

LECTURES
ON
PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY:
IN
DOCTRINE, EXPERIENCE, WORSHIP,
DISCIPLINE, and MANNERS, as it
appeared in the Church at *Jerusalem*,
in the Time of the Apostles;

ALSO

On the EPISTLE to the Church at *Sardis*. And
on the Faithful in the Days of *Malachi*.

Interspersed with
NOTES, REFLECTIONS, and ADDRESSES.
With a view to awaken a becoming Zeal for the Communion
of Saints, in Order and Love.

By BENJAMIN WALLIN.

And exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave
unto the Lord. **Ac** 11:23.

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P R E F A C E,

THESE Lectures are the substance of what I delivered some years ago; many of which were composed on a request for publishing two volumes on a variety of subjects, containing those here presented the Reader. I soon found the undertaking interrupt me in the more important duties of my office, and therefore laid it aside, with little or no expectation of reassuming the design; but last Summer, being called off, for a season, from my stated ministrations, I revised the manuscript, and went forward with the work; which providence gave me a further opportunity of perusing, by laying me under a partial confinement, through a casualty, under which my life was mercifully spared; Thus, it was finished. And if my attempt to improve this occasional leisure should in any degree promote the kingdom of God, I shall have reason to rejoice in the affliction and adore his wisdom and power, whose pleasure it is to bring good out of evil.

Thanks be to God, the churches have rest, and liberty of conscience is preserved by our gracious sovereign the king, and his parliament, who are over us under the most high, unto whom we are more especially indebted, who view the doctrines and precepts of scripture in a light different from the popular opinion, and are obliged to practice accordingly. May this invaluable privilege be improved, by walking in the fear of the Lord, as the primitive disciples, in Judea and Samaria, after the first persecution, that in like manner, through the comfort and operations of the Holy Ghost, we may abundantly increase.

The profane and immoral conduct of many of every rank, in the nation, may justly alarm us! We are notoriously given to pleasures, at a time when providence calls us to mourning and fasting; witness the cries of the industrious poor, under a long-continued scarcity of almost every kind of

provision, &c. but the ignorance and disorder of many, who by their holy profession, should be as lights of the world, and the salt of the earth, is still more threatening. What intercourse with heaven is held in private, I leave; but, in all appearance, family-devotion is much neglected, nor will it comport with the manner life in fashion with most; and with respect to social religion of a more public nature, it is notoriously slighted; the pious, of every name, lament a growing neglect of particular Christian communion in the land. The multitude, whose god is their belly, and who break the Sabbath continually, in pursuit of sensual delights, more and more fill the roads and public-houses, instead of attending the house of the Lord, while the hearers of the word, in general, regard not the peculiar institutions of Christ. In the national church, every native, who is sprinkled by her minister, is considered a member, and as such, on a testimony of competent knowledge, faith and sobriety, entitled to confirmation by the bishop, and through his hands to the table of the Lord; yet how few claim the privilege! And what excuse can be made for Dissenters, who separate under a notion of zeal for the purity of worship, and at the same time neglect ordinances they allow to be of divine authority; nevertheless their number in communion is comparatively small; yea, in some instances, it is melancholy to see how little a church is covered with a large congregation or audience! It may be questioned, with grief, what people under heaven, so generally omit the principal distinguishing rites of their religion, as those who call themselves Christians, not excepting them who pass under the venerable and glorious name of Protestants; strictly speaking, there is but little fellowship among them, in gospel-order, according to their own particular sentiments. The Lord's-supper, that criterion of fellowship, in which we commemorate the sufferings of the Savior, whose atonement is the ground of our hope; a feast which he has commanded his disciples frequently to keep till he comes; alas, how is it in a manner laid aside! Can we think it was Thus, when a law was enacted to disqualify persons, who had not taken the sacrament at church within a few months? Surely the communion-table was then more frequented in the nation than now, and, can we reflect

without blushing, on the shameful omission of this principal test of our obedience to Christ.

BUT, why do I trouble the Reader about the Communion of saints, in this or the other particular form? We are fallen in a day when many devoutly disclaim it. It is now very common to make light of ordinances, and even for serious persons to talk as if they valued themselves on being of no denomination Christians; if a man, say they, loves Jesus Christ, or a preacher sets forth the mercy of the Father in him, we have no concern about his form of religion; yet they cry up the martyrs, many of whom might have saved their treasure and blood, had they made no conscience of the authority of Christ in his house. The upright will deprecate a mere name, under any form, however agreeable to the dictates of scripture, but if a man intends by his being of no denomination, that he regards not the manner of service appointed by the Lord; where is his religion? They who blame an adherence to peculiar modes, and boast in their freedom to a variety in religious service, do well to consider, that there is certainly a right way of worship, prescribed by the sole King of saints. I may innocently mistake the sense of his order, but indifference about it can be no proper evidence of my devotion to his will. Indeed if it be a matter of no importance how God is worshipped, the voluntary sufferings, exile, and ruin of innumerable persons and families, who gave ample proof of their real piety, and also of their good understanding, was the height of folly and madness; yea, and still more, the orders of the sanctuary by our Lord and his inspired apostles, in his name, are impertinent, which no sober person will admit. The truth is, that to worship God in the way that he hath appointed, is an absolute duty under every dispensation. Jehovah alone is the object of worship, and it is his prerogative to direct the manner in which his servants shall wait upon him; this is left with Jesus, the head of the church, who before his ascension, charged his ministers with teaching the people to observe all things whatever he hath commanded them, to the end of the world, which includes, if not principally intends, the orders of his house; so that while the world stands, his disciples are to be taught to worship in the particular way he has prescribed, and no other, but how this consists with an indifference about the mode of religion, is

hard to conceive. Some represent the order of service as only the garb or dress of religion; be it so; it should be remembered, that there is a uniform established by the infinite wisdom our divine lawgiver, which belongs to the obedience of faith, and which cannot be despised, without affronting the Majesty of heaven, pouring contempt on the authority of the Son God, and danger of superstition.

