

SERMON XVI.

ON THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

HEBREWS ix. 26, 27, 28.

BUT NOW ONCE, IN THE END OF THE WORLD, HATH HE APPEARED TO PUT AWAY SIN BY THE SACRIFICE OF HIMSELF : AND AS IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MEN ONCE TO DIE, BUT AFTER THIS THE JUDGMENT : SO CHRIST WAS ONCE OFFERED TO BEAR THE SINS OF MANY ; AND UNTO THEM THAT LOOK FOR HIM, SHALL HE APPEAR THE SECOND TIME, WITHOUT SIN UNTO SALVATION.

IT is certain we may acquire some knowledge of God, by considering the works of creation, and some acquaintance with Christ, by looking back to those shadows which were figures of him under the law of Moses.

But these mediums of instruction require more management than we are always inclined to regard. The imperfection of creatures, and of shadows, is generally allowed : but the consequence is not sufficiently considered. Yet, if we are not very attentive to the disparity which always subsists between them and those objects which, in some degree, they represent, the consequence will be, that we must indulge crude and extravagant notions of our Creator and Redeemer. Let us then pass by shadows to substance. Let us, leaving first principles, go on unto perfection. But, while we regard this exhortation, it becomes us to say, And this will we do, if God permit : and to remember, that as our highest attainments are built upon our lowest, so our greatest improvements will not be destructive of the first principles of sound instruction.

The defects of the Jewish dispensation are strongly stated in this epistle. The object which the writer of it had in view, was to convince his countrymen that salvation could
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not be rationally expected without sacrifice, nor by any other sacrifice than that of Jesus Christ.

In the compass of a few verses, he proves the sufficiency of Christ's oblation, though but once offered, by no less than *six* arguments. He argues to this effect: Because, if it was not sufficient, then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world. Because, it was of divine appointment that Christ should die but once. Because, though the law can never, with those sacrifices which were offered under it, year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect, yet Christ, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God. Because, he sits there expecting till all his enemies be made his footstool. Because, by his one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Because, of the nature of the new covenant, which includes and secures the full remission of sins: for where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin*.

* Vid. Van Hocke in Loc.

From this view of the context, it appears, that the *sufficiency* of the one, the single offering of Jesus Christ, was the capital thing which the sacred writer here had in view.

In the text itself, we may observe, that he introduces a contrast and comparison suited to his serious purpose, and that to these he has subjoined a declaration of great importance to the household of faith.

Each part of my text, in the order which has been mentioned, I propose to consider : though the last part of it, I own, best agrees with the design of this discourse.

I. The CONTRAST now before us, lies in these words : *But now once, in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself.* This contrast is so formed from the preceding words, as to manifest a pleasing disparity between the high priests under the law, and the great High Priest of our profession. There is, if I may so express it, a triple contrast in our text. The
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first has respect to the time of Christ's oblation; the second, to its effect; and the third, to the nature of his sacrifice.

First; as to the TIME of Christ's oblation we may observe, that if it had been offered often, it would not have been deferred to the end of the world. But as the wisdom of God determines every thing that is excellent, to be done in its proper season, so undoubtedly, among the rest, it determined when it was most proper the vicarious sacrifice of Christ should be presented.

It is plain, the Apostle speaks of the *end* of the world, in our text, in opposition to the *foundation* of the world, in the former part of this verse: and that the word *once*, is here opposed to the word *often*, in the preceding clause.

But some may be disposed to ask, What does the author of this epistle mean by the *end* of the world? and, Why was the sacrifice of Christ so long *deferred*?

To the *first* of these questions, I answer, that the words which we translate *the end of the world*, hath been more literally translated *the consummation of ages*. This world hath often been divided into THREE AGES. According to this division, the first age was that which preceded the law of Moses. The second age was that which was under the law. The third age is the age which followed, the Christian age, which is the consummation of the preceding ages, and will not give way to any other. In this last age, the kindom of heaven is opened to *all* believers: and when it is finished, then cometh the end of every thing on earth, that God may be ALL IN ALL.

