooth the path of duty.

That Your Lordship may be long spared to adorn our Establishment, and promote its welfare, is the sincere prayer of,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obliged

And faithful Servant,

JOHN BIRD SUMNER.

CHAPTER III

The first of these is the fact that the
 world is not a uniform whole, but a
 collection of parts, each of which has
 its own life and development. It is
 not a static entity, but a dynamic
 process, constantly changing and
 growing. The second is the fact that
 the parts are not isolated, but
 interconnected. Each part is
 affected by the others, and in turn
 affects them. This is the principle of
 the whole being greater than the
 sum of its parts.

Long ago, the great philosopher
 Aristotle said, "The whole is
 different from the sum of its
 parts." This is a truth that is
 still valid today.

CONCLUSION

In this world, we are all
 connected. We are all part of
 a whole. We are all
 working together. We are all
 striving for a common goal.

P R E F A C E.

No wise man will go through life, no sensible parent will allow his child to enter into life, with vague and undefined notions upon the subject of religion. To be careless, or to be ignorant, in a matter of such unspeakable importance, is the most inexcusable error where it is wilful, and the most unhappy condition where it is unavoidable. And this is more especially evident when the nature of our holy faith is considered. It allows for no half-Christians, nominal Christians, Christians by mere birth or profession. It proposes a way of eternal salvation, which no one can embrace without understanding it, or understand without so far studying it, as to make it the object of his inquiry, his desire, and his deliberate choice. It declares, that "he that hath

the Son hath life; and that he that hath not the Son hath not life;”—that “whoever abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son:”—that Christ “is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;”—and that “to as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God.” Passages like these, which might be indefinitely multiplied, together with the various strong phrases by which the disciples of Christ are expressed in Scripture, all suppose a degree of personal interest in him, which can never be attained in that cursory method by which too many of all ranks acquire whatever they know of religion.

The ignorance which prevails on the true nature of Christianity, may be traced, in great measure, to the irregular and unmethodical manner in which religious instruction is frequently conveyed, and which is so

unlike the strict preparatory discipline to which the converts of the early ages were subjected. That which is understood to be the great secret of education, the leading the pupil on by a gradual progress in which no step is omitted, no advance made, till the preliminary information is attained; this is entirely neglected in the communication of religious knowledge, except in the case of peculiar attention and care. For that excellent summary, the Church Catechism, does not contain in itself a connected view of the Christian faith, but is rather a recapitulation of what is supposed to have been learnt elsewhere. And sermons, which afford the next chance of instruction to the young Christian, necessarily take it for granted that a great deal is understood by the hearer, which many, probably, do not understand, and for want of which much important truth fails of its effect, and loses its value. They give no opportunity for inquiring into what

is imperfectly known or comprehended; nor has the preacher always the means of ascertaining what is and what is not profitable, or how far the individuals whom he addresses are capable of receiving his instruction.

The Bible indeed is in the hands, or within the reach of every one; and if properly studied would *guide them into all truth*. But some awakening stimulus is necessary in order to induce the young and gay to read the Bible; neither can we pretend to be ignorant how much it is, in fact, neglected, by those especially who belong to the higher ranks of society. Besides, even the Bible itself does not supersede other teaching; because, from the nature of the sacred writings, its truth and precepts are generally delivered in a narrative, or at least an unconnected form, so that both their relation to one another, and their individual application, may often remain unperceived.

From these and other impediments, added to the natural distaste for religious inquiry, the Christian too often grows up with very little clear or profitable knowledge of the religion to which he nominally belongs, and for which he has, perhaps, a sincere, though ignorant, respect. But it cannot be expected that so vague an idea of the nature or obligations of Christianity, should enable him to oppose the corruption by which he is betrayed, and the temptations by which he is surrounded. It is too probable that he may fall into a course of carelessness or sinfulness, which may lead him to wish revelation untrue, the preparatory step to believing that it is untrue, and consequently to neglecting it altogether. At all events he is in a vacillating, uncertain state, extremely unsatisfactory to his own mind whenever he reflects, extremely unsatisfactory to all those who reflect for him, and consider the New Testament as a definite revelation of the will of God, and

baptism as a covenant which a man must ratify, if he is to be profited by it, and which he cannot ratify without understanding its conditions.

The state of ignorance, here presumed to be so common, accounts for the effect produced, and the benefits conferred, by such treatises as Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted," and other writings of a similar stamp. They suppose the reader to be what he so frequently is, uninformed; his taking up the book generally implies that he is inquiring; and he there finds the Gospel explained and applied to his own case in a manner almost as new and unexpected, as if the revelation were made to him for the first time.

These considerations have induced me to put the following Sermons into a more connected series than is usual in similar

publications. I have attempted to unite somewhat of the regularity of an essay, with the familiar exhortations which the pulpit requires: not pretending to dwell fully on the whole of the Christian revelation, but to bring into prominent view that which especially pertains to us, as called by the Gospel, and dedicated to Christ in baptism, viz. the incarnation of our Lord, the necessity of his atonement, and of our personal acceptance of the means of salvation which he offers. It is, therefore, intended, that the first ten Sermons should be read in the order in which they occur. In the last half of the volume I have endeavoured to illustrate the peculiar and essential graces of the Christian character, as set forth by their divine Author. My leading object has been to lay before the scholars educated at Eton, to whom most of the sermons were originally addressed, a succinct view of the religion which they profess both as a rule of faith and practice: led

as I am by every feeling, both personal and social, to desire that they may be permanently impressed with the infinite importance of cordially embracing that holy religion which affords them the best chance of earthly happiness, and which alone gives them a right to look forward to an eternal world with cheerful hope, instead of gloomy apprehension. That the volume may be found, in some degree, to answer its intended purpose, is the object of my earnest prayer on quitting a place with which I have been long and happily connected, and in the prosperity of which I must always feel an affectionate and grateful interest.

MAPLEDURHAM,

Jan. 10, 1821.

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S E R M O N S,

&c.

SERMON I.

THE INCARNATION.

JOHN, I. 14.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

MANY persons in all classes run through this life with few reflections on its nature, end, and consequences. Pleasure, business, labour, cares, so quickly succeed one another, and so fully occupy their time and thoughts, that they seem to have little leisure for the inquiry—What am I? how came I here? what shall I be hereafter? So they either neglect this question entirely, or acquiesce in any opinions that

may suit their habits, or prevail among their friends.

This is the case too often, notwithstanding the warning voice of Revelation. What then might have been expected, without that warning voice? without those calls from above which experience shows to be no less necessary to awaken men to a sense of their present condition, than to acquaint them with the means of their recovery?

Even if we suppose the rare case of persons brought to reflect upon the present and the future, with no other direction than the light of reason or experience, the moral appearance of the world would present, at first sight, a very perplexing scene. They would see the most different methods of life, the most opposite courses of conduct pursued. They would see mankind thoughtlessly following "the devices and desires of their own hearts:" and these leading them in no one uniform direction, but varying in every individual. They would find some revelling in sensuality: others wasting life in mean and unprofitable pursuits: others eagerly amassing wealth: others yielding to a nobler infirmity, and seeking fame or honours; but still looking

no further than this world. And the consequences of these different lines of action, however unsatisfactory, would not appear so remarkable or immediate as to influence decidedly a man's choice, in opposition to any strong bias in his natural constitution.

Not only the characters of mankind, but the nature of the world, might contribute to perplex such an inquirer. It contains a great deal of happiness and a great deal of misery. There is too much comfort universally diffused, to allow the supposition that the Creator intended his creatures to be miserable; and, at the same time, there is much more sorrow, privation, pain, and labour, than are consistent with a state of enjoyment. Neither in the distribution of this world's truest advantages, health, competency, domestic happiness, is it possible to trace any certain rule; no one, on surveying mankind, can describe the course of conduct which shall infallibly lead to actual enjoyment, or secure a man from disquietude, distress, or privation.

If the person who was thus contemplating the labyrinth in which he found himself placed, were able to carry back his retrospect to former ages, or to extend his

view through various countries, the prospect would be no less confused. He would perceive that almost every possible opinion, however contradictory or improbable, has been at different times received concerning the nature of this world, the counsels of its Author, and the duties of man in morals and religion. And we could not reasonably wonder if such inquiries terminated in the old and sceptical conclusion, *the thing which hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done. For all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*¹.

This being the appearance of the world, and these the circumstances in which we are placed, that which we require is abundantly evident. We require something that may awaken the attention, and force it to the subject of paramount importance:

¹ Eccles. i. 9. 2 Pet. iii. 4.

Throughout the volume, when the words of Scripture are introduced only by way of application, they are indicated by the use of italics: but when they are brought forward for the purpose of proof, a reference is commonly added; and it will be materially profitable, if all readers to whom the Bible is not very familiar, will consult the original.

We require that which may not only turn the mind to religion as a matter of speculation, but may fix it on religion as a governing principle. We require that which may restrain the passions of the sensual man; may direct the pursuits of the idle and unprofitable; may rouse the thoughtless from their lethargy; may console the cares of the indigent; may open a refuge to the distressed and sorrowful; and may confirm the reflections of the thoughtful few who might look beyond the present, and discern that the soul of man has capacities which ought not to be limited by low, and degrading, and perishing concerns. Mankind, in short, require what may enlighten their ignorance and arrest their career of depravity: they need a clue to guide them through the perplexities of their condition; a support on which they may lean with security; a counsellor on whom they may confidently depend.

And this, which is universally needed, and only needed the more because the want is too rarely felt, the GOSPEL is designed and able to supply. It clears up all the difficulties, disperses all the doubts, which hang over our state on earth. It

acquaints us that the condition of mankind, that very condition of ignorance and sinfulness which occasions our perplexity, excited the compassion of their heavenly Father; and that He, who to aid our conceptions, is revealed to us as his *only begotten Son*, he who had been *in the beginning with God, and was God*, regarded their state, and undertook their salvation. *All things were delivered unto him of his Father. He was made flesh; became man; and dwelt among us*². This is a mystery indeed; but not a mystery from which we should turn away our thoughts as too high for us: rather one to which we should bend the whole powers and faculties of our mind, that we may be able rightly to apprehend and value it.

This our world, indeed, as we learn throughout the New Testament, has been the peculiar care of *the Word*, or Son of God. By him it was created; and *without him was not any thing made that was made*³. He pitied from the beginning the state of its inhabitants, who had fallen from their

² John, i. 2, &c. Matt. ii. 27.

³ John, i. 3. Eph. iii. 9. Col. i. 16, 17. Heb. i. 2.

duty and allegiance; he contrived the means of delivering from the dreadful consequences of ignorance of God, or of rebellion against God, *as many as receive him, and believe in his name*⁵. This plan of redemption was at work from the day of Adam's fall. The dawn of mercy was approaching, long before it was perceived by the benighted eyes of the heathen world: just as the sun is performing his course, and preparing to visit us, and cheer us with his light, and refresh us with his genial warmth, though his rays are not visible to us above the horizon. So the Apostle declares: *the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not*⁶. How does this wonderful truth exalt the goodness of our Lord and Saviour, who was watchful over those whom he had engaged to redeem, whom he had taken as it were under his protection, even at a time when they were alike insensible, and unworthy, of his care! How, moreover, does it demonstrate, beyond all arguments, the value

⁵ John, ii. 12.

⁶ John, i. 5—10.

of the soul, that so much was undertaken and performed to save it from misery and ruin!

In the fulness of time he appeared "in the likeness of man." *He came unto his own*: how full of kindness and condescension is that term! *but his own received him not*: *but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God*⁷. This he effects as Saviour, who *takes away the sins of the world*; as Mediator between God and man; as *Advocate with the Father, who maketh intercession for us*⁸. What a consolation to those who are conscious of their frailty, who labour under a sense of their infirmities, and are heavy laden with the burden of their sinfulness!

He is *the light of the world*. *Whoever followeth him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*⁹. Through him we derive all the knowledge which we possess of things in heaven and things on earth. Through him we are acquainted with our future responsibility; with the immortality of our souls, the resurrection

⁷ John, i. 11.

⁸ John, i. 29. 1 John, ii. 1. Heb. vii. 25.

⁹ John, viii. 12.

of our bodies. Through him we believe in the TRIUNE GOD; declared, rather than explained to our human comprehensions as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: but perfectly intelligible to our faith in their relation to man as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; and demanding our liveliest gratitude, as interested in our salvation: the Father *so loving the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*¹; the Son consenting to lay aside the glory in which he had dwelt with the Father before all worlds, and to take upon him our nature, and satisfy the demands of infinite justice; and the Holy Spirit inclining the perverse minds of men to listen to the message from above, and accept the offer of mercy, and *walk in this world by faith, and not by sight.*

These are truths which at once clear up the uncertainties of our condition, and exalt the real dignity of man, the object of Almighty interest and protection. Has, then, He, who *was in the beginning with God, and who was God*, called the dwellers

¹ John, iii. 16.

in this transitory world *his own*? has he cared for them, has he contrived, has he effected a redemption for them? Lift up your heads, ye that are cast down by misfortune, or labouring with hopeless poverty: ye too that *are afflicted, and mourn, and weep*; and deem yourselves *smitten of God, or who tremble at his word*; ye are not forgotten or neglected of your Maker, ye are not disregarded, ye need not be dismayed: He who is called *Wonderful, on whose shoulder rests the government of this world, who was the counsellor of God in the creation*², regards you, watches over you, has *reconciled you to the Father*³, and calls on you to receive him as your Saviour and your Lord. For *the Word*, says the Apostle, *was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*⁴. Happy those,

² Isai. ix. 6.

³ 2 Cor. ii. 2.

⁴ The Jews, in their synagogues, by the reading of the paraphrase, or interpretation of the Hebrew text in the Chaldean language, were constantly taught that the *Word of God* was the same with God, and that by that Word all things were made, which undoubtedly was the cause why St. John delivered so great a mystery in so

you will think, who did thus behold him. But not less *blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed*⁴.

Indeed, if we consider attentively, we shall perceive that the glory of the Son of God was not confined to the age in which he appeared, or the persons *among whom he dwelt*: it has never been obscured, or ceased to shine; and is as evident now, to those who search for it, as it was to those who first were led by its brightness to forsake all, and follow Him who promised them *treasure in heaven*.

It was *beheld* by St. John, when the diseased were restored to health, and the dead to life; when *the winds and the sea obeyed* their Creator; when the Father gave his testimony, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*⁵; when, as he *prayed*, he was *transfigured before them*; the *fashion of his countenance was altered, and his*

few words, as speaking unto them who, at the first apprehension, understood him. To the Hellenists of the same age, the term *Λόγος* was equally familiar, as the second principle of the Platonic philosophy.—Pearson on the Creed, p. 117. Bryant on Philo, p. 18.

⁴ John, xx. 29.

⁵ Matt. iii. 17.

*raiment was white and glistening*⁶: above all, when the multitudes *were astonished at his doctrine*, and broke out into the confession, *Never man spake like this man*⁷. He who had been present at such scenes, might well assert, in a recollection which could never lose its original freshness, **WE BEHELD his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**

But was that glory seen less conspicuously, when an assembly of several thousands of those very persons who not two months before had contrived and consented to his death, struck by the power which he had communicated to his Apostles, and touched by the grace with which their preaching was accompanied, exclaimed with one accord, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* and received *baptism for the remission of sins in the name of that same Jesus whom they had crucified, but whom God had made both Lord and Christ*⁸.

Or was it less evidently seen, when Saul, the same man who, under the dominion of prejudice and error, had thought

⁶ Luke, ix. 29. Matt. xvii. 2. ⁷ John, vii. 46.

⁸ See Acts, xi. 22, &c.

that he *did God service* when he trampled under foot the followers of Jesus, humbly turned towards the object of his former hatred and violence, and inquired, *Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do⁹?* and spent a long and active life in converting the heathen to a way which they had not known, and in persuading his countrymen to turn from the preparatory discipline of the Mosaic law to the spiritual hopes and promises of the Gospel.

It was indeed necessary that a sensible evidence of divine power should impress conviction upon those who could not receive any other proof, and whose personal conviction was essential to the promulgation of the Gospel. But the great Head of the church has provided that no age should be without a sufficient evidence of his truth. And that same evidence, which after our Lord's ascension must have wrought most effectually even with those who had other proofs before them, is still open to us in all its original force. For surely I am justified in asserting that the *grace and truth* which accompanied the revelation of Jesus Christ,

⁹ Acts, xviii. 6.

were not more clearly *beheld* in the miracles which attested his divinity, than in the effects which that revelation produced upon the hearts of those whom it called from *darkness unto light, from the power of Satan unto God*¹: when multitudes who had been brought up in the worship of idols, with all its attendant superstition and depravity, *turned from these vanities to serve the living God*²: when those who had been filled with iniquity, and had *given themselves over to work all uncleanness with greediness*³, became temperate and holy and just and pure, in a degree which the world had not before seen, looking for a future recompense of their present mortification and self-denial. This is the real glory of the Gospel; this is the *grace and truth* which illustrated the advent of our blessed Lord; and this is a testimony which all ages since have beheld, in a more or less ample measure, which we ourselves behold at this day. Yes, my brethren, we too behold it in whatever is most valuable at home or in society; in whatever most adorns personal character; or elevates civil intercourse; in whatever

¹ Acts, xxvi. 18.² Acts, xiv. 16.³ Eph. iv. 19.

exalts honest poverty, or sheds the brightest lustre upon rank or talent; in whatever sanctifies temporal prosperity; in whatever softens the rigour of adversity: in all this we behold the *grace and truth* of the Son of God.

When the wicked, *being warned to flee from the wrath to come, turn away from the wickedness that they have committed, and do that which is lawful and right*; we see the grace of Him *who is mighty to save*, enabling them to conquer their corrupt affections, to abandon their inveterate habits, and, with a sense of their former sinfulness always before their eyes, still to rejoice in the promise of the *everlasting covenant*, by which Christ is made to them *wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*⁴.

When we see the true and consistent Christian walking steadfastly in the fear of God, finding in his word a guide through every difficulty, a support in every distress, a rule in every temptation; and thus maintaining in his domestic and social relations integrity, purity, charity, humility; do we

⁴ 1 Cor. i. 30.

not *behold* the Gospel triumphing over nature, the power of the Holy Spirit subduing the lusts of the flesh? When we find the great man humble in his exalted station, knowing that it is God who *hath made him to differ* from others; the poor man elevated above his indigence, knowing that *God careth for him*; the rich man using his wealth as a talent lent him, because he must *give account of his stewardship*; the afflicted rejoicing in his sufferings, because he trusts that his *light affliction which is but for a moment, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*⁵; the dying man breathing his last in peace, because *to die, and to be with Christ, is far better*⁶ than to linger in a world of trial: in all this daily influence and effect of the Gospel, this fruit which it is perpetually bearing, do we not *behold* at once the *grace and truth* of Christ?—His *truth*, inasmuch as he promised to *be with his disciples alway, even to the end of the world*⁷; and he is with them, *establishes, strengthens, settles them*⁸; and his *grace*, which puts so new a

⁵ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

⁶ Phil. i. 23.

⁷ Matt. xxviii. 20.

⁸ 1 Pet. v. 10.

heart and so right a spirit in men⁹, and enables them to rise superior to poverty or riches, to affliction or prosperity, to reproach or praise; sanctifying every condition, and bringing *the thoughts* of the voluptuous, of the proud, of the discontented, of the covetous, *into captivity to the obedience of Christ*¹.

This, blessed Lord, is the noblest triumph of thy glory! Grant that it may appear more and more, and rouse the heart of all to seek the *prize of their high calling!* that more may daily be convinced, by the bright example of thy disciples, that thou art the *true light of the world, the Sun of righteousness*; and may thus be turned towards thee, the source of all pardon, “the giver of all goodness, the fountain of all wisdom;” and prove, by happy experience, that thy Gospel is *the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*².

⁹ See Ezek. xviii. 31.

¹ 2 Cor. x. 5.

² Rom. i. 16.

SERMON II.

WORLD LOST BY SIN.

—◆—

LUKE, xix. 10.

*The Son of Man is come to seek and to save
that which was lost.*

THERE are several points in Revelation which agree with, and therefore corroborate, the conclusions of our natural reason. The being and unity of God; the immortality of the soul; a state of future retribution: these and many other points human reason has either arrived at with some degree of certainty, or at least shown to be antecedently probable.

But there are sundry other points growing out of these, and indeed of no less serious import to man as an individual, on which his own reason can give him no satisfaction; and on which, without the interference of revelation, he must have remained for ever at a loss. One of the most ob-

vious of these, is the light in which God views the acknowledged transgressions of mankind. We look around us, and see *the world*, taken as a whole, *lying in wickedness*¹: we scrutinize ourselves, and find corruption undermining all our faculties, and striving for the possession of our souls:—how, then, will God, whom both reason and revelation concur in describing as a Being infinitely holy, and just, and pure, how will he view this state of things? this habitual rebellion against his law, the law of righteousness? Will he avenge it? Will he pardon it? And if he will, on what conditions?

Those who neglect or disdain the light of Scripture, must consider for themselves how they can be satisfied on these vital questions. It must be allowed that they are seriously important; their solution not easy or obvious; and that revelation alone can enable us to decide upon them with that degree of certainty, according to which a reasonable man could be content to live or die.

These questions are virtually answered

¹ 1 John, v. 19.

in the text; which declares with what object *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*, as shown in my former discourse on these words. We are here assured that his object in taking our nature upon him was a most merciful object; that he came, in pity, *to seek and to save that which was lost.*

To seek and to save that which was lost! Was, then, the state of man, before Christ came into the world, a *lost* state? And is that the state of all who are without Christ? If so, how dreadfully are those mistaken, who are careless and indifferent whether they have any hope through him, or no!

We, my brethren, have the Scriptures to guide us, and I trust that we shall never look to any other guide in matters that relate to God; that we shall never give heed to our own belief or notions when those notions are contrary to his word; never indulge in any vain expectations, in opposition to the plain meaning of Scripture.

Let us inquire, then, what the Scripture says, that may agree with the declaration of our Lord when he affirms that he came *to seek and to save that which was lost.*

One of the first things related in the Bible, is how Adam sinned, by disobeying the commands of God; and how God, in consequence, inflicted a curse upon him and his posterity². St. Paul speaks of this more fully, where he explains, how *by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; how by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; and by one man's disobedience many were made sinners*. Elsewhere he says, *in Adam all died*³.

For sin, once admitted into the human heart, and showing itself in the actions, alienated man from God, and God from man. And surely this is a *lost* state, when the creature is estranged from the Creator; when one who is weak and mortal is deserted by Him who is all-powerful and eternal. We call the child a lost child, who is banished from home and rejected by a justly-offended parent. And this is the situation of mankind, while *given over* by God *to a reprobate mind, because they did not like to retain him in their knowledge*⁴.

² Genesis, iii.

³ Rom. v. 17, &c. 1 Cor. xv. 22. 2 Cor. v. 14.

⁴ Rom. i. 28.

This accounts for the way in which the world is spoken of in the Gospel; which is a way that may well make us all tremble, if we have no reasonable hope that we have obtained to ourselves, through faith, an interest in the sacrifice offered for us by the great Redeemer.

For, first, the state from which he delivered mankind is called a state of spiritual darkness. He says himself, *I am come, a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in DARKNESS*⁵. Without his light, therefore, all was, and would have continued darkness.

It was a state of condemnation. For he proceeds to say, *I came not to judge the world, but to SAVE the world*⁶. What follows, but that before this deliverance the world was condemned?

It was a state in which all were perishing. *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not PERISH, but have everlasting life*⁷. What follows, but that without him mankind were perishing, and would have perished?

⁵ John, xii. 46.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John, iii. 16.

It was, again, a state of wrath. St. Paul reminds the Ephesians⁸, that they had been *dead in trespasses and sins, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*. Their deliverer, he adds, from this state was Christ, by whose "*grace they were saved.*"

Lastly, it was a state in which mankind were at enmity with their Maker, and enslaved under the power and dominion of the evil spirit; of him who had first introduced sin into the world, and led the human race into rebellion against their Creator, and who is described by our Saviour himself as the *prince of this world*; and by St. Paul as *the god of this world, who had blinded the hearts of the people*⁹.

From this slavery Christ opened the first means of escape. It was he who from the beginning was foretold as the *seed of the woman* who should *bruise the serpent's head*¹. It was he who first pointed out the *accomplishment* of that prophecy, when he exclaimed, *I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven*². And afterwards more clearly:

⁸ Eph. xi. 1, 2.

⁹ John, xii. 31. xiv. 3. 1 Cor. iv. 4.

¹ Gen. iii.

² Luke, x. 17.

*Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out*³. Accordingly, St. Paul exhorts the Colossians to give thanks unto the Father, who had delivered them from the power of darkness, and translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son⁴. From the power of darkness, by which they had been before subdued, into the kingdom of the Son of God, established on the ruins of the empire of Satan.

Thus God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself—the world that “lay in darkness and the shadow of death;” the world that had been *lost*; the world that was *perishing*: the world that was lying under the *wrath of God*; the world that was alienated from God and holiness, and reduced under the dominion of the evil one.—To this world the glad tidings of *reconciliation* were opened in the Gospel.

II. Such, then, is the account given in Scripture of that world, out of which the Son of Man came *to seek and to save* as many as should receive him, and become his faithful and obedient disciples. Let us now consider what evidence have we that such *was* the state of mankind? Are there

³ John, xii. 31.

⁴ Col. i. 13.

any remains, any traces of it? is any correspondence with this character to be found in the human heart? Alas! we need not go back to the lives of the ancient heathens, as described by St. Paul in his first chapter to the Romans, nor to those countries which the light of the Gospel has never yet reached;—we have only to look around us, in order to witness a state of spiritual darkness, to see the dominion of Satan, or enmity against God; nay, we have only to look within, and study the bias, the natural bias, of our own hearts.—Are they in a state of obedience to God? If happily they are, is it a service to which they are naturally disposed? Is it a willing obedience—a cheerful devotion of the faculties of the soul to its great Author; and not a compulsory homage, extorted by fear, and offered with scruple and reluctance?

Willing obedience and prompt devotion to the commands of God, is not the work of nature but of grace; is not the state in which the Gospel finds the human heart, but that to which it gradually brings it, through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. Experience too plainly proves how much there is in the will and the affec-

tions of every man to show that he needs a Redeemer's sacrifice to reconcile him to his God.

1. There are several plain and easy tests by which this may be tried. For example : God has hallowed, and set apart for his own peculiar service, one day in seven :— Are we naturally inclined to observe that day, and *keep it holy* ; or do we grudge that so much time should be taken from our own concerns, from our regular amusements and pursuits, from our business and the worldly interests of our family ? Yet, if we loved God, we should love the day allotted to his service, we should rejoice in the opportunity thus given of retiring from the fatiguing bustle of the world, and composing ourselves in prayer and sacred meditation.

2. Again, if there were any such thing as a natural disposition towards the love and fear of God, would it be possible that men, and even children, should profane his name, and use it lightly, as we hear them at every turn, and on every trivial occasion ? Would they not be filled with too profound a reverence to call upon him thoughtlessly and carelessly ? and too sincerely impressed

with love, either to practise profaneness themselves, or to tolerate it in others? The very necessity for such a commandment as not to take the name of God in vain; and more, much more, the common violation of that commandment, sometimes in blasphemous cursing and sometimes in thoughtless ejaculations, would be enough to prove that man is naturally at enmity with God.

3. Again, the inclination of the heart may be tried in another way. What is the effect of that natural affection, which attaches us to any of our fellow-creatures? Is not its first result, that we seek to learn their wishes, and to comply with them? If then we naturally love our Maker, we shall try to discover his will, that we may at least not disobey him through ignorance. Concerning this will he has not left us at a loss—he has made a clear revelation of what he loves, and chooses, and demands. The book that contains that revelation is easily obtained, and easily understood.—But are all eyes eager to read it, and all ears anxious to listen to it? On the contrary, how few can say with the Psalmist, *Lord, what love have I unto thy law! all day long is my study in it!* How

few, comparatively, consult the Scriptures, in order to draw from them a rule of life, an infallible rule of right and wrong! How few examine their own practice, according to the rules there given, and compare their characters with the pattern there set up of the character which ought to distinguish all Christians, and must distinguish all who have any well-founded expectation of immortal glory. On the contrary, the Bible is often the last thing a man is disposed to read, the last thing he considers himself obliged to read; and, strange to say, the truths which it contains, and by which (whether he study them or no) he must one day be judged, are the last truths of which he is ashamed to be ignorant. Men are contented to live as others live, and practise what others practise: which might be safe and well, if all in the human heart were still *very good*, as it was once pronounced to be by its Creator; or if men still retained that divine image, according to which they were first formed⁵; but which, instead of being safe, is the broad way that leadeth to destruction, if, as the

⁵ Genesis, i. 26.

Apostle assures us, *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*; if, as the Prophet declares, *all we like sheep have gone astray*; if, as Christ asserts, *from out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, murders, and a fearful list of heinous crimes*⁶.

4. Once more: close our ears as we may, the great truth still reaches them, that all sin, all impurity whatever, every transgression of God's holy laws, though glossed over, perhaps, by custom and pardoned in the world, is nevertheless abominable in the sight of God—is a neglect of his revealed will—and a defiance of his righteous threats. Is it therefore hateful to us, because it is hateful to our God? True, indeed, it would be, if we really loved our Almighty Father: and truly also may we be said to love him, if it be a sign of love, or gratitude, or obedience, to establish worldly maxims and laws of honour in opposition to his clear commands; and, under shelter of such sanctions, to practise the very vices which he forbids, to exte-

⁶ Rom. iii. 23. Isaiah, liii. 6. Matt. xv. 19.

nuate their criminality, and even to ridicule the opposite virtues.

My brethren, that all these characters of a state of enmity against God, that all these proofs of a lost state, are to be seen in you, I would neither be so rash as to assert, nor so uncandid as to suppose. There are many to whom the observance of the sabbath is not matter of form or of wearisome burden, but of delightful service in which the heart is gladly engaged; many who treat the name and contemplate the attributes of God with awful reverence; many who diligently seek to discover his will in the book where it is revealed, and dread nothing so much as wilfully to offend him. But these are not the persons who will contradict the Scripture when it declares that the natural state of man is a state lost in darkness and in error; or who will be surprised at the preacher, when he speaks of the natural heart as being at enmity with God. No; if it were necessary to prove these points, I should appeal with the surest confidence to those very persons whose lives and characters show the fewest signs of their truth; whose sincere piety, whose purity of conduct bears

witness, that whatever the state of others may be, they at least have sought reconciliation through the great atonement, and broken down, through grace, the partition-wall of sin which separated them from their God. Ask them, whoever doubts, ask them, and they will tell you, that though their conduct may seem to disprove the state of spiritual blindness, the alienation from God of which we speak, their heart bears too faithful witness to it, and even supplies them still with daily evidence of its reality. They will tell you, that the love of God's holy day, that a taste for holy things, is not a natural, but an acquired taste; that the reason why the profanation of God's majesty is shocking to them, is because by frequent meditation they have attained a profound sense of his infinite greatness, and an habitual dread of offending him; that to search the Scripture has become pleasing to them, because they are convinced that they ought to live by it, and must be judged out of it; and that, so far from sin being naturally hateful or virtue lovely in their eyes, they feel every day the absolute necessity of mortifying the one and encouraging the other, by

all the aids which God's mercy has put into their hands; by constantly applying to "the means of grace," and constantly setting before their minds "the hope of glory."

If they answered otherwise, they would be happier than St. Paul himself, who declared that the spirit and the flesh rose in opposition to one another; that *he found a law within, that when he would do good, evil was present with him; and that he was forced to keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, lest, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway*⁷.

This, then, is the natural state of the world; and not only of the heathen or ancient world, but of that in which our lot has been appointed us; and what is still more important, of the world within ourselves: the natural state of every heart is that of disinclination to the sincere love and holy fear and entire service of God; and being so, is at enmity with him. He must have a mind impenetrably steeled against the terrors of the Lord, who can contemplate such a state without a strong

⁷ Gal. v. 17. Rom. vii. 19, &c. 1 Cor. ix. 27.

feeling of awe and pity: without awe for himself, encompassed as he is with so much sin and frailty; and without pity for those of his fellow-creatures whose ignorance, or carelessness, or hardness of heart, leaves them insensible of their danger, and thoughtless how to *escape from the body of this death*, not knowing, or not caring for the condition they are in, while subject to the wrath of God, and still liable to the punishment of unforsaken, unforgiven sin. “Who but must lament, must bitterly lament, the melancholy case, that God may look through a whole world of intelligent creatures, and find every breast, till he open, shut against him; all agreeing to exclude their rightful and most gracious Lord, and rather choosing to live desolate without him⁸?”

In mercy to this unhappy state, the Son of Man came into the world *to seek and to save that which was lost*: came to seek those who were lying in ignorance or neglect of their Creator, of their Creator's will, and of their own immortal destiny; and *to save* them, to save them from

⁸ Howe, “Living Temple.”

the eternal consequences of their corrupt nature, he was contented to suffer death, even the death of the cross.

Yes, my brethren, *God so loved the world*, even the corrupt and sinful world, *that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*⁹. *God so loved the world. Herein indeed was love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*¹. *Not that we loved God*: I have shown from Scripture and from experience, that it is not natural to men to love God; that though they may in speculation admire his attributes, or desire the protection of his providential care, yet none would love him, none would act faithfully, reverently, and obediently towards him, unless brought to do so by pious education, or awakened from a course of sinfulness or carelessness by alarming warnings, or in some way or other touched by divine grace, accompanying the means which we are instructed to use. This, to the last, will be a source of humiliation to the Christian. At the

⁹ John, iii. 16.

¹ 1 John, iv. 10.

same time, let it afford consolation to the young and feeble, to all who may find the first entrance of religion difficult: they need not be discouraged, as if *some strange thing had happened to them*; the same happens to all, who seek in earnest to do the will of God. It makes a part and a proof of that lost state which awakened the pity of the Son of Man, when he came to make atonement for sin; it is the necessary consequence of that alienation from God which he came to remove: let them go on, and by his grace they shall prosper; let them believe in him, and they shall not perish: nay more, shall become his peculiar people, being brought by the Holy Spirit to love, and fear, and know, and obey him. But for those who neglect, or despise, or abuse this offer of salvation, what is to be said, but that *their sin remaineth*²? They are still *lost*, while they refuse to come to Him who offers to save them; they are still in a state of *enmity*, while they neglect the only way of reconciliation: and in that state, as enemies, they must meet their God in judgment.

² John, ix. 41.

May He, "who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven," give us grace to *seek the Lord while he may be found, to call upon him while he is near! Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; lest he should declare of you as he did of the Israelites in the wilderness, that you shall not enter into his rest*³.

³ Psalm xcvi.

SERMON III.

CHRIST, THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD.

LUKE, XIX. 10.

The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

I POINTED out, in my former discourse on this text, what was the object of our Lord in taking our nature upon him, and appearing in the world as man. I showed that he came to save mankind, who had fallen by Adam's transgression,—to reconcile a guilty race to their offended Maker. And, in particular, I proved by instances in which the corruption of the natural heart is too plainly seen, how needful such a Mediator is to bring us to the knowledge, and love, and favour of our Almighty Father.

But we are not to suppose, that having accomplished what he came to do, he left the world, and regards it no more.

That which he declares to have been his object in coming, *to seek and to save that which was lost*, is still and always his object. His appearance was not like the star which preceded his birth, which shone for a single season till its office had been fulfilled, and then disappeared for ever : it was rather like the sun, which, from the time that God gave it a place in the heavens, has never ceased to shine, and cheer us with its light, and refresh us with its genial warmth. Such is Jesus Christ : still *the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the Christian world*¹. He still *seeks* those, who are in bondage to Satan ; still *saves* them from sin, and from the consequence of sin, eternal condemnation.

But before I attempt to prove this, it is necessary to premise, that the immediate agent, through which Christ influences the soul, is the Holy Spirit. He is that COMFORTER, promised by our Lord, and *sent from the Father*², to guide the disciples, and *teach them all things*. His presence is declared to be so valuable and important, as to recompense the Apostles even for the

¹ John, i. 9.

² John, xv. 26.

departure of their blessed Lord and Master. *It is expedient for you, said he, that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you*³. *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you*⁴. The extraordinary gifts which accompanied and attested the first descent of this Holy Person upon the Apostles, are no longer needed, and therefore no longer bestowed: but the operation of the same Spirit to *renew the heart in righteousness and true holiness, to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment*⁵, is always needed, and perpetually employed, and alone effectual. We bring our children to baptism; we exhort those who have reached maturer years to study the Bible, to listen to the word of God preached and explained, and to *continue instant in prayer*:

³ John, xvi. 7.

⁴ John, xiv. 16.

⁵ John, xvi. 8.

but this is from a conviction that through these means the Spirit acts; not from a vain confidence in their unassisted efficacy. And in attempting to explain the manner in which Christ still *seeks* those whom he may *save*, we do not pretend to lay down any regular or universal rule. This our Lord himself forbids, who compares the mode in which the Holy Ghost regenerates the soul, to the inscrutable agency of the winds of heaven.

I. 1. But in enumerating the usual methods in which Christ employs the influence of the Spirit, I would instance, first, the rite of baptism; that merciful ordinance, by which he delivers his infant disciples from the fatal effects of their first parents' sin. Shall we think this a slight blessing? Look at the child, thickly set with evil passions, closely surrounded by evil examples; but still capable of being led to the knowledge of God, and the practice of holiness; able to receive a disposition the very reverse of that which would naturally grow up in its heart. How graciously does he say of these, *Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not*: suffer them to come, and to learn the nature of the life they have

entered upon, and their condition in it; to be instructed in their duty towards God and man, and to receive grace to practise it. May all you, who are parents, strive to cooperate with your Lord in this act of mercy!—you present your children to him in their infancy; but do not think this sufficient, unless you teach them as they grow up, what it is to be made children of God, members of Christ's kingdom on earth, and heirs of his eternal glory in heaven: teach them what it is to possess this inestimable privilege, how dreadful to forfeit it; and when *light is come into the world, to love darkness rather than light*⁶: to remain the slaves of sin here, and incur its awful punishment hereafter.