It is an allowed criterion of piety, that we esteem those who fear God of every name, and take pleasure in the spread of his gospel. If Christ is preached, and the power of godliness prevails, by whomsoever, or in whatever particular form of profession, his ministers and people rejoice; yet, if judicious; not so but that wherein a man appears defective, in any doctrine of the gospel, or article of instituted worship, they must wish him to know the way of the Lord more perfectly, and consequently, rather in meekness point out his mistake than join him in his error; and, surely, my love to those who differ from me in some points of Christianity, may consist with a conscientious regard to every appointment of my Lord. Charity and truth are essential, and never to be separated. That love which abounds in knowledge and in all judgment will be sincere, inoffensive, fruitful and abiding, and is much to be desired. In a word, that notion of charity, that renders the subject indifferent about anything which he is persuaded to be the will of Christ, is false and pernicious; it tends to captivate the minds of men from the authority of God, and sap the foundation all true religion, it is therefore dangerous when, under any pretense, persons are taught to be unconcerned about the appointed form of worship; it should rather be commended to everyone to search the scripture, and keep to that which his conscience directs, and regard not the censures of men.

ANOTHER thing which eclipses our glory, is this, namely, the little concern of many, who have a name in the churches, to understand the nature, or practice the duties of their sacred covenant with one another in the Lord; hence they cleave not together, but are rather averse to the unity and order which are appointed, and needful to answer the purpose of particular fellowship; this destroys the foundation of godly discipline,

from whence alone can be expected the purity and mutual advantage to be hoped for in Christian society.

IT is gratefully acknowledged, that notwithstanding these defects, there is one thing prevailing, especially in the capital cities, which is highly commendable; many copy after the first disciples at Jerusalem in a rich liberality, on every occasion; this bountiful spirit is not confined to any particular sect, but reigns among all sorts of people, to the honor of the age, but to the shame of those who are not to be moved by the most striking and popular example; may this hopeful symptom, under all our just complaints, continue and become universal, that a blessing in store from on high being poured out upon us, we may revive and flourish again! but at present we have to bewail our many backslidings in other respects, with the tokens of the divine displeasure upon us; alas the scarcity of able and acceptable ministers; how few the instances of conversion and how little comfort and joy in our assemblies; while many wander, or mourn as sheep without a Shepherd, the ordinances of the sanctuary are but in too many instances as dry breasts and a miscarrying womb! Under these sad circumstances, shall it be thought unseasonable that we advert to the simplicity and zeal of the first Christians, with whom the Lord dwelt, that following the original pattern of piety and brotherly love, we may in like manner rejoice in his presence and blessing?

TO these valuable ends, and for the help of young and ordinary Christians, I drew up the following papers, in accomplishing which I have consulted several writers in this and the century past, from whom I have found myself obliged, with due respect, to differ in several instances, for I write to please no man, and at the same time would give no just offence to any who are otherwise minded, nor will it offend the ingenuous, that I have freely declared my thoughts on every point, as it fell in my way; this liberty is granted, when the rules of decency are not transgressed.

MY title will, I hope, be allowed, and not deemed a magisterial air, to which I have as little inclination as pretence. What led me into this choice was the manner in which these pieces were exhibited before they went to

the press, namely, by reading them over to some Christian friends in stated or occasional assemblies, so that they are truly and properly lectures. I wish they were more correct; but, having discovered no capital error, I rely on the sense and goodness of the Reader to rectify mistakes, which are not very numerous. As to the contents; it is at least highly probable that some will find their sentiment, spirit or conduct disapproved, but I am unconscious of introducing an article with a design to reflect on a single person or particular society, much less have I rejoiced in myself; on the contrary, my own great deficiency has been the occasion of several rebukes to be found in this piece; and, permit me to say, that if my own soul is not warned by these meditations, it will come short of the desire of one, who is deeply convinced of the importance of taking heed, lest after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away.

I SHALL only add further, that I have endeavoured to distinguish the things which are peculiar to the church, before her order was completed, an imitation of which is a mark of ignorance and imposture, from those in which she is an example to future generations. I have likewise attempted to point out the cause of the declensions we mourn, and the motives and means of recovery, together with the disposition, and duty of those who fear God in a degenerate age; with what success the Reader will judge; his prayer, however is desired, that this imperfect essay may not be in vain; on which I presume, and subscribe myself his friend and Servant in the Lord.

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LECTURES
ON
PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY, &c.

BOOK I.

CONTAINING

*Reflections on the Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Exaltation of the
Lord JESUS CHRIST.*

LECTURE I.

An Introduction to the Apostle's discourse—the murder of CHRIST death foreknown and determined.

IT is pleasant and useful to behold the power and faithfulness of God in setting up the kingdom of his Son. It began under a famous sermon by Peter the apostle at Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, of which we have a full and particular account in the second of the Acts. On this part of scripture some following Lectures are grounded; which I hope, by the blessing of God, will entertain and comfort the Christian who reads them; and if they should fall into the hands of any one in a state of unbelief, I heartily wish they may prove a means of conviction.