To the *second* question, Why was the sacrifice of Christ so long *deferred*? I answer, it becomes us to suppose, there were more and greater reasons for this seeming delay than we are able to comprehend. I add, it is sufficient for us to know it was the will of God the patriarchal age should take the lead, that the Mosaic dispensation should follow, that
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the Christian age should succeed it, and be the consummation of the former two; that Christ should not appear in the form of a servant, and as the Saviour of sinners, till predictions and promises, shadows and figures, had raised the desire and hope of his Incarnation; and till the nations of the world had ample reason to conclude, there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

From this view of the *sufficiency* of Christ's oblation, though but ONCE offered, we may infer its excellence. Whatever is most excellent is single. In nature there is but one sun. In a distinct kingdom there is but one king. In the universe there is but one God. In the church there is but one Redeemer,

Secondly; the *effect* of the sacrifice of Christ, is here opposed to the weakness of those sacrifices which were under the law; for, by his sacrifice, Christ hath put away sin; but in those sacrifices, there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

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By *sin* is here intended its whole empire and dominion, as it invaded our nature in its power, oppressed our persons with its guilt, and filled the whole world with its fruits. But Christ appeared to abolish sin, and to be its destruction; to take away its horrid force, or what is sometimes called the law of sin*.

In the *law* of sin there are two powers; that which obliges the sinner unto punishment, and that compelling power which leads him captive into all iniquity and disobedience. Christ appeared to abrogate this law of sin, and to deprive it gradually, of its whole strength: first, by making an atonement for our iniquities; next, by purging our consciences from dead works, and finally, by bringing us through his grace to eternal glory.

Thus the law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made believers free from the law of sin and death; and thus it appears, that

* See DOCTOR OWEN on the text, in his Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

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what the law of Moses could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh for sin condemned sin in the flesh of Christ, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in them who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

Thirdly; the Apostle contrasts the *nature* of Christ's sacrifice with the nature of those sacrifices which were offered under the law. Aaron and his sons offered, in sacrifice, the blood of others. Christ his own blood. The sacrifices under the law, at best, were brutal sacrifices; but our Lord's sacrifice was the sacrifice of HIMSELF.

On this argument, the writer of this Epistle frequently insists. When speaking of our great High Priest as holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; he adds, Who needeth not daily, as those high priests under the law, to offer up sacrifice first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once when he offered up HIMSELF: and in our
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context he reasons thus : If, saith he, the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the *flesh* ; how much more shall the blood of Christ who, through the eternal spirit, offered himself to God, purge your *consciences* from dead works to serve the living God ?—In short, from his arguments, nothing can be clearer than this, that Christ by HIMSELF, purged our sins before he sat down, in our nature, at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

II. Let us now pass from the contrast which has been considered, to that comparison that is connected with it. Thus it is introduced : *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment : so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.*

In these words the death of Christ, and the condition of our Lord's body after his death, is compared with the death of men in common, and with the common condition of their bodies, between death and judgment. The comparison therefore is double : the first
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part of it hath respect to the *necessity* of death, and the second to the well-known *condition* of the dead till the general judgment.

When the Apostle said, It is appointed unto men *once* to die, though it is an assertion liable to some exceptions, yet those exceptions, whether under the Old Testament, or under the New, do not affect the Apostle's argument. He speaks of the *general* state of mankind; that men *must* die; die but once, and once die, in consequence of the divine appointment. Death, therefore, is to us *inevitable*.

But we are not to suppose that the death of Christ was in consequence of this *general* appointment. No, his death was by a *particular* ordinance and appointment of the Father, according to which he became the surety of sinners. For, it is evident, that Jesus Christ being exempt from all sin, as well in his birth, as in his life, he could not be subject to death by that appointment which brings us into the regions of the dead. Besides,

sides, as his human nature was personally united to that WORD which was made flesh, that is to say, to the source of life, it was not possible he should have died without his own consent. Had not his death been voluntary, it could not have been vicarious. From his transfiguration, it is manifest, had not a previous compact made him willing to die for the sins of his people, mortality might have been swallowed up of life. But, by becoming our surety, the death of Christ, by a particular appointment, became as necessary, as by the general appointment, on account of sin, it was necessary that judgment should come upon all men to condemnation.