2. He *seeks*, secondly, by his ministers. These he has provided, to be *stewards of his mysteries*, wherever his doctrine is spread; and though some may have proved unfaithful to their trust, he has never allowed them to fail altogether, from the day when he first commissioned the Apostles to *go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature*⁷. These he or-

⁶ See John, iii. 19.

⁷ Mark, xxi. 15.

dains to be instruments of his awakening and preserving grace; that they may keep those once brought into his fold, to trust and obey *the good Shepherd*; that they may recover those who have gone astray; and that they may make more widely known what he has done to bring mankind to the knowledge of their Creator, and to restore them to his favour. Let me not seem to *magnify my office* unduly, when I say that it is Christ who *seeks* by the agency of his ministers. Every minister feels, that unless he does *seek*, they can do nothing. They cannot but learn this, from the different way in which the same doctrines and even the same words affect different hearers. While some, perhaps, resist the things that are spoken, and others neglect them; others receive them *in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit an hundred fold*⁸. So constantly are we reminded, that though one may *plant*, and another *water*, Christ alone *giveth the increase*⁹. O may he give that increase here! that *the eyes of your understandings being enlightened,*

⁸ See the parable of the sower, Luke, viii.

⁹ 1 Cor. iii. 6.

*ye may know what is the hope of his calling; and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance*¹.

3. Christ *seeks*, thirdly, by his Scriptures; that inestimable treasure which he directed his Apostles to leave for future ages, that his *way may be known upon earth*, his *saving health unto all nations*. The mode in which these act, or rather in which the Holy Spirit acts through them, may be illustrated by the history to which the words of the text belong.

Zaccheus, a principal person among the collectors of the revenue, and rich, showed an earnest desire to see our Lord. This was the first dawn of grace in his soul: a desire of salvation must precede the gift of salvation. Christ, *while he was yet a great way off*, perceived the state of his heart, and declared his intention of coming to his house as his guest. The precepts which he uttered there are not related: no doubt they impressed upon Zaccheus the necessity of repentance, and of *loying up treasure in heaven*; for we find him declaring, at that instant, his resolu-

¹ Eph. i. 18.

tion to lead a new life: *Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four fold.*

That change of heart which our Lord's words effected whilst he was on earth, his Scriptures effect now. These proclaim a constant notice of the world to come; and in the midst of business or of pleasure, of riches or of worldly pursuits, insinuate a hint of this nature:—*What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?—Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed; and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear².* Happy is it, when the Holy Spirit conveys these truths to the heart, and improves them there!

Thus do the Scriptures reach those that are yet lost, whilst their eyes are blinded by the god of this world: and the desire which they have once awakened, they will satisfy.

² Mark, viii. 36. Luke, xii. 20. Rev. iii. 18.

In this manner does our blessed Lord, now that he has ascended into heaven, and is *set down for ever on the right hand of the majesty on high*, still *seek* those who would otherwise “lie in darkness and the shadow of death:” he seeks by his ordinances, by his ministers, by his Scriptures, to bring men over to him out of an evil world. Let us stop a moment to inquire of ourselves, whether he has brought us over; whether we have attended to his *seeking*: even if it is a *little flock* that follow him, we may nevertheless belong to it. You have been called by baptism; you are reminded by your minister of the nature of that call: you have the Scriptures in your hands: the grace of God has been striving, from your youth up, against the corruption of your hearts: how have you profited by these blessings? are you followers of Christ, or lovers of this present world? whom are you serving? God, or mammon? or are you wasting your life in an unprofitable attempt to serve both? Whatever be your case, if you have been faithful to Christ who sought you, persevere—if you have hitherto despised him; hearken to him now—if you have wandered from his fold; re-

turn—*return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon you, and to your God, for he will abundantly pardon*³.

II. *He will abundantly pardon.* For I proceed, in the second place, to show, that his object in seeking that which was lost, is *to save*: to save from the punishment which inevitably follows sin: to save from this, and reconcile to God, all who come to him with faith and repentance. The holiness of God renders it impossible, that sin should escape unpunished. Under the law which Moses delivered to the Jews, this was impressed upon the people by the sacrifices and sin-offerings which were daily and annually slain by the high priests, and were types of Him that was to come⁴; “who by his own oblation of himself once offered, has made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world⁵.” I have shown how he *seeks* those who should apply to him for the benefit of this atonement; and all who do apply to him, he *saves*. Without such atonement as he made upon

³ Isaiah, lv. 7.

⁴ Heb. ix and x.

⁵ Communion Service.

the cross, God could not, consistently with his justice, pardon sin: and when man had sinned, was lost, was perishing, here was the union of his justice and his mercy. Christ consented to be *wounded for our transgressions, to be bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*⁶.

Some persons indeed will talk boldly and loosely, how God is too merciful to condemn men for ever on account of their conduct in this world: how they doubt not he will pardon their indulgence of their natural passions; and that he can, if he pleases, grant *remission without shedding of blood*⁷. But, my brethren, be not misled by any such vain hopes. Do we know any thing of God's will or counsels, except what it has pleased him to reveal in Scripture? And is it not declared there, in the plainest terms, that *no man cometh unto the Father, but by him; and that there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we may be saved*⁸?

⁶ Isaiah, liii. 5, 6.

⁷ Heb. ix. 22.

⁸ John, xiv. 6. Acts, iv. 12.

What should you think of the wisdom of a man, who when his life was endangered by an inveterate disease, and a physician of undoubted skill should say to him, There is one medicine, and but one, which is a cure for your complaint,—should refuse that one medicine, and try some other of which he knew nothing; or should reply, I had rather trust to the natural strength of my constitution?

Such, or rather infinitely more foolish, is the man who trusts to the mercy of God, and neglects the only known way in which that mercy may be obtained.

There is one passage, and that a most affecting passage in our Saviour's life, which affords a striking proof of the absolute necessity of that painful sacrifice which he made on the cross for the sins of men.

On the night which preceded his suffering, we are told that he withdrew to a little distance from his disciples, and *fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt*⁵. As much as to say, If it be possible, that

⁵ Matt. xxvi. 39.

without the sacrifice which I have undertaken to offer for the sins of the world, the world may be still reconciled unto thee: if it be possible that without the actual payment of that ransom which I have consented to pay, mankind may still escape the punishment due to their transgressions—take away this cup from me.

The *cup might not pass away from him, except he drank it*⁶: therefore this was not possible: not possible, consistently with the justice and holiness of God; whose *ways are far above out of our sight*, and leave us in all humility to wonder and adore.

It was not possible that the hour should pass from him: it was possible certainly that he should relinquish his great design, and save himself from that hour: those into whose hands he was betrayed *could have had no power at all over him, except it were given them from above*;—but *for this cause came he to that hour*⁷; for this cause, namely, to save what was lost, to recover what was perishing; that by the *one sacri-*

⁶ Mark, v. 42.

⁷ John, xii. 27.

*fice for sins*⁸ thus offered, all penitent believers should inherit eternal life.

And this cup was drank, this hour submitted to, for you, my brethren! O take this truth to heart with faith, and humiliation, and repentance, and gratitude! You were of the number that he came to seek: you were among those whom he died to save. Let not the sense of it vanish from your minds, as soon as you quit the church: let it not be forgotten like a sound when the instrument has ceased; but dwell upon it, both you who have, and you who have not, made your peace with God through the Lamb that was slain.

1. You who have *not*: you who are careless of the future, who postpone repentance, who indulge in sinful habits, and fancy that God will not call you to judgment—think of the positive proof you have that God will and must punish the wickedness of mankind. Your blessed Saviour, yes, *your* Saviour, though you despise the offer of his grace, he prayed that he might avoid the bitter punishment of sin, if it were possible that you should be pardoned

⁸ Heb. x. 12.

without his suffering it. Shall he suffer for sin, and you escape? If the righteous was not excepted, *where shall the ungodly and sinner appear*⁹? He suffered, it is true, that you might escape—escape by repentance; that there might be pardon for as many as believe and obey him: but he did not suffer that you might *continue in sin*, but to *purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*¹. Implore his grace, that you may add yourselves to that number, may be enrolled among his peculiar people. Turn unto him, for he hath redeemed you. He proclaims *liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound*². O do not consent to remain the willing slaves of sin and Satan.

2. But are there not many here, who have *washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*³; who have *taken his yoke upon them* in sincerity, and trust to be *accepted in the Beloved*? Need I remind you of what you owe to your Redeemer? As I proved more particularly in

⁹ 1 Pet. iv. 18.

¹ Tit. ii. 14.

² Isaiah, lxi. 1. Compare Luke, iv. 18.

³ Rev. vii. 14.

my last discourse, *darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people*⁴, when he arose, and gave them light. Satan held this world in dominion, till Christ dispossessed him of his power. You yourselves were under wrath and condemnation, for *there is none that doeth good, no not one*: but God, for Christ's sake, *blotteth out as a cloud your sins*⁵; and invites you to approach him, not as an angry father, not as a severe judge, but as a merciful God, and a reconciled parent. He says, by the mouth of his prophet, *I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls that I have made*⁶. Why has he dealt thus tenderly with us? Why has he laid aside his anger, neither will be always wroth? Not because his nature is changed, or his attributes passed away; not because the souls which he has made have ceased to fail before him, or his justice ceased to require satisfaction for sin; but because Christ has drank the cup of suffering in our stead; has *borne the sin of many, and*

⁴ Isaiah, lx. 2.

⁵ Isaiah, xlv. 16.

⁶ Isaiah, lvii. 15.

*made intercession for the transgressors ; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*⁷.

Therefore *there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus ; who has sought and saved them from the wrath to come, and delivered them from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*⁸. Be mindful, my brethren, of this high adoption ; raise your views above this low and unsatisfactory world, and soar upwards towards *the prize of the high calling* which is before you, *an inheritance eternal in the heavens*.

⁷ Isaiah, liii. 12.

⁸ Rom. viii. 1, 21.

SERMON IV.
INVITATION OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW, XI. 28.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

I HAVE shown in two former discourses, that Jesus Christ came into the world *to seek and to save that which was lost*. I have shown that all mankind were perishing through sin and ignorance, when he came to *seek* to himself a faithful flock, a *peculiar people*; and to *save* them from the punishment due to their transgressions, by taking their guilt upon himself, and suffering its penalty.

The words of the text contain the INVITATION which he addressed to all about him, exhorting them to come to him and receive this salvation. They were particularly suited to comfort those who had been long galled by the yoke of the Pharisees, and

had been *heavy laden* under the burden of the ceremonial law. But let us not suppose that they were addressed to these alone. They are addressed to persons of all times and places, wherever the Gospel is preached. They contain the *glad tidings* which were sent *to all people*. They contain the message which the Gospel brings ; or rather which constitutes the Gospel. They do not indeed fall new and unexpected upon our ears, as upon those which first listened to them. But their import must be for ever fresh and lively in our hearts, if we hope to have any part or lot in the blessings which Christ procured. They are the words by which the Redeemer of mankind, even though he has ascended into heaven, and is set down on the right hand of God, still speaks ; still *seeks to save* : by the voice of his Scripture, by the ordinances of his religion, by the admonitions of his ministers, and above all by the operations of his grace, he still says *to all that labour and are heavy laden, Come unto me, and I will give you rest.*

I shall proceed to make some remarks,

1st, On the nature of the invitation.

2dly, On the necessity of obeying it.

3dly, On the mode it which it is to be obeyed.

I. With regard to the nature of the invitation, I observe, 1. That it conveys the words of one conscious of his authority *to seek*, and power *to save*. It is such an invitation as a man of wealth might give to the poor and needy; as a physician might offer to the sick and infirm; as he that is powerful might hold out to those who were weak and in danger.—*Come unto me*, and ye shall find relief and protection. In all these characters it is applicable to Christ, and suitable to man. We are frail, and in danger from the wrath of God: while he is the powerful one, the *mighty God, who is able to save unto the uttermost*¹. He is the true physician of the guilty soul, and will *bind up the broken-hearted and heal them of their wounds*². His is the real treasure, for in him *we have redemption offered us through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*³. And with this full consciousness of his authority and power, he utters the words, *Come unto*

¹ Isaiah, ix. 6. Heb. vii. 25.

² Isaiah, lxi. Luke, iv. 18. Jer. xxx. 17.

³ Eph. i. 7.

*me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*⁴.

2. I observe, next, that the words, *Come unto me*, demand that we should obey them, and apply to him in full conviction that he is indeed possessed of this power. He has done all that is necessary to save every one of his disciples; but their coming to him to receive this salvation, must be an act of their own will, arising from a sense of their necessity, and of his sufficiency. His one oblation of himself once offered, is a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of

⁴ It might appear, at first, that the phrase, *Come unto me*, referred to our Lord's own time alone, when his disciples were literally to *come to him*, and learn from his own mouth. But other passages show that the term is metaphorical, and signifies the application of the heart to Christ through faith. So it is used by Isaiah, prophetically, "Incline your ear, and *come unto me*." And in St. John's gospel frequently by our Lord himself: as, "I am the bread of life; he that *cometh to me*, shall never hunger, and he that believeth in me, shall never thirst." In another place, "All that the Father giveth me *shall come unto me*; and him that *cometh to me* I will in no wise cast out." Here it evidently is synonymous with the term, *believe*; and expresses personal acceptance of the offer of the Gospel.

the whole world: but it is required that all who need it, and desire it, should apply to him, in their own persons, for pardon and acceptance. The covenant made for us at our baptism, we must personally ratify; the vow then made in our name, we must each of us for ourselves redeem. If we do not stretch out, as it were, a willing hand to take the mercies which Christ offers in the Gospel, what is sufficient in him, cannot be effectual to us.

This may be explained by more than one comparison, to which the Scriptures lead us. Take the figure of the prophet Zechariah, who compares the blood of Christ to a fountain which *cleanseth from all sin*. *In that day*, he says, that future day which he foresaw in the spirit, *there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness*⁵. Now we know that there are many fountains, in different parts of the world, which in particular complaints are able to restore health to the body. Such was that of Bethesda; where at certain seasons, *whoever first step-*

⁵ Zech. xiii. 1. Compare 1 John, i. 7.

*ped in was made whole of whatever disease he had*⁶. The fountain was flowing, ready to benefit him that came; but it was necessary that he should *step in* to receive that benefit. Therefore the poor disabled creature who was lying there when our Lord approached, lamented that he had *no one, when the water was troubled, to put him into the pool*. The mystical fountain which Christ has *opened for sin*, does not confine its efficacy to the one who may *first step in*, or to a few, or to any limited number: it is sufficient for all: *whoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely*⁷: but he must *will*, and he must *come to Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*⁸.

Again, our Lord himself compares the virtue of his cross to the brazen serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness. The rebellious Israelites had been smitten by a plague of venomous serpents. Moses interceded for them, and awakened the mercy of God: but they were not immediately healed: a type was prepared of that greater deliverance which was hereafter to be re-

⁶ John, v. 4.⁷ Rev. xxii. 17.⁸ Rev. i. 5.

vealed. *The Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live*¹. *Even so was the Son of man lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*². But as, among the Israelites, only those survived who looked up and *bekeld the serpent of brass*; so must we also, with our own eyes of faith, look up to Him who was crucified for us, that we may *obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*³.

We may derive instruction, further, from the cure performed upon the poor woman who had suffered under a lingering disease for twelve years, who *when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment: for she said, If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague*⁴. Now the power which he possessed to cure this malady, he would have possessed equally, whether she had availed herself of it, or no: but that

¹ Numbers, xxi. 8.

² John, iii. 14.

³ Heb. iv. 16.

⁴ Mark, v. 25, &c.

faith on her part, which led her to press through the crowd, and touch *the hem of his garment*, that faith which her conduct showed to be so strong, was requisite, that she might profit by his healing power. Therefore our Lord replies to her with great reason, *Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole*⁵.

So likewise are we required to come to him, in faith that he has power to make our peace with God; required to apply to him by prayer, as the sole *author and finisher* of our salvation; to *learn of him* what he expects of his disciples; and to implore his grace, that the *life which we now live in the flesh*; we may *live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us*⁶.

III. But it may be asked, perhaps, Do not "all who profess and call themselves Christians" thus *come to Christ* of course? are they not all baptized in this faith?

Certainly all are pledged by baptism to believe in Christ as their Redeemer, and to obey him through life as their lawgiver. But we know too well, that in point of fact

⁵ Matt. ix. 22.

⁶ Gal. ii. 20.

all who are baptized do not believe thus, or live thus: many, too many, no more look for salvation in any proper sense of the words through Christ, than if they had no sins to be redeemed from, or he had never died to redeem them; and' no more study to live according to the precepts which he has left us in the Gospel, than if he had never appeared to make the will of God known to mankind.

When, therefore, I call upon you, my brethren, in the words of the text, to *come unto Christ*, I do not suppose that you are all in the same condition as those to whom our Saviour first addressed the words: I do not mean that all have now any thing new to undertake, any new faith to embrace: some have already by themselves, as well as by their parents, claimed Jesus Christ as their Redeemer, and are confessing him in their lives, as their righteous Lord: they have owned him here to be their *Lord and their God*, and will be owned by him hereafter as his redeemed flock, for whom his precious blood was shed.

But I admonish all to *examine themselves, whether they be in the faith*⁷: not to

⁷ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

to be satisfied that they bear the name of Christians, unless they show the character of Christians. I desire to confirm those that are steadfast in the right way; to strengthen the wavering, to awaken the thoughtless; to lead all, if it were possible, to ascertain what their actual condition is, what it would be, if *this night their soul were required of them*:—if they are able to give a reasonable account of the hope that is in them, well—they are of all men the happiest—but if not, is it a state to continue in for a moment? *Arise from the dead, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light.*

Is it, then, enough for any one to sit down in full confidence of his own powers, and argue thus with himself: True, I have hitherto led a sinful, or at best, a careless life; thinking little of my eternal prospects, and only obeying a few outward ceremonies, which have not touched my heart: but it is now time that I should obey the call of Christ in earnest, and take him for my Saviour and my guide. Is it enough, I say, for one to make this reso-

lation, and depend upon himself for strength to execute it? So far indeed it is well, when a person is brought to this sense of his dangerous condition; but the power to act upon it, the grace to repent, the faith to believe, the strength to *endure unto the end*, must be given of the Father, who *worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*⁸. You must begin, therefore, by renouncing all dependence upon yourselves, and persevere in earnest prayer, that God may pour upon you the influence of his Spirit, may *take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh; may put a new heart, and a right spirit within you*⁹. "The Holy Ghost can alone illuminate your minds, can prevail over and change your corrupt wills, can imprint the word of God and the image of Christ upon the heart, can enable you to cast out the most inveterate sins, and bring you to the saving knowledge and obedience of the Gospel"¹.

Were it otherwise, mankind would not

⁸ John, vi. 44, 66. Phil. ii. 13.

⁹ Ezek. vii. 19; xxxvi. 26.

¹ Baxter's Christian Directory.

be in that lost and perishing state, in which, as we have seen, the Gospel represents them to be; and which indeed is implied in the very necessity of their coming to a Redeemer. It was not so, when man first proceeded from the hands of his Creator; it would not have been so, if Adam had not fallen by transgression. Had he preserved his allegiance, there could have been no conflict between the flesh and the spirit; no warfare between grace in the soul of man, and a tempting world without; no backsliding, no repentance to be sought carefully with tears. Then there would have been no wrath on God's part, because no apostacy on man's; no clouds in his mind, no tempest in his breast; no tears, nor cause for any: but a continual calm and serenity of soul, enjoying all the delights that God and nature could afford².

My brethren, this is not the description of fallen man. Your hearts will too surely suggest the difference. Who among you has not felt, who does not daily feel his own infirmity; the weakness of even his best resolutions; the struggle between his

² Hopkins on the Covenants.

conscience and his inclination ; his inward desire to interpret Scripture according to his own prejudices, or his corrupt affections ; his preference of this world to spiritual pursuits. Yes : every man's own heart, would he but attend and listen to it, will echo back the declarations of Scripture ; and compel him, however unwillingly, to confess, that of himself he can do no good thing ; and that if he acts in any thing according to God's pleasure, it is not himself, but *the grace of God that is with him.*

Let those, therefore, who have experienced the power of faith in their souls, give God the glory of it : let those who attempt the conversion of sinners, do it in an humble dependence on divine grace : and above all, let those who are touched with the merciful invitation, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,* fall on their knees before their offended Father, and implore him to bring them to true repentance, to inspire them with a lively faith, and enable them to *cease from evil, and to learn to do well.*

For do not suppose, that the influence of the Spirit, which can alone convert the heart *to the things which belong unto our*

peace, is bestowed only on a chosen number. It is offered to all, it may be enjoyed by all. Our Lord, in a well-known passage, seems to anticipate this fear, and to refute this error; while he thus argues against those who might doubt the impartial goodness of God. *What man, he says, is there of you, who if his son ask bread, will give him a stone, or if he ask a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that knocketh receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened³.*

If, therefore, you believe your Saviour, you must believe, both that if you ask, it shall be given you; and also, that if you sit down, and imagine, that, supposing it to be God's purpose to save you, he will do it without any care or endeavour on your parts; you are in imminent danger of being lost for ever. Will not Christ say at the

³ Matt. vii. 7.

day of judgment, I promised that those who *sought, should find*; but ye did not seek: I promised that it should be *opened to those that knocked*; but ye refused to knock? The corn that is sown can no more ripen its produce without the agency of the sun and rain, than the word of God, without his grace, can be fruitful on your hearts; but you do not on that account hesitate to use your own exertions, or doubt whether you shall plough or sow. Yet it is far less certain, that the rain and sun will bring the fruits of the earth to maturity, than that God, who "willeth not the death of sinners," will enable them, by his Holy Spirit, to *turn from their wickedness and live*. Therefore, if any of you *lack wisdom, spiritual wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to ALL MEN liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering*⁴.

Come, therefore, unto Christ, *all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and he will give you rest*. Come unto him for pardon of the past, and for grace against the future. Whither should you go, but unto him? *He*

⁴ James, i. 5.

has the words of eternal life. And how should you come to him, but by his help? He has the treasures of all grace. May He, then, who has wrought out this salvation for you, be pleased also to work this salvation in you! May he give you such a measure of his grace, as to believe in him here on earth, and then give you such degrees of glory, as fully to enjoy his presence for ever in heaven ⁵!

⁵ See Beveridge, *Private Thoughts*, vol. i. p. 97.

SERMON. V.

INVITATION OF CHRIST, TO WHOM
ADDRESSED.

 MATTHEW, XI. 38.

Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

I DISCOURSED, last Sunday, on the nature of our Lord's invitation, *Come unto me*; and showed that he requires all who desire the benefit of his death, to apply unto him as to a salutary fountain, which "*cleanseth from all sin*:" to look up to him as the dying Israelites looked up to the brazen serpent raised by Moses in the wilderness, that they may *behold* the great atonement offered for the sins of man, and *live, and not die*. I showed also that the heart to *come* thus must be the gift of God, and sought by prayer; and that it is denied to none who do so ask; *for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.*

I am to consider, now, the second clause of this invitation, which describes those to whom it is addressed: Come unto me, ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN.

I. 1. *All that labour.* This extends to all mankind. It would especially comfort and suit the Jewish people, because they were labouring under the yoke of the Pharisees, who rendered the Mosaic law, always heavy and burdensome, doubly galling by their hypocritical formality and false interpretations. But these, like the rest of our Lord's words, are in truth suited and addressed to every age and country. For who is there who, in some sense or other, does not labour as he passes through the wilderness of this world?

Many labour through poverty; a heavy burden, which presses down the soul, and troubles it with care about many things, and makes it difficult to remember that *one thing is needful.* Others labour through riches: this may seem a strange expression to some who hear me, but it is just; as riches increase, those increase that eat them; or certainly cares increase which attend them; and the business of seeking first the

kingdom of God and his righteousness is as difficult to the very rich as the very poor. *They that will be rich*, says St. Paul, *fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*¹. It was an excellently wise prayer of Agur, *Give me neither poverty nor riches*²; and certainly if men could think so, and preserve a true Christian moderation in their desires and pursuits, that would be the happiest state; but it is a state which, in the nature of things, few can enjoy. And even if such relief from worldly cares were common, there is much which all may labour with, as they travel through this world, besides riches or poverty. Many labour with sorrow, having seen the *desire of their eyes cut off at a stroke*—sorrow which neither poverty can increase, nor riches diminish: many labour with pain, and carry about with them a lingering disease, which turns the brightest and the smoothest path into a vale of tears.

Let no one be so ungrateful or insensible to the mercies of God, as to say that

¹ Οἱ βυλόμενοι πλεῖστοι. 1 Tim. xi. 9.

² Prov. xxx. 1.

this life is miserable; it may be laborious, and yet not miserable: all I argue is, that from some cause or other it is, to all who do not abandon their duty in it, laborious: and Scripture affirms no less, when it speaks of life as a warfare, as a *pilgrimage*³. Now, a warfare is not a state of ease; neither does a pilgrim, who is exposed to fatigue and famine, and passes through lands strange and barren and full of enemies, find his journey an enjoyment: he *seeks a country*⁴ where he may know repose; but if he was already in that country, he would not be a pilgrim.

2. But that the invitation to all that labour, includes every one who hears it, will appear more plainly if we consider that, in one sense, all mankind *labour*: all labour under the weight of sin already committed, under the temptation to further sin; all labour against the corruption of their nature, creating a constant struggle between the things they are inclined to do, and the things they are commanded to do. There are too many, indeed, who think

³ 1 Tim. i. 18. vi. 12. 2 Tim. ii. 6. iv. 7.

⁴ See Hebrews, xi. 14.

little of this labour; they do what is *right in their own eyes*, and pay no heed to the task which is set before them in the world, of *working out their salvation*: and the man who, when he ought to be going forward, loiters at an inn on the road, does not feel the fatigue of his journey till night comes upon him, and he is surprised at a distance from his home. But the prudent traveller, who has once considered what he is, a sinful creature—where he is, in a transitory world—whither he is going, to eternal happiness or eternal misery—this man will feel that he contends against an evil nature within, and an evil world without; he will feel that the call which is addressed to *all that labour*, is a friendly invitation to him, for he is labouring; and he will gladly hail the promise, *I will give you rest*. It is rest he wants, and rest he is seeking for.

God forbid there should be any who believe that the call is not addressed to them, for they have no need of a Saviour or a guide. No case is more dangerous, more desperate, than this. All, whether they know it or not, are on a journey of which eternity is the goal; all, whether they confess it or not, have so much sinfulness in

their own nature, that they cannot appear before God till that nature is changed and renewed; all are encompassed by the snares of Satan, taking advantage of their weakness, and strengthened by the evil examples which surround them.

This state is described by St. Paul in words which are re-echoed by the voice of every faithful conscience. *I find, he says, a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God, after the inward man; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members*⁵.

It is to those who thus labour under a consciousness of past miscarriages and present infirmities, that our Lord addresses his invitation; and summons them to seek, through his mediation, pardon of their manifold transgressions, and grace for the future that they may contend more successfully against the power of sin. If, indeed, there are any who are so little acquainted with the law of God, or with their own

⁵ Rom. vii. 21, &c.

hearts, that they can find nothing to accuse themselves of, nothing that may be written against them in God's book, the call of Christ will not reach their hearts, though it may sound upon their ears: they will hear it as they hear the words of a language which they do not understand, and which leaves no definite impression upon their minds.

But are there any such? any who, looking at the perfect law of thought, word, and deed set before them in the Gospel, can venture to be tried by it, on their own merits, at the tribunal of God? any who, comparing their own life with the rule which has been given to direct it, and by which it will be judged hereafter, are satisfied with the review, and do not rather exclaim, in the words of our Liturgy, "We have offended against thy holy law, and there is no health in us; *enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.*"

None, I trust, are so miserably mistaken, as to be satisfied that God should deal with them according to their works. But still some may be inclined to take what they may think the more moderate

side, and to say, It is true, we have not been perfect, and none are in this sinful world; but we have been as perfect as our frail and weak nature permitted; and God, who gave us that nature and knows that frailty, will not be *severe to mark what is done amiss!* he will not surely require *where he has not strewed*, nor expect to reap *where he has not sown*.

True, my brethren; God indeed is merciful; and because he is merciful, and *willeth not that any should perish*⁶, he has provided a way by which his sinful creatures may be pardoned, and his frail creatures made perfect: he has pointed out the gate of mercy, but woe to them who refuse to go in thereat! *Christ is the door, the way of life: by him if any man enter in, he shall be saved*⁷. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him*⁸. *The wrath incurred by his sinfulness abideth on him, not being taken off by the only name given unto men wherby we may be saved.*

In the last and fearful day of account,

⁶ 2 Pet. iii. 9.

⁷ John, x. 9.

⁸ John, iii. 36.

therefore, no plea of temptation, or of corrupt nature, will avail those who, in this the season of their trial, refuse to embrace the means by which that corrupt nature may be cleared of its stain, and presented pure and blameless before the Lord⁹. Alas! how will they who *trusted in themselves that they were righteous*, and needed no Redeemer; or those who justified their imperfect obedience on the excuse of natural infirmity, and refused to come to the *fountain opened for sin and uncleanness*—refused to claim *acceptance in the Beloved*; how will they call on the *rocks to fall on them, and on the mountains to cover them*, when the *book shall be opened*, and they that are *not written in the book of life* are *cast into the lake of fire*¹! Surely they shall not be *written in the Lamb's book of life*², who, like his ungrateful countrymen, *would not come unto him that they might have life*³; who refused to hear his invitation, to *receive him as their Saviour and their Lord*, and to take from him *power to become the sons of God*⁴!

⁹ See Jude, 24.

¹ Rev. xx. 12, 15.

² Rev. xxi. 27.

³ John, v. 40.

⁴ John, i. 12.

II. It is thus that the words which call on *all that labour*, concern every man who is journeying through this evil world. But there is a further invitation to those that are *heavy laden*; which I shall consider as describing those who not only labour under the common dangers and difficulties of life, but are weighed down by the additional burden of accumulated sin. That corruption, against which all are labouring, has overcome them: perhaps poverty has led them into evil—perhaps riches have caused them to forget God—the snares of Satan have entrapped them—the lusts of the flesh have prevailed:—after some error or other they have *gone astray, and dealt wickedly*.

And does our Lord invite even these? Yes, even to these he says, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*⁵.

Consider how mercifully this is suited to the nature and the wants of man. Those

⁵ Isaiah, i. 18.

indeed who are wise in their own conceits have ventured to arraign this exercise of divine mercy, which receives those who enter upon their work at the *sixth or ninth, or even at the eleventh hour*, as graciously as those who have *borne the burden and heat of the day*⁶. Well might David exclaim, *Let me fall into the hands of God, and not into the hands of men!* God saw and pitied human infirmities; he provided a remedy. How common is it to find those who for many years have led a profligate life, denying themselves no sin which they had inclination or opportunity to commit; or, at best, have pursued a thoughtless course, without prayer, without faith, *without God in the world*; how often are these at length touched with remorse, happily awakened to reflect, and to inquire, *What shall I do to be saved?*

What, then, would a friend or a minister feel, who was called to a case like this, had he nothing but the strict law of God to set before his penitent? had he only, for example, the promise made to Israel: *Keep the words of this covenant, and do them*⁷: *and it shall be your righteousness,*

⁶ Matt. xx.

⁷ Deut. xxix. 9.

*if you observe to do all these commandments before the Lord your God, as he hath commanded you*⁸. True, no doubt, might the penitent reply: such (if there be any such) are blessed—they have *held fast their righteousness*; they are justified by their works;—but this does not suit me;—I have “followed too much the devices and desires of my own heart;” I am among the *cursed, who do not continue in all the things that are written in the law, to do them*⁹. One thus *heavy laden* with the sense of past sin, does not ask for reward, but pardon; does not seek justice, but mercy. It would hold out no comfort to a man who was worn out with fatigue, and fainting, to be told that there was a paradise at the end of his journey: what is a paradise to him who cannot advance a step further towards it? Nor would it be any better comfort to tell one who felt himself a sinner against God, that God would raise up the righteous to eternal happiness at the last day.

But, no; Christ does not thus mock those who are conscious of their guilt and misery. His language is, I knew that ye

⁸ Deut. vi. 25.

⁹ Deut. xxvii. 26. Gal. iii. 10.

were *labouring*, and therefore I came to assist you on your way: I knew that ye were *heavy laden*, and therefore I came to bear your sins in my own body on the tree¹. Believe in me, and your sins, which are many, are forgiven you. Look up to me, and find rest unto your souls. Receive me, and ye shall become the children of God. Trust in me, and ye shall be saved.

My brethren, this is the offer of the Gospel. But I go further, and add, that nothing else would be the Gospel. For the Gospel means, as you know, *glad tidings*. But it is no glad tidings to a man, if that is offered him which he has no means of procuring; if heaven is to be the reward of merit, when he has no merits to plead. But when he learns that the debts are paid, which he was unable to discharge; that the ransom is laid down, on which his liberty depended; that the punishment is remitted to which he was looking forward with alarm; and that nothing is required of him but to come humbly and thankfully to the Benefactor who has contrived all this, and receive the gift—

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

receive that which is beyond all price, yet for which no price is demanded: these are indeed *glad tidings of great joy*².

Glad tidings, my brethren, *to you and to all people*, who do not obstinately shut their ears against them. The invitation, as I have shown, includes all of every age, and country, and rank, and condition: Jew and Gentile, young and old, *high and low, rich and poor, one with another*, are all equally summoned to the same Saviour. Say not, We are children, and therefore we cannot come: for what are your Lord's words?—*Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven*³. Neither say, We are poor and unlearned, and therefore we cannot come: Christ invites you to come that you *may learn of him, for he is meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls*. Say not, We are encumbered with the business of our stations, and therefore we cannot come: for He who best knew, reminds you that *one thing is needful: and what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?* Nei-

² Isa. lv. 1.

³ Matt. xix. 14.

ther say, We are righteous, and therefore we need not come : of all errors this is the most fatal : for *what is man, that he should be clean ; or he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous*⁴? If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us⁵. Neither say, again, We have been so long strangers to God and to religion, that we must not come : for did not Christ declare that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance⁶? Does he not assure us, that as a woman seeketh a piece of money which she has lost, or as a shepherd follows one of his flock which is gone astray, even so the Lord is always eager to receive back his prodigal children, insomuch that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth⁷?

Therefore, whoever thou art, in age, or condition, or character, come unto Christ, and he will give you rest. If you are young, and want assistance and protection through the dangers and temptations of life, come to a Saviour who will be your guide, your patron, and your friend. If you are poor,

⁴ Job, xv. 14.

⁵ 1 John, i. 8.

⁶ Matt. ix. 13.

⁷ Luke, xv.

come to Him who will make you rich indeed; for *not as the world giveth, giveth he unto you*⁸. If you are ignorant, come to Him who will make you truly wise—*wise unto salvation*. If you are burdened with this world's care, *cast your care upon him, for he careth for you*⁹. If you are trusting in your own righteousness, come unto Him who will show you your real state, that without him you *are blind, and miserable, and poor, and naked*¹. If you are entangled in sinful habits, come to Him whose power is greater than that of Satan; who will make your peace with God, and endue you with grace to lead a new life, walking from henceforth in holiness and righteousness. Come unto Him, and *ye shall find rest unto your souls*.

The nature of that *rest* would detain me too long for the present opportunity². I shall conclude, therefore, by repeating the exhortation, Come unto Him, all ye that labour *to make your calling and election sure*, amidst all the cares and troubles and temptations of this life; for it is He *that*

⁸ John, xiv. 27.

¹ Rev. iii. 17.

⁹ 1 Pet. v. 7.

² See Serm. VIII.

*worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*³. Again, come unto Him all ye that are heavy laden with the weight of your sins, and the fear of God's anger; for *surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*⁴. He has invited you to him. O may he give you the heart to come! He has purchased your salvation—O may you not want the will to be saved!

³ Phil. xi. 13.

⁴ Isaiah, lv.

SÉRMON VI.

YOKE OF CHRIST A YOKE OF FAITH.

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MATTHEW, XI. 29.

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ;
for I am meek and lowly of heart : and
ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

IN my former discourses on the verse which precedes this text, I explained that the invitation of our Lord, *Come unto me*, is addressed to all, since all require it; and may be accepted by all: for those that *come unto him*, *he will in no wise cast out*. I showed that it is encouraging, for it is made to those who *labour* with the business, cares, sorrows, and temptations of life; and that it is merciful, since it is made to those who are *heavy laden* with the burden of sin, and promises rest unto their souls.

I proceed now to explain the words, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me*. This

is as much as to say, Devote yourselves to me: give your lives up to my service. *Yoke* is the sign of service. Those who with us are free servants, in ancient times were slaves; slaves taken in war, or bought for money; and therefore bearing a master's yoke which they could in no way shake off. Hence St. Paul's exhortation, *Let as many servants as are under the yoke*¹, i. e. let slaves,—when converted to Christianity,—*count their masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.*

The phrase, then, means, neither more nor less than this—Enter by faith into my service, and live as obeying a Master who is in heaven.

But the expression has still greater propriety, when we remember that the persons to whom this command was given, were at present under the law of Moses, and, in fact, slaves to the Pharisees, who pretended to interpret the law, and in so doing loaded their countrymen with *burdens grievous to be borne*². In allusion to this, our meek and lowly Saviour takes up the

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 1.

² Luke, xi. 46.

word: Come unto me, ye who have long laboured under the scrupulous attachment to outward ceremonies, by which the Scribes and Pharisees attempt to make up for their neglect of true and pure religion: you have been hitherto enslaved by sin; or if you have desired to turn towards God, the Pharisees have given you the shadow instead of the substance of religion; sackcloth and ashes, the mere appearance of contrition, in place of a tender and penitent heart; and cold unmeaning forms instead of true and spiritual worship³: turn from these, and enter into my service, for I have none of their self-righteousness or pride: and *ye shall find such rest unto your souls* as only my religion can give. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me*: come to me in faith, and serve me in obedience: receive from me as a servant is bound to receive from his master, what is and must be the character of those who enjoy my favour and reward.