PENTECOST, it is known, was a feast of the Jews, on which they offered the first-fruits of the field, **Ex** 23:16. It is called, **De** 16:10 “The feast of weeks,” being seven weeks from the Passover; and it is styled Pentecost, which signifies the fiftieth, because it fell on the fiftieth day after the feast of unleavened bread, the usual distance between our Easter and

Whitsuntide. It has been remarked, that this festival [Thus, as Christ suffered at the feast of the Passover he was glorified at the next great festival of the Jews, which being in the summer was attended by numbers who otherwise would have been absent.] happened on the first day of the week; for this year it began on Saturday evening: So that on our Lord's-day morning, it might properly be said "to be fully come," ver. 1. This was the day on which Christ rose from the dead, "and became the first-fruits of them that slept," **1Co** 15:20. And on the same chosen day the spirit was poured out on the disciples, who immediately spake in a variety of tongues, as he gave them utterance, to the amazement all who heard them. And thus, the Holy Ghost bare witness to the glory of their ascended Master, and enabled them to publish his name in the world. In this manner it pleased God to make way for the spread of the gospel; not by a miraculous alteration in the hearers, but by furnishing his ministers, who were chosen from illiterate men, with an extraordinary power of speaking his wonderful works to all people in their own native language: this they did in a very large audience, composed of persons providentially collected at Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, ver. 5. That, as hath been often observed, as the confusion of language at Babel divided mankind, and separated the world in general from the means of grace, whereby the true knowledge of God was lost; this veil was destroyed, and the nations turned from darkness to light, through the gift of tongues in the church.

ONE might have expected, that every one who saw the astonishing fact, would have ascribed it to the power of God; but alas, what are the greatest miracles with hardened unbelievers! It is not uncommon for sceptics to plead, that they have never seen the like wonders performed which are produced in favor of Christianity, but experience hath shown, that no kind of evidence, however striking, can remove the inveterate prejudices of men who oppose themselves to the truth: "If they hear not the scriptures, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead," **Lu** 16:31. And accordingly, in the instance before us the multitude marvelled; "they were amazed and in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?" But we read of none who were truly convinced; on the contrary, many of them mocked, and were even so base as to impute this pre-natural

volubility to the force of new wine; some have thought it incredible that any should be so extremely absurd as to imagine that an excess of drinking could enable the disciples to speak with tongues they understood not before, and therefore suppose that these scoffers, being native Jews, as the next verse declares, and not acquainted with any dialect but that of their own country, the apostles seemed to them as babblers; but, why should any be surprised that a generation, who had been taught to reproach our Lord with casting out devils by Beelzebub, and who had afterwards crucified him as an imposter, should be stupid and malicious enough, thus to apprehend, or misrepresent this wonderful energy of the Holy Ghost? However, this is their charge: "These men are full of new wine."

To this slander, Peter, standing up with the eleven, and having intreated a hearing, replies, that it was but "the third hour of the day," or nine in the morning: this was the time of the daily sacrifice, at which the Jews in general came fasting, and at these festivals they were accustomed to abstain from wine till noon; it was therefore most unreasonable to imagine that these men were drunken. From this pertinent remark the apostle hastens to observe, that what they saw and heard was no other than what Joel the prophet foretold, by whom God saith, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." By the last days the prophet intended, and the Jews themselves understood, the days of the Messiah, when "all flesh should see the salvation of God," for it is written, "that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved." The apostle having explained this appearance from scripture, in faithfulness turns on these Jerusalem-sinners, and with a view to their repentance, boldly charges them with the murder of Jesus, and points out the light against which they sinned in shedding his blood, and also that their end was not obtained without the counsel of heaven, ver. 22, 23. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Thus, from a general report of certain salvation in Christ to every one that believes, which is the tenor of

the gospel, his ministers are without reserve to lay before sinners their evil and danger, that obtaining mercy they may repent and be saved.

FROM this introduction it appears that the apostle directs himself to the Jews who dwelt at Jerusalem, and that they were prepared for his alarming remonstrance, by his reasoning out of scripture relating to Jesus whom they had crucified, and also concerning the effusion of the spirit at which they had ignorantly scoffed; and this no doubt was subservient, by the blessing of God, to those painful convictions under which many of them hereafter cry out.

PETER might have upbraided them as Stephen did on another occasion, **Ac** 7:51. “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost!” They deserved to be styled a perverse and absurd generation, who had no regard to reason or truth; but behold he accosts them as the people of God, and under a title which was to their honor, “Ye men of Israel.” In **Isa** 41:14. the Lord thus addresses his people, “Thou worm Jacob:” Not in contempt, but in compassion he speaks in this manner, to let them know, that though in themselves, and according to their own apprehension, they were as Jacob their Father, greatly afflicted and threatened, helpless and mean as a worm; nevertheless he, their mighty Redeemer, would help them, and their adversaries should be as nothing: But Peter’s design was to show the regard he had for the Jews, while he spared not to censure their folly and wickedness, and accordingly he styles them “men of Israel.” And under a more respectful character he could not bespeak them; yet what could more highly reflect on their conduct? Great was the honor and advantage of being a descendant from Israel, that renowned patriarch; in this they might have gloried, had they behaved as became their eminent ancestor; on the other hand, their baseness in the crucifixion of Jesus, and blaspheming his disciples, who were endued with the Holy Ghost, appeared in proportion to this their high character, and the privileges they enjoyed; They were Israelites, and many of them, it is probable, leaders of the people, to whom were committed the oracles of God, and who professed to be waiting for the Messiah, and the effusion of the Spirit, which aggravated their

conduct; and no doubt this manner of address was designed the more deeply to affect them with a sense of their guilt: With the same view the prophets frequently, under the same character, call on the degenerate Jews to repent, **Ho** 13:9. “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself.” And again, **Ho** 14:1, “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.” In these, and other like places, this backsliding people are styled Israel, as I apprehend, at least among other things, to show how unworthy they acted in departing from the Lord; and it must be acknowledged that this was an excellent means of conviction.