The common *condition* of the dead till the day of judgment is such, that as the body falls to the dust, there it must lie, till the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. When a man dies he hath done with this world. In it he no longer lives, acts, or suffers. The argument of the Apostle is to this effect, That as between death and judgment men are not on earth,

earth, and have no function there to perform, so Christ from his death, or rather from his ascension into heaven, is no longer on earth, in respect of his corporal presence, and therefore, cannot offer himself a *second* time.

Christ indeed, shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs; being seen of them that believed in him, forty days, and speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. But when the cloud received him out of their sight, his body became *immortal*; it ascended into heaven, and must there remain, till the times of the restitution of all things.

Of this corporal absence, our Lord spake frequently, in strong terms, previous to his departure. I leave, said he, the world, and go to the Father. Again, just before his crucifixion, he was heard to say, I am no more in the world. At another time he said, If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. If any man shall
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say, Behold, he is in the desert ; go not forth : behold, he is in the secret chambers ; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so also shall the coming of the son of man be.

The manner in which our Lord appeared unto Stephen in the council, and to Saul when he journied towards Damascus, by no means contradicts the preceding quotations. The word of the Lord is stedfast ; and we may depend upon it, that when Christ appears the second time, it will be from heaven, and in the manner declared in the following words of my text.

III. Of that DECLARATION which is so important to the household of faith, I am now to take some notice. It is the closing part of the comparison which has engaged our attention, and is thus represented : *Unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.*

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At his first coming, Christ took on him the sins of his people, and bare them, as Peter expresses it, in his own body on the tree. But at his second coming, he will appear *without sin* : because, as we have seen, it was abolished by his death. Had the least sin remained which he had not put away, by the sacrifice of himself, he could not, as our surety, have been released from his tomb, much less could he have passed into the heavens, in, or with our nature, to plead the virtue of his own blood. But having magnified the law, and made it honourable, he received a full discharge at his resurrection, and, at his ascension, went up into heaven with a shout : the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

We are now then, to regard him who speaketh from heaven : and should endeavour to live looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. For to them that look for him, will he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Of the particular *time* of the second coming of Christ, whether it will be in this century, in the following, or in the next after that, I know nothing. But, as his first coming included the whole of that period which commenced at his incarnation, and was not closed till his crucifixion, so I believe his second coming involves in it, every display of his power, and every operation of his providence, from his ascension into heaven to the general judgment.

In this long period, Christ is continually coming in the course of providential events, and by the ministry of his word. But *when* the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not his gospel—*when* he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be honored in all them that believe, of this, it is my duty to say, I have no knowledge.

The *manner* of his appearance, whenever it shall happen, will be *without sin*. But as
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Christ ever was without sin in himself, the meaning must be, that at his second coming, he will appear without the likeness of sinful flesh, and without any the least need of offering a second oblation for the sins of his people. For, he will then come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of his holy angels.

The *end* of this promised, and glorious appearance, is the salvation of them that look for him. If the word salvation relates immediately to his appearance, the meaning is to bestow on them that look for him *eternal* salvation. If to *look* for his appearance, is most emphatical in this clause, this expresses the qualification of those who expect it, by the object of their faith, and by the manner in which their faith is exercised in this world. But where both senses are equally true, we need not limit the signification of the words to either*.

* Doctor Owen, in Loc.

Having thus attended to the contrast and comparison in our text, and to that declaration in it which completes the latter, and which hath led us to reflect on the second coming of Christ, I will now subjoin a few additional remarks.

1. When the Apostle speaks of the end of the world, or of the *consummation of ages*, as if the preceding earthly, and carnal system, were done away by Christ, to give place to a state of things celestial and everlasting, is it not to teach us the propriety of setting our affections on things above, not on things on the earth; and of putting on the new man which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him; where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision, nor uncircumcision, barbarian, bond, nor free; but where Christ is all in all?

2. If Christ appeared to *put away sin*, we must suppose that he abhors it. Why else did he take it away? Why else doth he seek
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its destruction? Why else it is said, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity? Are we thoroughly convinced of this fact? Doth it meet with our approbation? Do we know that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin? If we know this, and reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord; if we let not sin reign in our mortal bodies, that we should obey it in the lusts thereof, if we yield not our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield ourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, we may be satisfied sin shall not have dominion over us; and conclude we are not under the law, but under grace.