Such is the meaning of your Saviour's command, *Take my yoke upon you*—of HIS command, who bore a heavy yoke indeed

³ John, iv. 23.

for you; who put off the robe of divine glory which he had worn from *the beginning with God*, and took upon him the burden of the flesh; the infirmities and pains of our weak and weary nature; so that *having himself suffered, being tempted, he is better able to succour them that are tempted*⁴.

Surely you are disposed to exclaim, *We obey, O merciful Saviour; we receive thy call; we desire to throw off from this moment the yoke of Satan and of this world, as far as this world might detain us from thee; and to present ourselves, our souls, and bodies, to thy reasonable and holy service:—we resolve afresh to believe what thou hast revealed, and to obey what thou commandest as necessary to our salvation. Do thou confirm our faith, and succour our weakness.*

The first thing which those would resolve who had thus surrendered themselves to a rightful Lord, would be diligently to seek and examine what faith and what obedience he required. And so our Saviour adds, *learn of me.* What is offer-

⁴ Heb. ii. 18.

ed to our faith, as far as concerns himself, though all-important, is comprehended within a short compass, and has been lately set before you⁵; it is briefly this: that mankind were lost, and he appeared to save them; were under the dominion of Satan, whom he came to subdue; were condemned under the wrath of God to the just punishment of sin, which punishment he underwent in his own person. This is the truth, the main truth of the whole Gospel, that if any individual among us, or in the world, is saved from the penalty of sin, that man owes his salvation to the ransom paid by Jesus Christ; and also, further, that he is ready to save from that penalty, and to present pure and blameless before the Lord at the last day, every individual in the world or among ourselves, who comes to him, and bears his yoke as a Redeemer and a Lord.

This is the faith which we must take home to our souls, in order that the benefits which he has procured may be effectual to ourselves. This is the faith to which salvation is universally promised in the Gos-

⁵ Sermons I. and II.

pel⁶. I shall consider to-day the nature of that faith; the nature of that trust or confidence in Jesus Christ, which we emphatically term FAITH; and perhaps, what it is, may be best explained by showing what it is not: as lights and marks are raised on a dangerous coast, not to signify the channel in which a ship should sail, but the sands and rocks which it should avoid. If I can succeed in discovering the insufficient notions which fall far short of real faith, though often mistaken for it, I may be better able to point out that which is indeed the way to eternal life.

I. First, then, SAVING FAITH, that faith, to which God, by a merciful covenant, has annexed an everlasting reward, is not a mere historical belief; i. e. a belief, that eighteen hundred years ago a person called Jesus Christ came into the world with a divine commission, and effected a great change in the religion of mankind. This is indeed a true fact, and the basis of all faith; but it is only the first step towards the faith of a Christian. It is a point of history, which comes down to us on such

⁶ Acts, xiii. 39. Gal. iii. 22. Eph. ii. 8. 1 John, v. 13.

strong and various evidence, that it is impossible we should deny it: but this mere assent which our reason cannot refuse to a known fact, can no more secure our salvation than our assent to any other historical truth. For consider, that if this were saving faith, the grossest sinner or blasphemer might be saved: for even those who *make a mock at sin*, and have not the most distant thoughts of obeying the Gospel, will readily confess, that Jesus taught an excellent system of laws for the use of mankind; and that after a life spent in benevolence and mortification, he suffered an unjust death upon the cross; and that a religion, called after his name, and framed according to his doctrines and commands, has been since diffused throughout the world. The very blasphemers of the Bible acknowledge this. I shall not delay upon a point so plain; and shall only add upon the authority of St. James, that if this general assent to the historical facts of Christ's life and death were all that is required, the devils themselves might be saved. *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well*: but beware of thinking mere belief of this sufficient; remember,

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*the devils also believe and tremble*⁷. Thus the Apostle warns his disciples, by a terrible instance, to beware how they satisfied themselves with a heartless assent to a truth which it was impossible they should deny, but which had no effect upon their lives.

II. An historical faith, then, is not effectual to salvation; neither, 2dly, is a nominal or baptismal faith. By these terms, I mean to signify that faith which is generally and indiscriminately professed by all persons in a Christian country. They are baptized in their infancy in the name of Christ; an inestimable privilege, which gives them "the means of grace," and sets before them "the hope of glory:" they learn the Church Catechism: at a riper age they are confirmed: they attend public worship with tolerable regularity: they preserve a decent reputation; and if any one were to hazard a doubt of their religious principles, they would be surprised and angry. Neither would it be justifiable to say, without reserve, that theirs is not saving faith; for these external signs are presumptive evi-

⁷ James, ii. 19.

dence in their favour; and it is for God, not man, to judge the heart; but we may and must say, on the authority of Scripture, that if they have only these external signs, they are far from that belief of the heart to which the promises of the Gospel are made⁸. Baptism is an admission to the blessings of that merciful covenant, by which the Father has consented to bestow eternal life on as many as receive Jesus Christ for the author of their salvation⁹: but observe, there are two parties to the covenant; and he who is baptized and called Christian, engages, on his side, to forsake "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and to lead a spiritual life, making the commands of God and the injunctions of the Gospel his rule throughout¹. I need not tell you, that all who are baptized do not lead this life; and all who do not lead it, make void the covenant by not fulfilling its conditions. How many members of the visible church, how many who do not abstain from the public duties of religion, are contented to live on in tacit violation of all they profess, and in virtual contradiction to all they

⁸ See Rom. x. 9.

⁹ John, i. 12.

¹ Baptismal Service.

hear; making the revealed will of God their law, only as far as it agrees with the practice of the world, or with their own inclination, or with the habits of their friends and neighbours. Neglecting the regular study of the Scriptures, they know little of the extent of those obligations which the Gospel imposes on its followers; and neglecting private prayer, they deprive themselves of that grace by which they might be enabled both to see *the truth as it is in Jesus*, and to practise it. In the ordinary course of their lives, even if they are externally decorous and useful, they think nothing of that first and great commandment, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy mind, and all thy soul, and all thy strength*². Their good works, are they done from the single principle of obedience to Christ, as their Lord and King? as offerings of gratitude for mercies, inestimable mercies received; as evidence to the world that they desire to follow him, and him alone, as their guide, and teacher, and great example?—It is an awful reflection, my brethren, but Christ

² Matt. xx:i. 38.

assures us that many who outwardly profess his name, and have perhaps been highly esteemed on earth, are not his, neither will he acknowledge them when he comes to judgment. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father that is in heaven*³.

III. There is another species of faith which goes beyond either the historical or the nominal faith which I have described, and yet stops very short of the faith inculcated in the Gospel. This I shall term a partial faith. A partial faith entertains a vague idea of Christ as the Saviour of the world; but fails of placing an entire reliance upon him for personal salvation. There are many persons who are ready to confess the obligations owed by all mankind to Jesus Christ, and who are not without an indistinct notion of certain mercies which they themselves have received through him; but are far, very far from taking home to themselves, and feeling in their hearts, that their own individual salvation is only due to him; that their peace

³ Matt. vii. 20.

was his purchase; that his death was eternal life to them. In language, perhaps, they may profess to trust in Christ, and to acknowledge the mercies of which he is the author; but when you pierce deeper and examine the heart, it becomes very plain that the principal dependence is a self-dependence. They have no practical sense of the alienation of the natural heart from God; they do not daily feel the imperfection of their obedience; they are not aware of the insufficiency even of their best works to please God without Christ's mediation; or of their own innate sinfulness, which rendered his sacrifice necessary to propitiate their offended God.

If you ask a person of this class a *reason of the hope that is in him*, the weakness of his principle is immediately betrayed. The answer is, I trust that God will forgive me—I have injured no one intentionally, and I wish no one any harm—I have not been perfect certainly, but I have not been worse than other men; and I have done my duty by my family and neighbours.

Now, I am far from denying that some of these are comfortable reflections, when

they can be truly entertained; and if set in the right place, may justly console a sick bed; but he has gone a very little way in the Gospel who does not see that a reliance on them for salvation, and as the meritorious or procuring cause of God's mercy, betokens a partial, unsound, and most insecure faith. Is it according to Scripture to expect salvation on the score that your sins have been fewer and less heinous than they might have been; and not rather to confess with tears, that they have rendered you unworthy of the sight of God, who *cannot look upon iniquity*, and to seek acceptance through His blood, who *was wounded for your transgressions*, and by whose *stripes you are healed*⁴? It is well for those who can look back upon the past, and reflect that they have done their duty, in their respective stations: but our Saviour at once shuts the door against this claim to acceptance, and lays down this injunction: *Ye, when ye have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants—we have done that which it was our duty to do*⁵. Fly, my brethren, from the idea of calling God to

⁴ Isaiah, liii. 5.

⁵ Luke, xvii. 10

*enter into judgment with you. Know in what you are trusting, and let it be something surer than your own merits, something better than your own works. Engrave upon your hearts the words of St. Paul, Not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through Jesus Christ. The Scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe*⁶.

With a practical conviction of this humbling, yet consolatory truth—humbling to the pride of man, but most consolatory to the contrite spirit; one of the most pious Christians that ever lived, thus expressed himself in his last hours: “Though I have, by the grace of God, feared him in my youth, and loved him in mine age; and have laboured to *have a conscience void of offence both towards him and towards men*; yet if thou, Lord, be *extreme to mark what I have done amiss*, who can abide it? And therefore where I have failed, Lord, show mercy to me; for I plead not my righteousness, but the forgiveness of my unright-

⁶ Tit. iii. 5. Gal. iii. 23.

teousness, for His merits who died to purchase a pardon for penitent sinners⁷.”

Thus it is that a true Christian sees his whole salvation to be the work of Christ. He confesses that it was Christ who first called him, when of himself he had no health in him, and could find no means of pleasing God, to leave those hard and deceitful tyrants, “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” and to serve a heavenly Master, whose *yoke is easy, and whose burden is light*: he confesses, that whatever progress he has made, whatever temptations he has avoided, or holiness he has attained, Christ has bestowed on him both the will and the power: lastly, he confesses that if he be finally accepted at the day of judgment, not unto himself, not unto himself, but unto Christ will be the praise: he does not presume to appear clothed in his own imperfect righteousness, but adorned in the *righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe*⁸.

Fourthly, saving faith is not a dead, or barren, or inactive faith. Whoever takes

⁷ See Hooker's Life, by Walton.

⁸ Rom. iii. 22.

up the *yoke of Christ*, *learns of him*: and the first lesson which he is taught is, to show his faith by his works; i. e. by a holy, cautious, and improving life, acknowledging Scripture alone as its rule or guide. Though he has received from St. Paul, that his salvation is *of grace, not of works, lest any man should boast*¹; yet he is equally taught by the assurances of his Saviour, that men are to be *known by their works*²; that *no fornicators, thieves, covetous, drunkards, liars, revilers, extortioners, murderers, shall have any inheritance in his kingdom*³; that *whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin*⁴; that no man can love God, and hate his brother⁵; that *the righteous shall go into life eternal*⁶; that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*⁷; that *if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*⁸; that *if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his*⁹; that *He is the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him*¹⁰; and that the

¹ Eph. ii. 9.² Matt. vii. 16.³ 1 Cor. vi. 9.⁴ 1 John, iii. 9.⁵ 1 John, ii. 9.⁶ Matt. xxv. 46.⁷ Heb. xii. 14.⁸ 2 Cor. v. 17.⁹ Rom. viii. 9.¹⁰ Heb. v. 9.

Christian must strive to be perfect, even as his Father who is in heaven is perfect¹.

These remarks on the errors which too often, I fear, usurp the place and appear in the stead of true Christian faith, may assist us in the inquiry which we are bound frequently to make into the state of our souls. Prove, therefore, *your own selves*, lest you be wandering from the right road; examine your faith, and see that it excels the counterfeit, and goes beyond the defective notions which I have attempted to expose.

Do you consider the death of Christ as something more than a point of history? Do you give more than a heartless assent to it, or treat it only as a fact which your education has taught you to believe; being satisfied that you have been baptized in the name of Christ, and do not avowedly reject the religion of your country; while you are careless of the truths which it inculcates, and of the obedience which it requires, making general practice your rule of life, or taking your own corrupt heart for your spiritual guide? Have you

¹ Matt. v. 48.

a clear view that his death procured the pardon of your sin, if indeed it is pardoned, and purchased whatever title you have to a heavenly inheritance; or do you consider his merit as only filling up the imperfect measure of your own, and therefore contributing no more than a partial share towards your salvation?

But do not suppose that this introduces a perplexity into what ought to be plain, or makes religion consist in nice distinctions. Nothing can be more practical than true faith; and the question to a religious inquirer, Have you taken upon you the yoke of Christ? is no less plain than the question to a subject, What king do you profess to serve? or to a soldier, What commander do you follow? For example: in the conduct of your life, do you refer to Christ, through the Scripture; do you learn from him the road which you are to take, and seek from him grace which may enable you to pursue it, and to escape the dangers which surround you? When temptation assaults you, in whose strength do you go forth to meet it; in your own, or in that which Christ promises shall be *sufficient* for

those that trust in him²? If sorrows afflict you, if fears harass you, have you recourse to Christ through prayer, as to a friend whom faith has secured to you, and who will *come and make his abode* with his sincere disciples³? When you are conscious of your weakness, of your constant infirmities, nay, your exceeding sinfulness; when you remember the guilt of your past life, and the transgressions and omissions of every day, do you exclaim, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord*⁴: he is the Saviour of all them that believe.

Examine yourselves, further, whether yours is a lively and active, and not a dead or barren faith. The tree is corrupt that brings forth bad fruit; so the tree is useless that does not bring forth any fruit at all; and the husbandman will say of one as much as of the other, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground*⁵? Now, the fruits of the Spirit of Christ, which are the fruits of faith, are love, joy, peace, long-suffering,

² See 2 Cor. xii. 9.

³ John, xiv. 23.

⁴ Rom. vii. 24.

⁵ Luke, xiii. 7.

*gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance*⁶. Are you without these? Then is your faith defective. Have you all of these? That the best Christian will not dare to assert; neither will he be satisfied, as *though he were already perfect*⁷; but will strive to increase and improve these evidences of his faith to the very end of life, to add what is wanting, and to correct what is amiss; yes, and will find it necessary too, as one that labours against a stream, who, if he once relaxes his exertions, is carried back to the place whence he set out, and has all his toil to begin anew. So is it in religion: the man that thinks he has reached the point where he may be allowed to stop, will soon fall back, and lose even *that which he hath*⁸.

Examine yourselves, then, whether this is your faith; and seek for the wisdom that cometh from above, that you may not err in a matter where your eternal salvation is concerned. Rest not, till you are satisfied that your faith is neither a cold assent of the understanding to a point of history, nor a vague profession of the reli-

⁶ Gal. v. 22

⁷ Phil. iii. 12.

⁸ See Matt. xiii. 12. Luke, viii. 18.

gion of your country, nor a partial faith which sinks the Redeemer into a mere teacher of moral duties, nor an idle or barren faith, which forgets that the light of a true Christian *must so shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father who is in heaven*⁹. Rest not till you are convinced, and intimately feel, that you believe in Christ with the whole heart: and though, after all, your most confident language will only be like that of the afflicted father in the Gospel, *Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief*¹; yet, if you are sincere, you will receive, as he did, the object of your prayer; and at the last will hear the blessed words, *Thy faith hath saved thee; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*.

⁹ Matt. v. 16.

¹ Mark, ix. 24.

SERMON VII.

YOKE OF CHRIST A YOKE OF OBEDIENCE.

MATTHEW, XI. 29.

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ;
for I am meek and lowly of heart ; and
ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

IN discoursing, on Sunday last, from this text, I showed that the invitation to take upon us the yoke of Christ, is an invitation to give ourselves up to his service ; that his is a service, first, of FAITH—a faith which must be personally and individually felt—must be something far beyond a mere assent to the fact of his coming into the world, even his coming with a divine commission—must be something more than a trust that he will fill up the measure of our imperfect obedience, or that he will save us without our obedience ;—must be, in short, an entire reliance on him for acceptance with God, in the way and by the

means which he has revealed: by this faith, *being justified, we have peace with God*¹.

This may be termed the YOKE OF FAITH, imposed on us by the Gospel: a yoke which will become more and more light and satisfactory, in proportion as we are made more and more sensible of the majesty of God, the extent of his law, and our own inability to attain the perfection which it sets before us. For the service of Christ lays on us a yoke of OBEDIENCE, as well as a yoke of faith: and those who belong to his service must consent to *learn of him*, not only the peculiar characteristics mentioned in the text, in opposition to the Pharisees, meekness and lowliness of heart, but all the other graces of which he gave the precepts, and set the admirable example; charity, purity, fidelity, goodness, justice, temperance.

No doubt, it is declared in the Gospel that the promise of an infinite reward to the faithful and obedient servant of Christ, is the free and unmerited *gift of God*, obtained through the intervention of Christ between his justice and our transgression;

¹ Rom. v. 1.

for the *wages of sin is death, and all have sinned*²; and therefore if all had their deserts, all would perish: yet it is also declared, in terms equally plain, that this gift is appropriated to certain qualifications, and will only be bestowed upon certain characters, which are clearly described; namely, on those who, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*³. Those, therefore, who profess the hope of the Gospel, must *learn* of its divine Author; in the fullest sense, *learn of him*; both that they may understand the holy character which it requires, and may obtain grace to cultivate it: he must furnish both the rules to study and the power to obey; both the pattern to be imitated and the desire to follow it.

The rules or pattern of a Christian life are to be sought in Scripture, for there only

² Rom. vi. 23, iii. 23.

³ Titus, ii. 12—14.

can they be found. Do not suppose, because many things which are commanded in Scripture are approved also among men, as justice, fidelity, humanity; or, because many things which are forbidden in Scripture are generally forbidden among men, as dishonesty, false witness, murder;—do not suppose that, on this account, a Christian has no occasion to study the Bible, which can teach him little new, or tell him nothing more of his duty than he knows already. This would be a most fatal error. There are great rules of morality which have been generally received and established among mankind, because without them human society could hardly be kept together. Society cannot exist where murder, theft, and similar heinous crimes are allowed to go unpunished, and therefore even heathen nations restrain them by public laws: but it must not be imagined, because Scripture and the world agree in forbidding these, that therefore every thing which is forbidden in Scripture is forbidden by mankind in general, or that the Gospel did no more than ratify the laws of human society. Christianity, as I have shown, is a yoke, a service; and every service has its

peculiarities, which can only be learnt from the master's own mouth; much more that divine service to which Christians are engaged. Our Lord himself leads the way to this distinction; when, after declaring his *new commandment, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you,*—he goes on to argue,—*For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so⁴?* Believe me, my brethren, a higher service, a service actuated by purer motives, is required of the “member of Christ, the child of God, the inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.” If Christ bestows upon his disciples such peace “as the world cannot give,” he also enjoins them duties such as this world cannot teach. Do not take this on my authority; inquire for yourselves. If you are inclined to believe that the laws of the land, or the practice and opinions of mankind, are sufficient to direct you in a course of conduct agreeable to the precepts of Christ, or the demands

⁴ Matt. v. 46, 47.

of God; consult those precepts diligently; make yourselves fully acquainted with those demands. Enter into your closets, if you are sincere, and commune with yourselves alone; and when you have thus shut the door against this world, its vanities and its errors, then turn to the practical epistles of St. Paul or the other apostles—do this with an earnest prayer against self-deception—and then inquire whether it can be safe for the disciples of Christ to compare their lives with any other standard than that of the Bible. Meditate on the exhortations there given to the love of God and man—to charity of thought, word, and deed—to spirituality, purity, and humility of mind—to indifference towards the opinion of others in all cases where custom leads one way and duty another—to zeal in the practice and propagation of religion—to perseverance in prayer—to resignation under afflictions and disappointments, and to gratitude in temporal prosperity—meditate on these things, and you will soon perceive that those who profess to bear the yoke of Christ have much indeed to learn of him: and at the very best, must find reason to exclaim with unfeigned humility

at the close of their lives, nay, at the review of every day, If thou, Lord, shouldst be *extreme to mark what is done amiss*, who may abide it? *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified*⁵.

I shall proceed to instance a few signs which distinguish the YOKE of Christ, as it is a service of obedience.

I. First, whoever bears this yoke, endeavours in all things to act on Christian motives; not only to do what he is commanded to do, and to avoid what he is taught to avoid, but to do this for scriptural reasons; namely, for the love which he owes his Master, because it is his Master's will; or for the sake of *the hope that is set before him*. Actions, as well as words, proceed out of *the abundance of the heart*; if Christ is at the bottom of the heart, every action will flow from a desire of pleasing him; if, on the other hand, this world reigns sovereign there, the first desire will be to please the world, or to gain something which it can give. We will place things in the most favourable light,

⁵ Psalm cxliii. 2.

and suppose that you are sober, honest, chaste, industrious. So far all is well. But why are you sober or honest? What is the principle which regulates your conduct? It is the will of Christ, no doubt, that you should lead a virtuous life; but you may avoid much that is wrong, and practise much that is right, without being his servant, unless you do this, because it is his will; unless you act from faithful obedience, and holy love, and godly fear.

For example: you are just; it is right you should be so. But in order to know the state of your hearts, inquire of yourselves, whether you are just through fear of the consequences of theft or fraud, and to maintain credit in the eyes of the world—or whether you are just in obedience to the Gospel, because you have learnt of your Saviour, *whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*⁶: because the Apostle's rule is, *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another*⁷.

Again, you are charitable. It is well. But on what motive? Some persons relieve distress, because they cannot bear to

⁶ Matt. vii. 12.

⁷ Rom. xiii. 8.

see it: it is absolutely painful to have an object of famine or disease before their eyes. This is an amiable feeling; but the act which springs from it is not an act of obedience. Others are charitable, because the age is charitable; the virtue highly esteemed; and they like that their name should appear among those who desire to benefit their fellow-creatures. This motive is neither amiable nor Christian, but Phari-
saical: such persons *give alms that they may be seen of men*⁸. But the faithful disciple of Christ is charitable for his Master's sake: he knows that the *love of God cannot dwell in him, who seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him*⁹. He sets before himself the motive implied in the words of our Lord to his disciples: *Whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water to drink, whosoever shall do you the most trifling kindness, in my name, because you belong to Christ, shall not lose his reward*¹.

Again, you are ready to forgive injuries, and candid in your judgment of others. These are delightful qualities. Such is the

⁸ Matt. vi. 1. ⁹ 1 John, iii. 17. ¹ Matt. x. 42.

natural disposition of some kind-hearted persons; and would to God it were universal! But the servant of Christ, even if he be naturally resentful, learns to forgive, for reasons which he finds in the Gospel. He himself has been forgiven much; and shall not he pardon in his turn? Has not St. Paul taught him, *Be ye kind one to another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you*²? So he judges favourably of other men, in conformity to the precept of his Lord, *Judge not, that ye be not judged*³; and because that charity which he is taught to cultivate, *hopeth all things, beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things*⁴.

As this is a subject on which I should be sorry to be mistaken, I will explain it further by an example from Scripture. You remember the temptation by which Joseph was assailed in Egypt, when his lord's wife conceived a criminal affection towards him. There were many worldly reasons which might induce him to reject her passion. He was high in office and in esteem, through his master's favour; and to be discovered guilty of a crime of this nature would, of

² Eph. iv. 32.³ Matt. vii. 1⁴ 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

course, have proved his ruin. He might have resisted temptation on this ground. Such conduct would have been prudent, but would have received no reward from God, because no regard to God would have been shown in it, but only a regard for his own temporal welfare. This, however, was not the thing uppermost in Joseph's thoughts. It was the favour of God, and not the favour of the governor, which he feared to lose. He does not reason with himself, *How shall I commit this crime, and run the risk of being dismissed from my situation, or of disgracing myself in the eyes of men?* but he argues, *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God⁵?* So the Christian, and the man of common worldly prudence, agree in this, that they both cultivate temperance, soberness, and chastity; but the worldly man does so, because it is beneficial to his health, suitable to his fortune, or decorous in his station; whilst the Christian *lets his moderation be known*, because such is the command of the Lord whom he serves; because the Apostle says, *Use this world, as not abusing it: make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts*

⁵ Gen. xxxix. 9.

*thereof. Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*⁵.

However rigid this scrutiny of motives may sound, perhaps, to some ears, a little consideration will show that it is no less reasonable than it is scriptural. We admit the principle in our ordinary conduct towards one another. Suppose a person to render his neighbour an useful service, which service, however, as the neighbour afterwards discerns, was not done out of any good will to him, but for some private object of the benefactor's own: does the person thus benefited hold himself bound by any obligation after this discovery? He may be glad of the advantage which he has received; but he neither feels called upon to profess gratitude, or return compensation. So without doubt it is desirable, that men should be just, and liberal, and chaste, and candid, and merciful on any grounds, rather than they should run into the opposite vices. But the future promise is made to those alone who act thus, because they *love the Lord their God with all their heart, and mind, and soul, and strength*; who have

⁵ Phil. iv. 5. Rom. xiii. 14. 1 Pet. ii. 11.

given themselves up to follow their Redeemer and his precepts *through evil report and good report*⁶, with the world or against the world; *doing all to the glory of God*⁷. My brethren, it is a noble motive, it is a delightful object, to keep the will of God always before you, and to follow it through love of Christ. It is suitable to the best feelings of our nature, to love him because he *first loved us, and gave himself for us*. And surely *greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*⁸. Let this, from henceforth, be your leading object, your highest desire, and for grace to succeed in it, your first and latest prayer.

II. Another sign of a life led in the faithful service of Christ, is the careful and conscientious improvement of time and property. I do not speak here of ample fortunes only, or of abundant leisure; I speak no less of the wages earned by labour, and of the hours which are free from labour; as the evenings, and the sabbaths. He who receives ten or twenty shillings a week, may spend them ill or well, no

⁶ 2 Cor. vi. 8. ⁷ 1 Cor. x. 31. ⁸ John, xv. 13.

less than he who receives ten or twenty pounds. He who has two or three hours in the day, or one day in the week at his command, may employ them usefully, or may waste and misuse them, no less than those few whose whole life is a continued leisure. In the parable, the lord of the servants calls to account him who had received one talent, as well as those who had received five or ten⁹. Time and property are such talents; talents committed to us; and for which all, both rich and poor, shall be held accountable at the last day, whether we have improved, or whether we have wasted them. It is but a short span, in the most favourable case, which is allowed us for a very great concern; the longest life is little, compared with the business to be done in it—the discharge of the service which we owe to Him who will *reward us according to our works*. Shall we squander that time in trifling pursuits, in unprofitable society, in idleness, in unnecessary recreations? Shall we not consider, before we give ourselves up to any habit, Will this way of employing my leisure be profitable

⁹ Matt. xxv. 14, &c.

to my immortal soul? Will it be approved by the heavenly Master whom I serve? Would not my opportunities be more properly used in studying the way of salvation, in reading the Scriptures and the best explanations of them, or in visiting my poorer brethren, and comforting the *widow and the fatherless in their affliction*? So, again, in the use which they make of property, whatever it be, whether of great or small amount, the sincere Christian, and he who has only the name of Christian, are essentially distinguished. The one spends his annual income, or his weekly wages, as knowing that he *must give account*; the other, as being subject to no law but his own inclination or humour. The one endeavours to keep the will of his Saviour always in his mind: the other thinks that an occasional prayer or two, or an attendance at public worship, is a full discharge of his duty towards God. He considers that he has done all that can be required of him, if he abstains from open wickedness; while the Christian labours *to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for himself*

*a good foundation against the time to come, that he may lay hold on eternal life*¹.

I am aware, however, that reflections on duty or on eternity cannot occur to the mind in the employment of every hour, or the disbursement of every sum; it is in the formation of his general habits, that the Christian considers his responsibility; and asks himself, whether in the arrangement of his family and his establishment, of his annual or weekly expenditure, he has consulted merely his own gratification, his sensual appetites, or the fashion of this passing world: or whether, on the contrary, he has studied the will, and followed the precepts of his Saviour; whether his charities bear a fair proportion to the property which God has intrusted to him, and to his expenses on himself; whether he is remembering that *the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*; whether he is remembering, that *all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the*

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 15, &c.

Father; but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever²;

Believe me, these things are not matters of indifference. This is almost the whole of that part of life, or mode of living, which a man has in his own power, or where he is free to choose; where it is not determined for him by the necessities of his situation how he shall act; and, therefore, their respective ways of acting in these things, in the society which they keep, in the habits which they pursue, in the books which they read, in the expenses which they indulge, form the chief visible distinction between the thoughtless and inconsiderate, and those who are sincerely striving, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to pass the *life which they live in the flesh, in the faith of the Son of God*³:

This it is, my brethren, to *take upon you the yoke of Christ*: it is to have his will, his precepts, the spirit of his Gospel in view, in all your undertakings, in all your duties, in all your pleasures. It cannot be denied, that whoever has determined to

² 1 Tim. vi. 10. 1 John, ii. 16. ³ Gal. ii. 20.

live in this faith, and to bear without swerving his Saviour's yoke, must run counter in many respects to the spirit and practice of those around him. But, remember, this does not prove him to be wrong. You cannot read the Gospel, without observing that **THE WORLD** is there spoken of throughout as something different from true Christianity; something whose principles and practices are to be avoided by the sincere disciples of Jesus, as being in opposition to his laws. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world*⁴. *Be not conformed to this world*⁵. *This is pure religion, that a man keep himself unspotted from the world. Whoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God*⁶. These are a very few of the texts which go to prove this point. How indeed can it be otherwise? Is not this world our probation? There is no probation, where all is on the right and favourable side. Does not Satan still lie in wait seeking whom he may make his prey? and how can we be safe in an enemy's country, except while we continue on our guard? Is not our nature

⁴ John, ii. 15.

⁵ Rom. xii. 2.

⁶ James, i. 27. iv. 4.

corrupt, and averse to that spirituality which we are taught to cherish? and will not that nature, like an overflowing stream, be constantly breaking out, unless we are on the watch to prevent its encroachments, and keep it within bounds?

You, therefore, who would be faithful to the service of your Lord, must be content to renounce those amusements, those pursuits, those gratifications, which dissipate the mind, and nourish pride, and consume money unprofitably, and expend still more precious time,—though your friends may pursue them, and many may deem them innocent. But this will not be to you a sacrifice, but matter of choice, if you have rightly learned Christ, *by whom the world is crucified unto you, and you unto the world*⁷. The object before you, heaven with all its glories, will make every thing else appear so little in your eyes, that you will wonder at the eagerness with which others follow trifles not worth a moment's care. The habit of inquiring of yourselves from day to day, Have I lived as one who is preparing for eternity, as one who is en-

⁷ Gal. vi. 14.

gaged to serve a divine Master—will make it impossible for you to *follow a multitude to do evil*. If any express their wonder that you thus dare to think and act for yourselves; you will reply, We rather wonder that so few should remember the baptismal vow on which all their hopes depend; which bound them “to renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world,” no less than “the sinful lusts of the flesh⁸.”

Indeed, in one respect we live in a happy age: there are great temptations, no doubt, to live inconsistently with Christianity; but again, there are great encouragements to the consistent Christian. All consistency of principle is respectable; and we may add, it is now respected; and no person is more really contemptible, or actually more despised, than one who attempts to join the appearances of piety with the realities of worldliness. Charity too is much admired; and however perverted that taste might be thought, which left the haunts, or neglected the ornaments of fashion, to *visit the widow and fatherless in their affliction*, to clothe the naked, or instruct the

⁸ Baptismal Service.

ignorant, still such conduct would not be without the encouragement of even earthly praise; and it would be remarked, however mistaken such ideas of religion are, it must be owned they are very laudable and amiable. Thus men would *see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

But these are consequences, not motives, of action. The motive is one, obedience; the single source, faith; the reward—the future reward, it passes the heart of man to conceive; but the present reward is such as nothing else can give. *Verily I say unto you, saith our Lord, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting*⁹. Yes: observe, my brethren, manifold more in this present time. Believe it: if there is truth in Scripture, if confidence may be placed in the declarations of martyrs and confessors, if the experience of Christians of all orders and all ages may be trusted,

⁹ Luke, xviii. 30.

there is nothing this world can give, of fortune, or reputation, or pleasure, nothing that can bear a moment's comparison with the present reward of sincere faith; which is **PEACE** with God, and **UNION** with Christ.

SERMON VIII

PEACE THE PRIVILEGE OF FAITH.

—◆—

MATTHEW, XI. 29.

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me,
for I am meek and lowly of heart; and
ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

I HAVE, on two former occasions, explained the yoke or service of Christ, to be a service of faith and a service of obedience. And this service we *take upon us*, when we accept him as our Redeemer who has made our peace with God, and adhere to him as our ruler, by cultivating through his grace the character which he approves, and obeying the laws which he has prescribed to distinguish his servants in their passage through this world.

I come now to the reward which is promised to this service—*ye shall find rest unto your souls*. For, although it is no matter of choice whether we *take this yoke upon us*

or no, since *he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life*¹; yet our Lord desires a voluntary service, a service of love and not of fear; a service of the heart; and therefore he allures us by promise, by reward; and declares that those who come to him, shall find *rest unto their souls*.

Yes, my brethren, there is *rest* which follows the yoke of Christ, both as it is a service of faith and a service of obedience. Obedience, though it obliges us to renounce many things which are at first desirable to our corrupt natures, is nevertheless attended with such rest as the ways of sin can never give; rest from those evil passions, and unprofitable cares, and raging desires, which vex the heart with perpetual distractions. What enemies are there to peace of mind so cruel as lust, envy, pride, covetousness, malice?

But the *rest* of which our Lord chiefly speaks here, is no doubt the comfort of faith, delivering us from the dread of God's displeasure; that rest, that repose of soul which the penitent enjoys from reflecting,

¹ 1 John, v. 12.

that his pardon has been purchased, his ransom paid; that, through the atonement made upon the cross, he is justified before God; being set free from the punishment of those offences of which his conscience accuses him. Till this sense of pardon is obtained, the mind may perhaps have the slumber of insensibility or thoughtlessness; but it can possess no title to real peace. One man may sleep as soundly on the brink of a precipice, as another in a sheltered valley; but he is not equally safe, though he may be insensible of danger. And so the need of an established peace with God is often least felt, where the want is greatest; but this is not a state of safety, but a state of insensibility. A man, however, cannot always forget his nature and condition: as a rational being, he must sometimes reflect what he is, and where he is, and whither he is going; and when he does reflect, what does he find? He finds that in many ways he has offended that pure and holy God, whose creature he is, and to whose presence he is hastening; and whose judgment must crush him for ever, if he were to "deal with him after his sins, and reward him according to his

iniquities." Sooner or later, we find that these thoughts (gracious warnings if they are rightly hearkened to) will disturb the most hardened, and awaken the most thoughtless. Happy, comparatively happy those, whom they visit early, and who early yield to the impression! O, if any of you have hitherto held no intercourse with your Maker; if you have not *set God before you*, as the Psalmist speaks, nor *had him in all your thoughts*²; but have lived without him in the world; refuse not to listen to the call of the Holy Spirit, when by the voice of conscience he urges you to repentance: be assured that that guilty mind sorrows most, which sorrows latest; and that if it were necessary to live in perpetual penance, and undergo the severest mortification through the whole of life, in order to obtain *peace at the last*, it would still be well worth while.

Suppose, then, a person brought to this condition, the first step towards a better, and to know his own helplessness; to feel himself condemned as the creature of an all-powerful and all-seeing God, whom he

² Psalm xvi. 8. x. 4.

has despised and neglected; or at best, in many instances, offended and disobeyed. Suppose him to "repent and be heartily sorry for these his misdoings;" will repentance save him? The Gospel, indeed, promises pardon on repentance, and offers mercy to the returning sinner; but I am supposing him at present to be ignorant of the Gospel: and judging without the Gospel, or till he has accepted the terms which it offers, he has no reason to hope that repentance will make satisfaction for his past misdeeds. He can have no assurance of this from what happens in the usual course of this world. The disinherited son, the discarded servant, experience that repentance may often come too late. One man who has ruined his health by sinful habits, another who has dissipated his fortune by extravagance, may most sincerely repent; but will they re-establish, by repentance, the one his constitution, the other his estate? What will repentance avail the man who has in any way broken the laws of his country? Will it restore him his life, if he has forfeited his life? Will it restore him his liberty, if he has forfeited his liberty? Why, then, should God treat

men in another world by different laws from those which his Providence has established in this? Or why should he treat them more mercifully than their brethren on earth could treat them, without destroying the foundations of society? Is there not great reason to fear, that as the deed once done can never be undone, as the word once spoken can never be recalled; so the sin once committed can never be effaced, the punishment once incurred can never be remitted? For how shall the penitent offender make compensation for his past transgressions? By a "new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways?" Our best endeavours are feeble; our best actions faulty; even if both were perfect, we owe them all, and could *do no more than it was our duty to do*³: how, then, can that which we are bound to do at present, make amends for that which we were equally bound to do, but neglected, in times past?

These thoughts are natural, and will disturb the mind which has arrived at a sense of the power and majesty of God,

³ Luke, xvii. 10.

without a knowledge of the *fountain opened for sin and uncleanness*⁴, or a just view of the promised remission of sin through Jesus Christ. That they are natural, appears from the means devised in various parts and ages of the world, to propitiate God, and avert his anger. No sacrifice so cruel, which has not been thus abused; no penance so severe, which has not been voluntarily undergone; no mortification so absurd, which has not been proposed and adopted, in the hope of mitigating by sufferings in this world the punishment dreaded in another. How many of our brethren in the East are at this moment subjecting themselves to every species of voluntary torture, because they are without the comfort which we possess, at *propitiation for sin!* But to go no further than Scripture: we read there of the Ammonites, who *made their children pass through fire*⁵ to appease their god Moloch; and we read of the priests of Baal who *cut themselves after their manner with knives,* that they might attract his regard, (as they cried, *O Baal, hear us*⁶. Even the Apostle,

⁴ Zech. xiii. 1.

⁵ Lev. xviii. 21, &c.

⁶ 1 Kings, xviii. 28.

knowing the natural bias of the human heart, warned his disciples against *will-worship and voluntary humility*⁷; and not without reason, as the history of the church shows during that dark period when the leading truths of the Gospel were lost or obscured; and men having forgotten that *the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin*, and that alone, for the *Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*,—tried by voluntary inflictions and useless privations, by hair shirts and beds of iron, to efface the stain of corruption, and render themselves acceptable to God.