THE apostle proceeds, and craves their attention, “Hear these words,” which, in connection with what went before, runs to this purpose, q. d. ‘O ye men of Israel; you see how unreasonable it is to suppose, that these persons are drunken, or to imagine that the excess of new wine should enable them to speak in this variety of tongues: this ability proceeds from the Spirit, which the prophet foretold should be poured out in the days of the Messiah; now I have somewhat to say which nearly concerns you, I beseech you therefore patiently to hear me.’ Note, it is the universal and earnest desire of ministers, who seek the salvation of their hearers, that they attend without prejudice, that under a divine blessing, they may convince them of error, and bring them to repentance.

BUT, what are these words? They are words, the hearing of which would make their ears tingle; yea words which hereafter appear to make their hearts tremble: Words by which the divine Spirit raised those convictions that pierced and punctually wounded their confidence. The apostle might well be anxious for a hearing, for there was reason to expect that these bold transgressors would stop their ears against the heavy charge he was about to lay on them. For what impenitent criminal will listen to the voice of his accuser? but with God all things are possible; he can draw the ear of the most obstinate sinner, as a means of convincing his heart, at his pleasure, and his hand is evident in the present case, since, otherwise, why should they not behave in the same manner as with Stephen the martyr, mentioned before? However, what Peter delivered in general, related to their having crucified the Lord, notwithstanding they

had seen the fullest testimony of God in his favor. It contains his description of the Saviour, the striking evidence afforded these Jews of his divine mission, their concern in his death, and the counsel of God in respect of this amazing scene of iniquity and blood; from whence may be drawn a variety of useful observations.

IN describing our Saviour, whom these men had slain, the apostle styles him "Jesus of Nazareth." Now Nazareth we know was a poor and small city on the borders of Zebulun, and held in the utmost contempt. Hence saith Nathaniel to Philip, "can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" **Joh** 1:46. But that which men disesteem is frequently honored by God: this poor despised city was the place where Joseph and Mary resided, and consequently where the incarnate Son of God dwelt a considerable part of his time in the flesh; yet, alas! what are the most distinguishing external advantages! There was no connection between the place of our Lord's abode and a participation of his grace; this city was no less notorious for its perverse infidelity than its very great meanness; so hardened were the inhabitants, that on our Lord's preaching to them, and upbraiding them with their incredulity, they rejected him with the utmost indignation, and in wrath attempted to destroy him., **Lu** 4:28-29. And accordingly, he soon left them because of their unbelief; so that there is reason to fear that the generality of those among whom the Saviour of the world lived more than thirty years, perished in their sins. Thus, persons may be highly exalted in an early enjoyment of the richest means of grace, and in the pride and wickedness of their heart sink deep into hell, under a fatal opposition to the counsel of God!

BUT to return: it may seem strange at first, that Peter, who appears at this time to have a realizing prospect of the redeemer now exalted at the right-hand of God, should mention him under this diminutive character; but when we consider to whom he was speaking, and the design he was upon, we shall admire the propriety of this chosen description. He is addressing the Jews, with a view to convince them, that this same Lord, of whom Joel prophesied, and in whom alone salvation is to be found, was no other than that very person whom they had unrighteously slain. Now

what could be more to his purpose than to speak of him under the identical terms by which he was described in the writing over his head when he hung on the cross? Which is known to run thus; “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews,” **Joh 19:19.** q. d. that same Jesus, whom ye in contempt call Jesus of Nazareth, is no other than that great person of whom the prophet speaks, in calling on whose name the subject shall be saved. Besides, in descending to this description of the Saviour, the apostle is not ashamed to own his Lord in that very character under which he was despised and persecuted to death; and he likewise ascends with the greater advantage to his glorious state in heaven. An instance of courage and wisdom we may justly admire!

THE next thing which Peter remonstrates is, the ample and undeniable proof offered the Jews of our Lord’s divine mission. this was admirably calculated to affect them with a sense of their folly, which was a main thing in view; it was as full and as strong as could possibly be given: a man approved of God.” Jesus was approved, and sometimes applauded by men; his mighty works and holy conversation rendered him, for a season, admired and followed as an extraordinary person; but the Jews are called upon to reflect on the undeniable and glorious testimony they had received from heaven; “A man approved of God, [*The Greek words seem in this place to convey the idea of works or tokens above or contrary to the course of nature, and may be considered as a redundancy of expression, to show the number and variety of those amazing testimonies of a divine power manifest by Christ.*] by miracles, wonders and signs:” The wonderful works by which the Father testified of his Son, in the course of his ministry were many, and known to these men. These miracles were not done in a corner, or at a distance, but openly and among them; “which God did by him in the midst of you,” saith the apostle, i.e. in your synagogues, in the temple, and in places of public resort. They were not lying wonders, but miracles indeed, the reality of which no man could decently question: signs which were evident, and of which his enemies themselves were convinced; and accordingly he adds, “Ye yourselves also know;” q. d. ‘O ye men of Israel, ye are witnesses to the truth of what I declare, for these divine works were performed in your presence! Did ye not daily behold, in Jerusalem, many wonders and signs

wrought by Jesus, by which God approved him? You cannot deny it.' Thus, he appeals to their consciences, and many of them were deeply convinced on reflection, and sorely wounded under a sense of their guilt, as will hereafter appear.