3. As Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of HIMSELF, the grandeur of his sacrifice, which is not typical, but real, which is not defective, but complete, should engage us constantly, to mortify by it, our members which are yet upon the earth; lest

we despise the proper effect of his oblation, or at least, incapacitate ourselves for glorying in the cross of Christ. If the sacrifices of beasts under the law, obliged the comers thereunto to renounce sin, might not the obedient Israelites rise up in judgment against us, should we treat with contempt, (which God forbid!) the sacrifice of his own Son? But if by it, we do not *exercise* ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men, it is impossible to say into what errors we may not fall, what follies we may not commit, or what degree of reproach we may not bring on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. As it is *appointed* unto men once to die, let us look upon our own death as inevitable, and, from the divine appointment, regard it as a very solemn event. If you consider death to be nothing more than the *mere* effect of second causes, it is a mistake. The scriptures inform us, the wages of sin is death: and they assure us, that if we believe not in Christ, we must die in our sins.

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These are very serious declarations to men who have the seeds of death within themselves, and who are already under its *arrest*. What else can we call our gradual decay, and those increasing complaints which daily remind us of our approaching dissolution? Are we properly affected with these things? Are we disposed to say, Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom? In the gayer moments of life, whether in society, or in some flippant temper at home, such questions may be unwelcome; but when we sedately consider the transitory nature of our present state, and that the future is not to be expected as another state of probation, they will not seem to be impertinent, nor will they be thought illiberal.

5. If after death is *the judgment*, let us frequently meditate on this awful, glorious, and final scene. It is a judgment in which the books of God will be opened. A judgment in which our own conscience, as another book, shall set before us a thousand

things which we have now forgotten. A judgment in which Christ will appear in his glory. A judgment in which all men will be confounded who are not interested in his grace. What manner of persons then, ought we to be, (as much as lieth in us,) in all holy conversation and godliness ; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat !

But you will say, who can possibly live without sin ? I answer, no man. But I add, there are sins of infirmity, and sins of rebellion, and malice against God ; there are sins which reign uncontrouled, and of which some men are disposed to glory ; and sins which we confess, blushing at our follies, and which we attempt to mortify and subdue. The spots of the latter are the spots of the upright ; (for there is not even now, a just man upon earth who doth good, and sinneth not ;) but if our spots are not the spots of his children, how shall we stand before him who is Judge of all !

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Christians, however, have nothing to fear, but much to expect, from the second coming of Christ. They live looking for him, and unto them that *look* for him, shall he appear, without sin, unto salvation.—It is true, when he cometh, *every* eye shall see him, and *all* kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him; yet they only who *look* for him will rejoice at his approach.

The promised and expected appearance of our Lord, supposes, as has been stated to you before, that at present, he is to us *invisible*, and will be so to the inhabitants of this world, till the general judgment. This fact is a great exercise to our faith: but as faith flourishes, we shall live in stedfast and ardent hope, that he will *appear* to our joy, and believe that they who have said, *Where* is the promise of his coming? shall then be ashamed?

6. To conclude: If Isaiah said to the ancient Jews, Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon

upon thee; if under all their calamities, the approaching advent of the Messiah was their greatest consolation; if the truly pious among them were ever saying, O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! in belief that when the Lord brought back the captivity of his people, Jacob would rejoice, and Israel would be glad; if Simeon, when the promised Messiah appeared, (taking up in his aged arms, the child Jesus,) said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation! how much more should they rejoice, who properly expect, and patiently wait, for the *second* coming of Christ!

At his first coming, he appeared indeed, to announce glad tidings, to public salvation, and to promise eternal life. But, at his second coming, we are told, there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying neither shall there be any more pain. At his first coming, our Lord left, his church on earth, subject to innumerable temptations; but at the close of his second coming, he
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himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then those which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together, with them who are raised from the dead, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall they ever be with the Lord!—May we have grace to comfort one another with these words! and to say, Even so come, Lord JESUS*. AMEN!

* See a Sermon on the words of our text, by JEAN MESTREZAT.

SERMON