There may, no doubt, be persons, who making to themselves an idea of God which is not the God of the Scriptures, may disbelieve or deny that he will punish mankind eternally for their misconduct in this stage of being. But even these, we might suppose, would be grateful for the promises of the Gospel. They believe that God will pardon, without his revealed word; the Gospel acquaints them with the conditions on which he declares that he will pardon. In a matter of such unspeakable import-

⁷ Col. ii. 18.

ance, it is satisfactory, we might imagine, to make "assurance doubly sure," and to find the suggestions of their hope, or the conclusions of their reason, confirmed by the only authority from which in this case there is no appeal. What suitor, who wanted a favour from a king, would not rather receive an absolute promise, than trust to what he imagined must be his character? More especially if he had offended against the king's commands, and this were known to the king, and the favour which he desired was pardon. Still more, if he perceived that his king were perfectly just, and throughout his whole government had given evident proof, that he was determined to punish rebellion against his laws. In such a case, a positive promise is infinitely more comfortable and satisfactory than the most confident hope, or what may seem to us the justest reasoning.

Blessed be God, that rest which the guilty soul desires, which the inquiring soul is searching for, which the trembling soul pants after, that rest is promised, is assured to those who take upon themselves the yoke of Christ. He, according to the prophecy, *was wounded for our transgres-*

sions, and bruised for our iniquities⁸; he was pointed out by his messenger as *the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*⁹; he is justly styled the *Prince of peace*¹, who first discharged to the full the only price at which that peace could be obtained; and who originally in his own person, and through all ages since by the Apostles whom he sent, by the Scriptures which he inspired, and by the ministers which he has provided, proclaims to all men the gracious terms of the covenant; that, *being justified by faith, we have peace with God through him*; that *there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus*². He did all, suffered all, paid all for us; and is, therefore, revealed to us as the Advocate, the Intercessor, the Mediator between God and man, because he steps between the offender and his judge, and offers the infinite ransom, and sets the prisoner free³. Not ceasing to be God, as he had been before all worlds, he became man, that he

⁸ Isaiah, liii. 5.

⁹ John, i. 29.

¹ Isaiah, ix. 6.

² Rom. v. 1. viii. 1.

³ Some of the following sentiments and expressions are taken from Bishop Hall's beautiful treatise, entitled, "Heaven on Earth."

might be a perfect mediator between God and man, being both in one person—God, that he might satisfy, since God was offended; and MAN, that he might suffer, since man had sinned. Great indeed is the mystery thus declared to us; that God should be clothed in flesh, and become man; should take, not our nature only, but our infirmities upon him, our shame, our sins, and their punishment; should do this, that mankind might be raised from the sad condition to which sin had reduced them, and might be restored to the regard of their Creator; that He whom the heavens were too narrow to contain, should lie in obscurity and poverty; that He who had been attended by angels should be derided by men, rejected by his own, persecuted by wicked men, tempted by the evil spirit, betrayed by his servants, crucified *among transgressors*, and what was worse than all, to outward appearance deserted by his Father! Who shall measure the inestimable ransom, who shall rightly appreciate the purchase of our peace?

No man, in this frail and ignorant state, can justly measure or value it, because no man can form an adequate idea either of

the misery of that *second death* from which we are thus rescued, or of the glory of heaven, which is thus offered to our acceptance. But he will go nearest to a due sense of such blessings, and of the gratitude which he owes for them, who is taught by the Holy Spirit to understand what the Scripture says of these things; of the hopeless misery of man, while unredeemed, and of the glorious inheritance prepared for those *who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead*⁴.

This, then, is the fulfilment of the promise, *ye shall find rest unto your souls*; this accomplishes it, that the *chastisement of our peace* was upon Christ⁵, that *the Lord laid on him* the chastisement by which our peace was obtained. In that atonement, we acquire a personal interest by faith;—by faith we severally take home and reckon to ourselves that sacrifice, “that full and sufficient sacrifice, once offered” for the sins of mankind. What Christ offers, he offers to your faith: believe, and you have received. Believe that he came into the world, that

⁴ Luke, xx. 35.

⁵ Isaiah, liii. 5, 6.

he died upon the cross, to deliver from the consequences of sin as many as apply to him with a sense of their guilt and helplessness; believe that he *ever liveth to make intercession for us*⁶; believe that he is the propitiation with the Father, for the sins of all who *take his yoke upon them* in this season of their earthly trial. By such faith we obtain an interest in all that God has promised, in all that Christ has performed. Hence we have from our Father, whom we had offended, pardon and love; hence we that were enemies become friends, and even more than friends, even *the sons of God by adoption*⁷; and, as sons, are entitled to look not only for provision and protection here on earth, but for an everlasting patrimony above, *an inheritance eternal in the heavens*.

Happy are you, whose privilege it is to have this inheritance, this *everlasting rest* proposed to you in the Gospel: more happy you, my brethren, whoever of you have through grace understood, and received, and felt it, and proved by experience that it is such as this world can neither

⁶ Heb. vii. 21.

⁷ Gal. iv. 5.

give nor take away! On earth all things may frown upon you; friends may desert you, or be snatched away; fortune may fail; your reputation be blasted: but what is the world to you? Your *habitation is above*. You may be worn down by sorrow or pain or poverty; but such afflictions are your Saviour's sending; HIS sending, who himself suffered and was tried by them, and *knoweth our infirmities*, and will make *all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose*⁸. Even death approaches you shorn of his terrors; *the sting of death is sin*; but your sin is ransomed; your debt is paid, your account is closed; therefore you through faith have overcome death: *thanks be to God, who giveth you the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*⁹. It was this confidence which inspired the hymn of the holy prophet of old: *Lord, now, now that I have seen my Redeemer in the flesh, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace*¹;—depart in peace; no more fear of death and judgment to the true

⁸ Rom. viii. 28.

⁹ 1 Cor. xv. 57.

¹ Luke, ii. 29.

Christian. The unbeliever can have no comfort in death, because he fears to lose his existence altogether. The sinful man dares not meet death, through fear of being condemned to eternal misery. The half Christian, who has halted all his life between two opinions, between God and mammon, he dares not die, because he knows not what his future lot may be. The determined and settled Christian alone, he who has taken upon him in earnest the yoke of Christ, he not only dares, but is willing to die, because he knows he shall be happy; and looking earnestly towards heaven, the place of his rest, he can unfeignedly say, *to die, and to be with Christ, is far better*² than to linger in this world of trial. He now sees that home nigh at hand, to which, through a long and weary pilgrimage, he has aspired.

Not that he is free from offences against God: he finds constant reason to say, in the beautiful language of our Communion Service, "We do not presume to come to thee, O Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great

² Phil. i. 23

mercies." But he is free from habitual and wilful offences; and he has entreated pardon through his Redeemer's merits; and through his Redeemer's merits, his *transgressions are forgiven, his sin is covered*³.

To those who possess this happy confidence, the gloomy road of death is cheered; the soul finds its promised rest; and like that of the martyr Stephen, being blessed with a view of the glory of heaven, and an assurance of its Saviour's mercy, can pray with serenity, nay, with triumph, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*⁴.

It is thus that our Saviour, both through life and in the hour of death, accomplishes his gracious promise, that those who take his yoke upon them, and learn of him, shall *find rest unto their souls*..

Looking to himself and his past life, the Christian sees it stained, too probably, with many known and wilful sins; or at the best, he finds it marked with many omissions and transgressions of the written law of God, and that he has "followed too much the devices and desires of his own heart." Should he be of a reasoning tem-

³ Psalm xxxii. 1. Rom. iv. 7.

⁴ Acts, vii. 59.

per, he perceives that if he were *weighed in the balance*, he must be *found wanting*⁵; or should he be of a humble and fearful temper, “the remembrance of his sins is grievous unto him, the burden of them is intolerable;” but his conscience assures him that he has embraced the offers of God’s mercy through Christ, and in the confidence that Christ is able to present his people *faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*⁶, he *finds rest unto his soul*.

Looking towards the world in which he is placed, the Christian sees himself encompassed with difficulty and danger; feels himself labouring against much inward corruption, so that he cannot do the things his better judgment inclines unto; and has before him the prospect of the *valley of the shadow of death*, through which he must of necessity pass to his eternal abode of happiness or misery; but he remembers the merciful invitation, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you*: he remembers the promise of the same Saviour to those who struggle

⁵ Dan. v. 27.

⁶ Jude, 24.

against the power of sin and Satan, *I have prayed, that thy faith fail not*⁷: he remembers the gracious words, proof even against the king of terrors, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*⁸; and here even *in the multitude of the sorrows that he may have in his heart, he finds rest unto his soul.*

*Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness*⁹; Christ appearing in the flesh, to procure the redemption of mankind; and mankind redeemed, through faith in the atonement which he thus made. Corrupt nature revolts against a doctrine so humiliating to its pride. Does it do this in the hearts of any here present to-day? Should such be unhappily the case, then ask yourselves these two questions, and pray for God's assistance, that you may answer them to your soul's comfort. First, Do you believe the Gospel to be a divine revelation; to be emphatically, the *Word of God*? Next, Is not this fact declared in every page of the Gospel, *that Christ, and Christ alone, is the way; and the truth, and the life; that no man cometh unto the Father*

⁷ Luke, xxii. 32.

⁸ Josh. i. 5. Heb. xiii. 5.

⁹ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

*but through him; that there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we can be saved; that if Christ died for all, then were all dead: in short, that, being justified by faith, we have peace with God*¹? Yes: if you doubt the inspiration of the Gospel, then start at the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ. But if you believe, as I trust you do, in what no man acquainted with the laws of evidence can reasonably scruple to believe; if you believe in what comes to you authenticated by the sure word of prophecy, by a mighty display of miracles, by a successful promulgation under every human discouragement, and by an intrinsic excellence truly divine,—if, on these grounds, the truth of the Gospel be impressed upon your hearts, then the question is not, whether the Christian's justification is by faith, for of this there can be no farther doubt; but your inquiry must be, whether you yourselves have that faith, to which alone the declared will of God has annexed salvation; and the real nature of which I attempted to explain in

¹ John, xiv. 6. Acts, iv. 12. 2 Cor. v. 24. Rom. v. 1.

my two last discourses, as consisting of entire reliance and sincere obedience. If this faith is still wanting, leave not your closet, rise not from your knees, till you have entreated Almighty God, who has offered you the means, and opened to you the way of acceptance with him, to give you grace to receive his mercy, to *compel you to come in*: then you shall find in the trials of life, in the hour of death, and even in the day of judgment, such *peace as passeth man's understanding*, even *peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

SERMON IX.

YOKE OF CHRIST WHY TERMED LIGHT
AND EASY.

MATTHEW, XI. 29.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

IN the preceding verses, our Lord invites all men to come to him, and take his yoke upon them; i. e. to enter into his service by faith, and to follow him in holy obedience. He now concludes and enforces his invitation by the assurance that *his yoke is easy, and his burden light.*

His yoke easy? it may be asked. Can that be an *easy yoke*, which lays upon us duties and restraints so strongly opposed to our natural inclinations? Can that be a *light burden*, which we submit to so unwillingly, and are so ready to shake off on any sudden temptation?

In answer to this, it must be admitted,

first, that the yoke of Christ is not called easy, because it relieves us from the necessity of our own labour and diligence. The language of the Gospel is uniformly against any such deceitful notion. The Apostles nowhere argue, that since Christ has done so much for you, nothing remains for you to do yourselves; but rather, that *giving all diligence, you should add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity*¹. So St. Paul to the Romans, after explaining at length the way in which man is justified before God, proceeds to urge—*I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, by all that has been undertaken for your souls, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service*². Indeed, throughout the Gospel, there is nothing to flatter our indolence, or warrant the relaxation of our constant exertions. Our life is compared in it to a *warfare; to a race; to a pilgrim-*

¹ 2 Pet. i. 5.

² Rom. xii. 1.

age; to a *stewardship*. If it is a warfare, the crown is given to *him that overcometh*. If it is a race, the *prize of the high calling which is before us* must be won by labouring to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection. If it is a pilgrimage, we must live like *strangers in the world*, knowing that *our habitation is above*. If it is a stewardship, we are bound to continual watchfulness in our use of the talents committed to our trust, for which *we must give account*. Nay, *if the gate is strait, and the way narrow that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*³; if, out of the *many who are called, few are chosen*⁴; how strictly are we obliged to *watch, and pray, and labour*, that we make our own *calling and election sure*⁵!

Neither can the yoke of Christ be termed easy, because its demands are agreeable to our natural heart and disposition. It cannot be agreeable to our corrupt nature, to be told that we must *mortify the deeds of the body*; must *mortify our members that are upon the earth*; must *crucify the flesh, with*

³ Matt. vii. 14.

⁴ Matt. xx. 16.

⁵ 2 Pet. i. 10.

*the affections and lusts; must deny ourselves*⁶. So far from this being naturally easy to us, the very words imply difficulty, trial, and temptation; and no one has endeavoured long to obey such commands, without finding that *the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other*⁷.

It is not, therefore, as being a service of no pains or labour, nor as being a service to which we are by nature inclined, that the yoke of Christ is called easy, or his burden light. But it is easy, in the first place, in comparison with any other service which we can follow in the world. And it is easy, in the second place, because if we heartily and earnestly take it upon ourselves, He whom we engage to serve, engages also to assist us with such gracious aid, as shall enable us to serve him successfully, and *endure unto the end*.

I. First, then, the service of Christ is light and easy, compared with any other yoke which we can bear through life. We are placed here in a state of existence,

⁶ Rom. viii. 13. Col. iii. 5. Gal. v. 24.

⁷ Gal. v. 17.

which does not profess to offer us undisturbed peace or unmixed gratifications. Our business in this world is not to enjoy ourselves, but to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*⁸. It is only at the right hand of God, that there is *fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore*. We are not, therefore, on earth to look for perfect, but for comparative happiness. And though it would be a wilful concealment of the truth, to pretend that nothing is to be resigned, nothing opposed by one who endeavours, by divine grace, to live the life of the Gospel for the sake of the promises of the Gospel; yet it is indisputable that a life so led is a life of peace and pleasantness, compared with any life which can be set against it—compared, for instance, with a life of careless irreligion; or compared with the life most directly opposed to it, a life of open sin.

1. Think, first, of those who are *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*. It might be supposed that their life, at least while it lasted, would be light and easy. But it is not so. Every amusement in

⁸ Phil. ii. 12.

which they indulge leaves them weary and restless; they feel no delight in looking back upon gratifications which are past, but are ever seeking some new object, which, when they have obtained it, proves as empty and incomplete as those which they had tried before. They waste a life which was given for higher purposes, in seeking a sort of happiness which has no view beyond this world, and which even in this world, always eludes, always disappoints them. The hours which were designed to prepare us for eternity, are consumed in a succession of misnamed pleasures, which become in effect a succession of cares.

2. Think again of those who give up life to the unrestrained pursuit of riches or honours. Is theirs an easy service? Is it a light burden which the worldly man bears, when he *rises up early, and late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness; spending his labour, after all, for that which satisfieth not, instead of laying up treasure in heaven?* Or does he bear an easy yoke, who seeks after honours, and devotes himself to ambition? The majority of this class are disappointed in their object altogether;

but suppose them to succeed: however high they rise in distinction, there is always some one before them in the race, some obstacle to their satisfaction, some barrier between them and happiness.

3. Again, if we take the less flagrant case of those who attempt to unite two services which are incompatible; to *serve both God and manimon*: do these bear a light burden? They live in perpetual fear of displeasing either one or the other. In attempting to be *conformed to this world*, instead of setting the Gospel before them as their only rule or standard, they are pursuing what has no stability, no settled character: they are copying the shadow of a cloud, which before its figure can be caught is changed or flown. Through dread of acting against the practice of those around them, of contradicting general opinion, of differing from the fashion of the passing day, they are hurried into a thousand compliances, some against their conscience, and some against their inclination, and some against their reason. Yet it is a vain endeavour, after all: an anxious desire to please the world, must end in disappointment or in sin. Whoever makes the mul-

itude his judges, will be condemned by the multitude at last, if he does not *follow them to do evil.*

4. Supposing, however, that instead of a life of levity, and carelessness, and irreligion, it is a life of positively sinful habits, which interferes with the service of Christ; it might surely be expected that such a life, which sets at open defiance all future consequences, might, at least, afford him present satisfaction. But the truth is far otherwise. A man who pursues a course of wicked habits, of whatever sort, is in no respect a happy man, even as far as regards this world. What is more tormenting than envy? what is exposed to more vexations than pride? what is more wearisome and disappointing than covetousness? Could you enter the heart of the malicious man, you might ask whether there is any thing so comfortless, as to be always seeking the injury, regretting the prosperity, or grieving at the reputation of a neighbour. Inquire, again, of the profligate man, whatever may be the degree or nature of his profligacy, whether his heart tell him that he is happy; whether the pains he takes to practise wickedness, are not far greater

than it would require to live in temperance and chastity; whether the remembrance of those companions of his guilt, whom, perhaps, he has led into irrevocable wrong, does not molest him in his bed, and haunt him when he is waking; and whether the consciousness of that shipwreck, to which he is bringing his own immortal soul, does not intrude itself upon his secret moments, and embitter his most festive revels?

St. Paul is very bold upon this point, and plainly asks the disciples, whom he had converted from the error of their ways, *What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?* *What fruit, what enjoyment, what gratification had ye in that wickedness, which it now humbles you to the dust, to think that ye ever indulged and delighted in?* And yet I believe there is many a conscience that will bear him out, and prove that he, as well as the Lord whom he served, *knew what was in man.* Yes. I will venture to follow up the question of the Apostle, and to ask any of those that are here present, and who are living in the habit of any wicked-

⁹ Rom. vi. 21.

ness, living as strangers to God, living as enemies to Christ: I too will dare to put the question, *What fruit* have ye now in *those things* whereof the Christian is ashamed? Are your days peaceful? Are your nights tranquil? Do you love the companions of your guilt? Are they dear to you? Do you like the recollection of your sin? Are not the thoughts of those who first led you into evil practices, hateful to your sober conscience? Are you not haunted too by the remembrance of those whom you have allured to do wrong; whose souls at the day of judgment may rise and condemn you, because you have decoyed them into everlasting ruin?

I know I may ask with truth, *What fruit* have ye now in *those things* whereof the Christian is ashamed? I know that sin is a hard master, and benefits none who are his servants even in this world. May you be sensible of this in time; and learn that the beginning of these things is sorrow and vexation, no less surely than *their end is death*¹; before you feel it by sad experience, and are forced to lament it in vain for ever and ever.

¹ Rom. vi. 21.

Now the service of Christ is free from all these disappointments and uncertainties and regrets. It is free from disappointments, because whoever heartily enters upon it, shall *in no wise be cast out*². It has no inconsistency, no perplexity: it is followed by no remorse, because every step which we have taken in it is agreeable to look back upon, and will give comfort, when every other comfort has sunk from under us. It is sometimes, perhaps, like all the ways of human life, perplexed with cares, and with sorrow, that we make a progress too slow for our desires; but this is the effect of our corruption, not of the efforts which we are making to overcome corruption. And, in general, the heart is allowed to experience the truth of the assurance, that the *yoke of Christ is easy*. *The God of hope*, says the Apostle, *shall fill you with all joy and peace in believing*³. *To be spiritually minded*, he elsewhere says, *is life and peace*⁴; and our Saviour's promise to his disciples stands thus: *Peace I*

² John, vi. 87.

³ Rom. xv. 13.

⁴ Rom. viii. 6.

*leave with you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you*⁵.

The fulfilment of these promises must, of course, be matter of experience, not of argument; but their truth has never failed, if the assurance of Christians in all seasons and under all circumstances may be believed. Indeed, your own hearts may furnish you with the means of conviction. There are none, I trust, who have not themselves enjoyed the gratification arising from such conduct as their conscience assured them to be right. How delightful, then, would life be, if the whole of it were made up of such gratifications? And such is the life of faith, *bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

I trust, again, there are none who have not experienced the heart-felt satisfaction which attends resisting a temptation to do wrong. No one, I believe, ever yet felt happy or self-satisfied, because he had given way to temptation: no one, on the other hand, ever failed to feel so, when he had sacrificed an evil inclination at the shrine of duty. And what is this inward

⁵ John, xiv. 27.

satisfaction? this mental joy? It is the immediate reward which recompenses those who are bearing the yoke of Christ; it is the testimony of his faithfulness, imprinted on the heart of those who love and fear him: it is an earnest of those future inconceivable joys, which he will hereafter bestow on those who are faithful and obedient unto the end.

But surely I am only urging what has been frequently felt and understood by many of you who hear me. Have you not found, in some of your more favoured moments, when you have been more than usually affected by a sense of divine things and future glories, when your minds have been exalted by reflection on your Saviour's mercy, and the blessings which he has purchased for the faithful penitent, have you not found a satisfaction more pure, more unalloyed, from the resolution of following him, than ever arises from any of this world's best enjoyments? Have you not been ready to adopt the language of the Apostles, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*⁶, where we are obeying thy will, and enjoy-

⁶ Luke, ix. 33.

ing thy favour? Or of David, *Lord, what love have I unto thy law! How sweet are thy words unto my heart! One day in thy courts, is better than a thousand!* What is this but an evidence that the *yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light?* for, if this were always the state of the mind, earth would become heaven to us, and our life the life of angels.

II. But without considering the misery which follows sin usually even in this world; and without considering the encouragement which commonly assists the progress of the faithful Christian; I proceed, in the second place, to show, how that *burden* may justly be called *light*, and that *yoke easy*, which the Master whom we serve will enable us to bear, by affording us aid in proportion to our wants, and corresponding to our own exertions. The servant of Christ is not left to himself to make the best of his way through difficulties and temptations; Christ himself *knoweth those that are his*⁷; he takes a tender interest in their safety, and is *with them*, as he declared to his disciples, *always, even to the end of the world*⁸.

⁷ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

⁸ Matt. xxviii. 20.

And the comfort arising from this confidence of support, is no less necessary than it is delightful to the sincere but humble Christian.

To a man who does not consult his Bible, or understand himself and the corruption of his own heart, nothing seems more easy than "so to pass through things temporal, as finally to lose not things eternal." He knows too little about God, to be sensible what God requires.

Not so the person who has been, happily, enough enlightened to see the difference between his own character, and that of the *children of light*. I say, happily; for, which is best: to perceive your danger, or to be blind in the midst of danger? Which does the sailor most dread, the hidden rock, or the open, though boisterous sea?—I say, again, happily—for such acquaintance with our state and condition in the world is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the conscience, who will *perform to the end that good work which he has begun in us*⁹, if we are true to ourselves, and do not stifle conviction.

⁹ Phil. i. 6.

Now the person who has been thus happily awakened, is apt to feel the very contrary impression from that of the careless and ignorant; is apt to think, *Who is sufficient for these things? who then can be saved?* And when we consider the snares of the world, and the difficulty, with our corrupt dispositions, of avoiding them; we might reasonably fear that none would be *sufficient*, if we had only to look to our own strength and natural powers.

It is in this state of feeling that the promises of the Gospel are indeed valuable to the anxious soul; which are to this effect: that whoever comes to Christ with a real desire of taking up his yoke, and being ruled by him, that he may *not perish, but have everlasting life*: such a one engages God and his Saviour on his side, who will assist him in every conflict, and support him in every temptation. *If a man love me, says our Lord, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him*¹. He who is gone to *prepare a place* for his disciples, will no less prepare them

¹ John, xiv. 23.

to inherit those heavenly mansions². He will deliver them from the snare of *the tempter*, tempt he never so cunningly. He will provide that *as your day is, so shall your strength be*³. St. Paul declares his persuasion, that *he is able to keep that which he had committed to him unto the great day*⁴. My brethren, intrust your souls to him with the same confidence, and he will give you *grace for grace*, and carry you on *from strength to strength*, till the trial is over, and the reward yours. Apply to him, after the example of the Apostle, in every difficulty; and he will answer you as he answered the Apostle, *My grace is sufficient for thee*⁵.

We read, in the book of Exodus, that when God was about to fulfil his promise, and deliver the Israelites from Egypt in order to settle them in the land of Canaan, Moses, who was to be his instrument in this business, was at first afraid to undertake the duty to which he was appointed. *God said, Come, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my*

² John, xiv. 2.

³ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 12.

⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

*people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto God, Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And He said, CERTAINLY I WILL BE WITH THEE*⁶.

So when our blessed Lord gives an invitation to the ignorant, or the thoughtless, or the wicked amongst us, Forsake your evil ways, turn from your iniquities, that they may not be your ruin—*take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls*; we are ready to answer, Who are we, that we should oppose Satan, and *overcome the world*? Then does our Redeemer condescend to say, *Certainly I will be with thee*; go forth in my strength, and thou shalt prevail against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

As many, therefore, as have entered resolutely into the service of Christ, even if they sometimes find it a toilsome, a laborious profession, have a comfort and a security in their exertions, which no other service can afford. What Christ said to Peter, *Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to*

⁶ Exod. iii. 10.

have you, that he may sift you as wheat; this points out their toil, their trial—but what he proceeds to add, *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not*⁷, this is their security. No man's condition is so sure as theirs. The prayer of Christ is more than sufficient to strengthen them, however weak they may be, and to overthrow all the powers that are against them, however strong and malignant. Yes: blessed for ever is that faithful soul, who has taken upon him in sincerity the yoke of Christ; nothing shall make a separation between him and his God. He *knows in whom he has believed*⁸; he is not ignorant whose precious blood has been shed for him; he has a shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power; unto him he applies for growth in grace and knowledge, and pours out his heart in prayer; and what is there in the world that shall change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affection towards God, or the affection of God towards him⁹?

In this way does our Lord make good his assurance, that his *yoke is easy*, and his

⁷ Luke, xxii. 32.

⁸ 2 Tim. i. 12.

⁹ Hooker. Sermon on Habak. i. 4.

burden light. Be not, therefore, so mistaken as to suppose, that if you are serving Christ, you must lead a comfortless and melancholy life, and make up your mind to be miserable here, with the hope of being happy hereafter. This is, in fact, the suggestion of Satan; who would thus counteract the salutary impressions which are made on the yielding conscience, and prevent their becoming effectual. He would persuade you that the religious man must be ignorant of all enjoyment, and the adversary of innocent relaxation; and that there is an inseparable connexion between piety and melancholy. Far otherwise: cheerfulness, instead of being the enemy, is the characteristic of piety; and the Christian, though he does not join in the *laughter of fools*, or *sit in the chair of the scorner*, has the truest enjoyment of all those really innocent pleasures, which a merciful God has interspersed among the cares and labours of life. No one else, in truth, has any title, any claim to cheerfulness. The wicked and impenitent man is at enmity with God: how can he be cheerful, who lies under the wrath of his Maker and his Judge? The thoughtless inconsi-

derate worldling is a stranger to God; how can he be cheerful, or ought he to be cheerful, who is alienated from the Author of every good and perfect gift?

No; there is nothing gloomy connected with the religion of the Gospel. Those, perhaps, who have only known it as disturbing the lethargy of conscience, or forbidding the practice of sin, may have declared otherwise, and brought back a bad report of *the land of promise*; but this has been owing to the want of an entire surrender of their hearts to their rightful Lord, and must not be ascribed to the existence of religion, but to the remains of sin. The comfort which arises from faith, must necessarily be proportioned to the degree of faith; according as the one is sincere, the other will be entire.

Miserable, melancholy, is the Christian called? No: rather happy, happy beyond the lot of his fellow mortals, is that man, on the tablets of whose heart the Holy Spirit has engraven this great truth, that life has but one important business, the service of God through Christ; and who has also, by his grace, devoted himself to that *reasonable service*. He has an object before him,

not trivial or temporary, but of permanent and universal interest—an object attended by no sorrow, and followed by no remorse—an object in which he is always advancing—an object in which he must succeed;—in which he has the divine promise, that he shall succeed. According to the words of that most spiritual service in which we are about to engage, “he dwells in Christ, and Christ in him: he is one with Christ, and Christ with him⁹.” What can dwell in that heart where Christ himself abides, but *peace and quietness and assurance for ever*? His presence banishes those evil inhabitants, those baleful passions, which, independently of their wretched consequences, deprive the soul of rest, and fill it with anxiety and turbulence. In the midst of those disappointments and vexations which naturally spring from the bustle of worldly affairs, his consolations cheer the mind, and restore it to peaceful serenity.

My brethren, if you find the yoke of Christ heavy and burdensome, depend upon it, this is because you have not taken it up

⁹ See Communion Service.

in earnest or heartily, but your affections are still set elsewhere. Be not satisfied with yourselves, till you have proved by your own happy experience, that the *yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light.*

SERMON X
THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

MATTHEW, v. 1, 2.

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them.

I HAVE NOW, in a series of discourses, explained the object of our Lord Jesus Christ in taking upon himself the nature of man, and appearing in the world, and submitting to the death of the cross. I have set before you his merciful purpose, *to seek and to save that which was lost*. I have shown how he invites all who feel that in their passage through this world they *labour and are heavy laden, to come unto him; to take his yoke upon them*, both as it is a service of faith, and a service of obedience; and thus to *learn of him how they may find rest unto their souls; for his yoke is easy, and his burden light*.

The question now remains, For what end this is undertaken and done? To what does it tend? Not only to an escape from that future punishment which awaits those who remain under the wrath of God: but, further, his purpose in inviting mankind to come unto him, and to learn of him, is to prepare them for a future kingdom, which he reveals and promises to those who follow him on earth. This is the great truth which lies at the foundation of the whole. *The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*¹. This, he declares, is the will of Him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day². He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die³. And as a last encouragement to his disciples, he leaves them these words: *In my Father's house are many mansions: if*

¹ John, v. 29.² John, vi. 40.³ John, xi. 25:

it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, ye may be also⁴.

This revelation, therefore, proposes to as many as receive it, a new object of transcendent importance. It binds them to form and cultivate, through the Spirit of God, a disposition, a character, which may be suited to that eternal kingdom where Christ is, and where they also, who follow him here on earth, *shall appear with him in glory⁵*. For that a character which is formed upon the principles of the Gospel, and can be formed on no other principles, is the only character for which an eternal kingdom is prepared of God; this is evident from every thing which has been heretofore discussed, and made the argument of the preceding discourses.

If the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost, then those who required to be thus sought and saved, were travelling in the wrong path, and had wan-

⁴ John, xiv. 2.

⁵ Col. iii. 5.

dered out of the road which leads to everlasting life.

If his message purports to invite men to *take his yoke upon them and learn of him, that they may find rest unto their souls*; then it follows, that without bearing his yoke, and listening to his instruction, they cannot obtain such rest. For *he is the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by him*⁶.

But supposing Christ himself had left this doubtful, which he has not, it becomes abundantly plain from the absolute declaration of the Apostles; who affirm, that the intent of their Lord's appearing was to prepare for an everlasting inheritance *as many as receive him*; by creating and nourishing in them a peculiar character, by which they should be known and distinguished here as his disciples.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to Titus, after laying down a set of rules, according to which Titus was to regulate his church, concludes them with this reasoning: *For the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that, de-*

⁶ John, xiv. 6.

rying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world: looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works⁷.

Again, in writing to the Galatians, he enumerates at length the sins which exclude men from heaven, and the graces which shall be received into heaven. *Now the works of the flesh, he says, the works to which human nature is of itself more or less inclined, are manifest; which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God⁸.* These, we see, are the works of the flesh, which the Christian is bound by his covenant to mortify and sub-

⁷ Titus, ii. 11, &c.

⁸ Gal. v. 19, &c.

due; but the *fruit of the Spirit*, the fruit of that Holy Spirit which Christ bestows, and by which he purifies the souls of his followers, is *love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*. *And they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.*

So, likewise, in his Epistle to the Romans, it is expressly declared that the eternal life promised by Jesus Christ, is reserved for those who do thus keep the body in subjection, and obey the influences of the Spirit. *For, if ye live after the flesh, live as you are naturally disposed to live, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God⁹.*

Being instructed, therefore, that we have an immortal soul, which, if it is not for ever happy, must be for ever miserable; and which Christ appeared to save from misery, and exalt to happiness; what remains for the Christian but to present himself humbly and obediently before his Lord,

⁹ Rom. viii. 14.

and inquire, *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*

The character which our Lord designs to create in his people, is described by him in various ways; by his replies, on some occasions, to questions put to him; by accidental remarks, arising from circumstances in which he was placed; by parables, illustrating the conduct which he meant to approve, or to condemn. But there is one occasion on which he concentrated, as it were, this character, and brought it forward in a single point of view; I mean that described in the text, when our Lord delivered the discourse which is known by the title of the Sermon on the Mount. And surely the situation there represented, is the most extraordinary and the most interesting which the history of the world records.

Imagine to yourselves the Médiator of a new and everlasting covenant, which God had mercifully entered into with mankind; *multitudes* collected around him, and listening to the message of Him who came down from heaven; to *speak that which he knew, and testify that which he had seen.* Behold him declaring, not according to man's judg-

ment, but according to the judgment of his own infinite and infallible knowledge, to whom the title of *blessed* properly belongs, i. e. for whom happiness is intended by their heavenly Father; what are the duties, the virtues, the graces, the qualifications, to which he has attached such a reward.

No wonder that a scene of such grandeur and importance should have left an impression which all the changes of time and foreign conquest have been unable to obliterate. The mountain from which this heavenly philosophy was first disclosed, has preserved by tradition the name of the Mountain of Beatitudes. Remember, that we were addressed there, as well as the multitudes who then surrounded the holy Jesus; and may the Spirit of God enable us to receive the precious lessons which were there given for the instruction of Christians of every succeeding age!

If the scene was thus extraordinary, the instruction was no less so. The divine teacher is easily distinguished. *He spake as never man spake.* How new and wonderful the opening of his discourse must have sounded in the ears of the multitude assembled! Some of them perhaps were

come, in hopes of bearing high office in that kingdom of this world, which they expected the Messiah to establish; and were prepared to ask what the mother of two of the disciples asked afterwards, *Lord, grant that my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, when thou comest in thy kingdom.* Others would expect to hear a lecture on their law, the law of Moses; or, a panegyric on their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; on whose merits they rested a claim to the exclusive favour of God towards their own nation; or, perhaps, a philosophical discourse on the nature of the soul, deciding the dispute which existed between the Pharisees and Sadducees, concerning the resurrection of the dead.

Nothing of all this. *No strife about words to no profit. No foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law.* No encouragement to those who *suppose that gain is godliness.* He who had been *in the beginning with God, and was God,* ascends at once to heaven. "In his first sentence, he casts as it were this world behind him, or carries his hearers out of it, and above it."

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake. And why? not because the world esteems them, nor because they possess the honours or the treasures of the world; but because they shall obtain mercy; they shall see God; they shall be called the children of God; theirs is the kingdom of heaven. As much as to say, Blessed are these characters; to them the promises of the Gospel are annexed; they have treasure in heaven: such must those be, who take my yoke upon them, and learn of me; my Spirit shall make them such; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

This leads me to advert to an error which prevails sometimes in doctrine, but far more frequently in the practical application of undisputed truth; when the efficacy of our Lord's death is so represented, as if the principal object of his incarnation was to save from future punishment those who have led a careless or a sinful life; to

suffer in their stead the penalties which their disobedience towards God had deserved and incurred.

Now, that the redemption of sinners was his great object, none can deny. *This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners¹. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself²; that as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many should be made righteous: that as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift might come upon all men unto justification of life³; that as in Adam all died, even so in Christ might all be made alive⁴.*

But no one can study the Gospel faithfully, without perceiving that its purpose is, *to save sinners, by converting them; converting them "to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from thenceforth according to his holy word⁵."* Not that men should pursue their own will and evil propensities, follow-

¹ 1 Tim. i. 15.

² 2 Cor. v. 19.

³ Rom. v. 18, 19.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 22.

⁵ Communion Service.

ing the devices and desires of their own hearts; and that at last, when this world failed them, and they could extract no more enjoyments from it, Christ should confer a pardon on them, and admit them into heaven; but that they should live here as his servants, according to the laws which he has prescribed, in order that they might be thus prepared to receive the future *reward of the inheritance*.

Thus we are told, that those who are *the called according to the purpose of God, whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON*⁶. We are told again, that **THE UNGODLY SHALL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD; that WITHOUT HOLINESS NO MAN SHALL SEE THE LORD**⁷. The injunctions which the Apostles intermixed with their announcement of the Gospel, even if they were not every where obvious, might be collected from a single passage of St. Paul:—*We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that AS YE HAVE RECEIVED OF US HOW YE OUGHT TO WALK, AND TO PLEASE GOD, so ye would*

⁶ Rom. viii. 29.

⁷ 1 Cor. vi. 9. Heb. xii. 10.

abound more and more. FOR YE KNOW WHAT COMMANDMENTS WE GAVE YOU BY THE LORD JESUS ⁸.

But without multiplying quotations to the same effect, consider the nature of those characters on which the positive blessings are pronounced in the verses which succeed the text. They are the *poor in spirit; the meek; the peacemakers; the merciful; the pure in heart; the persecuted for righteousness' sake.* All these are characters which are to be displayed in actual life; which suppose temptation and difficulty; which are not to yield to the opposition which they meet with in the world, but to be confirmed by it. A man could not show a humble spirit, unless he were surrounded by objects which excite him to be proud, or by persons who provoke him to jealousy and emulation. It is while he is thus surrounded, that he is enjoined to cultivate meekness. Purity of heart is exhibited in resisting *the lusts of the flesh,* and *mortifying the deeds of the body*⁹. We are exhorted to *hunger and thirst after righteousness,* not when there can be no other

⁸ 1 Thess. iv. 1.

⁹ Rom. viii. 13.

object of our desire, but while the heart is actually disposed and tempted to seek in preference the honours, or riches, or pleasures of the world. Patience under trials, and willingness to endure reproach for righteousness' sake, is to be practised in the bustle and business of life, when there are men ready to *revile and speak evil falsely* against those who differ from them.