HAVING represented their perverse incredulity in withstanding so clear divine evidence to the character of Jesus, the apostle proceeds to the concern which the Jews had in his death. It was his great design to convince them that they were guilty in shedding the blood not only of an innocent person, but of killing the Messiah, that being awakened, they might repent of this heinous transgression and all other sins, and call on his name and be saved. He, therefore, spares not to charge them directly with crucifying and slaying the man whom God had approved, in which he is very circumstantial.

HE first observes that they took Him. "Him have ye taken." Now this may include their laying hands on him as upon a malefactor, with all the ill-treatment they gave him from his being apprehended to their nailing him on the cross. Our Lord himself said, **Mt 26:55**, "Are you come out as against a thief with swords and staves?" In this manner they came with Judas their guide, and when they had, by means of the execrable traitor, found our Saviour in the garden, by his own permission, they seized him, and led him bound to his judges to be condemned, in order to which they suborned false witness against him; and when he was delivered into their hands they impiously insult and curse him for an imposter; they mock, spit upon, and crown him with thorns, and, having unmercifully scourged him, thus mangled, they bring him with bitter revilings up to mount Calvary: In a word, they treated the divine Jesus with all the contempt and cruelty which the malice of earth or hell could invent. In this vile manner the Jews apprehended and dealt with our Lord; and there is reason to think that while Peter expressed these words, "Him have ye taken," some individuals present began to reflect with shame on their own concern in this wicked transaction.

THEN comes the charge of his death. “Him ye have crucified and slain.” Crucifixion is known to be a manner of punishment used by the Romans; it inflicted only on slaves, and that for crimes the most infamous: He that suffered this kind of death bore [Not the whole cross, but the Patibulum, or piece of timber that lay across the erect part which stood fixed in the earth, and on which the arms of the criminal were stretched.] his cross on his shoulders to the place of execution, where, being stripped of his clothes, he was fastened naked unto it, and this was usually, if not always with nails, attended with the cause of his death written over his head, in capital letters. Now we know that this exactly agrees with the manner in which our Lord was treated by the Jews; so that they dealt with him as with the basest of men and the vilest of criminals! Such was the rage and envy of these Jerusalem-sinners; they thirsted after his blood; their malice prompted them to shed it in a manner the most ignominious and painful. He was crucified and slain indeed under a form of law, and by the hands of the civil magistrate, which had a specious appearance, nevertheless the holy and innocent Jesus was unjustly cut off out of the land of the living, and his crucifiers are truly said to kill him, and charged with his murder. **Ac** 3:15. chap. vii. 52. compared.

THE means by which they shed the blood of the Saviour, is the next thing which the apostle remarks; namely, “by wicked hands;” for the understanding of this, we are to remember the civil state of the Jews at this time; they were now in subjection to the Romans, under whom they enjoyed far greater privileges than a conquered people might expect; but it was the well-known policy of that famous state to protect the nations they subdued in the free exercise of their own religion, and accordingly the Jews were in this respect remarkably favored, insomuch that they were allowed to kill a Gentile, even though he were a Roman, who presumed to enter and defile their temple. On this pretence it was that some went about to slay Paul, as appears by comparing **Ac** 21:29 with chap. xxvi.21. So highly were they indulged by their heathen masters; they had also a power to judge petty offences, and to inflict lesser penalties by their counsel where the high-priest presided in chief, but they could not judicially punish any criminal with death. This point indeed, like most

other articles hath been disputed, but it seems evident from the instance before us, the Jews had not the power of life and death; as a learned and laborious writer [Dr. Lardiner's *Credibility*, vol. I. page 77. See also page 97, 354. *Whether the Jews had this power taken from them, or lost by their own negligence, as Dr. Lightfoot asserts. It is, I think, generally allowed, that they enjoyed not this privilege forty years before the temple was destroyed*, Lardiner, vol. I. 21.] observes. If in any case they had this authority, it must have been in the case of our Lord, whose sole charge was blasphemy, in assuming the character of the Messiah; it was therefore a point of religion in which the Romans, who, as hinted, gave their conquered subjects full liberty, would not have concerned themselves, had they in any case allowed the Jews the authority of capital punishment, nor would a person so fond of power, and I may say, so enraged against Jesus, and determined to take away his life, have committed a cause within their own jurisdiction to a foreigner, or left his execution to the will of the Romans; but that which one should think would set it beyond all dispute in their own declaration to Pilate, **Joh** 18:31. When the governor bids them take Jesus and judge him according to their law, which indeed they had already done, for they had brought him in guilty of death, see **Mt** 26:66; **Joh** 19:7, but it was not in their power to execute this sentence. Hence the answer is this; "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death;" and accordingly they brought him to the judge, who though he was convinced of the innocence of Jesus, and knew that for envy the Jews had delivered him, yet so base was this magistrate, that through fear, or with a sinister end, he yielded to the popular cry, and gave up this holy person to the will of these wretches, see **Mt** 28:18-20. Thus, the Jews crucified and slew our Lord, not by their own, but by the hands of the Romans; these hands were those of Pilate that wicked man and unjust judge, and as officers and soldiers under him, who, being stimulated by the voice of the multitude, stirred up by their leaders, were but too eager in the execution of his unlawful sentence. The Jews themselves took Jesus, with their own hands into which he was betrayed, and did unto him spitefully as they could, but they could not put him to death; this they brought about by means of the Roman civil power, who most unrighteously crucified him as a malefactor; it is therefore truly declared, that with wicked hands, that is, of others, they slew him, which the sacred historian most accurately

placeth in his account, between the apprehending and crucifixion of our Lord, according to the fact. Thus, the scripture was fulfilled, **Ps 11:2**. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed.” And as Christ came into the world to save Jews and Gentiles, they were both concerned in putting him to death.

BUT there is nothing in the whole of the address more instructive or important than the divine hand in this affecting event. The death of Christ was no precarious or casual thing, but settled in the counsel of God, whose understanding is infinite, and who declareth the end from the beginning; this the apostle asserts; “Him, being delivered [*It has been suggested, that for particular reasons the Jews voluntarily surrendered Jesus, though they might themselves have put him to death, but we have already seen they had not this power, and Dr. Lardiner has proved that the Greek word in this place does not carry in it a yielding any civil authority or right, and shown that it is used in the New Testament for the act of private persons who prosecute, or bring any one before a court of justice in order to be condemned, and I think he has also entirely removed the most plausible pretence for this opinion. See Lardiner’s Credibility, Vol. I. page 86.]* by the determinate [*The original Greek Signifies to declare, as by definitive sentence, **Ro 1:4**. Or to ordain, or decree, as in **Ac 10:42** where it is used to express the divine ordination of Christ to the office of judge.]* counsel and foreknowledge of God.” The same is confirmed and explained by Peter and John on another occasion, **Ac 4:27-28**. “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” The word determined, [*To foreordain or predestinate, **Ro 8:30**; **1Co 2:7**; **Eph 1:5**.*] in this proof indeed differs from that in the passage we are upon, but the idea is the same, and they concur to ascertain the predestination of this great event. It was determined, i.e. say some it was written, which no doubt is a truth; thus saith our Lord, **Lu 22:22**. “The Son of man goeth, as it is determined;” and in **Mt 26:24**. in relating the same, the sacred historian uses the phrase “it is written; ” for the same was both determined and written; but we are not to resolve the determination of Christ’s death into a simple prediction, as if it was determined in no other sense than as declared in the scripture: things are not properly determined because declared in God’s word; on the contrary, they are foretold because

predetermined. The decree of God is the ground of prophecy, which is no other than a revelation, as providence is the execution, of the divine will. Nothing can be plainer than that the blood-shedding of Jesus was not only foreknown, but truly and properly predetermined by the most High who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. And what Peter now preacheth concerning this point he afterwards wrote in his first epistle, chap, i. 20. "Who," says he, meaning Christ, "was verily fore-ordained," i.e. to his sufferings and death, as appears from the context, "before the foundation of the world." To which agreeth **Re** 13:8 where he is styled, "The Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world." And this is the current of scripture. So then the delivery of the innocent Jesus into the hands of the wicked to be crucified, as I may say, according to the known idea of the terms, was settled in the definitive counsel of God from everlasting; it was all fixed before in that adorable constitution, the covenant of redemption, of which the Son of God is the Mediator and Surety; and indeed his being delivered was in consequence of his undertaking in that holy and gracious compact, to be the Substitute of the people; by which a just and legal foundation was laid, for his bearing their sins in his own body on the tree.

THIS is the address of the apostle to the men of Judea, who killed our Lord. After bespeaking their attention in a manner most respectful, he plainly and faithfully remonstrates their aggravated guilt, in presuming thus, to shed the blood of the innocent and holy Jesus, in defiance of all the miracles which God did by Him in the midst of them, as a testimony of his character; he positively charges his murder upon them, though they could not themselves perpetrate this horrid fact, but did it by the hands of other wicked men, who put him to death, and then he declares that he being thus delivered into their hands to be crucified and slain, was determined before in the counsel of God; which might justly alarm them, and made way for a further account of Jesus in proof of his being the Messiah; an address which, by the blessing of God, proved a means of the conversion of many who heard him, and who, as it afterwards appears, cried out in distress, under a sense of their perishing condition, and being instructed, gladly embraced the word of the gospel. Many other glorious

things are spoken of Jesus who was crucified; but, before we proceed, it may be useful to pause, and reflect on several points which stand supported by this remonstrance of the apostle to the Jews; and this will be attempted in the following lecture.

LECTURE II.

Containing notes and reflections on Peter's address to the men of Judea.

THE foregoing Lecture, contains the apostle's high charge on the Jews with the murder of our Lord, in prevailing on the Romans to crucify him, and the foreknowledge and counsel of God, in respect of this scene of iniquity and blood, in the present the Reader is desired to consider the following articles, which appear from the account, and nearly concerns us!