These, then, are characters which cannot be assumed in a moment, at the close of our earthly scene, merely because they are wanted, and necessary that we may be received into heaven. They cannot be adopted like a name or title, or put on as a dress, merely because they are useful for the occasion. Nor can the opposite vices be suddenly thrown aside, because they have been found pernicious, or can be practised no longer, or we dread their consequences. We cannot have a perfect flower except by gradual and careful cultivation; we cannot have a perfect ear of corn, except by sowing the seed, and watching and encouraging it as it advances; and so the Christian character is gradually formed, and grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, till it reaches its

maturity, and is fitted for the garner of the heavenly Husbandmen.

At the same time, it is not for us to set limits to the mercy of God, or to say that *where sin has abounded, there his grace may not much more abound*. The Scriptures give us some examples of a change of character wrought in a very sudden manner, and in a very short time; and every minister of experience and observation has seen similar instances. The penitent thief, it has been often said, forbids despair. But observe, that this example by no means proves that any one was ever pardoned with an unconverted heart, or that punishment will ever be remitted to unrepented sin. The same humble confession of guilt, the same faith, is the very state of mind to which pardon is uniformly held out. *We indeed justly—* he acknowledged; *we justly* suffer this condemnation. *We receive the due reward of our deeds*¹. And his faith prevailed not only against probability, but almost against evidence. The bitter and shameful death which he saw the Redeemer undergoing, did not hinder his trusting in his divine

¹ Luke, xxiii. 41.

power, or prevent his exclaiming, *Lord, remember me, when thou comest in thy kingdom.* We may without hesitation affirm, that a like consciousness of sin, and a like conviction of the power of Christ to save, will draw down mercy such as he experienced upon all who truly feel them.

But what I would argue is, that such cases are anomalous; are contrary to the general purpose of the Gospel, and neither to be confidently expected, nor rashly trusted. No one can live an unholy life in a Christian land, without doing much *despite unto the Spirit of grace*², and has more reason to fear, that it will be utterly withdrawn, than to believe it will prove effectual at last. For the plain tenour of the Gospel is, not that men should die like penitent convicts, but that they should have their conversation in the world as a *peculiar people*, redeemed from sin to holiness, and from the power of Satan to the fear of God. In this view did Christ call upon mankind to *take his yoke upon them, and learn of him*; in this view did he teach the multitudes what characters are to be

² Heb. x. 29.

accounted as *blessed*, and of whom *is the kingdom of heaven*; and in conformity with this does the Christian at his baptism “re-nounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of this world, with all covetous desires of the same, and carnal desire of the flesh³.”

To conclude. *Eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ; not of works, lest any man should boast.* But none have any evidence or reasonable ground of hope that this *unspeakable gift* will be bestowed on them, except those who cultivate, by divine grace, the CHARACTER which is alike the proof and the effect of FAITH.

Under this view, I shall proceed, in some future discourses, to consider the nature of those qualities to which it is promised that they shall be admitted into the presence of God, and inherit the kingdom heaven.

³ Baptismal Service.

SERMON XI.

THE POOR IN SPIRIT.

MATTHEW, V. 3.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

THIS is the first maxim of that heavenly philosophy which, on the occasion described on Sunday last, our Lord sat down to teach, and the multitude around him assembled to hear. He instances this as the first feature of that character which his disciples are to cultivate and display. And thus he gave an early indication that his *kingdom was not of this world*. For this is not the spirit by which any thing in this world is to be obtained. What parent, who wished his son to rise above the condition of his birth, or even to keep his place among his equals, ever left him a maxim like this to set out upon, *Blessed are the poor in spirit?* But as our Redeemer

promises to his followers what this world cannot give, so he requires them to learn of him a character which this world cannot teach.

And yet, although this is not the natural character of mankind, it might reasonably be expected to be found so. Whether we consider them in the light of dependent creatures, or of sinful beings, or of *strangers and pilgrims in the world*, humility is the only feeling which is any way suited to their situation¹. And perhaps I

¹ It will appear that I follow the opinion of those commentators who consider this sentence as describing the Christian spirit towards God, as the third beatitude enforces meekness towards man. The application of the word *πτωχός* to the mind, has been treated as a difficulty by Wetstein and others; but it is impossible to escape it without departing from the simplicity of Scripture. Campbell, indeed, has translated the passage, Blessed are the poor who repine not: but he is not aware that, by his own phrase, he has attributed *πτωχός* to the mind: τὸ πνεῦμα alone cannot signify contentment; he must, after all, take the sense which he has given from the word *πτωχός*. The sentiment, no doubt, is a completion of Isaiah's prophecy, *πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται*: but, as the good tidings which our Lord brought were not confined to the poor, he in his wisdom added the description of *the spirit* to that of *the condition*. Campbell's second reason is still more extraordinary: "Poor-spirited," he says, "is al-

cannot more usefully describe the state of mind which is intended by the expressive phrase, *the poor in spirit*, than by examining how it will operate and display itself in each of these points of view.

I. First, as the creature of God, he who is *poor in spirit* will cultivate contentment; contentment in that state of life which it has pleased his Maker to allot to him, and with that degree of this world's good which it is given him to enjoy. For consider: to repine or murmur at our condition, what is it but to say, I am worthy of a higher station—I have more poverty, more labour, more affliction than I ought to suffer; God has dealt with me worse than I deserve.

At the same time, such contented acquiescence in the divine will as is contrary to these repinings, and is alone becoming in a Christian, does not condemn any just endeavour to improve our condition, as long as no duty towards God is violated by

ways employed in a bad sense, to denote mean, dastardly, servile. Poorness of spirit is the same ill quality in the abstract." Let the language of the world be conformed to that of the Gospel; not that of the Gospel to the world.

murmuring, no duty towards our neighbour broken by over-reaching. But an unprincipled desire, which scruples not the means it uses; or an eager anxiety, which cannot repose itself patiently on Providence, whatever may be the event of its search after worldly advantages:—these are quite inconsistent with a poor and humble spirit, which never forgets that we and all belonging to us are in the hands of God, who will provide better for us than our ignorant and short-sighted wishes. Even the pursuit of lawful things becomes unlawful, when they are inordinately and irregularly followed.

II. God, however, is not only our Creator, but our moral Governor; and a deep sense of our own unworthiness in his sight is a leading evidence of true humility. Nothing more surely distinguishes the Christian than this feeling; nothing more widely separates him from others. Unbelievers, and all who know little of the Bible, are uniformly proud and self-righteous. They talk of returning their souls pure to God who gave them; or they cannot believe that God will condemn mankind for sins to which they are so naturally disposed; and they speak with as much confidence of his for-

giving all that they have done in contradiction to his laws, as if they had known his purposes by an exclusive revelation. This is because they have neither studied Scripture, nor themselves: had they studied Scripture, they would have there learned to understand the perfect holiness and justice of God; had they studied themselves, they would have discovered, by a comparison of their own hearts with Holy Writ, how far short they fall of that character to which God has promised eternal life.

This ignorance of ourselves and of our state before God, is forcibly described in that striking passage, where our Lord is represented as apostrophizing the Laodiceans: *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear*². It will be seen at once, that

² Revel. iii. 17, &c.

this is the very characteristic of a Christian, to dread and deprecate God's judgments; to trust in no *riches* but those of divine grace; to pretend to no worthiness except that which he acquires by faith in his Redeemer. He knows that in himself he is *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. When he reflects upon the grievous transgressions into which he has fallen, either before he was acquainted with the Gospel, or in spite of the obligations under which it laid him, he is penetrated alike with a sense of God's goodness, which spared him to repent, and of his own unworthiness, which has so ill requited it. Therefore he is ready to look unto Christ alone for acceptance with God, before whom "he does not presume to appear, trusting in his own righteousness, but in His manifold and great mercies³;" and it is not the expression of the lips alone, but of the heart, when he prays, *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified*⁴.

But we shall better understand the na-

³ Communion Service.

⁴ Psa. cxliii. 2.

ture of this spirit, if we consider it embodied in a living model, and examine how it existed in those in whom it was first implanted by the Holy Ghost: who were first invested with a new and hitherto unknown character, and went out to show the world what a Christian was, in disposition and in action. Look, then, at St. Paul: if any man had reason to be proud, or liberty to boast about what he had done and suffered for the cause of the Gospel, he surely was that man. He had given up a high reputation for zeal among his countrymen; he had overcome the strongest prejudices; he had made himself known as the most earnest promoter of a doctrine which he had once reviled and persecuted. But this, it may be thought, was nothing to excite his pride; it was the necessary consequence of his miraculous conversion; so he himself argues: *For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel*⁵. Be it so. What, then, will be said of the conversion itself? to have been thought worthy of so pecu-

⁵ 1 Cor. ix. 16.

liar a call? Human corruption is found to pollute spiritual no less than temporal superiority; and certainly, as to labours in the Christian cause, he was equalled by none of the Apostles: *In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and fearfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness*.⁶

But the self-complacency which these proofs of zeal might naturally tend to excite, he is careful to keep down: and the feeling of real humility which prevailed in his mind, notwithstanding his *more abundant labours*, is seen by the frequent mention which he makes of the sinfulness of which he had been guilty, in opposing the Gospel before his conversion. He does not excuse himself, *because he did it ignorantly in unbelief*⁷; he rather holds it forth as a reason why he *obtained mercy*, though the *chief of sinners*, that in him first Jesus

⁶ 2 Cor. xi. 26.

⁷ 1 Tim. i. 13.

*Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting*⁸. He styles himself *the least of the Apostles, that was not meet to be called an Apostle, because he persecuted the church of God*⁹. And this not only in private, as an act of secret humiliation, but in his public Epistles, which were to be read in all the churches, and even in that church where his authority had met with the most serious opposition.

So, again, with regard to holy exercises, and such means as pious men have found it beneficial to use, in *crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts*: though the Spirit surely bore witness with his spirit that he was *the child of God*¹, yet he does not boast of security, or deny that often, *when he would do good, evil was present with him*; nay, his language is, *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*².

Neither, with regard to acceptance with God, does he make his extraordinary gifts,

⁸ 1 Tim. i. 16.

⁹ 1 Cor. xv. 9.

¹ See Rom. viii. 16.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

or labours, or sufferings, his title to future glory: his ground of hope is that which must be made the ground of the highest as well as of the lowest of Christ's servants: his desire is, to be *found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.* Brethren, he declares, *I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*³.

Such is an example of that humble spirit to which the blessings of the text are offered. This is the feeling which received the express commendation of our Lord, in his parable of the Pharisee and publican; and is that feeling which every Christian should strive to maintain; by meditating, like St. Paul, on his sins rather than on his obedience; by contemplating the purity of the divine law, rather than his

³ Phil. iii. 9—14.

own poor endeavours to comply with it. And, though the servant of Christ cannot, and need not, pretend to be ignorant whether he has taken up his Lord's yoke or no;—he will check every presumptuous rising of spiritual pride by reflecting that *by the grace of God he is what he is*; and, if he ever dares to set before his mind the evidences of his faith, by recollecting the labours which he has undergone, the worldly advantages which he has abandoned, the sins which he has renounced for his Master's sake,—he will not fail to add, *yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*⁴.

III. A third necessary effect of the same spirit, is sobriety of mind, is moderation; that *moderation*, by which, as the Apostle says, Christians should be known, be distinguished among men⁵; as those who *confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and desire a better country, that is, a heavenly*⁶. This preserves in them a temperance as to all the enjoyments and vanities of this world; a temperance in pleasures, a temperance in pur-

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

⁵ Phil. iv. 5.

⁶ Hebrews, xi. 14—16.

suit of honours and distinctions, a temperance in expenses. This makes them ready to renounce any amusement, any advancement of wealth or dignity, any flattering appendage of pride, which may be inconsistent with duty, and likely to corrupt the heart, or overthrow that humility which is alone suitable to a weak and sinful creature like man. Whoever has this spirit, is willing to forego any worldly advantage or enjoyment, when God requires it; which is, when he can no longer keep them without offending against some duty. He thinks too lowly and meanly of whatever he does, to be puffed up with self-conceit. Being taught to *prefer others in honour* before himself, he does not strive after precedence and distinction. In his whole progress through life he rests entirely upon God; relying upon his providence, trusting his promises, seeking his grace, and depending upon his strength for assistance in duties and deliverance in dangers⁷. This is a slight description of that spirit of deep humility before God which is the foundation of all the characteristic graces

⁷ See Taylor's Life of Christ, sect. xii.

of a Christian. It is the spirit which Isaiah describes: *To this man will I look, says the Lord; even to him that is poor, to him that is of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word*⁸. It is the temper of those whom St. James calls *the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom*⁹: the temper of which St. Paul declares, that *godliness with contentment is great gain*¹; and which our Lord represents in his description of the church at Smyrna: *I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty; but thou art rich, rich towards God*². Moses gave an eminent example of this spirit, when he *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*³.

Make it, therefore, my brethren, your earnest endeavour to bring your heart into this frame, through the grace which accompanies meditation and prayer. By your approach to this state of feeling you may judge in some degree of the share which you individually possess in the privi-

⁸ Isaiah, lxvi. 2.

⁹ James, ii. 5.

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 6.

² Rev. ii. 9.

³ Hebrews, xi. 24. See Clarke, *Serm.* 46.

leges procured by your Redeemer for those who believe, and fear, and imitate, and obey him. For such ought to be the spirit of all who "profess and call themselves Christians." Whether, indeed, this be so much the case, that all who are called after the name of Christ are *poor in spirit*, like their Master, and as he instructed them to be, you can judge by what you know of the spirit of mankind in general. How is that man commonly thought of, who is careless about this world's good? who is indifferent as to a greater fortune, or a higher situation, or more honours than he at present possesses? who foregoes any immediate advantage, for the sake of his soul's future health? who, in his choice of profession or situation in life, consults his religious interests, and not his chance of fortune or promotion? who, in his daily habits and expenses, conforms to the humility and simplicity of the Gospel? who, in his habitual feelings and conversation, obeys the Apostle's precept; and, *having food and raiment* (*i. e.* having the necessaries of life, in the situation and sphere in which he was born and brought up), is *therewith content*?

As far as a man of this disposition and conduct is praised, applauded, and imitated, so far does the spirit of Christ prevail in the world, and those who are his followers in name are his disciples in deed and in truth. If, on the other hand, such a man would be commonly thought mean-spirited, would be blamed as a stranger to his own interests and those of his family, would be despised for his moderation, or censured as a lover of singularity,—then we have a plain proof that the influence of the Gospel is not yet universally received, understood, and valued; and that we must study the Gospel itself, if we mean to obey it, and not take up with general opinion. For it is an awful consideration, that, whether we believe him or no, our Lord has positively declared, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*; and he has added a reason well worthy our attention—*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, in whichever sense we receive the phrase. If it mean here, as it often does, the spiritual kingdom set up by Christ on earth, of which his disciples are members, *blessed are the poor in spirit*; to them the Gospel

is preached, for they receive it with humility; they are the true members of the church, the sincere disciples of Jesus. Or if it mean that state of future happiness prepared by our Lord for those *who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for honour, and glory, and immortality,—still blessed are the poor in spirit*, for theirs is that spirit which is fit for heaven, and therefore shall be rewarded in heaven; theirs is that humble, that chastened state of heart, which Christ implants and encourages in his followers, and which he will recompense with a kingdom that is not of this world; for they that are little in their own eyes are great in the sight of God.

Here, then, you have the reason placed before you why you should implore the divine grace to infuse and cherish in you a humble spirit. So Christ says elsewhere, *Suffer little children, who are usually simple, and meek and teachable, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven*⁴. So he says again: *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom*⁵. What should they fear who are

⁴ Matt. x. 14.

⁵ Luke, xii. 32.

heirs of such a promise? A kingdom, as is well known, is the metaphor by which not only the spiritual reign of the Messiah on earth, but the future state of his redeemed people, is often expressed. So it is called *a crown; a crown of life; everlasting life; paradise; the joy of our Lord.* By all which terms we are intended to believe that it is a state of honour, as a kingdom and a crown in this world are honourable; a state of comfort, as in paradise there was no labour or sorrow; a state of happiness, in the presence of our Lord himself, with whom is *fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.*

This is the scriptural account of heaven, and this is the exceeding great reward held out to encourage *the poor in spirit.* To those who look forward to this object; who *set their affections on things above,* and *seek first the kingdom of God,* it will matter little whether their spirit is such as is admired or approved in this world: they are satisfied with knowing that it is such as their Saviour showed by his example, taught in his word, and favours with his regard: and this is the approbation which they have learned to prize and value be-

yond all earthly things. Therefore, when they are tempted to repine at their condition, or disposed to think highly of themselves and meanly of others; or enticed by the *lust of the eyes and the pride of life*; they restrain the workings of corrupt nature, by recollecting how their Saviour has said, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*; and why he has pronounced them blessed—*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

SERMON XII.

USES OF AFFLICTION.

—◆—

MATTHEW, v. 4.

*Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall
be comforted.*

I OBSERVED, on a former occasion, how extraordinary and unexpected the features of the Christian character, as described by our Lord in this discourse, must have appeared to those who stood around him. And those who had been surprised by his first declaration, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, would be no less astonished by the sentence of the text, *Blessed are they that mourn*; for how different is this from common language! how much at variance with general opinion! Common opinion says, Happy are the young, whose hearts are light, and take little thought of the morrow; happy are the rich and gay, on whose amusements and desires no check is im-

posed; happy those who run through life easily and smoothly, without any reverse of health or fortune. These are our natural thoughts; and perhaps, my brethren, it may seem extraordinary to some of you, that any one should be of a different mind. If it be so, let this passage have its due effect, and awaken you to serious inquiry. Your Redeemer says, *Happy are they that mourn.* You are disposed to say, Those who enjoy youth, and gaiety, and riches, and health, are happy. No sentiments can differ more widely; yet which, think ye, is most likely to be in error; He who saw all things,—things both relating to this world and the next, at the same point of view; who *knew what was in man*, and knew what was in heaven, and what was requisite to prepare such a being as man for heaven: or you, who, betrayed by corrupt hearts within, and assaulted by dangerous temptations abroad, can hardly elevate your thoughts or wishes above earthly cares or worldly pleasures?

If, then, your habits of thinking are such that you can perceive no grounds for the assertion in the text, that you are offended at it—pause, and review them: it

is a serious matter to differ from Him who has revealed to us all that we know, and who is the author of all that we hope beyond this present world.

More especially, as these are not the words of one who was himself a stranger to all enjoyment, and having never experienced any thing but gloom and melancholy, utters a sentiment of this kind in a fit of despondency: neither, again, are they the words of one who speaks of that which he knows not of, and recommends what he has never tried. They are the words of Him who was indeed himself *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*; but who was also acquainted with happiness too; who knew the joys of religion, and the power of heavenly support; and had tasted the anticipations of future glory, and that *peace of God which now passes all understanding*, and shall hereafter satisfy all desire. He had tasted of both cups, the *cup of trembling*, and the *cup of salvation*; and was, therefore, well able to judge what proportion the comforts of God bear to the miseries of man; and how little the sufferings of this present time are in comparison of the glory that shall be revealed to those

who bear them with meekness, and improve them to the design which they are intended to serve. He, then, having tried both the best and the worst, may justly be believed, when he declares that true happiness may be increased by present affliction. And he is so far from discouraging his disciples from treading in the same thorny rugged path in which he had walked himself, that he rather invites them to do so; casting, as it were, a glory round the head of the sorrowful, and affirming, *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*¹.

Let us, then, listen to Him who prefers these claims to our attention; and instead of passing hastily over such a sentence as if it could not concern ourselves, let us attempt to trace the argument on which this moral paradox is raised.

The object of all men who believe the Scriptures must be the same; so to pass through this preparatory state, as to be received hereafter to an enjoyment of those good things which God has prepared for them that love him. To be living with this

¹ See Norris on the Beatitudes, Discourse II.

in view, *seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, is the best thing possible for a man; and it follows, that the best thing possible for those who are not so living is, that they should be brought to do it. Once convince yourselves of this truth, which a moment's serious reflection must show to be undeniable, and you will plainly see why uninterrupted happiness, unfailing spirits, and unbroken health, however agreeable, may be very far from advantageous to a man in the end.

Suppose you saw two travellers both seeking the same place, some distant home; of whom one was travelling smoothly over a delightful country, along a road refreshed with flowers, and enlivened with pleasant prospects, and watered with cooling streams; but which was exactly in the wrong direction of the place he intended to reach; and, moreover, would lead him to a wilderness, or to an enemy's country, from which it would be impossible to escape: whilst the other was following a rugged track, encountering many dangers, and climbing many a steep ascent, but which, nevertheless, led straight to the place of his destination. I need not ask which of the

two you would think in the best situation on the whole: for what is the advantage of a path, however agreeable for a while, unless it lead toward the place for which the traveller is bound?

This all would acknowledge at once in the case I have supposed, the case of the travellers: if any one were to observe, How delightful is the path that man has chosen! you would immediately answer, Yes, delightful for the present; but see the end; is it not the *broad way that leadeth to destruction?*

It was the same feeling, probably, which induced our Saviour's observation in the text. He saw how little men are inclined to reflect about their spiritual state, to think, whether they are at peace or at enmity with God, while they continue in full enjoyment of the things of this world. Happy, therefore, he declares, are they who are led by any circumstances, however painful, to meditate on the uncertainty of life, and on the necessity of repentance. How *hardly*, he elsewhere says, *shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God?*² Why was this remark extorted

² Mark, x. 23.

from him? Not, as the context shows, because riches, and faith, are incompatible; St. Paul gives express instructions how the rich are to conduct themselves, *that they may lay hold on eternal life*³; but because there is too often so much unwillingness on the part of those who possess this world's treasure to raise their hearts above it, and *lay up treasure in heaven*.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus illustrates the same truth⁴. The rich man is represented as leading a luxurious, sumptuous life. Nothing worse is said of him, than that he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. We are led to suppose that this luxurious ease had its usual effect, and produced carelessness towards God, and selfishness towards man. He forgot that he must give account of his talents, his time, and his property: he allowed Lazarus to lie neglected at his gate *full of sores, and desiring to eat of the crumbs which fell from his table*. No person, who saw the different state of these two men, would have hesitated between their situations. Who

³ 1 Tim. vi. 19.

⁴ Luke, xvi. 20.

would have ventured to say, Wretched is this rich man who fares sumptuously, in comparison of the diseased and famished beggar at his gate? But mark the event; and it will appear, that whosoever had said so, would not have judged ill. Lazarus died, and was carried to the company of the blest: the rich man also died, and went to the place appointed for the sensual and impenitent. Then he perceived the truth too late: he perceived the danger of having good things in this life, without being *rich towards God, rich in good works*; and the sense of this struck him so powerfully, that he desired to send and warn his brethren on earth, lest they also should come to that place of torment. No, replies Abraham; *they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them*. It is not for want of light, it is not for want of warning, that they live on in a careless and unprofitable manner: but *this is their condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light*⁵. *They hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they hear, though one rose from the dead.*

⁵ John, iii. 19.

Therefore, when this world is seen in its true aspect, as a preparation for eternity; happy are they that mourn: if not now, yet happy in the end; as the parallel remark stands in St. Luke, *Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh^b*: your mourning shall be turned into joy, if it arises from just grounds, and tends to a right end.

Such is the scope of the declaration in the text: the truth of which will then appear most forcibly, when we have learnt to see in a scriptural view, the snares of the world, and the danger of being entangled by *the deceitfulness of riches*, and corrupted by *the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*.

But a material inquiry still remains: What is that mourning, which the text declares to be blessed? We may be well assured, that it is not that state of indigence, disease, and misery, which is the natural consequence of many of the more heinous sins, and punishes even in this world dishonesty and sensuality. Our Saviour would not declare those blessed on whom his Fa-

^b Luke, vi. 21.

ther, in arranging that, by the providential course of things, misery should follow sin, has pronounced a curse; for *he and his Father are one* ⁶.

It must not be supposed, therefore, that men are necessarily blessed, because they mourn, but because they mourn to a good purpose. The severest distress may be unprofitable, may lead to no spiritual advantage; may harden the heart, instead of softening it. As there are some that *sorrow without hope*, so there is some kind of sorrow concerning which we can hope nothing. It is then blessed, and then only, when it leads men to *consider their ways*; when it is *godly sorrow*, and *worketh repentance unto salvation* ⁷. Thus it is that the heaviest calamities experienced in this world, as a sudden and great reverse of fortune, or loss of health, or the death of a beloved friend, are often mercies sent by the hand of God to confer an eternal blessing on the mourner. When the main pillars of earthly happiness are removed, a man naturally turns for comfort, where, perhaps, he had not looked for it before;

⁶ John, x. 30.

⁷ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

he seeks some new support to lean upon; and happy is it, if, when he finds trouble and heaviness, he is taught by the Spirit to call upon God; if, *when his father and mother forsake him*, he is led to seek and find a Saviour in whom he has peace such as this world cannot give. When earthly distress works this spiritual effect, the assertion of the text is verified, *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*

But the mourning which is surely blessed, and to which the promise of the text is indisputably made, is that which arises from a conviction of sinfulness; from remorse at having offended a just and holy God, and incurred the punishment which he has denounced against the worldly who forget him, and the wicked who defy him. Other mourning is profitable so far as it produces this feeling; for this is that *godly sorrow which worketh repentance*; and the Gospel is pledged, that they *who sow in tears of penitence, shall reap in joy*.

Of the nature and degree of this *comfort* you will form some idea, if you imagine the case of a person awakened, by whatever outward means, to a sense of the holiness of God, and of his own wickedness, yet

totally ignorant how he could satisfy the one, or atone for the other. This must have been the case with many who were now listening to our Lord's instruction. They had already heard enough of the nature of his kingdom to understand their own unfitness to enter it; to see how far *short they came of the glory of God*; but they were yet to learn the virtue which is in *the blood of Christ to cleanse from all sin*, they were hitherto unacquainted with *the righteousness which is of God by faith*. And this would be the course of their reflections.

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? and bow myself before the high God? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?⁸ It is true, he is a God of mercy; so he revealed himself to our ancestors, as *the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin⁹*. He is long-suffering, or I should not be alive at this moment; I who am the creature of an all-seeing and all-powerful God whom I have

⁸ Micah, vi. 7, 8.

⁹ Exodus, xxxiv. 6.

neglected; the servant of a righteous Governor of the world, whom I have despised and offended. But it is also true, that he is a God of judgment, *who will by no means clear the guilty*¹:—and Adam, with all his posterity, condemned to die; Sodom and Gomorrah, with all their sinful race, swallowed up in a sea of fire; Pharaoh and his host sunk by the returning waves; Jerusalem, Babylon, Nineveh, besieged, conquered, or even blotted out from existence; are all so many indisputable and historical truths, that *vengeance is his, and he will repay; will repay tribulation, wrath, and anguish to every soul of man that doeth evil. Wretched that I am, how shall I escape the body of this death*²?

Such would be the reflections, such the feelings of a man who knew enough of God to be aware of his danger, and too little of the Gospel to discover the means of escape. Suppose a man thus *mourning*; would it be slight *comfort* to learn that God had visited the world, *reconciling it to himself through Christ*³; that he had prepared a sacrifice by which his justice might be

¹ Exodus, xxxiv. 7.

² Rom. ii. 9. vii. 24.

³ 2 Cor. v. 19.

satisfied; and had promised forgiveness of sins to all those who “with hearty repentance and true faith, turn unto him.” *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest:* such was the message which Christ sent out into the world, and such the accomplishment of his assurance, that *those who mourn should be comforted.* Millions have felt the value and experienced the truth of this assurance, from the Apostles’ time to the present hour; —from the day when St. Peter having convinced a large body of his countrymen of their heinous sin in *crucifying the Lord of glory*, they were *pricked in their hearts*, and inquired, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* Then he said unto them, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*³; thus discharging his commission, to *comfort those that mourned.*

The same comfort is daily and hourly enjoyed by all who, feeling their *iniquities a sore burden, too heavy for them to bear*, have brought them to the foot of the cross, and laid them upon Him, *who himself bore*

³ Acts, ii. 38, &c.

*our sins in his own body on the tree*⁴; whilst conscious of the frailty of their nature, and the imperfection of even their best services, they do not presume to appear before God, or to hope for salvation, trusting in their own righteousness, but only look to be accepted of him through the power of the sacrifice once offered as *a propitiation for our sins*.

Therefore, *blessed are they that mourn*. But, perhaps the sentiment may require a word or two of further explanation. Some one might ask, Are, then, mankind expected to refuse the enjoyment of health, or fortune, or honourable reputation? This is to follow the error of those monks and ascetics who corrupted Christianity. If, however, I have given a just interpretation of the text, such doubts are answered at once. If many may mourn, and be no better for it, for *the sorrow of the world worketh death*⁵, so others may enjoy the blessings with which a merciful God has strewed the path of life, and still be living in his faith and fear. If you saw one man using an ample fortune as a faithful steward, or employing his talents as one who remembered that he

⁴ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

⁵ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

was to give account, showing, by his whole conduct, that he had *taken his Lord's yoke upon him*, and was *laying up a good foundation against the time to come*⁶; it would be plain that such a person required not sorrow to bring him to reflection. He might, indeed, suffer affliction; the servants of God are not exempt from this; but it would be intended to refine, to *try him even as silver is tried*; to chasten, and not to subdue his heart; and whilst he mourned, he would still *be comforted* by the assurance, that *all things, whether prosperous or adverse, shall work together for good to them that love God*⁷. But if you saw another running a mad career of dissipation and extravagance, employing his wealth to procure the opportunities of sin, or carelessly mis-spending life by doing God no service, the natural remark would be, it might be a blessing for this man, if some misfortune should cause him to mourn: for often *by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better*⁸.

So, likewise, with respect to penitence;

⁶ 1 Tim. vi. 19.

⁷ Rom. viii. 28.

⁸ Eccles, vii. 3.

it is not the humble publican who exclaims, *God be merciful to me a sinner*⁹; nor the returning prodigal, who confesses, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son*¹: these are not the persons whom we exhort to mourn;—*they shall be comforted*; but the high-minded Pharisee; who boasts of his fasting, and his prayers, and his exact justice; or the mistaken reasoner, who considers the letter rather than the spirit of the commandments, and dares to say, *All these have I kept from my youth up*²: these are the characters whom we address in the words of St. James, *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord*³.

My brethren, would you avoid that late and bitter mourning, which pierces the heart through with many, and too often, fruitless sorrows? Mourn in time, in *the accepted time*, while the *day of salvation* is still shining. Consider whether ye are so using the blessings vouchsafed to you, as to be *making to yourselves friends out of the*

⁹ Luke, xviii. 13.

¹ Luke, xv. 19.

² Matt. xix. 20.

³ James, iv. 10.

*mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations*⁴. Consider whether you *so use the world as not abusing it*⁵; or whether earthly comforts induce you to neglect the services which you owe to God, the charity which you owe to your neighbour, the temperance which you owe to yourselves. Inquire too, whether the remembrance and the sense of your sinfulness has wrought its due effect, and brought you to your Saviour, to seek *rest unto your soul*. This is the frame of mind which is suitable to man, and acceptable to God; as the prophet has said, *To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word*⁶.

In conclusion, remember, that though the Gospel calls upon all men at all times to *consider their ways*, it does not call on any always to mourn. It says, that *those that mourn, mourn wisely and in time, shall be comforted*—shall be *filled with all joy and peace in believing*⁷. The pious Christian will, indeed, have constant reason to la-

⁴ Luke, xvi. 9.

⁵ 1 Cor. vii. 31.

⁶ Isaiah, lxvi. 2.

⁷ Rom. xv. 13.

ment his infirmities ; his low sense of the mercy of God, and the poor return which he is able to make for it ; and he will have certain fixed periods for humbling himself before God, on account of those more grievous sins of which his conscience may accuse him ; but still there are joys peculiar to himself, *with which a stranger intermeddleth not*⁸ : still he possesses the surest *comfort*, a confidence in the support of his Saviour, who will love, will love unto the end, those faithful servants of his who have sought him as their Redeemer, and chosen him as their Lord. There is no rest, no comfort, no joy like this. O claim it for your own ; and *thank God for his unspeakable gift*, in providing a refuge for those who dread his anger, a never-failing refuge for *those that mourn*.

⁸ Prov. xiv. 10.

SERMON XIII.

CHRISTIAN MEEKNESS.

—

MATTHEW, v. 5.

*Blessed are the meek ; for they shall inherit
the earth.*

HAVING, on two former occasions, discoursed on the blessings promised by our Lord to the poor in spirit, and to those that mourn, I come to-day to consider another divine blessing, pronounced upon a character which seldom obtains from men the credit which it deserves. *Blessed are the meek*; i. e. blessed are those who, in all their communication with their fellow-creatures, behave towards them with lowliness and humility ; who are slow to anger ; who, *when reviled, revile not again* ; who bear just reproof with thankfulness, and undeserved insult with patience. Ask your own hearts, my brethren, whether this is a NATURAL character ; or lest your own hearts

should deceive you, look to what you know of the ordinary disposition of mankind.—Look to the disposition of children: do they not from their very infancy oppose those who restrain their inclinations, and who thwart their desires? are they not perverse; angry without cause; and do they not, always in their intentions, and as far as they have power by their actions, return evil for evil, and indeed for good, which seems to them evil? This is their natural propensity: in most cases this propensity is corrected, in some degree, by education; but when it is not corrected, nature becomes stronger by habit, and the conduct of man who possesses an immortal soul, is not less ferocious than that of the beasts that perish. Those unhappy countries, where the will of God has not been made known, and the people being without revealed law, *are a law unto themselves*, are filled with anger, hatred, malice, violence, and revenge; to love an enemy would be cowardice; to forgive him, the vilest meanness; and it is held a virtue to return insult for affront, and to retaliate ten-fold the slightest injury.

Nay—though in civilized countries such

excess is restrained by law, and the society at large redresses the wrongs of the individuals; yet the evil principle exists, though the practice is moderated; and enough of nature remains to show that the virtue of meekness, where it does exist, is a plant of divine and not of human origin: a heavenly plant too often stunted by the unkindly soil it meets with. Indeed, meekness is a word in low esteem, even among those who “*profess and call themselves Christians,*” and nominally follow Him who described himself as *meek and lowly of heart*. Meekness seldom enters into our enumeration of valuable qualities. Few parents are fond of seeing meekness in their children, except as it may be exercised towards themselves: they commonly praise them, because they can keep their own, can defend their honour; in other words, because they are angry when provoked, and revenge themselves when insulted. For instance, when we talk of a young man of spirit, what do we intend by the term?—a meek, forgiving spirit, which overlooks affront, and is patient under injuries and provocation? Is such a spirit a recommendation in society? Would it not be thought absolutely

to disqualify a person for some situations in life?

Yet our Lord has said, *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* May he, therefore, teach us to judge of character, not according to our corrupt nature, but according to his pure will and approbation!

Let me, then, endeavour to describe this character of Christian growth, the virtue of meekness, as it should be displayed in our conduct towards one another.

I. First, however, I would clear true meekness from the adulteration of counterfeits: it has no connexion with a certain weakness of principle, which may be glad to shelter itself under so respectable a name. It is not meekness for a man to have no character, no opinion of his own; to adopt the tone and sentiments of whatever company he may happen to be in; to take his standard of religion or morals from those around him; to be a Christian among Christians, or a man of the world among the *children of this generation.* It is not true meekness, to be without a firm, consistent, settled character, which shows

where it has been stamped, and exhibits the title and superscription which it bears.

For example: it is not meekness to sit by, and hear religion, or religious characters disparaged, without owning our own sentiments, and bearing such testimony as the occasion requires, and is consistent with sound discretion. It is by bearing such testimony, that truth is propagated: it is by refusing it, that errors prevail, and become inveterate. So far from this being praiseworthy, nothing is more hurtful: nor is any faculty more to be imitated, or more to be cultivated, than that of wisely maintaining truth, or reproving error in our ordinary intercourse with other men. The effect often verifies the remark of Solomon, *A word spoken in good season, how good is it!* Indeed, such conduct is almost sure to follow, where the heart is sincerely impressed. We find this in the behaviour of St. Paul at Athens¹. He does not seem to have gone to that city with an express commission or intention to preach the Gospel there, but was expecting Silas and Timotheus, whom he had commanded to come

¹ Acts, xvii.

to him with all speed. And while he waited for them his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. And the reward of his holy boldness in a good cause, will commonly be the reward of similar conduct in similar circumstances. Though *some mocked*, and others put the subject aside to another time, *certain men clave unto him, and believed.* So, although some will adhere to errors, however successfully exposed; and others will remain rooted in their prejudices, however unreasonable they may be shown to be; yet some will often be awakened to inquiry, which may be blessed to the welfare of the soul. Much is often gained by making it appear that we are in earnest in the cause of religion: much must be lost by letting this remain doubtful.

Neither, again, is it meekness to lose any opportunity of reproof and correcting vice. I do not speak now of the ministers of religion, whose business, of course, it is to be instant on all occasions in pointing out to a sinner the error of his way;

but I speak of all who have influence or authority over others; whether it be the authority of birth or situation, or the influence of friendship, or of superior talent and education. It was a precept in the Hebrew law, *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him*². Eli, the high priest of Israel, offended against this precept in the worst way—he suffered his own sons to commit iniquity without restraint; and thus he drew down on himself the severe anger of the Lord. God said, that he would *judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knew; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*³. Similar weakness, at a time when we are called upon to speak openly and *quit ourselves like men* in the cause of God, is always hateful to Him whom we profess to serve. It shows an indifference whether God is obeyed or no, which is quite inconsistent with zeal in his service; it shows a carelessness in regard to sin, which is quite inconsistent with a due sense of its awful consequences. Indeed we daily find that where these feel-

² Lev. xviii. 17.

³ 1 Sam. iii. 13.

ings are duly entertained, the heart will vent itself. It will feel as David felt, when he exclaims, *Mine eyes gush out with tears for the ungodly which forsake thy law*⁴. And it will show itself by firmness, like that of the penitent on the cross, who gave a lively proof of a heart touched by divine grace, when he reprov'd the wickedness of his companion in suffering. *One of the malefactors which were hanged railed on our crucified Redeemer, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss*⁵. This was true courage; to defend the right, but weaker, cause—to defend it when it seemed weakest; and it was shown in the full spirit of meekness and humility.