I. THE insufficiency of every kind and degree of evidence to convince the unbeliever, and bring him to repentance. This has already been hinted, and is a point fully proved in the instance before us The absurd light in which the scornful and prejudiced Jews placed the wonderful effects of the Spirit, in their unfair, if not malicious imputation on the disciples, who spake by his influence, evidently shows their insuperable perverseness; and their crucifying Jesus, notwithstanding the repeated and undeniable testimony from heaven in his favor, is no less a proof that all external means whatever are in themselves insufficient to open the eyes, or turn the hearts of men enslaved to sin and unbelief. What could be more striking, or more adapted to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, than the variety of miracles and wonders, by which God approved him in their sight? Yet, behold this series of supernatural works are in vain! these men were filled with envy and malice against our Lord, for no other reason than that of his assuming the character of Messiah; and, being left to their own will, nothing could prevent their shedding his blood. In like manner all unbelievers are hardened; however, their circumstances may differ, such is the power and deceit of the flesh, that those who are in it, are proof against every means of conviction, even miracles

themselves cannot turn them. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and will ever find an excuse for persisting in opposition to his will; it is not subject to his law, and despises his grace; and he that is under its dominion, if left to himself, will withdraw from the clearest light; he will either prevent, or by some means stifle convictions, for he is a rebel in heart, and in nothing is he more determined than against a submission to God and his righteousness: so stout is corruption in the unregenerate mind that nothing can remove it; mere moral suasion is by no means sufficient; yea, if reasoning out of the scriptures is attended with miracle on miracle and prodigies without number, unless a divine power is exerted in the sinner, even this, or whatever else of an external nature, can be conceived, will certainly fail of bringing an Infidel to repent. Again,

II. WE see that the condemnation of those who finally reject the Lord Jesus Christ, will be in proportion to the evidence afforded them of his divine mission, and the means of grace they have enjoyed. This awful truth stands confirmed by the instance before us. The abundant testimony God gave to his Son, in the midst of Jerusalem, is urged by the apostle on the Jews who crucified and slew him, to show the aggravations of their guilt in that murder. Let him that in wantonness despises or neglects the salvation of God beware! Think, O careless and scornful transgressor, what a judgment awaits thee, if thou die in unbelief! The impenitent man, unto whom the gospel has been preached, and in whose days it hath flourished, shall hereafter find that every sermon he has heard, and every instance of conversion he hath seen, will rise up and witness against him, at the tribunal of Christ; and how wilt thou endure the wrath of the Lamb, when he is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them who obey not the gospel! But,

III. HOW astonishing is it that the lusts of men, should be overruled to fulfill the purpose of God! To make evil answer a good and valuable end, is a noble effect of infinite wisdom. A most illustrious instance of this appears in the gospel of Jesus, in which we behold the chosen redeemed to life ever-lasting by his sufferings and death. Herein is the wisdom of God in a mystery indeed! He hath taken occasion, from the most shameful

and hateful evil, to yield the brighter display of his love, and of all his perfections; for in no point of light doth the glory of God shine with that splendor as it doth in Christ, in whom the Father hath righteously magnified his grace, in advancing his people to a blessedness, in some respects superior to that which would have resulted from innocence itself. The same adorable wisdom is seen in accomplishing this great design, by the crucifixion of Jesus. Behold, the vilest passions of men fulfill the counsel of God! their lusts prompt them to do what no one could with reason expect; for by the most flagrant instance of wickedness, they strangely bring to pass the design of him against whom they rebel. How unlikely was it, that Jesus of Nazareth, who in every tittle so plainly answered the prophecies of the Messiah, or that he who was so circumstantially pointed out in the scripture, should be put to death by the people, to whom were committed the oracles of God! It is wonderful indeed, that the men, who had seen undeniable testimonies from heaven to the authority of Jesus, should nevertheless set themselves to prove him an imposter, and be satisfied with nothing less than his blood; and, still more astonishing, that in this base attempt they should put him to death, in the very manner the prophets describe! It had been easy for the Jews to have taken away the life of our Saviour in a method contrary to the account given of the Messiah, and thereby thrown a doubt on his character; but behold they are diligent to do to this Jesus whatever the scriptures declare should be done to him they expected, as if they designed to prove him that very Christ he professed himself to be. Who could have thought that the injustice, folly, hatred and cruelty of these wicked men, was subservient to the justice, wisdom, love and mercy of God! “O the depth of the riches, both of the divine wisdom and knowledge!” “How unsearchable are God’s judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Surely his counsel stands, whoever sins, or whoever suffers! If the vilest of lusts and a conduct against all humanity and righteousness, in a people professing the fear of Jehovah, could have defeated the purpose of heaven, it had now been the case; but lo, Jesus is “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” Could not the Almighty have restrained the wicked that they might not have found their hands? No doubt he could have interposed and defended the innocent from blood:

it was therefore his will to permit it, but for an end worthy of himself, that grace might reign through righteousness in the salvation of sinners through the death of his Son. And indeed, it is unworthy of God to suppose that he will suffer any kind of evil which shall not prove an occasion of good to his glory. But then,

IV. WE are to note, That the decrees of God, which are infallible in their event, entirely consist with the free agency of man who acts under them. All things are possible, yea, and certain in consequence of the divine counsel. Thus, there was a necessity of infallibility in the death of Jesus i.e. it could not but fall out as God had determined, that Christ should be delivered into the hands of the wicked, and be crucified and slain in the manner described; nevertheless there was no necessity of compulsion, whereby the freedom of their action who killed him, was interrupted. The decree of God is not properly the cause of any thing that comes to pass, but of the futurition of its subject: And his decree of permission, in respect of the sin of the Jews, had no physical or moral influence on any of the people concerned, each one acted freely, and of choice. The pretence some have against the divine decrees, as being inconsistent with man's free agency, is groundless, and no other than a cavil, since nothing is clearer on record, than that our Saviour was delivered and crucified according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, and at the same time it is equally plain, that the Jews most freely and willfully slew him. And thus, it is always in respect of the sinful actions of men, as one observes, "they sin as freely as if there was no decree, and yet as infallibly as if there was no liberty," so then God is not the author of sin, though men sin according to the divine foreknowledge and counsel. In a word, on the one hand, there is not the least color for the imputation of evil to the Almighty, who decrees to permit sin as the occasion of good for his own glory, nor, on the other, of excuse for the transgressor, who, when he sinneth, acts freely, not to fulfill the will of God, but to gratify his own. It follows,