I have said thus much on what is not meekness, because, though meekness is not a natural virtue, silence in the cause of religion is but too natural an error, and young persons ought to be aware that it is an

⁴ Psalm cxix. 53.

⁵ Luke, xxiii. 41.

error, and not a virtue. A Christian spirit is habitually retired and unobtrusive, while vice has not only the majority on its side, but is overbearing and domineering. But this, though it make the duty more difficult and painful, especially to some tempers, does not make it less a duty, *to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves*⁶. It is impossible to say how far some of the worst and commonest vices, such as swearing, indecent conversation, and jesting upon sacred subjects, might be restrained, if all those who do not join in them, and even abhor them in their hearts, were to express their disapprobation in an open and decided manner. I might add with truth, though I dare not urge it as a motive, that such conduct is always respected even by those who are opposed by it, where it is seen to be sincere, and where the spirit of MEEKNESS is preserved.

II. Having thus shown what is not meekness, let me describe the evidences of that feature of the Christian character, on

⁶ Eph. v. 15.

which its divine Author has pronounced his blessing.

1. He who is meek, is SLOW TO ANGER. The passion of anger is not altogether sinful. It is necessary for such purposes of reproof and restraint and correction of vice as I have just recommended. There is a degree of honest indignation which arises in some breasts, when they hear or witness any flagrant instance of cruelty, or fraud, or treachery, which nature need not be ashamed of, or the Christian desire to extinguish. But anger is a passion which requires no encouragement: unless immediately and wisely restrained, it is sure to become sin. Therefore the Apostle says, *Be ye angry, and sin not*: let it be a sudden impulse, not an indulged feeling—let *not the sun go down upon your wrath*⁷. It betrayed Moses on one occasion, though *he was the meekest man of all the earth*—it betrayed Moses into grievous sin: the people *angered him, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips*⁸. “*The wrath of man found admission, and that worketh not the*

⁷ Eph. iv. 26.

⁸ Psalm cvi. 32. Numb. xx. 2—13.

*righteousness of God*⁹." And this was so displeasing to the Almighty, that he conferred upon Joshua, instead of him, the honour of bringing the Israelites into the land of Canaan. And if such is the sinfulness of even just anger, carried too far, what shall we think of being *angry with a brother without a cause*? what shall we think of anger that is followed by cruelty, or which leads to revenge? We may judge of it by the sentence denounced against it in the book of Genesis, even a father's curse, issued by Jacob on his sons Simeon and Levi: *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel*¹. It is our duty, my brethren, not to suffer anger in ourselves, not to excite it in others; to *turn it away*, when roused, *by a soft answer; with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*².

2. Another evidence of meekness, is PATIENCE UNDER INJURIES of whatever sort, whether of word or deed. This is as pe-

⁹ Horne.

¹ Gen. xlix. 7.

² Prov. xv. 1. Eph. iv. 3.

cular to Christianity, as it is essential to the Christian. *To recompense to no man evil for evil. To avenge not ourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Not to render railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully*².

The importance of this spirit may be understood by the way in which our Lord further explains and enforces it as he proceeds in the discourse which furnishes the text. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; this is what, in some cases, is allowed by the public law, for the sake of restraining offenders; and this is the language and demand of human nature when left to itself. But I, he proceeds to add, I am come to teach a different lesson—I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him*

² Rom. xii. 17—19. 1 Pet. iii. 9.

have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. By these remarkable instances, our Lord points out to what an extent we are bound to oppose that leading principle of our nature, which inclines us to retaliation, resistance, and revenge. He inculcates patience under injuries, by setting before us those cases of injury which are most liable to rouse and provoke us to angry violence; and when the disciple would be inclined to ask, *Is this too to be borne?* Yes, this and every extreme must be borne, rather than you should run the risk of sinning yourself, and exciting your adversary to further sin. *In patience possess ye your souls*⁴. *Commit yourself to Him who judgeth righteously*⁵. Imitate Him who left you an example, that *ye should follow his steps: who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but when his disciple drew a sword in his defence, and would have so maintained his just cause, commanded him, Put up thy sword into its place: for all they that use the sword shall perish by the sword*⁶.

⁴ Luke, xxi. 19.⁵ 1 Pet. ii. 23.⁶ Matt. xxvi. 52. John, xviii. 11.

3. The last sign of meekness which I shall mention is, PATIENCE UNDER REPROOF. This is by no means a common quality. Many persons who will join in lamenting their own weakness, and the corruption of their hearts, cannot bear that any particular fault should be pointed out to them, and thus put themselves out of the reach of that medicine which is intended to heal the diseases of the soul; for few friends are so faithful as to discharge honestly the duty of rebuke and correction, at the risk of losing good will, or of exciting anger. Yet no duty can be more plain and scriptural, than that of rebuking those who transgress, except, perhaps, that of receiving such correction patiently and thankfully. If we see a man's health declining, or if we see the worldly estate of a friend in jeopardy, we warn and advise them, and they are grateful for such timely admonition; and shall we be then only silent, when the soul is at stake? or shall we be offended by no other warning, than by that which admonishes us to beware of the snares of Satan, and the wrath of God?

But the man of true meekness will listen to such an adviser as his best friend; and

will not stifle the suggestions of conscience, when it tells him that the rebuke is just, and his fault requires amendment. It was a proof of grace in Eli, notwithstanding his guilty negligence in overlooking the transgression of his children, when he bore with patience the message which God sent him by the mouth of Samuel, though his inferior in experience and age. *Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good*⁷. So also was it a sign of grace in David, when, instead of recoiling from the open declaration of the prophet Nathan, *Thou art the man*—he instantly submitted himself, and confessed, *I have sinned against the Lord*⁸. So the Christian has too strong a sense of his own corruption, to be surprised if he should be thought to have done wrong; and too strong a desire to amend, and approach nearer towards the pattern of perfection before him, to be offended when it is shown him how he may improve. Therefore he is patient under reproof, even if it is harsh and severe, and proceeds from no good

⁷ 1 Sam. iii. 18.

⁸ 2 Sam. xii. 18.

will towards him; but for kind and gentle reproof he is thankful: in a word, he is meek; and being meek, he is blessed: *for the meek shall inherit the earth.*

III. *Shall inherit the earth.* This may seem an unexpected blessing on a virtue which appears little calculated to obtain this world's good. But the words are capable of a two-fold explanation. Those whose dispositions are regulated by such rules as I have described, though they may be sometimes despised, and sometimes misunderstood; do really inherit the best enjoyments even of this world: for what is more wretched than to live a prey to anger or revenge; what more surely punishes itself than irritation or petulance, a readiness to take offence or give it? According to the proverbial illustration, those storms which pass harmless over the bending reed, overthrow the stubborn and unyielding trees of the forest; and so those injuries, calumnies, and provocations which keep the unsubdued temper of the violent and the proud in a perpetual convulsion, make little impression on the meek and patient and forgiving Christian, and leave his spirit unruffled, his comfort undisturbed.

This is undeniable, and sufficiently explains the text. But it must also be observed, that the words, *the meek shall inherit the earth*⁹, are quoted from the Old Testament, where they occur several times as the blessing connected with obedience. Now, as the result of God's favour, under the GOSPEL, is an *everlasting habitation, a heavenly city*; its result under the LAW was an earthly inheritance. The old covenant promised to the Israelites on condition of their obedience, that they should enjoy a *land flowing with milk and honey*, should literally *inherit the earth*, possess its blessings, and *live long in the land which the Lord their God had given them*: a temporal reward, in which the land of Canaan was a type of the far greater promises hereafter to be made, when the *shadows of the law* should be brightened up by a clearer manifestation of divine glory. Taken in this sense, the word *earth* in the text is a type of the *land of future promise*, the spiritual Canaan, to which it is the object of Christ in the Gospel to conduct his faithful people. In either view, the promise shall

⁹ Psalm xxxvii. 11, 29, 34. Isaiah, lx. 21.

not fail. For as it commonly happens, that those who follow the precepts of their Lord, and cultivate the character which he approves, have the fairest lot and the truest enjoyments in this world, and daily experience that *godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come*⁹; so is it still less to be doubted, that those who are endued with the eminent grace of meekness, possess a strong evidence that they are among those for whom the future inheritance is prepared. Whether approved or disapproved among men, theirs is that character which God will receive into his eternal kingdom.

Go, then, and imitate in your daily intercourse with one another the temper of Him who, as he died for your redemption, so also lived for your instruction. You will find difficulties, indeed. Meekness is natural to few, and can only be attained by daily watchfulness and self-correction; and after all, will never be equally the grace of every Christian, as it will meet with different degrees of opposition in different persons, from the natural bent of the heart. But it must be studied and desired, and in

⁹ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

some measure practised by every Christian; for we find, from the place which our Saviour gives it, that it is one of those qualities which will be required in all who shall *enter into his rest*. Therefore, it must be shown in all the various relations of life; shown by the Christian parent, the Christian husband, the Christian child, the Christian master, the Christian servant; it must be seen, that the disciples of a *meek and lowly Saviour* are under a control which is not natural to them, which, perhaps, they formerly did not attempt to exercise, and which, without divine grace, they would not and could not cultivate. For the opposition of the natural heart must not be pleaded in excuse for the want of any of the qualities which our Lord requires; the Gospel not only prescribes rules, but promises power. *Faithful is He who hath called us* by the Gospel; and will suffer none of those who come unto him, and take his yoke upon them, to perish for want of those graces which they earnestly seek to be clothed with, and fervently pray him to bestow.

SERMON XIV.

PURSUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATTHEW, v. 6.

Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

THE word translated in the text, and throughout the New Testament, by the term RIGHTEOUSNESS, is one of those to which the Gospel has affixed an original and peculiar sense. In a great majority of passages it does not signify justice, probity, benevolence, or any single virtue; but, in general, that state of heart, or course of conduct, which is acceptable and satisfactory to God.

Now, of all inquiries, the most important, beyond comparison, is, what character is thus acceptable; and, in particular, whether we are possessed of it. Placed, as we must feel ourselves, in the power of

God—for *who art thou, O man, that repliest against him*?¹ having ages before us which we can no more avoid entering upon, than we can avoid passing through this present life—that eternity being revealed to us as a state of inconceivable happiness or misery;—the first and latest thoughts of our hearts may well be, how we may satisfy him; how we may be “accounted righteous” before him; how we may be accepted by him; and, when the way is known, whether we are in it—are individually thus justified, righteous, and acceptable.

And this is that inquiry on which our Lord, in the text, pronounces his blessing: *Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness.* Blessed are they who, instead of running through this life thoughtlessly, as if it had no consequence—or throwing it away idly, as if it had no end; instead of acting as if there was no God, or as if he did not regard their conduct:—are making it their first concern to serve him, please him, and *do all to his glory.*

In discoursing from this sentence, I

¹ Rom. ix. 20.

shall take the words in their natural order; and, having first explained what is not, and what is, to *hunger and thirst after righteousness*, I shall conclude with a few words on the blessing attached to that gracious disposition of the heart.

I. The words which distinguish, by a peculiar blessing, these lovers of RIGHTEOUSNESS, imply that such is not the desire or pursuit of all. And this too clearly agrees with what we know, and feel, and see, and hear.

We need but a little acquaintance with mankind, in order to perceive that their pursuits are exceedingly various; the objects which they *thirst after* widely different. Some make pleasure their idol; and, to attain it, throw off all restraint, *doing even what they list*. Others have no higher view than the acquisition of wealth, and the providing largely for the present and future support of their families. With others, to attain a place of great distinction, to be widely known and enjoy a high reputation among men, appears of all things the most desirable. In the mean time, God is forgotten, his worship is neglected, his Scriptures despised, his will unknown;

whether he has made a revelation, or whether such lives conform to it, is no more considered than if it concerned a different race of beings. I need hardly say, then, that all who live with these views mainly before their eyes, are going astray more or less widely, more or less dangerously. Our Lord's blessing applies not to them. No blessing, but rather woe, attaches to those who are *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*², even if their pleasures are what it is common to term innocent: should they be of a guilty nature, we are distinctly assured that those who seek them *have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ or of God*³. No blessing attaches to the covetous man, who is declared to be *an idolater*⁴, and reminded *What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul*⁵? No blessing attaches to the lover of worldly honours and distinctions; for *know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God*⁶? *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust*

² 2 Tim. iii. 4.

⁴ Col. iii. 5.

⁶ James, iv. 4.

³ Eph. v. 5.

⁵ Mark, viii. 36.

of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. For the world passeth away, and the lust thereof. The business of life, therefore, is to seek that which shall not pass away; shall abide for ever, when human reputation is of no value, and earthly pleasures fail, and worldly goods perish, with those who have trusted in them. That which shall so abide is RIGHTEOUSNESS. RIGHTEOUSNESS is the first and great concern. In due subordination to this main object, let a man taste of pleasure, as a traveller would taste of a spring by the way-side; let him labour in his vocation, that he and his family may eat of the bread of industry, and be thankful; let him gratefully enjoy such honours as belong to the understanding with which God has endued him, or to the station in which God has placed him. But let not these be the principal objects of his wishes or pursuits, so that he shall at any time be ready to say, *When I attain these, I shall be satisfied: let them be, rather, the fruit which he plucks by the way, as he travels through*

⁷ 1 John, i. 16.

the wilderness of this world, than the chief support and provision of his journey, or still more the objects for which he takes it; let him not *hunger and thirst after* reputation, or pleasures, or wealth, as things necessary to his existence, or even to his happiness. No, my brethren, *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*; the righteousness required by him: then, if earthly blessings are added unto you, receive them, enjoy them, acknowledge them, as the gifts of a gracious and merciful Creator: if, on the contrary, they are withheld, doubt not that there is mercy in denying no less than in giving; remember that the Lord often *chasteneth* those most, whom most he *loveth*⁸; that it is a faithful promise, *that all things shall work together for good to them that love him*⁹, however wearisome or painful the present dispensation may appear: for those who *hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled*, be satisfied in the end.

II. But there is another class of persons, who, though not absolutely *despising the righteousness of God*, like those to

⁸ Hebrews, xii. 6.

⁹ Rom. viii. 28.

whom I have been hitherto alluding, are yet very careless, very indifferent respecting it. They do not, indeed, throw off religion, or altogether neglect its forms, or run into any excesses which might injure their character. But they take up with any idea of the will of God, and of the extent of Christian duty, which others may hold, or which may suit their own practice; they seek no personal interest in their Redeemer, and cannot, even in the lowest sense, be said to *live unto Him who died for them*¹; they do not strive to go on unto perfection, or to *grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*². Such persons, perhaps, in the eyes of the world or the opinion of Christian charity, may pass with little to blame. But, as an anxious parent or a skilful physician will often discover an unsoundness in the constitution which a slight observer might deem secure, so is it with the health of

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again."

² 2 Pet. iii. 18.

the soul; the sincere friend, the zealous minister, cannot but see symptoms of alarming danger in this supine indifference; cannot but perceive that in this cold and languid interest about an eternal concern, in this Sunday religion (if, indeed, it does last through the whole of Sunday, and is not forgotten when the service is closed) there is something very short of what the Gospel requires, and its genuine followers in all ages have practised.

For consider: how does any lukewarmness, any carelessness, any thing indeed except the most earnest endeavour after a continued progress, as if nothing had been *already attained*, agree with the force of that expression, to *hunger and thirst after righteousness*? The appetites of hunger and thirst, being necessary to the support of human life, are of all others the most vehement and difficult to restrain. Yet this is the example selected by our Lord to express what ought to be the eager pursuit of his disciples after righteousness. It is to desire it as that which is of all things most indispensable; as that which they cannot possibly give up; cannot even exist without. In many parts of Scripture we

find instances to exemplify the sort and degree of feeling which this strong phrase of our Saviour leads us to imagine. It abounds in St. Paul, who describes himself as *forgetting the things which were behind, forgetting all that he had done and suffered, and pressing still on towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*³. It abounds throughout the Psalms. David seems to have experienced its force most sensibly: *Lord, he exclaims, what love have I unto thy law! All the day long is my study in it. O how sweet are thy words unto my throat; yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth! Thy testimonies are the very joy of my heart. My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God. One day in thy courts is better than a thousand. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver*⁴.

Such expressions as these disclose the

³ Phil. iii. 14.

⁴ Psalm lxxxiv. 10; cxix. 10. 72. 97. 103.

state of the heart; and surely they discover a heart which *hungers and thirsts after righteousness*; a heart whose meat and drink it is to learn the will and obey the laws of God. Examine yourselves by a test like this, that you may know how far you partake of a desire which Christ pronounces blessed. "How," you may ask, "is it to be shown? the text expresses it by a figure which affords no definite criterion." But there are many plain and infallible marks by which the state of the heart may be ascertained.

1. The Scripture is given as our rule of RIGHTEOUSNESS: it acquaints us with the will of God; it points out the method of acceptance which he has revealed, and the way of living which he has prescribed. What is this sacred book to you? Is it the book which you most frequently study and consult, and are most ashamed to be ignorant of? Is it the book by which you habitually desire to regulate your thoughts, and words, and deeds? Or do you drive it from your recollection, whenever it suggests that the mode in which you live, and the habits which you indulge, are contrary to the divine law? He, surely, who is

longing *after righteousness*, will not turn away from the Counsellor who shows him what it is, and how it is to be attained.

2. Again; private prayer and the public worship of God, when sincerely practised, inspire us with an increasing knowledge and love of the *way of righteousness*. Is it in this view that we are regular in private devotion? Is it in this light that we see the public services of the Church? As what are able to convert or amend the heart, and bring it to the temper which God requires? Or do we merely treat them as forms which it is decent to observe, without seeking, or caring for, any holy effects and consequences? He who is earnestly desiring to gain an object, will watch every step in his progress, will mark what has hindered and what has advanced him in it: he needs no exhortation to profit by every opportunity within his reach. For example, the most solemn service of our Church, the holy sacrament, which we are this day invited to attend, is a public testimony that we are *living in the faith of the Son of God*; that for our salvation, our eternal life, we are looking to the sacrifice which we there commemorate. Experience

fully proves that nothing more surely draws down the grace of the Redeemer, or more powerfully assists the Christian in his onward progress, than a reasonable and devout attendance at that holy table. Those, then, who attend it with no reasonable sense of the service in which they engage, and, above all, those who abstain from that service altogether, have a positive evidence against themselves that they, at least, are not *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*. He that is, will feel the value of this spiritual feast, and neither want persuasions to bring him, nor allow any trifling hinderance or vain excuse to detain him away.

3. Again: if we desired to know what spirit a man was of, we should naturally look to the society which he preferred, the books which he studied, the conversation which he promoted. Inquire of yourselves by this rule. In what light do you treat religious persons, religious books, religious conversation? Do you avoid them, turn away from them, with a sneer, or regard them with aversion? Or do you eagerly apply to them all, when opportunity permits, as efficacious means of promoting the

great end before you? Of course, I am far from insinuating that no conversation can be innocent, and no books useful, except those that bear upon religious points. I am not now prescribing a rule, but proposing a test; and if *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*⁵, let me ask whether a man can be *hungering and thirsting after* that which he never talks of, never studies, and eagerly dismisses from his thoughts.

4. Once more: if you are making the attainment of righteousness your leading object, you habitually avoid whatever tends to withdraw you from it: you are afraid of worldly pleasures; you disencumber yourself, as far as possible, of worldly cares. Here again take an example from those who seek any other object. Ask a man, who is desiring to improve his fortune, to join in this or that idle pursuit; he will reply, that business is urgent and must be first attended to. Ask the same of a man who is aspiring after eternal happiness, and will not he reply that the business of the soul must be first attended to?

⁵ Matt. xii. 34.

Will he not resolutely keep clear of every unnecessary care, every doubtful pleasure, which might possibly divert him from his main concern? If this is undeniable, then it follows, on the other hand, that if any one is leaving no pleasures untasted, however unprofitable or questionable, which come within his reach; or is encumbering himself with worldly cares in a greater degree than the duties of his station oblige him, that man has a witness in himself that he is not *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*.

III. I shall conclude with a few reflections on the blessings promised to those who do *hunger and thirst after righteousness*. *They shall be filled*. What other human pursuit ever promised this? What lover of this world was ever satisfied? What votary of pleasure ever set aside the deadly cup till he had drank its poison to the dregs? What aspirant after fame ever said, *It is enough*? The proverbial character of ambition is, never to rest or stop; it is the very nature of covetousness, that the desire is excited even whilst it is gratified. But our blessed Lord, when he proposed to mankind the higher object of che-

rishing heavenly affections and seeking heavenly treasures, declared with truth, *Peace I leave with you ; with you who embrace this object ; my peace I give unto you ; not as the world giveth, give I unto you*⁶.

1. In that full sense of the word RIGHTEOUSNESS which, as I began by observing, it peculiarly bears in the Gospel, it is the infallible and gracious assurance of our Lord, that those who seek it shall be filled, be satisfied. Blessed, he declares, from this time, are those who are seeking acceptance with God, who are mourning under a sense of their manifold offences, and eagerly thirsting after the forgiveness of their almighty Judge ; happy are they from henceforth, from my appearance in the flesh to take the nature of man upon me, and bear his transgressions ; happy are they, for their atonement is made—a way is proclaimed, by which the sins of all that repent, *though they be red like scarlet, shall be made white as wool* ; happy are they, for they shall hear glad tidings preached through *the ministry of reconciliation* ; such

⁶ John, xiv. 27.

sincere penitents shall be clothed in that righteousness *which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe*⁷.

2. Then, again, if we carry on our views to the more common and natural import which the word RIGHTEOUSNESS bears in Scripture, the subjection of our passions and our will, of our thoughts and actions, to the command of God; the blessing is no less precious and no less peculiar to the Gospel. Before the time when this discourse was uttered, nothing was known with certainty, except by one small nation, concerning the divine will and counsels; and little by conjecture. A very few sought after God, *if haply they might find him*⁸, enveloped as he was in clouds and darkness. But now *the Sun of righteousness had come a light unto the world, that whoever believeth on him should not abide in darkness*⁹. He has fully described the character which is pleasing to God, and which man must labour to attain. He has done more. He has promised that those who

⁷ Isa. i. 18. 2 Cor. v. 18. Rom. iii. 32.

⁸ Acts, xvii. 27.

⁹ John, xii. 46.

earnestly desire to be invested with this holy character, who truly *hunger and thirst after righteousness, shall be filled*: filled with his holy influences; *filled with the Spirit*; and thus enabled to subdue the evil of their nature, and to *work out their salvation*, through Him who *worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*¹. He has declared, that *if any man will do (is disposed to do) the will of God, he shall not be suffered to abide in ignorance, or continue the slave of Satan; he shall be filled with true wisdom, for he shall know, shall have assurance of the doctrine, whether it be of God. Whoever hungers thus, shall be satisfied with the bread of heaven*²; whoever has this holy thirst, *let him take of the water of life freely*³.

Therefore cherish the first desire of the heart, when it begins to aspire after righteousness. Stifle no suggestions of conscience; rather encourage them by the means to which I have alluded: by studying the Scripture; *continuing instant in prayer*; imitating those who have advanced

¹ Phil. vi. 13.

² See John, vi. 54 et seq.

³ Rev. xxii. 17.

farthest in the ways of holiness; and avoiding whatever reason shows, or your own experience proves to have a tendency to *frustrate the grace of God*⁴. Be not disheartened, even if your progress is slower than you had expected, if only you have reason to trust that you are in the road. The Christian character is a plant of gradual increase, even when it has been rooted by the Spirit; it is severely checked both by the climate to which it is exposed, and by the soil in which it grows. But it has a principle of life, a support from above, which enables it to encounter every evil, and, in the end, to overcome.

If you are really longing after holiness, you have a right to comfort; and you may justly derive it from the text. It pronounces a blessing on those who make RIGHTEOUSNESS the object to which every other pursuit in life is subservient; who earnestly desire it as what is essential to their happiness; who cannot be satisfied without it, as what is indispensable to their existence. And that blessing is, that they shall receive *the righteousness of God, even*

⁴ Gal. ii. 21.

*the righteousness which is by faith*⁵; and, further, shall enjoy such a measure of divine grace, as to be *filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God*⁶; shall be enabled, *giving all diligence, to add to their faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity*⁷.

I call upon you, therefore, brethren, to *prove your own selves*, whether you are individually seeking *the kingdom of God and his righteousness*; whether you are seeking it first, as your leading object; and so seeking it, as to be able to apply to yourselves the expressive figure, that you *hunger and thirst after righteousness*. Or, in the Prophet's phrase, *Do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not*⁸? Is the care of the soul no part of your concern, or only an occasional part, as if it were the

⁵ Rom. x. 6.

⁶ Phil. i. 11.

⁷ 2 Pet. i. 5.

⁸ Isa. lv. 2.

last and least important business of your lives, instead of the *one thing needful*?

Whichever is your present case, remember the declaration of our Lord; in the one case, for your confirmation in the better part which you have chosen; in the other, for your warning and instruction. The tenour, not of this single text, but of the whole discourse from the Mount, which may be considered as the abstract of all our Saviour's teaching, is to the same effect; that the only wise pursuit in life is, to *lay up treasure in heaven*; that this cannot be done as a secondary object, for *no man can serve the two masters, God and mammon*; that it cannot be done without persevering labour, for *narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*: but that as many as eagerly strive to enter in at the strait gate, shall be the peculiar care of their heavenly Father, who will add all other things to those that hunger and thirst after RIGHTEOUSNESS⁹.

⁹ Matt. vi. 19—24. vii. 13. vi, 83.

SERMON XV.
CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

—◆—
MATTHEW, V. 7.

*Blessed are the merciful; for they shall
obtain mercy.*

WHEN we reflect on the situation of men in the world, and their relation to one another, we might reasonably suppose, that **MERCY**, in its fullest sense, would be the natural feeling of their hearts, and rule of their conduct. All are creatures of the same heavenly Father, and as such, brethren. All are liable to the same wants, the same evils, the same afflictions; and we might expect this common lot to produce a general feeling of sympathy and compassion. All are heirs of the same corruption, exposed to the same temptations, subject to the same infirmities;—we might suppose, therefore, that frailties into which all are equally liable to fall, would be treated

by all with tenderness and pity. But we know that the fact is otherwise: and that though examples, beautiful examples of charity sometimes appear where least looked for, and delight us like a verdant spot in a sandy desert; yet whoever were to affirm that the natural disposition of mankind is to show mercy and pity towards their fellow-creatures, would affirm it in the face of all record, experience, and observation. As the public history of mankind is little else than a history of *wars and fightings*, so their private history is but too often stained with envy, malice, and revenge. But this must not be among Christians. He, whose sole object in coming into the world was a merciful object, has pronounced his blessing on the merciful; and has pointed out mutual love, as the distinguishing token of his followers: *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another.*

I shall, first, endeavour to show, what this mercy is which our Saviour thus strongly enforces and recommends: and next, the grounds on which he recommends it; why *the merciful are blessed*.

I. 1. Mercy, in the text, is pity, com-

passion, charity. And it is exercised, first, in a willingness to forgive, wherever we have been offended, instead of persecuting the offender; yes: though the right may be altogether on our side, nothing short of absolute necessity, in order to preserve ourselves, or absolute duty, in order to prevent future harm to others, should persuade us to inflict punishment upon one who has trespassed against us. Observe our Lord's command—*If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him*¹. And so St. Paul: *Avenge not yourselves; but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord*². Who was ever so hardly dealt with and sinned against as our Redeemer himself? And did this treatment extinguish his pity for his persecutors? His disciples indeed, on one occasion, desired to call down fire from heaven; but he restrained their vehemence, and replied, *Ye know not what manner of*

¹ Luke, xvii. 3.

² Rom. xii. 19.

*spirit ye are of*³. The spirit which I teach, is a spirit of mercy, not of severity. Nay, when he beheld the very city where he had suffered so much, and was to suffer so much more from the wickedness of the inhabitants, he yet *wept over it*; wept over the misery which that wickedness had incurred. And with his last breath⁴, instead of desiring vengeance, he prayed for those who had used him so despitefully, and begged, that, if it were possible, their punishment might pass from them: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*⁵.

2. It is shown in pity for the temporal wants and bodily sufferings of our fellow-creatures. I do not mean that sickly feeling, which turns away from a sight of distress, or an object of misery, as too shocking to be looked upon; but that active charity, which forgets its own trouble, that it may relieve the sorrows of another, and knows no limit to its efforts to assist, except its power of assisting.

The great business which our Lord had always in view, was to act as the physician of the soul. Yet he did not think the bo-

³ Luke, ix. 54, 55.

⁴ Luke, xix. 41.

⁵ Luke, xxiii. 34.

dily infirmities of mankind a matter of no consequence; he relieved suffering wherever he found it; nor is there a single instance recorded of his treating with harshness, or sending away unrelieved, those who applied to him for the cure of their diseases. On other occasions he worked miracles, to supply with provisions those who had been led by zeal or curiosity to follow him to a distance from their own homes. We read, that *seeing the multitude, he had compassion on them, because they had nothing to eat, and if they were dismissed fasting, would faint by the way: for divers of them came from far*⁶.

In this merciful exercise of the power intrusted to them, the Apostles imitated their heavenly Master. Both have left us strict commandment to follow their example, and *do good unto all men; to be merciful after our power: for, whoso hath this world's good and seeeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him*⁷?

A spirit of selfishness is apt to be generated by the state of society in which we

⁶ Mark, viii. 3.

⁷ Gal. ii. 10. John, iii. 17.

live, which is a great hindrance to the active love of our neighbour. We consider the different ranks of men as unalterably fixed by the circumstances of their birth and education; and this belief, which is no doubt just in the main, tends to withhold the attention of one class from the wants or difficulties of the other. Nothing can be more contrary to the merciful spirit of the Gospel. The Gospel represents Christians as one great family; in which some may be younger, and weaker, and less gifted than others, and on that very account requiring the help of those who have more power, more talent, more experience. And when the Gospel was first preached and received, and Christians formed a small body only in each town or neighbourhood, they did live together as brethren, and what was wanting to some, was made up by the abundance of others. The Apostle compares it to the gathering manna in the wilderness; of which it is written, that *he that had gathered much, had nothing over; and he that had gathered little, had no lack*⁸. This community of interests, and inter-

⁸ 2 Cor. viii. 15.

change of assistance, gave such an appearance of liberality and affection to the whole society, that the common remark of the unconverted heathen around them was, See how these Christians love one another.

My brethren, I wish this remark could be truly made of Christians now. But when I have seen the envy which too often attends the man who has some little advantage over his neighbour; and the jealousy which follows any gift that may be bestowed, unless it is managed with as much exactness as a man would use in paying his debts, so that it is difficult even to do good without stirring a hundred evil passions; —I have sometimes thought that a bystander might now more justly say, See how those who call themselves Christians, hate one another.

In proportion as you have imbibed the spirit of the Gospel, all these jealousies will give way to mutual love and good-will; you will rejoice when others are benefited, and you will labour to benefit them yourselves. Nor is it by those of large fortune or plentiful means alone, that this blessed quality of mercy may be shown. You practise it, when you sit by a neigh-

bour's sick bed, and cool his feverish tongue; you practise it, when you comfort the widow in her affliction; you practise it, when you share your humblest pittance with those who are worse provided: whenever, in short, you do the least and lowest office of kindness, from a sense that the creatures of God, and servants of your Redeemer, ought not to pine for any thing which you can give them. God and your Redeemer will receive the charity as done to themselves. Jesus blessed the widow's mite; and declared to his disciples, that whosoever should give them *a cup of water to drink in his name, and because they belonged to Christ, he should not lose his reward*⁹.

3. Another evidence of this character, is pity for the faults of others, and for the ignorance which occasions them. Nothing surely is a greater object of pity, than a man who lives in sin, or falls into sin. When we behold such a one, we behold a fellow-creature overcome by Satan, or the slave of Satan; and, therefore, in danger of the portion which awaits his slaves and his vic-

⁹ Mark, ix. 41.

tims. Nor, again, is it any thing but a humbling sight to ourselves; who are born in the same corruption, and subject to the same infirmities, and the moment we are abandoned by the grace of God, are liable to fall into the same errors. Yet who would think this, who remembers the malicious satisfaction with which the faults of our neighbour are seen, are pointed out, are often exaggerated! Satan, the author and lover of evil, might indeed rejoice, when he had tempted Adam to disobey the divine command, when he had led David to commit adultery, or Peter to deny his Lord; but should a fellow-creature rejoice when he sees another risking his eternal life, and incurring everlasting punishment? Should he not rather throw a cloke over his infirmities, and make such excuse for them as they will admit, reflecting, that he may also be *in the same condemnation?*

Neither will this pity evaporate in useless sensibility. It will employ all possible means, by rebuke, advice, instruction, and prayer, to awaken, inform, and convert the offenders. It was, indeed, objected against our blessed Lord by the Pharisees, that he went amongst the bad characters of the

city. But he defends this, as the very purpose of his coming, to warn sinners of their danger, and call them to repentance. And we read of St. Paul, that whilst he was staying at Athens, his spirit *was stirred within him, when he saw the people wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him*¹. He had not been sent to preach the Gospel at Athens; he was merely a stranger tarrying there for a time; but when he saw the ignorance and vices of the place, his pity for the souls thus perishing around him *for lack of knowledge*, would not suffer him to rest without attempting to turn them from the error of their way.

And such will be the feeling of every Christian, towards those who are living without the *knowledge of God*. He will be merciful towards them; not by excusing or palliating the evil of their state, by saying, that they are ignorant and uneducated, and that God will not require where he has not given; but by curing that ignorance, and

¹ Acts, xvii. 16.

raising them, if possible, to higher and better grounded hopes. A charitable physician would not pass by a disease, saying either that it was a trifle, or that it was very common, and that the providence of God was over the patient; but would set himself to the business of a cure. Charity acts in the same manner towards the soul: and by warning those within its reach, by persuading those under its authority, by supplying them with useful books, and, in particular, with the Word of God, endeavours to bring over as many as possible to the ways of true religion. There is no surer test than this, of the value which we ourselves set upon the Gospel, and the salvation which it brings. The moment a man has really felt the burden of his own sins, and the mercy of Christ in offering to pardon them, from that moment he is anxious that every fellow-creature should enjoy the same blessing. This is seen among those heathen nations, whom the charity of some of our countrymen is now enlightening with the hope of salvation. They are no sooner awakened themselves to the voice of the Gospel, than even out of their penury they desire to subscribe a little mite

towards diffusing the same knowledge among their countrymen, or those who are still benighted in ignorance. Wherever we turn, we find the spirit of the Gospel the same. Human nature differs by a thousand shades of character: some nations have cruelty, and others revenge, and others indolence, and others lust, as their prevailing vice; but in every climate, and under every form of government, or degree of civilization, the Christian is still the same; and a prominent feature in his portrait is this—He is MERCIFUL.

II. Consider now, in the second place, the reason for cultivating this character; the promise by which our Lord recommends mercy to his disciples. He says, that the *merciful are blessed*, are to be accounted happy; *for they shall obtain mercy.*

My brethren, we are now upon earth, masters of our own conduct, and accountable to no one here for the tempers which we cherish, or the dispositions we show. We may hate our enemies, and refuse to forgive an injury; we may *pass by on the other side*, while our neighbour is in grievous want; we may spend our substance in selfish gratifications, or lay it up for our chil-

den, and refuse meanwhile to bestow any portion of it upon the bodies or the souls of our poorer brethren; and, at the same time, none have a right to call us to account, except by a friendly warning: God leaves us to follow our own bent: no fire comes down from heaven to consume the churlish or the malicious; the sun shines alike on the merciful and on the uncharitable; and the rain fertilizes alike those fields which spread their bounty upon God's needy creatures, and those which enrich no one but their covetous owner. We are free to use as we like, the gifts of Providence; and this freedom affords the opportunity by which our characters are formed and displayed.

But it will not be always so. There will be a time when we must render an account; when all superiority of strength, or talent, or influence, or place, or fortune, will be levelled; when the strongest, and the cleverest, and the greatest, and the richest must yield up and return their several gifts to Him who lent them; and with their gifts must return an account of the way in which they have used them. The question will then be, Have you used your

strength to injure, your wit to insult, your power to oppress? Have you, like the rich man in the parable, kept to yourself *your good things*, and taken no care to *lay up for yourself a good foundation against the time to come*? Have you never thought of spreading around you, as far as your opportunities allowed, temporal comfort and religious knowledge? Have you suffered the fatherless and widows to lie unfriended in their affliction, when you might have supported or consoled them? Has the ignorant man, as far as concerned you, continued in his ignorance, and the wicked died in his sin? Then you have shown yourself wanting in that quality which most certainly distinguishes the followers of Jesus: you have borne the name, but you have not possessed the spirit of a Christian: you have not been merciful in your generation; and now you have no claim to mercy, when nothing else can snatch you from the *wrath to come*.

Our Lord has taken especial pains to assure us, that such will be the course of proceeding at the day of judgment. On one occasion, Peter came to him, and said, *Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against*

me, and I forgive him; until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven². He must be sooner wearied out with doing you wrong, than you be tired of forgiving. And then he goes on to point out, by a beautiful parable, the true ground of a Christian's forgiveness. He describes a man, who had been excused by his lord a sum of ten thousand talents, and who, nevertheless, cast his fellow-servant into prison, till he should pay one hundred pence. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due to him. So likewise, he concludes, shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. For consider, a Christian is one who, by the voluntary death and suf-

² Matt. xviii. 22.

fering of Christ, has been delivered from the weight of sin, preserved from the curse of God's anger, and made an heir of everlasting happiness. Can he refuse to show mercy, who has received so much undeserved mercy? If he does refuse, is it not a proof that mercy has done no more in softening his temper, than it did in the case of the unforgiving servant in the parable?

So, again, with regard to pity shown towards the distressed: the sentence pronounced on those who have practised none of this charity, is such as the most charitable man on earth can scarcely read without trembling. The Lord *shall say to them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it*

*not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me*³.

No doubt the scrutiny of *the great day* will extend much farther, and relate to other qualities, besides the grace of charity. Those on the right hand, which shall hear the summons, *Come ye blessed children of my Father*, must be humble, and penitent, and meek, and pure in heart, as well as merciful. But the very prominent place which our Lord has assigned to charity in this awful description of the tribunal, where he will himself appear in his glory as Judge, and *before him shall be gathered all nations*, shows thus much, at least, that this virtue is indispensable; is one by which the Christian must often examine himself, and prove his own soul; inasmuch as, without it, his Saviour will not acknowledge him: he shall not *obtain mercy*. Not that charity, or any other virtue, can redeem us from the punishment of sin, or entitle us to the reward of heaven: *eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ*⁴. It would be a miserable error for a man to suppose that by giving an alms he could atone for a crime, or

³ Matt. xxv. 32, &c.

⁴ Rom. vi. 23.

by excusing his debtor here, clear his own account with God. Forgiveness and pity are necessary parts of that character which Christ will save, but cannot alone save us, or be placed in the stead of Christ. But as I observed, they are necessary features in that character which Christ will save. Without these, it will be vain for a man to cry unto him in that day, *Lord, Lord, have we not been called by thy name?* He will still answer, You could not have a proper sense of the mercy which I showed, in *bearing your sins in my own body on the tree*⁵, when you showed no mercy towards your own brethren, who had not offended you by ten thousand times as heavily as you have offended against your Almighty Father. Neither could you value your knowledge of my Gospel, when you have employed no pains to give others that knowledge; neither could you love your brethren, as I commanded you to love them, when you refused to do unto them as ye would they should do unto you: therefore, yours is not the character which shall *obtain mercy*; nor the character for which my heavenly kingdom is prepared.

⁵ 1 Pet. ii: 24.

My brethren, if any of you are conscious that you have not forgiven a neighbour when he trespassed against you; if any of you are conscious that you have taken a malicious pleasure in making a brother's offences known, and injuring his credit; if any have pushed your rights to an extreme, and insisted on severity of justice, when you might rather have shown mercy and pity; if any have no feeling for their fellow-creatures' wants, and are contented to enjoy themselves, without bestowing a thought on those who have in this life *evil things*; you plainly perceive that the blessing bestowed on the merciful is not addressed to you: you must expect judgment without mercy, if you have showed no mercy. Pray, therefore, to the Lord Jesus Christ, that He who first set the most beautiful example of charity, and displayed his almighty power, not by removing mountains or destroying cities, but went about doing good, reforming the sinner, and curing the diseased, and relieving the distressed, and blessing those who persecuted him, may "pour into your hearts that most excellent gift of charity, without which all other qualities are nothing worth." When-

ever you are tempted to resent an injury, reflect with yourselves, has God no account against you? when you are inclined to speak, or to think, hardly of your neighbour, who may have fallen into sin; reflect, Am I so without sin, that I can venture to *cast the first stone* against another? when you are unwilling to take some trouble, or to spare some little of your substance, to relieve another's wants, remember the sentence of your Lord and Judge, *Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me*⁶.

⁶ Matt. xxv. 45.

SERMON XVI.
PURITY OF HEART.

—◆—

MATTHEW, V. 8.

*Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall
see God.*

It is probable, that many of the persons who were assembled round our Lord when he uttered this sentence, were expecting him to establish a temporal kingdom, a *kingdom of this world*; and not only so, but were eagerly looking forward to it, as giving them an opportunity to indulge their passions and desires. How great would be their surprise and disappointment, when, in addition to the spiritual precepts before uttered, they heard the words, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*. For the virtue here required had been little practised among the Jews, who had substituted external forms for inward purity; and by the heathen world it was totally neglect-

ed and unknown, till the Gospel at once inculcated the necessity, and conferred the power, of attaining it. For, purity of heart, both in precept and in practice, is peculiarly the triumph of Christianity. No false religion has attempted a task so difficult, as to subdue the lusts of the flesh; or has ventured to oppose so strong a barrier against its own reception. Nor can any human motive, any power short of that of the Spirit of God sent by our Lord to renew the hearts of his disciples, prevail in a case where the corruption of our nature shows itself most conspicuously; most conspicuously, most generally shows itself; for, surveying mankind, and comparing them with this text, the reflection which obviously occurs, is this: *the pure in heart; is it as such only that we can see God?* Then how great a change—how great a change in the heart—how great a change in the outward conduct, must take place in the generality of mankind, before they are admitted to that scene of glory! But so it is: all Scripture confirms it. *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the*

*body, ye shall live*¹. These must be overcome. *They are not of the Father, but of the world*². They raise a barrier between God and man. *They war against the soul*, which is indisposed to receive the truths of the Gospel, when the first proof of faith must be an act of self-denial, a mortification of corrupt habits.

Yet it is not until a person is become strongly impressed with divine truth, and with the necessity of regulating his life according to it; and has, therefore, manfully taken up the yoke of Christ, and is daily learning of him: it is not till then, that he enters upon the contest between the desires of his heart, and the law of his God. He finds the breach of this law little dreaded by most of those around him. Their conversation, perhaps their conduct, give him no reason to suppose that they are making it their earnest study to maintain purity of heart. On the contrary, the language of the tongue too often betrays the impurity of the source from which that language flows; and the practice of many in a country which is called Christian, nearly re-

¹ Rom. viii. 13.

² 1 John, ii. 16.

seembles that of the ancient heathens, *who being past feeling, gave themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness*³. Considerations of present interest may affect and restrain some, and preserve an outward decency. But the sincere follower of Christ alone sees the necessity of purifying himself even as he is pure⁴; of *purging his conscience from dead works to serve the living God*⁵. According to St. Paul's argument: *Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and 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*⁶. Or that of another Apostle: *As He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy*⁷.

But although the overcoming the depravity of the heart is part of the work which is given us to do, part of our trial in this world, part of our preparation for another; no one who is acquainted with human

³ Eph. iv. 19.

⁴ 1 John, iii. 3.

⁵ Heb. ix. 14.

⁶ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

⁷ 2 Pet. iii. 11.

nature will say that it is an easy work, or one which can be immediately achieved. It is a tedious and gradual course of discipline, by which *we through the spirit do keep under the body, and bring it into subjection.* St. Paul describes it as such in himself: *I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.* And in another place: *The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other*⁸.

From the moment, however, that divine grace has determined us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, and to make the *working out our salvation* our first and great concern; whether this be in more advanced life, or whether, as is most anxiously to be prayed for, in early youth, before natural evil has been strengthened by corrupt habit: from that time we must make it our daily endeavour to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit*⁹. If the passion

⁸ Rom. vii. 21. Gal. v. 17.

⁹ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

which it is necessary to overcome, be as dear as *a right eye*, or as valuable as *a right hand*¹, we must still cast it from us; it must be subdued, or every future hope renounced. *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication; that every one of you should know how to preserve his body in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness*². *And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts*³.

The power, indeed, of Satan, though weakened, still remains; but his dominion is broken; he is not permitted to rule; and the difference is evident in this: we habitually set a bridle upon our desires, and give no indulgence to our passions, except so far as they are sanctioned by the laws of God. Every impure thought is repelled, as soon as it arises; instead of being invited, dwelt upon, and loved, it is turned away and dreaded as an object of hatred and of

¹ Matt. v. 29.

² 1 Thess. iv. 8, &c.

³ Gal. v. 24.

danger. For *the thought of foolishness is sin*⁴. Our Lord showed his knowledge of the human heart, when he set his restraint upon the thought as well as the outward act. For, where "the sparks of sin are kept glowing in the soul, what can prevent them from breaking out into a flame," on the first temptation or opportunity? And even if this were not so, holiness must have its seat in the heart; and if that is filled with corrupt imaginations, there is no room for sanctification.

Again, every temptation to impurity is feared, every occasion of sin avoided. The emphatic language of Job is the language of the Christian: *I have made a covenant with mine eyes*⁵. He is aware of the latent depravity of his heart, and its weakness even when renewed by grace; so that he flies from every situation of risk, and incurs no danger that can be foreseen. The man who is sensible that his constitution is delicate, and that a particular air or climate are injurious to it, will avoid that air and climate: and whoever has so watched the workings of his heart as to be aware of its

⁴ Prov. xxiv. 9. ⁵ Job, xxxi. 1.

infirmity, will dread the influence of temptation. He will not act like the Apostle Peter, who ventured into the palace of his Lord's worst enemy, the very place where his fidelity was most likely to be endangered; but will keep at a distance from every opportunity that might weaken his resolution. He will often reflect on such Scriptures as these:—*Is not destruction to the wicked; and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity? Does not God see my ways, and count all my steps? Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee*⁶.

If purity of heart is so indispensable, and yet so contrary to our corrupt propensities, and so difficult to maintain, we naturally ask, *Who is sufficient for these things?* And the answer must be, Not we ourselves; *our sufficiency is from above;* and our encouragement is, that whoever has resolved to contend against those lusts which *make a separation between him and his God,* as part of the covenant by which he is engaged, interests the Lord Jesus on his

⁶ Job, xxxi. 2. Psalm cxxxix. 12.

side, the *Mediator of that covenant*; who will say to him, as he said to his Apostle, *My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness*⁷.

And, as one of the most powerful means of grace, he places before us the hope of glory. Mysterious as the idea is, this, we are told, was present to his own mind, when, *for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame*⁸: and that his followers may be encouraged to maintain a conflict which requires daily exertion and mortification, he reveals to them the consequences of sin, and the rewards of holiness. He declares that *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*; which implies, on the other hand, a curse upon the impure, *who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; for, without holiness no man shall see the Lord*⁹.

And this promise, my brethren, has a double accomplishment. We enjoy the earnest here, of its completion hereafter.

⁷ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁸ Hebrews, xii. 2.

⁹ 2 Thess. i. 9.

For, as many as are striving to *bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*, and to conform not their actions only, but their will and desires, to the rule of the divine law: these have an immediate reward in the manifestation which God makes of himself more and more to their hearts within: they *see him*, in a lower sense, even while they continue on earth; they see his power in the victory which he gives them over their strongest appetites; they see his goodness in the compensation which he makes to them for what they resign—in the inward peace, inward satisfaction, arising from a freedom from those passions which, by the disquiet which they occasion to the soul here, give an assurance of the misery which, if not overcome, they will inflict upon us hereafter. It is an undoubted truth, that these encouragements are afforded to the Christian; afforded in near proportion to the earnestness with which he aspires after holiness. *Who is the man*, says the Psalmist, in the name of God, *that seeketh the Lord? Him will I teach in the way that I shall choose*¹. Draw

¹ Psalm xxv. 12.

*nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*². So the Apostle declares; and one greater than an Apostle led the way to him, saying, *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*³. O let this assurance encourage all more and more to *taste and see how gracious the Lord is: blessed is the man that trusteth in him*⁴.

It is not, however, on earth that we are to expect the entire fulfilment of those blessings which Christ has promised to his disciples. The first opposition made to sin, and especially to habits of sin, may be very far from happiness. It may be attended with severe struggles, with grievous discouragements; it may call down on those who persevere in it ridicule and reproach from the many who, it is to be feared, will always *make a mock at sin*, and refuse to believe that *for all this God will call them into judgment*⁵. When a man has long and steadfastly followed righteousness, he experiences that her ways are truly *ways of pleasantness, and all her*

² James, iv. 8.

³ John, xiv. 23.

⁴ Psalm xxxiv. 8.

⁵ Eccles. xi. 3.

paths are peace; but the first entrance into those ways, especially if a different path has been heretofore pursued, will be a difficult ascent, a slow progress, which Satan will use all his arts to hinder.

But suppose the worst: suppose that the present mortification is severe, the immediate sacrifice painful:—is nothing to be sought but present gratification, nothing feared but present hardships? How will habitual disobedience to the commands of God be remembered in the closing scenes of life? When every thing of this world has lost its value, when the idea of appearing in the presence of God is no longer a distant prospect, which we can put aside till a more *convenient season*; but is immediate, can neither be diverted nor escaped, haunting every sleeping and every waking hour:—when weakness, and perhaps anguish, require all the balm which a mind at ease can minister to bodily distress;—then it is that the truth of our Lord's sentence is made good, *Blessed are the pure in heart*; for then it is indeed most miserable to look back upon a past life, and to remember only passions indulged, and lusts unsubdued, and divine

laws despised. The soul about to quit its earthly tabernacle, and to finish its pilgrimage here, looks round for support and comfort, that though it *walk through the valley of the shadow of death, it may fear no evil*⁶, but may be received into a *continuing city, an everlasting habitation*. And for whom is this prepared? Not for the unholy and impure—for *this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*⁷. Not for those who *have fulfilled the lusts of the flesh, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*⁸.

Therefore, when self-denial is grievous, or temptation strong, look beyond the present towards this future period, which is as sure to come as we are living now: look even further; imagine the case of those who, instead of lying on the brink of the grave, have gone beyond it—have gone to answer for a life of impurity before Him whose name is Holy; have been called from

⁶ Psa. xxiii. 4.⁷ Eph. v. 5.⁸ Gal. v. 19.

practical unbelief to prove the realities of an eternal world. Their body moulders in the dust; but the soul, as we learn from Scripture, never loses its consciousness of the past, or its expectation of the future, but, even before its reunion with the body at the day of judgment, anticipates its final sentence, and has a foretaste of eternal happiness or of everlasting misery. What, then, must be the present sense of those unhappy persons, who have been surprised, as thousands are every day, in a state of *trespasses and sins*, their desires unmortified, their passions unsubdued! What anguish are their souls enduring! The remembrance of the past is intolerable: it recalls nothing to them except a life mispent, an opportunity of salvation lost, an eternal promise given up for the poor gratification of present sensuality. How dreadful this remembrance is, we may form some notion from our Lord's well-known parable, which represents *the rich man* who, while on earth, had never bestowed a moment's thought or compassion on others, yet now praying Abraham that Lazarus might testify unto his five surviving brethren, lest they also should have a portion

like that which he himself was experiencing⁹.

Such is their present horror. And as they look onward, is there any brighter prospect to cheer them? Far otherwise; their next step will be to the judgment-seat of God, and clouds and darkness are before his throne. *The terrors of the Lord* are before them, who has denounced *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil*. The sacred writers labour to express and describe to us that punishment, that *second death*, which we cannot yet fully comprehend, by setting before our minds all those miseries which we now must shudder at: the *blackness of darkness for ever*; the *gnawing worm* of conscience, *which dieth not*; *outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*; *the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*; *the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, whence the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day or night*¹.

Human nature starts back from this

⁹ Luke, xvi. 24.

¹ Jude, 13. Mark, ix. 44. Matt. viii. 12. Matt. xxv. 41. Rev. xiv. 11.

description, and would willingly shut it out of view; yet for those who die in a habit of any unforsaken sin, what hope is there that it will not be realized in their own punishment? None but the weak and groundless hope, that the word of Almighty God may not be found true; that he will prove merciful on other terms than those on which he has promised to show mercy; that he will admit into his heavenly kingdom those who have no character in common with the inhabitants of heaven; that he will suffer those who are not *pure in heart* to see his glory.

Compare, then, with the state to which death, whenever it comes, must convey the sensual and impenitent—compare with this the condition of the Christian; of him, I mean, who has not walked *after the flesh, but after the spirit*²; and who, through the power bestowed upon him by his Redeemer, has laboured to *purify himself, even as He is pure*. His *soul is in the hand of the Lord, and there shall no torment touch it: he is in peace; and though he seems to die, yet is his hope full of immortality*³. He is

² Rom. viii. 1.

³ Wisd. iii. 1.

already, as the Apostle desired to be⁴, and as our Lord assured the penitent thief that he should be, *with Christ, and in paradise*; conscious of his immediate presence and perpetual favour, and rewarded with an anticipation of his glorious kingdom. "There is nothing where he is that can affright or afflict him; nothing that can grieve or trouble, nothing that can molest or disquiet him. The body of guilt and corruption he has thrown off; the *motions of sin* have ceased for ever in his *eternal rest*. Perhaps, while he dwelt upon earth, sorrows had oppressed him; he is now where tears shall be wiped away from all faces. Perhaps he had been harassed by temptations, by *the flesh lusting against the spirit, so that he could not do the things that he would*; he is now removed far out of the reach of all the fiery darts of the evil one⁵." In short, this world, with all its trials, dangers, and difficulties, is behind him and forgotten; while heaven, with all its glories, is within his view, and furnishes him with a perpetual source of delightful contemplation. How little does he now

⁴ Phil. i. 23.

⁵ Hopkins.

remember those labours which every true Christian must encounter in resisting the pleasures of the world, in combating his passions, in regulating his desires! How trifling in the retrospect does that self-denial appear, which perhaps formerly, in the beginning of his religious course, he was inclined to think an intolerable burden! It is even an addition to his present joy, when he looks back on the temptations which his Saviour's aid enabled him to conquer, on the allurements of sin which it taught him successfully to oppose: and he feels with unspeakable thankfulness that his light privations, *which were but for a moment, have wrought for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* This shall be bestowed upon him in that day, when the Son of Man, who at his first coming made a full propitiation for the sins of all that believe, shall a second time appear, as the Judge of all that have denied, and the rewarder of all that have obeyed him; when he shall delight the ears of those who have lived and died in his faith and fear, with the joyful summons, *Come, ye blessed children of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from*

the foundation of the world. Come ye poor in spirit, ye mourners, who have trembled at my word; enter now into the joy of your Lord. Come, ye who have hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and be made as the angels of God in heaven. Come, ye meek, and ye lovers of peace, inherit a land where malice and anger are unknown. Come, ye merciful, and obtain mercy. Come, ye pure in heart, and see Him face to face, whom heretofore ye have not seen and yet have believed.

May He, then, who is alone *able to present us faultless before the presence of his glory*, “cleanse our hearts and minds by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit;” and, “that we may obtain that which he doth promise, make us to love that which he doth command!”

SERMON XVII.

THE PEACEMAKERS.

—◆—

MATTHEW, v. 9.

*Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall
be called the children of God.*

THE first annunciation of our Lord's nativity proclaimed *peace on earth*. Neither could brotherly love be possibly recommended on stronger grounds than these, that as God had so wonderfully displayed his *good will towards men*, men should cultivate good-will towards one another.

Throughout the Gospel, this duty is enforced in the most earnest manner. *This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you*¹. This is the test of faith which our Lord prescribes; and accordingly St. Paul writes, *Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another*²: and St.

¹ John, xv. 12.

² 1 Thess. iv. 9.

Peter: See ye love one another with a pure heart, fervently³. Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another: love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; knowing that ye are hereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it⁴.

It is a remarkable proof of human corruption, that such earnest exhortations are necessary to recommend a state of mind which we might reasonably expect all would spontaneously cherish from a consideration of their relative circumstances and mutual wants, and of the assistance afforded to these by the exercise of general good will. The fact, however, is indisputable. Not that men sit down and deliberately make war against their neighbours' wishes, or interests, or reputation. But it is the natural tendency of their vicious passions to engender and create envy,

³ 1 Pet. i. 22.

⁴ 1 Pet. iii. 8.

distrust, jealousy, and anger; so that domestic and social harmony, peace in the family, and peace in the neighbourhood, are not the natural attendants of mutual intercourse, and can only be preserved by active effort and continual watchfulness; which occasions our Redeemer, in describing what Christians ought to be, not to confine his blessing to *the meek*, who sow the seeds of no dissension; but to bestow it likewise on *the peacemakers*, who suppress them when sown, and check their farther growth.

I shall endeavour to point out the useful operation of this quality, first, in the family; secondly, in society at large; and thirdly, in the church.

I. There is no way in which the evil of the human heart more generally discovers itself than in a sort of feverish irritation, which often disturbs the peace of domestic life more seriously than great calamities. Abroad, men are subject to restraint; they conceal their feelings, keep down their wishes, and bridle the petulance of the tongue. But at home, they too frequently disclose the corruption which works within—resenting opposition even in trifling

things; expecting a ready submission to their inclination, perhaps their caprice and humour; and thus apply sparks to a body of bad passions which are always ready to break out into a flame.

Whoever analyzes this irritable temper, will find its chief ingredients to be what a Christian is peculiarly called upon to subdue, selfishness and pride: selfishness refusing to give up our personal wishes or gratification; and pride, maintaining its own opinion even in the most frivolous matters, and requiring all to yield to its authority. Independently, therefore, of the duty incumbent on us, not to inflict pain on another, the feeling itself is of a nature which must be carefully corrected, because it is inconsistent with a Christian state of heart. Accordingly, the Apostles insist with great earnestness upon that mutual concession and forbearance which can alone preserve peace in a family. *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another; forbearing one another, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of*

God. *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh. And ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your Master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him⁵.*

Obedience to these precepts is that peaceable disposition which is enforced in the text; the reward of which is immediate, as well as future; for the comfort which it diffuses around is reflected upon itself. *The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, and we may add, reaped in peace, by them that make peace⁶.* Let me in particular urge it upon those among you, who profess to be bearing the yoke of Christ; to call yourselves to strict account on this point. Gentleness of mind will recom-

⁵ Eph. iv. 21. Col. iii. 13, 18. Eph. v. 21; vi. 5.

⁶ James, iii. 18.

mend your faith; the want of it will be unjustly thought to cast disgrace upon your religion. Let not common courtesy, or good manners, or a naturally amiable temper, enable those who are guided by no superior principle, to surpass one who professes to be taught of Heaven, in the display of a mild and equable disposition.

II. A sincere desire to preserve the *bond of peace* unbroken will be exercised in society as well as at home. Half the dissensions which divide mankind arise from misrepresentations and misapprehensions. Things which appear very unwarrantable or very injudicious when only one side of the question is known, or one part of the history told, will often change their character on a fuller and more exact inquiry. It is part of the quality which we are now considering to bear this in view, both in our opinions and discourse concerning others. When a story of doubtful nature is related, we should set before our minds the motives which may possibly have influenced those concerned, or the circumstances which may extenuate their blame, if they appear blameworthy. By bringing such reflections forward, we may often turn aside the stroke

of unmerited censure, or, at least, blunt its edge: and such conduct frequently deserves the praise of right judgment, no less than of Christian spirit.

Care, indeed, is necessary, that we do not confound the nature of actions, and extend candour so far as to lose the important distinctions of right and wrong. But this may be wisely preserved, while every reasonable palliation is still offered for the person in fault. Our Lord did not deny the guilt of the Jews when he pleaded their bigotry and prejudice as some excuse for their inhuman violence. *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* Neither did Peter deny the wickedness of those hands which had crucified and slain the Messiah; but he mercifully, as well as discreetly, acknowledges the only extenuation of which their sin was capable, when he admits, *And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers*⁷.

To make peace in this way, by alleging the most favourable motives whenever the case is doubtful, and, when there is no

⁷ Acts, iii. 17.

room for doubt, by suggesting such circumstances as may give it a better appearance, is a delightful office, and one in which every Christian may have constant opportunities of showing the spirit by which he is actuated. A life may elapse before he has any solemn occasion of making peace, by settling a matter submitted to his arbitration, or acting as an umpire between contending parties. But scarcely a day will pass with those who have frequent intercourse among their fellow-creatures, when a man may not have it in his power to make peace in the most useful manner, by preventing strife, and quieting animosity; by preserving those who are brethren by birth and brethren by common faith, in favourable regards towards each other.

III. Let the same temper be also exhibited in matters relating to religion, and prevail throughout the church. Strange, that it should ever be wanting there! that the vehemence of those who differ in religious opinions should be proverbial! But so it is; and the influence of Satan is universally discovered, endeavouring to corrupt that which he cannot destroy.

1. There are two principles, which, if they could be duly kept in view, would in a great measure preserve that peace in the church which is so mainly calculated to enlarge its sphere of usefulness, as well as so desirable to its individual members. The first is, that we set no more than a just value on things which are not of primary importance. If this rule were more generally observed, how much of the fuel of dissension would be taken away! But in this respect the conduct of mankind is often at variance with their avowed conviction. The Arminian of any candour or experience will acknowledge that the firm advocate of personal election may yet *strive to enter in at the strait gate*; may labour to *work out his salvation with fear and trembling*. The Calvinist, on the other hand, will not in terms deny that one who believes that the grace of God does not irresistibly subdue the sinfulness of the natural heart, may nevertheless be *poor in spirit*, and own himself an *unprofitable servant*. And yet a difference in these points, confessedly unessential to salvation, is often able to preclude friendship and prevent co-operation, and shuts out both par-

ties from spiritual advantages, by rendering them unwilling to profit by the writings or discourses of others. So likewise with regard to conduct: a difference in matters which it cannot be pretended are essential, and which, being left undecided in Holy Writ, may properly be referred to views of individual expediency, is often treated as if it marked the character, and drew the boundary-line between the despiser and the follower of the Gospel.

Who is the *peacemaker* in these cases? He who steps in and says, *Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?* who points out the forgotten grounds of mutual agreement, the reasons for union, and the evils of dissension. And whose is the spirit which is opposite to that inculcated in the text?—His, who exaggerates the supposed consequences of the opinion which he does not hold; who fixes severe imputations; suggests uncertain inferences; distorts the views or conduct of the party to which he does not belong; uses the opportunities which ought to be employed in edifying, in hostile attacks and recriminations; and insinuates that there can be no sincerity where there is

not an absolute decision upon points which Scripture appears to have left unsettled. God grant, my brethren, that those who have done or do these things, may not be judged according to the pernicious consequences of their intolerance! A bad effect may possibly follow a good intention: but every man is bound most scrupulously to examine his motives, and to be *persuaded in his own mind*, that his conduct is free from the influence of prejudice or passion.

St. Paul has left us an example in matters of this nature which we shall do well to imitate. He surely was no time-server, no unstable reasoner, *carried about by every wind of doctrine*. He perceived that there was a time when it was necessary to withstand Peter, *because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision*⁸. Here he corrected Peter's error, who was treating things of light importance as essential. And yet the same Apostle, on another occasion, to avoid unnecessary

⁸ See Galat. ii. 11, &c.

offence, conformed to some of the abrogated rites and superfluous ceremonies of the law⁸. As he explains his own conduct, *Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some*⁹. This was acting in the true spirit of a peacemaker.

2. But in order to preserve peace in the church, this rule of not laying any undue stress upon things of unessential moment, must be joined with another; viz. that we do set a just value on matters of undeniable importance. Now, there is one concern of overpowering importance to ourselves and others; the eternal welfare of the soul; the repentance, faith, and holiness on which that welfare depends. If this, in our habitual judgment, stands forward in a true light, it will throw into the shade a host of those trifling considera-

⁸ Acts, xxi. 23. ⁹ 1 Cor. ix. 20.

tions which often become occasions of dissension and hostility.

For example : it is often made a matter of charge against religious persons, that they are ascetic in their habits, that they discountenance what others deem innocent amusements, and so appear to cast a gloom over those ways which ought to be the *ways of peace and pleasantness*. Such persons are frequently dreaded, censured, and avoided by their neighbours. But what is their crime?—Only that of reckoning their salvation of such eminent importance, that they fear the least approach towards any temptation which might bring it into hazard: only that of so loving Him *who gave himself for them*, as to wish their desire of *living to him*, to be manifest to all the world¹. Let it be allowed that their fears are sometimes groundless, their abstinence precise, still the object which they have in view ought to secure them from blame. The valetudinarian, who is scrupulously careful of his bodily health, is not thought to deserve our dislike, and seldom meets with more than a little good-humoured raillery.

¹ 2 Cor. v. 15.

Why should those who habitually feel that the *one thing needful* cannot be too anxiously provided for, be treated by many, many even who are not irreligious or profane, as the least amiable, least excusable of mankind?

Let the same considerations influence our views of conduct which has the eternal welfare of others in view. We often hear an earnest anxiety about the spiritual improvement of a neighbourhood censured, on the grounds of improper interference, or unwarrantable zeal, as if the question related only to a little more or less of the perishable goods of this world. Neither would I advocate the cause of indiscretion, or justify such zeal as sets order and regularity at defiance: few ill-directed measures attain the end at which they aim. But before you pass a severe sentence, consider the object at stake; is it not of such a nature, as may well excuse the greatest earnestness? *It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing*². The Apostles blamed that Mary, who expended a box of ointment which might have been sold for a consider-

² Gal. iv. 18.

able sum, in anointing the person of our Lord³. But he at once checked the ill-timed reproof: yes, He who had given the frugal maxim, *Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost*, he commended the woman, and declared that she had done well, in thus consuming a precious treasure. Her love, and his just title to that love, sanctified her extravagance. And so do you, before you find fault with an unseasonable remonstrance, or an over-zealous exertion of influence respecting the souls of others, prove and examine yourselves, and be sure that you duly appreciate the magnitude of the question, whether a person be walking in the *narrow way* of eternal life, or in the *broad way that leadeth to destruction*.

These cautions will not seem unsuited to the present times, if we remember the light in which many Societies, which have in view the salvation of man, and many eminent persons who have distinguished themselves in the same pursuit, are viewed by a large proportion of their fellow-Christians. They can hardly be named in some

³ See Matt. xxvi. 8.

companies, without exciting a hostile feeling. Yet let their enemies analyze that feeling, or inquire more nearly into the character which they dislike; and what will they find, but that they have shown a remarkable dread lest others should remain under the wrath of God, and miss the offer of salvation which he has held forth? If any of you have indulged such groundless enmity, ask yourselves whether this is matter of grievous charge? You may entertain a less keen sense of the danger, or you may think unfavourably of any particular means of meeting it: yet surely it must be allowed, that although no object will justify wrong measures, an object of infinite importance may excuse an unusual degree of zeal. Beware, lest they should rob you of the reward attached to the true peacemakers; but at all events, do not incur the opposite guilt of stirring up strife among brethren, by joining in unmerited censure, or unmeaning ridicule against those whom very possibly God may not behold with displeasure. For as, of all enmity, that is the most serious and awful, which Christ came to remove; so of all peacemakers, those are the most truly en-

viable, who are the instruments of bringing their fellow-creatures within the Christian covenant, and *breaking down the partition-wall*⁴ which separates the sinner from his Creator, as long as he continues a sinner.

I shall conclude with a few words upon the blessing annexed to the character which I have been considering; *ye shall be called the children of God*: i. e. as we learn from a similar expression in St. John, *shall BE his children*⁵. His children, first, by imitation. Nothing is more conformable than mutual love to the God of love. Nothing is more agreeable to his will, than that his creatures should cultivate such a disposition towards one another. He requires this as a proof of their faithfulness. *Love, says St. John, is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God*⁶. He proceeds to enforce the same precept from the mystery of the incarna-

⁴ Eph. ii. 14.

⁵ "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that *we should be called the sons of God.*" The Apostle shows that the expressions are synonymous, by adding in the next verse, "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God.*"

⁶ 1 John, iii. 7, &c.

tion. *Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* And the Gospel, among all the fruit which it bears so abundantly, has no fairer fruit than this, that it unites men of the same country and of different countries, in one close bond of union, as servants employed in the business of the same Lord for the sake of the same promised inheritance.

But the peacemakers are also the *children of God* by adoption: *and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*⁷. Not that the eternal kingdom prepared for them is given as the reward of actual desert; the whole tenour of the Gospel would refute such an error. But, as I have observed with respect to other blessings, this is a part of the character which God commands us to cultivate, and purposes to reward. To those *who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world*⁸, all those truths and circumstances will appear revealed, which might have rendered union

⁷ Romans, viii. 15.

⁸ Luke, xx. 35.

more cordial, and esteem more sincere on earth. We may reasonably trust, that on the scrutiny of *that day* many secrets will be disclosed, to prove that some who have walked through life in the most opposite courses, have been actuated by motives equally honest and sincere. *Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*⁹.

But certainly it must be confessed even here, that those who endeavour to soften the collision of conflicting opinions, to prevent disputes, to reconcile those opposed to each other, to maintain peace, in short, wherever their influence lies, in families, in their neighbourhood, in civil or ecclesiastical society, have drank the deepest of the spirit of that religion which began in love, and tends to love; and which shall have its perfect consummation in that heavenly kingdom where mistrust, jealousy, and animosity shall exist no more.

⁹ Matt. viii. 11.

SERMON XVIII.

PERSECUTION FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS'
SAKE.

 MATTHEW, v. 10.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

FOR several reasons, this is a very remarkable verse of Scripture. First, it shows our Lord's faithfulness to his disciples, that he warned them beforehand what they were to expect in the world, and what they were not to expect. They were not to expect honours. *My kingdom*, he says, *is not of this world*. They were not to expect comforts. To one who declared his intention of following him he replied, *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head*¹. They were not to expect

¹ Matt. viii. 20.

pleasures. *If any man will come after me, he says, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me*².

On the other hand, they were to expect distress. *In the world, he says, ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*³. They were to expect opposition. *Think not, he warns them, that I am come to send peace upon earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household*⁴. They were to expect hatred. *Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake*⁵. Lastly, they were to expect every sort of persecution. *Beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils and they will scourge you in the synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my name's sake*⁶. This was the

² Matt. xvi. 24.

³ John, xvii. 33.

⁴ Matt. x. 36.

⁵ Luke, xxi. 16.

⁶ Matt. x. 8

treatment which they were to expect in the world; this was the life which they were to lead in it; a life of sorrow, of poverty, of trials, of hatred, of persecution. How well convinced they must have been by the miracles which they saw, that he was indeed the Son of God, who was able to secure to them a complete reward in heaven, before they consented to become his disciples, and to subject themselves to so much present misery! This you may judge of from your own thoughts and feelings: for, who in these days would follow any man, who had nothing better than this to offer those who came after him?

But the text is remarkable for another reason. It shows a wonderful knowledge of the nature of man. It shows an acquaintance with things to come, which none could have who was not himself God, or whom God had not inspired. For, observe, what does our Lord imply when he utters the words, *Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake?* He implies and intimates beforehand, that men shall be persecuted for the sake of righteousness. He foretells, that their preaching the Gospel, and living faithfully to the Gospel,

shall bring them into danger of persecution. And who, I say, would have supposed this? Who would have supposed that a religion full of mercy, full of charity, full of comfort, and bringing tidings of good will from God to men, should have been received with suspicion and hatred? Who would have supposed that a Messenger who came from heaven to say, "Ye inhabitants of the earth, ye are lost through sin, and exposed to eternal punishment from the just anger of God; but I will lay down my life for your sakes"—who would have supposed, that such a Benefactor should be followed by an angry multitude, crying, *Away with this fellow from the earth! Crucify him, crucify him!*

And so in the case of the Apostles: would you have expected that they should be warned to look for persecution as the reward of the message which they were commissioned to carry? They did not go through Judea, calling down fire from heaven, withering the fruits of the earth by a curse, or praying that God would withhold from the country his rain and fruitful seasons; but, like their Master, they *went about doing good*, healing the lame and the

diseased. Was this conduct to provoke cruel treatment? But it had this effect: for the rulers and elders conferred together; saying, *What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle has been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak to no man henceforth in this name*⁷.

And why should they not *speak in this name*? It was not in anger, but in kindness that they preached the Gospel: it was not a message of wrath, but of mercy, that they brought. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*⁸. And the words in which they preached this were no more harsh or severe than these, *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins*⁹. Repent, and confess that God has made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both God and Lord, and ye shall receive pardon through the very blood which ye yourselves shed.

⁷ Acts, iv. 14.

⁸ John, iii. 17.

⁹ Acts, ii. 38.

Was this language to excite persecution? Would it seem likely beforehand, that men who came with such an offer should be reviled and falsely accused, and treated with stripes, imprisonment, and death?

Therefore, when our Lord prophesied, as he did, that they should be thus treated, it is a proof that he *knew what was in man*; and it is a proof that there is in man something very unholy, very corrupt; that it turned out according as he had prophesied, and that the best friends which the world had ever seen, were despised, rejected, and persecuted by so many. But this treatment neither grieved nor deterred them: on the contrary, they remembered the assurance of their Saviour, *Great is your reward in heaven, and rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name*¹.

Such was the case in those early times, soon after our Lord's resurrection. But it may be thought that the sentence, *Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake*, could only apply to those times, and has no concern with us. Which leads me to consider a very interesting part of

¹ Acts, v. 41.

the subject, how far it does concern us, and probably will concern all Christians to the end of the world.

First, it is plain that if all men were what they should be, all faithful servants of Christ, there would be an end to persecution for righteousness' sake. When all were striving to be perfect, none would quarrel with his neighbour for being too sober, too fond of prayer, too much given to reading the Scriptures, too fearful of offending God. They would rather be on the watch to warn him kindly if they saw in him the least appearance of evil, than to assail him rudely, if they saw in him a very zealous desire after godliness. But the Scripture gives us little reason to hope that this happy time shall ever come. Our Lord tells us in many ways to expect that the world will always show, what it shows now, two different classes of men; those who believe the things that are spoken in the Bible, and those who believe not. He tells us, that *broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat; for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* He says, *that many*

are called, but few chosen. He speaks of *the children of this world*, and of *the children of light*; which leads us to fear, that there will be always those who follow the wages of unrighteousness, and go after Satan, as well as those who *set their affections on things above.*

My brethren, whenever you hear these things said in a discourse, or read from the Scriptures, look to your own hearts for a moment, and inquire of them thus :—Is the way of destruction broad? are there many that pursue it? God grant grace to me, that I may enter the narrow gate of life! God grant that I, who am called by baptism, may be chosen to salvation through Jesus Christ, and may live as a child of God, an heir of the kingdom of heaven, and not as a lover of this world! For we must belong to one class or the other: and *now is the accepted time, to make through prayer, and grace which is given to prayer, our calling and election sure!*

But to return. For these reasons it is to be feared, that there will always be ungodly, as well as godly, men in the world: always be enemies or despisers, as well as followers and disciples of Christ. And if

so, there will always be danger of some sort of persecution for righteousness' sake. It will not be that which the Apostles underwent, or which many of the *excellent of the earth*, since the Apostles' time, have been called to suffer for their Saviour's sake; stripes, imprisonment, death, or torture worse than death. Thanks be to God, he has given us a fairer lot, a smoother path. The worst that any man can now be called to encounter, is a little ridicule, or perhaps a harsh and unmeaning name, because he endeavours to act up to the Bible, and to be *altogether* a Christian. This he must be prepared for, and ready to repel or despise.

1. For instance: If a person has lived sinfully, has been used to consort with wicked companions, and then is happily turned *from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God*; it must not be thought surprising, if those whom he has left laugh at the change, and try by sneers and reproaches to bring their old companion back to his former ways. Just as a bird, which has been taken by a fowler, is trained to decoy others into the snare: just so does Satan instigate the wicked to lead

others into sinfulness like their own, and to keep them from repentance. This is a sort of persecution; a sort too which is often very difficult to bear. It brings the penitent to say, They told me that the ways of piety were ways of pleasantness and peace; but I find them full of disquiet and vexation! They told me that godliness had the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come; but I am weary of my life, because of the sons of Belial who surround me. Should there be any here whom this case suits, remember that a great part of this vexation results from your former sin, and not from your present repentance. Had you not lived heretofore sinfully or carelessly, you would not have given others this advantage over you: but as it is, be of good cheer. You may have the wicked against you; but you have your Saviour with you. You may have tribulation here; but great is your reward in heaven. You may be opposed or hated; but what says the Scripture? *Be not afraid of those that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear Him which, after he hath killed, hath*

*power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, fear him*².

2. I will state another case. There is a certain degree of decency of conduct, which none but the vilest reprobates treat with scorn. To abstain from gross and open wickedness; to be regular at church, at least once a day; to be just and true in all dealings, is so respectable in the eyes of the world, that, instead of subjecting any one to persecution, even the persecution of ridicule, it is generally approved, and all men wish to see it in their friends, in their children, in their servants, in their neighbours. But let a man go much farther than this: let him be very zealous in the love of God; very ardent in his faith; let him attempt to live according to the Gospel, and imitate, as far as circumstances allow, the conduct of the Apostles; it is more doubtful how far he will then be approved or praised. Suppose, for instance, he imitates Abraham, who not only served God himself, but made his household do the same³; or says, like Joshua, *I and my house will serve the Lord*⁴; suppose that, to

² Matt. x. 28.

³ Gen. xviii. 19.

⁴ Josh. xxiv. 15.

promote this, he begins and closes the day in prayer with his family (which seems to be a very natural thing, for those who serve the same God, and acknowledge the same Saviour)—suppose he keeps away from all meetings and companies of people, where he might be likely to fall in with sinners, or to be led into sin—suppose he is always found in his place at church, not only at one of the services, but, if possible, at both, and not only when he has a sermon to interest him, but when he only comes to join in prayer, and hear the Scriptures—suppose he gives proof that he is trusting to his Saviour for salvation, by always attending the Holy Sacrament—suppose he shows such a dread and hatred of sin, as not only to abstain from it himself, but, wherever he can, to rebuke it in others,—will not all this bring him upon tender ground? Will not his neighbours begin to whisper, that he is growing *righteous over-much*? Will there not be some danger of his being despised by some, and bantered by others? In a clergyman, indeed, all this might be allowed, as if one man's soul did not require the same care as another's, and there were two sets of rules for a

Christian's conduct in the Gospel; but I doubt whether men in general could act up to this standard without being prepared to encounter a little opposition, a few friendly hints of the danger they were in. Danger; of what! of loving God too much! of following his Revelation too closely! of making their salvation too secure!

My brethren, in the case I have supposed, I have not gone a whit beyond what the spirit of the Bible requires, or what all pious men practise, or I will venture to say what every man whose conscience is the least awakened, will wish that he had practised when he comes to die, or stands in judgment. Whether such conduct would subject you to any of that gentle persecution which I have spoken of, will depend on many things; on the character of those who chiefly surround you, on your own consistency: certainly it is less exposed to ridicule now than formerly, because, through the grace of God, it is more common; but if it did expose you to persecution, it would be for righteousness' sake, and you would have reason to call yourselves happy, for great is your reward in heaven!

3. I will mention another case of great difficulty wherever it occurs. Sometimes divine grace touches the heart of one in the midst of an ungodly family. The prophet gives us reason to look for this: *I will take you*, says the Lord, *one of a city, and two of a family*⁵. A person thus unfortunately placed, cannot expect to perform even the lowest duties of religion without severe persecution. He cannot pray, without being laughed to scorn; he cannot read, without being interrupted; and constantly surrounded as he is by sinful actions, and exposed to hear the name of God blasphemed and his worshippers ridiculed, he is in a state of daily trial.

Such a one has little encouragement to persevere in a right course, as far as this world is concerned. But let him not be deterred from his path; let him say with David, *The Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man can do unto me*. In proportion as the circumstances in which the Christian is placed are difficult, his support is strengthened. The Saviour in whom he trusts is watchful over him; and will *pray that his faith fail not*. He has many promises

⁵ Jeremiah, iii. 14.

in his favour: the Scripture expressly says, that God will *suffer none to be tempted above what he is able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*⁶. Elsewhere he reads, *Blessed is he that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*⁷. Again, we are assured, that *greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world*⁸. And how sweet will the words of the text sound in the ears of such a one, *Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Let him not be distressed, as though some strange thing had happened to him; there has no temptation taken him, but such as is common to man; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*⁹. From the days of Abel to the days of Jesus Christ, and from the days of Jesus Christ to the present hour, those that *will live godly* have been subject to persecution, from the ungodly part of the world around them¹: but their holy resolution and bold-

⁶ 1 Cor. x. 13.

⁷ James, i. 12.

⁸ 1 John, iv. 4.

⁹ 1 Cor. x. 13. Matt. v. 12.

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 13.

ness is supported by the special grace of God, and seen with delight by the angels of heaven, who are *ministering spirits sent out to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation*².

I will conclude with a word, first, to those who may be inclined to blame others because they are more zealous followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and more earnest in the pursuit of salvation, than themselves. Why should this be a crime in your eyes? When the prize is so vast, and the state of those who fall short of that prize so awful, is it possible to be too eager in seeking it? We allow a man to be very careful about his health, very careful about his fortune, very careful about his good name: we are never afraid of his being too well, or too rich, or too much esteemed: why should we fear his being too much regarded by God; too *rich in good works*; too completely cured of the evil of his nature; too securely invested with *the righteousness of faith*? There are degrees of wealth and of dignity on earth, and men are seldom blamed for seeking the highest in an ho-

² Heb. i. 14.

nourable way; so there are degrees of glory in heaven; and is ambition only noble which is limited to the concerns of this world? may not the CHRISTIAN *look to himself that he receive a full reward*³? As for those who revile others, and *speak evil of them falsely for Christ's sake*, they should remember, that as there are degrees of glory in heaven, so there are degrees of condemnation in hell; and as his glory will be enviable indeed, who *turns many to righteousness*⁴, so will his condemnation be most terrible and most just, who adds to the difficulties which corrupt nature and an ensnaring world throw in the way of faith and holiness.

Lastly, should any find yourselves *persecuted for righteousness' sake*, be comforted by the assurance of the text, that yours *is the kingdom of heaven*. Let no discouragement turn you aside from the narrow way, which you are entering, into the broad road which leadeth to destruction. Consider who those are that blame you or speak evil of you. Are they the lovers of God, the haters of sin? Is it not more likely that they are annoyed by your example, than

³ John, ii. 8.

⁴ See Dan. xii. 3.

anxious for your spiritual good? Are they persons who are so living as to be prepared for judgment? *Ye shall know them by their fruits*; and so let them know you by your fruits. Be thankful that we live in times when a *good confession* is respected, and first or last will be held honourable even here. Never depart from the straight line which the Gospel sets before you, in order to escape ridicule or opposition. Yet be careful to give no needless offence. *Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*⁵. *Adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*⁶; and show that your entire trust in his blood for pardon, in his merits for salvation, is the principle that makes you more fearful to offend, more anxious to please him. *So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

⁵ Matt. x 16.⁶ Titus, ii. 10.

SERMON XIX.

CONNEXION BETWEEN CHRISTIAN FAITH
AND CHRISTIAN PRACTICE.

—◆—

MATTHEW, XII. 33.

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruits

ON different occasions lately I have attempted to delineate the various features of the Christian character, which our Lord placed together in one point of view in his discourse on the Mount, and on which he pronounced his blessing. They are the poor in spirit; the penitent; the meek; the merciful; the pure in heart; the peacemakers; those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; and those who are willing to encounter persecution for righteousness' sake: these are *blessed* by their Saviour's voice; *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

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But it must not be thought that these virtues, though they are distinctly named and distinctly treated of, are therefore unconnected and separable, so that a man may profess and follow some, and reject or violate the rest. This would no more form a consistent Christian, than a set of words thrown together at random would form an intelligible sentence, or a string of unconnected sentences produce a regular treatise. There must be a ruling mind; to give meaning to the words and sentences; and so there must be a governing and connecting principle to give value and consistency to the several virtues.

No doubt, in talking of persons who are not governed or influenced by the Gospel, we often speak of them as eminent for this or that particular quality, which may exist by itself unsupported by any others. We praise one man as remarkably prudent; another, as being strictly correct in all his dealings; another, as being uniformly temperate and sober. And this has nothing in it inconsistent or unintelligible; for a man may be sober, and yet not honest; or he may be honest, and yet not temperate; or he may be both honest and

chaste, and yet addicted to anger and revenge.

This, I say, may be the description of characters which are not formed upon the Gospel; but it cannot be the description of a Christian. The Christian virtues must stand or fall together. It is not enough for one man to say,—I admire the spirit of charity which the Gospel inculcates: it is a spirit which would universally promote happiness among men. I will endeavour to practise that virtue. Or for another to say,—I admire the meekness which is taught in the Gospel. I will adopt that article of the Christian code. It is not in this way that the character can be formed of which our Lord declares, *great is its reward in heaven.*

And the reason is this: that the Christian character, to which these virtues belong, naturally springs out of and grows up from the Christian doctrines; so that whoever receives the doctrines, must cultivate the character; whoever does not cultivate the character can have no real faith in the doctrines. Make the *tree good, and his fruit good.* If the principle which actuates a man's life be the right principle

which the Gospel inculcates, that of *faith in the Son of God*¹, its excellence will be seen in his whole conduct towards God and man; will pervade entirely his frame of mind; and the feelings of the heart within will naturally regulate the outward deportment. *For the tree is known by its fruits.*

It is a fallacy by which some men deceive their consciences, and disguise from themselves their "hardness of heart, and contempt of God's word," to separate the things to be believed, and the things to be practised, the *agenda* and *credenda*, as they are called; as if Christianity were made up of the articles of a creed, and a set of maxims. The articles are useful, and the maxims are useful, for discipline, and examination, and instruction; but these are to Christianity no more than the branches and the leaves are to a tree: to know its nature, its soundness or corruptness, you must look elsewhere. The language of the Gospel is, *My son, give me thy heart*: there is the seat of Christianity, because there is the seat of FAITH: there must the parent stock be planted, from which the Christian virtues

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

are to spring : for they grow from one and the same root ; they are the natural and necessary produce of that root ; they can be found on no other ; whilst that remains sound they will flourish ; if that is weakened, they must in the same degree wither and decay.

1. Let me attempt to prove this. And first with regard to the virtue which is distinguished by the first blessing, HUMILITY. The foundation of the Gospel is the ruined and lost state of human nature, *dead in trespasses and sins*, lying under the wrath of God, and requiring the atonement of the cross. Whoever believes that this was his own state, from which he was redeemed by Jesus Christ, and in which, without that redemption, he must have remained for ever—must needs be *poor in spirit* : for how can he fail to entertain deep self-abasement, when he reflects how great and precious a sacrifice (even of the *just for the unjust*) was necessary to ransom him from the penalty of sin ? How can he admit the feeling of pride or self-complacency, whilst he confesses that his salvation is not his own work, but the work of grace ; *is the gift of God through Jesus Christ* ; and

that whatever good thing he is enabled to do, or evil thing he is enabled to avoid, is not from the power of his own natural heart, unless as it is changed and renewed by Him, from whom "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works proceed."

2. So as to MEEKNESS. This quality is produced and cherished by the same feeling. Anger, revenge, and pride, the vices opposite to meekness, all spring from an overweening sense of the deference, respect, and consideration due to ourselves. But who can think highly of himself, who reflects seriously on his natural sinfulness and abiding infirmities? When the apostle Peter, on one occasion, recorded in the Gospel, saw a very evident proof of the divine power of our Lord, he exclaimed, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord*². I am not worthy of being found in the presence of God. And such a feeling of unworthiness before God, deeply fixed in the Christian's mind, must necessarily terminate in meekness towards man; must lead him to *prefer others in honour*

² Luke, v. 8.

*before himself*³; to abstain from all vehemence and severity, as little suited to his own weakness and frailty; must teach him to bear reproach with patience, and to suffer injuries without desiring retaliation.

3. MERCY too, in that extended sense which it bears in the Gospel, is a branch of the same stock. The remembrance of what Christ has done for us, cannot but fill us with a lively feeling of interest towards that whole "family for which he consented to be betrayed;" the whole *household of faith*. It cannot but make us compassionate towards their persons, charitable towards their faults, and full of pity for their souls. The Christian lives through mercy. His spiritual existence is all of mercy. Mercy provided a *propitiation for his sins*; mercy called him to partake of that blessing; mercy, perhaps, long spared him whilst he was deaf to that call; mercy bears with his unworthiness, and gives him *grace for grace*; at the last he looks for mercy, and prays that God may receive him, "not weighing his merits, but pardoning his offences." And can he who feels all this,

³ Rom. xii. 20.

be severe to *mark what is done amiss*? Can he be wanting in tenderness, in pity, who owes to the divine mercy a daily increasing obligation? Impossible! He must labour to be merciful, even as his Father who is in heaven is merciful. He must love much, who has received so much from love. He cannot but forgive, who has been so much forgiven.

4. So, again, with regard to the views which fill his thoughts and actuate his life; these make it his daily aim to attain PURITY OF HEART; these lead him, before all other things, to HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS⁴. For a Christian is one, who is *dead with Christ to earthly things*, and *risen with Christ to things above*; who has *here no continuing city, but seeks one to come*⁵; whose *conversation is in heaven*⁶, where an eternal inheritance is purchased and prepared for him. *I go*, says our Lord, *to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, ye may be also. Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, be*

⁴ Col. ii. 20. iii. 1—3.

⁵ Heb. xiii. 14.

⁶ Phil. iii. 20.

*with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me*⁷. Such is the Christian's prospect: his treasure is in heaven; and *where his treasure is, there will his heart be also*; which leads him to *mortify his members which are upon earth, and set his affections on things above*⁸. Whilst he is zealous and active in his duties here below, yet he is always looking higher, and sees all the events of this life as they bear upon his future hopes; and his first and latest care is to render himself more fit for the glorious inheritance set before him; his most earnest prayer, that he may not forfeit it by unworthiness. For he knows that he may forfeit it; he knows that as many as do not forsake "the works of the devil," and "renounce the vanities of the world," and overcome the "sinful lusts of the flesh," *have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*⁹; that *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but of the world*¹; that *if he lives after the flesh, he shall die; but if he through the*

⁷ John, xiv. 2, &c. xvii. 24.

⁸ Col. iii. 5.

⁹ Eph. v. 5.

¹ 1 John, ii. 16.

*Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, he shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*².

Imagine the case of one whom some kind friend had raised to an estate, or a situation, or a rank in life far beyond his just expectations or natural claim from the condition of his birth; the thoughts of that person would be all fixed on the way in which he might best enjoy it, or be most suited to the possession of it, or least liable to forfeit it. And such is the case of the Christian: and therefore *does he hunger and thirst after righteousness, because the righteous shall go into life eternal; therefore does he labour to keep his heart pure from all filthiness of the flesh or the spirit, because the pure in heart shall see God; therefore is he willing to encounter persecution, in whatever shape it may come, for righteousness' sake, because his Saviour has declared, Whoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven*³. And it follows, that the more he feels the value of this heavenly inheritance, the less he prizes

² Rom. viii. 13. ³ Matt. x. 32. Luke, xii. 8.

earthly treasures, earthly distinctions, earthly enjoyments; and the more afraid he is of their pernicious effect upon his soul. It is not enough for him to keep clear of this or that actual and open sin; he is afraid of any approach towards it; any *appearance of evil*: he will not venture on the edge of the precipice, on the other side of which is eternal ruin.

If this be so, it follows, as I began by saying, that faith in Him who *was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*⁴, is the main spring of all Christian virtue, and can alone produce the Christian character; and that the first aim of those who desire to see this fruit in others, must be to implant that faith; the earnest prayer of all who are individually seeking *the kingdom of God*, must be, that they may fully understand the Lord Jesus Christ as their *wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*⁵. For it is only by *coming* personally to him as our Redeemer, and *taking upon us his yoke*, and *learning of him*, that we can attain the character which distinguishes his *peculiar*

⁴ Rom. iv. 25.

⁵ 1 Cor. i. 30.

people. Many, who have not done this, may have amiable and useful qualities; they may be led by natural disposition to be merciful, or to be meek, or to entertain a humble opinion of themselves, or to be correctly moral; i. e. they may have this or that branch of the Christian character, and so far it will be well; but unless these virtues are rooted in the doctrines of the Gospel, and proceed from a cordial reception of all its truths, they will be counterbalanced by vices which show the natural corruption unsubdued, the evil heart unchanged; the character will be incomplete and inconsistent, and so betray its hollowness, its want of a right foundation; and he that is charitable, will be, at the same time, impure and sensual; or he that is decent and moral in his habits, will at the same time be proud and self-righteous; or he that is not *wise in his own conceit*, will still be covetous, seeking this world's gain, and *laying up no good foundation against the time to come.* A man must have fairly and unreservedly entered into the service of Christ, and have taken refuge in the Gospel as his only ground of hope, before he can assume that holy and consist-

ent character which deserves the name of Christian, before he can be one of those of whom their Lord will say, *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* *.

It is true, all will not reach a like degree of eminence in all the Christian virtues. Some Christians will be *poor in spirit* beyond others; either because they look back with remorse at having long lived *without God in the world*, or gone great lengths in sin; or because they have naturally a heart more easily broken, more keenly sensible of the *terrors of the Lord*. Others, who are by nature of a mild and placid temper, will more readily exercise that meekness which the Gospel inculcates: and others will be remarkable for their zealous activity in doing good to their fellow-creatures. So also there will be degrees in purity of heart, in spirituality of mind: all will not attain the same command over their passions and desires, nor be equally dead to the pleasures and honours of the world. But then, although Christians may attain a different degree of eminence in different virtues, as

* Luke, xii. 32.

they may be remarkable for different natural gifts and talents; they will not be absolutely wanting in any of the features of the Christian character; still less will they admit or retain the opposite vices. One Christian may be a greater mourner for sin than another; but no Christian will trust to his own righteousness, or fail to lament his numberless transgressions and his daily infirmities. One Christian may be distinguished, like Moses, as the *meekest man of all the earth*; but none will be habitually violent or revengeful. One Christian may give half his goods to the poor, or may spend his life in seeking objects of charity, and traverse distant countries to relieve the spiritual and temporal wants of his fellow-creatures: this will be in the heart or in the power of but few; yet still no Christian can be without mercy and charity in its fullest sense; can be too covetous to assist distress, or too resentful to pardon those who may trespass against him. No Christian will be yielding to the dominion of sinful lusts; no Christian will be satisfied with himself, *as though he had attained, either were already perfect*⁷, but will be ever ea-

⁷ Phil. iii. 12.

gerly desiring to grow in righteousness. No Christian will be induced by the fear of worldly reproach or loss, to *deny the Lord that bought him*; or refuse to *confess him before men*⁸. He may indeed be surprised into some of these sins; but they will not be wilful; they will not be habitual; they will not be a part of his general character, but an exception to it; they will not be allowed by himself; but earnestly contended against, and heartily repented of.

Such is the Christian character, springing out of a lively faith in the Son of God, implanted and nourished in the heart by the Holy Spirit. And now, my brethren, examine yourselves how far this character belongs to you? I do not ask whether it is complete in you; whether you never admit a thought contrary to humility, or to meekness, or to charity, or to purity, or to spirituality of mind; because to the end we shall have Satan to resist, and the world to overcome, and an evil nature to subdue; and even St. Paul, after thirty years of zealous labour against enemies within and enemies without, did not *count himself to*

⁸ 2 Pet. ii. 1. Matt. x. 32.

*have apprehended the prize of his high calling; but kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead*⁹. I do not, therefore, inquire, whether the Christian character is perfected in you, but whether it is begun in you? Are you poor in spirit; willing to receive *eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ*; and desiring, like the Apostle, to be found in him, not having your *own righteousness*, but that which is *through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*¹? If so, you have committed your soul to him, that he may *guide you by his counsel*, as written in his word and suggested by his grace, and hereafter *receive you to his glory*. If so, the effect of this faith is plain and visible; its light shines in the sight of men; for you are *meek and lowly of heart*; you are *merciful* in your actions, and your judgments, and your disposition towards others: you are *pure* in thought, and word, and deed: you are desiring daily to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*: you are *confess-*

⁹ Phil. iii. 13, 11.

¹ Phil. iii. 9.

ing him before men, by daring to do his will, and to show yourself on his side, whatever may be the opinion or conduct of those around you. This is the course which you are on the whole pursuing; this is the track in which you are striving to go; if there is any point where you are particularly liable to fail, your attention is directed to that point, and you are there particularly on your guard.

If any of your consciences can answer that this is upon the whole your state, we may truly say, Blessed are you, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. You could not possess this frame of mind, you could not show these evidences of grace, unless you had indeed received Jesus as your Saviour, and he had received you, and taken you under his heavenly protection. *For as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name*². He strengthens them, he teaches them; he *guides them into all truth, he makes his abode with them*³. In all their temptations, he defends them; in their sorrows, he does *not leave them comfort-*

² John, i. 12.

³ John, xvi. 13. xiv. 23.

less⁴; he daily supports their spiritual life, for they “dwell in him, and he in them⁵.” This is no visionary picture; no shadow of the imagination; it is embodied in the substance of active piety; it is realized every day; it is realized in the conversion of sinners, *when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, serving the Lord who has paid the penalty of his sins: it is realized in the life of faith, which millions of our fellow-creatures have led in this sinful world, opposing, through the grace given them, the corruption of their nature; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be made like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself⁶.*

Imaginary, did I say? God forbid that we should so doubt or disparage the power of the everlasting Gospel! No: if there are any here who think little of this effect

⁴ John, xiv. 18.

⁵ Communion Service.

⁶ Phil. iii. 21.

of grace, because they have not experienced it in themselves; let them *taste and see how gracious the Lord is*; let them *come unto him*, and apply to him for *remission of sins that are past*; and then prove to themselves and others, that faithful is He who has promised, and that in him is treasured up both the will to pardon, and the power to sanctify. Yes: if there are any here to whom the character which has been described is strange; who have no sense of their natural corruption, and their actual sinfulness, requiring that *Christ should suffer for their sins, the just for the unjust*?; any in whose hearts pity and forgiveness have no place; any who think that meekness would render them too low in the eyes of the world; that God would not have implanted passions in our breasts, if they might not be indulged; any who have no desire after righteousness, and understand nothing of religion but its outward forms; in a word, if there are any whom no blessing will reach, if only the *poor in spirit*, and *the meek*, and *the merciful*, and the *pure in heart*, and the spiritual minded, are

7 1 Pet. iii. 18.

B B 2

blessed; O let them consider in time; repent ere it is too late; *seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.* For, indeed, my brethren, if there are any of you in this case, *you are yet in your sins*⁸; you have not made good the vows to which you were bound in baptism; the covenant is void, and, as far as you are concerned, *Christ is dead in vain*⁹. But remember, in him is life, eternal life—and in him only. *He that hath the Son, hath life; and whoever hath not the Son, hath not life*¹: *whosoever believeth not the Son, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God*².

Let not another night close upon you, while you remain in this unsettled, unprepared, unrenewed condition. Look well to the foundations of your faith; and be not content, until it is firmly built on Christ, *the rock of ages.*

⁸ 1 Cor. xv. 17.

¹ John, v. 12.

⁹ Gal. ii. 21.

² John, iii. 18.

SERMON XX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DEPENDENCE UPON
HIS REDEEMER.

—◆—

JOHN, XV. 4.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

It is scarcely possible to contemplate the Christian character, as described in the Gospel, and held up to our imitation, without acknowledging an excellence truly divine. This may be justly attributed to that religion, which if it were universally obeyed, would extinguish all the vices which disturb human society, and disgrace human nature; would subdue pride, violence, selfishness, and sensuality, and introduce in their stead humility, charity, gentleness, mutual forbearance; would repress all that eager desire after temporal advantages

B B 3

which excites evil passions through the collision of interests; and would unite all men in one pursuit, the only pursuit in which all could unite, and yet assist instead of counteracting each other, that of studying to do the will of God for the sake of everlasting happiness.

Were men to presume so far as to invent a test, by which the divine origin of a religion should be tried, I can imagine none more unexceptionable than its tendency to overcome what is acknowledged to be evil in human nature, and to raise in an immeasurable degree the standard of happiness. I can imagine no eulogy more complete than this; that if all men lived up to the spirit of the Gospel, very little misery would remain in the world, and even that remainder would receive the utmost alleviation.

The only objection which has ever been urged against the true Christian character, derives whatever force it has from the disobedience of mankind. It has been said, that the meekness, the patience under injuries, which it prescribes, is incompatible with our condition on earth, and would expose the man who should strictly comply

with its demands, to indignities and wrongs without remedy. But if this were true, which it is not to any material extent, as experience proves, even under the present circumstances of Christianity, it would afford no argument against a religion which requires abstinence from injuries no less positively than patience under them. The excellence of a law is not impugned, because its violation may occasion inconvenience. Let a human legislator sometimes condescend, if necessary, to the refractory subjects with which he has to deal. But it is not, surely, for God to yield to the passions which rebel against his will, but to ordain where their proud waves shall be stayed. In no other way can the standard of human nature be raised.

An objection more plausibly reasonable might perhaps be formed against the Christian character, namely, the impossibility of reaching and sustaining it, not only from the opposition of the surrounding world, but from the opposition of the natural heart; which we confess, nay avow, rises more or less against all the qualities which form the consistent Christian. The answer to this objection is conveyed in the text.

The Christian has one on his side who is greater than his natural heart. He *can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth him*. As there is an inseparable connexion between the faith and practice of a Christian, so is there likewise a mystical union between the Christian and his Redeemer, the *author and finisher of his faith*, which enables him both to *will and to do of his good pleasure*. This is described by a strong, but clear and most intelligible metaphor, when it is compared to the union between a tree and its branches. It is not pretended that our natural unaided strength would enable us to comply with the demands of the Gospel. Our Lord expressly declares to his disciples, *Without me ye can do nothing*. But he promises such assistance of his Spirit from above, as shall make them both willing and able in *the day of his power*. He compares them to the branch, which itself separated at a distance from the root and the soil which nourishes the root, is made fruitful by the juices which the stem supplies; but can bear no fruit, from the time that it is severed from the parent tree. *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit in itself, unless*

it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

But as the expression which exhorts u to *abide in Christ* is confessedly figurative, it becomes necessary to consider in what way we may be said to comply with the condition on which our power of obedience depends. What is it *to abide in Christ*? It is to live in habitual faith in his redemption, and in habitual reliance upon his Spirit.

I. And, first, as to habitual faith. FAITH is a word so familiar to our ears and our lips, that we may be easily misled into a groundless belief that we understand, nay, adopt it, in its full and scriptural acceptation. But trace it back to its original meaning; and by that signification try your feelings with respect to Christ. That signification is, such a belief or persuasion as leads to trust, reliance, confidence. And if we consider the offer or call of Christ, we shall perceive that the trust or confidence which he requires may be justly termed *abiding in him*. He came into the world to deliver mankind from the darkness of ignorance and sin, i. e. from spiritual blindness and alienation from God,

a state inconsistent with their salvation. He came to redeem them from punishment; to renew their hearts by his holy Spirit; to assign them rules for such a life as God approves. And in the fulfilment of this purpose, his language is, *Ye who live in the world, the posterity of Adam, are enemies to God, who is a God of holiness, by wicked works; this enmity, this wickedness, he does not punish now; but after death there is judgment, when he will inflict indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.* But trust in me, and I will, for you, appease that wrath, and disarm that indignation; cleave to me, and follow the commandments which I set before you; then will I lead you safely through the *valley of the shadow of death*, by which you must pass to an eternal world, and will present you pure and faultless before the throne of your Almighty Judge.

Now an offer of this nature precludes the idea of a passive or even hesitating reception. It is a personal offer, which must be personally accepted or personally rejected. It requires, first, that we see our necessity, and are therefore ready to apply

for help; that we feel our desert of punishment, and therefore desire a ransom: but it requires more also; for one might feel his necessity, and wish for relief, and yet doubt the power of him who offered it: it requires therefore a firm persuasion that He who makes the offer, is able to make the offer good; and in the special case of Christ, it requires us to believe that he can and will save us; has ransomed us; is able to bestow on us his holy Spirit, and to prepare us for an eternal kingdom, into which he will hereafter receive us if we follow him obediently here.

Such is the corresponding movement on our parts, by which his gracious offer must be met; such is the willing hand which we must stretch out to receive the proffered boon, or it is proposed to us in vain. "Faith is not merely a speculation, but a practical acknowledgment of Jesus as the Christ; an effort and motion of the mind towards God: when the sinner, convinced of sin, accepts with thankfulness the proffered terms of pardon, and in humble confidence applying individually to himself the benefit of the general atonement, in the elevated lan-

guage of a venerable father of the church, "drinks deep of the stream which flows from the Redeemer's side. The effect is, that in a little time he is filled with that *perfect love of God which casteth out fear*—he cleaves to God with the entire affection of the soul¹." And the question, whether we are abiding in Christ, comes to this; have we that confidence, that trust, that dependence upon him, which induces us to accept his offer; and are we ready to commit ourselves, I should rather say, have we committed ourselves, into his hands, both for this world and the next, instead of taking our chance for what may come, or instead of trusting to our own power, our own goodness, our own views of religion? Then we can say with the Apostle, *I know in whom I have believed; and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day*². This acceptance of his offer, is FAITH; and to have so accepted it, as to be habitually living by it, and depending on it, is to *abide in Christ*: then he is to the Christian what the stem is to

¹ Bishop Horsley.

² 2 Tim. i. 12.

the branch; the sole support on which it leans.

II. But the branch receives from its stem, not only support, but nourishment; and so to *abide in Christ*, is, secondly, to rely upon his Spirit for such grace as may make and keep us his obedient followers. What is the branch, when deprived of the juices which the parent stem conveys to it? Withered, or, at best, barren. And such is he who is without that divine aid which alone can overcome the corruption of nature, and enable the heart to refuse the evil which is offered it in the world, and choose the good which the Scripture sets before it. This spirit is sent, this assistance given to those who unite themselves to Christ by faith. *To as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God*³—power in its double sense of privilege and ability. He authorizes them to call upon God by the endearing title of *Abba, Father*⁴; and he enables them to know that they are *born of God*, and are *his children*, and *love him*, by this

³ John, i. 12.

⁴ See Rom. viii. 15.

infallible and apostolical rule, that they keep his commandments⁵; that sin hath no more dominion over them⁶; that they are led by his Spirit⁷.

This mysterious union between the Christian and his Redeemer, through the Holy Spirit, is distinctly and frequently recognised in Scripture. St. Paul speaks of the Ephesians as an *habitation of God through the Spirit*⁸; of the Corinthians, as *the temple of the Holy Ghost*⁹; and prays, for the disciples, that *Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith; that they may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to reward those who believe, according to the working of his mighty power*¹. *I live unto God, he says; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*².

And again, the effect of this union is the Christian's ability to maintain an obedience the most contrary and opposite to his natural inclinations. Through this he is enabled to subdue the lusts of the flesh,

⁵ See 1 John, i. 2—15.

⁷ Rom. viii. 14.

⁹ 1 Cor. vi. 19.

² Gal. ii. 20.

⁶ Rom. vi. 14.

⁸ Eph. ii. 22.

¹ Eph. iii. 17. i. 18.

though they be precious as a right eye, or valuable as a right arm: is enabled to overcome all undue anxiety about worldly advantages, and commit himself entirely to the will of God, *knowing that God careth for him*. Such has been the heartfelt experience of his servants in every age. *I know*, says the Apostle, *both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me*³. And of his ministerial labours, he says, *I strive according to his working, which worketh in me mightily*⁴. The well-known passage, in which he speaks of the *thorn in his flesh, the messenger of Satan*, whatever the allusion may be, tends to the same purpose. *For this thing*, he says, *I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me*⁵. *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness*. And he proceeds to declare it as the result of his practical experience, that when he was weakest in himself, then he was strongest in the power of his Lord.

³ Phil. iii. 15.

⁴ Col. i. 20.

⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 7, &c.

All this clearly shows where the reliance of a Christian must be placed, and that his strength will be in proportion to the steadfastness of his reliance. And to continue in this humble, yet confident dependence, the effect of the lively faith before described, is to *abide in Christ*. While "we thus dwell in him, he dwells in us," and enables us to *work out our salvation* in the mode which he has appointed us to follow, in spite of the opposition which meets us without, and haunts us within. The assurance is verified; *he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing*⁶.

No doubt, if this is Christian faith, (and what else answers the description given of the power of faith in Scripture?) it is something far beyond bearing the Christian name, and possessing that general knowledge of the doctrines of the Gospel, and paying them that degree of attention, which ordinarily passes for the profession of Christianity. It supposes a more deliberate surrender of ourselves to

⁶ John, xv. 5.

him, a more complete reliance upon him for the spirit by which we must be sanctified, as well as the merits by which we must be justified, than many either deem necessary, or intelligible, or practicable.

But the more you consider the nature of that evidence by which our Lord's mission stands confirmed, the more you will be convinced of the wisdom of submitting yourselves entirely to be ruled by him, for the great purpose of salvation. And the more you study that Book, in which the purpose of his mission is unfolded, and his commands, which are the commands of God, disclosed; the more surely you will find that nothing short of this total dependence upon him can enable you to satisfy, even in the lowest degree, the demands which he makes upon you for progressive holiness and unreserved obedience.

If, therefore, you are sincerely seeking the only path of safety, instead of renouncing the idea of that union with Christ which is implied in the text, as visionary, you will desire it more and more. It is not pretended that men arrive

at it immediately, or that it is at once complete: we are directed to *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*⁷; and this growth must be cherished like the growth of any thing else that is not natural to us, by using the appointed means.

Read then the Gospel with this view; see how the graces expected in a Christian are said to flow from Christ, as their source; how uniformly the grace by which they are produced is promised to those who trust in him. *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*⁸. Meditate frequently on this appointed way of access to God. It is a common error, for men who have attained their knowledge of God through the Christian revelation, to keep out of sight the main object of that revelation, as appointing the means by which God is graciously willing to be approached, and thus to exclude their Mediator from their view; relapsing into a sort of natural religion, which turns our noon-day into darkness,

⁷ 2 Pet. iii. 18.

⁸ John, xv. 7.

though it would have been as the light of the sun to the heathen world. Remember always that it is only as a member of that body of which Christ is the head, as a plant in that vineyard which he has prepared for himself and tends with his continual grace, that you have any knowledge of God, any confidence before him, any sure ground of acceptance with him. It is only through the adoption which you enjoy through Christ, that you have any right to call upon him as your *Father which is in heaven*⁹. As long as you *abide in him*, and *he in you*, and no longer, God has covenanted to receive your prayers.

An habitual sense of those blessings which you derive from him, will lead you onward to the surest means of attaining strength for obedience, the *continuing instant in prayer*. It was thus that our Lord himself, during that season of humiliation in which he bore our nature, maintained his union with the Father, from whose mansions he had descended. And it was thus, as we learn throughout the Acts and writings of the Apostles, that they pre-

⁹ See Rom. viii. 15, &c.

served that spirit of entire dependence, together with that energy of active obedience which it becomes us to make the standard of our distant imitation. All union is strengthened by intercourse; but the only intercourse which we can enjoy with a heavenly Lord, we are alike invited and commanded to use, the intercourse of prayer.

Lastly, communion with our Redeemer is maintained by his Sacraments:—by never losing sight of the privileges of baptism, and by a regular attendance at the holy table. The sacrament of the Lord's supper was specially ordained with this view. There we mystically “eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood;” and thus forcibly reminded of his death, and solemnly declaring our personal acceptance of his salvation, we experience that *his flesh is meat indeed, his blood is drink indeed*¹; able to nourish in our souls a principle of holiness, *springing up unto everlasting life*².

There may be some, perhaps, who will set at nought the idea of this union, this

¹ John, vi. 55.

² John, iv. 14.

personal intercourse with the Redeemer, and asperse it with the formidable name of Enthusiasm. But, my brethren, *let no man deceive you with vain words.* "Enthusiasm is founded neither on reason nor divine revelation³;" this intercourse is agreeable to reason, and has both the letter and spirit of the Gospel as its foundation, and is therefore firmly built and established by all the evidence which establishes the Gospel. So far from yielding to the erroneous notion, that no such intercourse can be believed without enthusiasm; remember that it is the object of all divine revelation, and most especially the nature of the Christian faith, by removing the veil of ignorance and setting aside the barrier of sin, to diminish the distance which separates God from men; and thus to prepare them by degrees for that future state of glory, in which they may see their *Maker face to face*, and *know* him, even as they are *now known* of him⁴. The assurance of the Scriptures is, *Draw nigh unto God, and*

³ Locke.

⁴ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

*he will draw nigh unto you*⁵: but a vague apprehension that any of the acts or thoughts, by which we can *draw nigh unto him*, are to be avoided as enthusiastic; that any of the comfortable assurances by which he *draws nigh unto us*, are to be regarded as visionary, deprives us of all the *joy and peace in believing*, which that mysterious mercy, *God manifest in the flesh*, was designed to afford. Indeed, you will not long incline your hearts towards him, or apply to the study of the Scriptures, religious meditation, and prayer, without experiencing proof of the reality of a spiritual union with the *Author of our faith*, far beyond what argument can give, or external evidence supply. You will find the truth which is received within, answered by the peace which arises in your hearts; you will find the surest testimony of Christ's presence there, from your increasing desire of holiness, and increasing power over your remaining corruption. You will find that the *grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*,

⁵ James, iv. 8.

and the communion of the Holy Spirit, are real and substantial gifts, attesting the divinity, and confirming the truth of Him who hath redeemed us, and rewarding as many as receive him, and abide in him, with that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

THE END.

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