V. THAT the moral evil of those sinful actions, which are permitted by the counsel of God, are justly imputed and involve the transgressor in

guilt. The wickedness of a criminal is not the less, because his unrighteous act was foreknown, or fell in with the divine purpose, since his action was free, and committed to satisfy his own carnal inclinations; his wicked conduct is no other than willful rebellion, and deserves to be punished. It was a righteous thing with God to pour out his long-threatened vengeance on the rebellious Jews, who in that generation filled up the measure of their iniquity in crucifying his Son. Sinners may now presume impiously to blaspheme the decrees of the Almighty, or think to screen themselves under them, but their mouths will be stopped, when God shall judge the secrets of men; then, alas, too late they will be convinced, and see that they have deceived their own souls, and that the reward of their doings is just; when they shall go away into everlasting punishment! And further,

VI. IT should not be omitted, that men are chargeable with the evil that others commit at their instigation. The assassine is not more truly worthy of death, than he that procured him to take away the life of his neighbour, **1Sa 22:21**. Saul, saith Abiather, hath slain the Lord's priests, Uriah the Hittite was slain by the sword of the enemy, yet David who ordered him in the front of the battle, with a view to his death, is justly charged with shedding his blood. In like manner, these men of Israel, though they did not, for they could not with their own hands, put to death the Lord Jesus Christ, yet having condemned him by false accusation, and procured the power by which he was crucified, are truly declared his murderers. The Jews were no less guilty than the Romans, and under the imputation of that guilt, each one concerned perished, who obtained not remission through faith in that blood which he shed. Thus, we have reason to conclude, that many will be condemned in the great and last day for crimes which they had not in their power themselves to commit, but which, to gratify their lusts, they prompted others to do. O let us take heed that we are not the occasion, especially the willful occasion of other men's sins, for he that is so shall not be clear, but is justly liable to the punishment due to the evil committed. Once more:

VII. NOTE, It becomes the ministers of the gospel, to be bold in reproving sinners, and faithfully to remonstrate all the guilt that is evident

upon them. Mankind are far more sinful than they can apprehend, while in their natural state, so that most hearers lie under vain conceits, which, if not removed, will prove their destruction, and therefore, however, it may be disrelished by many, there is need of insisting much on original and heart-corruption, the curse of the law, and the certain and everlasting perdition of him that dies in his sins, lest the blood of souls is required at our hands: but, besides the general state and conduct of men since the fall, which call for plain dealing, there are often many particular evils in practice to be set home on the conscience; when these become notorious and habitual, we ought after the example of the apostle in this case, with all due respect to their persons, to tell the guilty of their crimes. It requires great wisdom and courage duly to warn them who presume, especially those who are of a distinguished character: we are not to be rude, nor yet on the reserve. Peter, you see, accosts these Jerusalem-sinners, as men of Israel, yet spares not to charge them with the murder of Christ: in like manner a minister may be civil, and, at the same time, sincere; he may be decent, yet faithful. Men are not to be flattered in their iniquity to their ruin, but, in love to their souls, ministers should cry aloud, and plainly remonstrate to sinners, hardened in their way, the whole of their wickedness, with a view to awaken and convince them, that obtaining mercy to believe on Jesus they may be saved. He that lives after the flesh, under any form of religion, may be pleased with the minister who disturbs not his course; but, in the day of judgment, he will not look on that man as his friend, who hath covered his sin and soothed him to the loss of his soul. Is any man tempted, through fear or private advantage, to connive at transgressors, let him consider the heavy charge that will lie on every unfaithful teacher, when those who have deceived themselves under him are finally condemned, and consigned to the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!

THESE notes on the apostle's remonstrance to the Jews deserve our serious attention. The greatest miracles are insufficient to convince the unbeliever; his prejudices are not to be removed, by any kind or degree of evidence whatever, so that objective grace or mere moral suasion will never convert him; yet the condemnation of them who obey not the

gospel, will be in proportion to the evidence afforded them: it also appears, that the lusts of men are wonderfully overruled by infinite and adorable wisdom, to bring about the purpose of God, whose holy and unchangeable decrees, though they infallibly insure the event of what is determined, perfectly consists with man's free agency. A transgressor therefore is justly charged with the evil he commits, however foreknown to the almighty, and settled in his immutable counsel, seeing his action is free: it is farther to be remarked, that men are accountable, not only for the evil which they themselves do, but likewise for every wicked act performed by others at their instigation; and finally, from this example, ministers of the word are led to consider, that it becomes them to treat their audience with every kind of respect due to their character, and, at the same time, on no consideration whatever, to flatter any man in his iniquity, but freely to lay open the perverseness and crimes of the guilty, with a view to their being converted and saved.

AND now, my dear Reader, art thou not astonished at the popular prejudice against the doctrine of predestination? At this many stumble through unhappy mistakes, and see not the consequence; but consider the current of scripture, and is it not strange that any person, above the character of a deist, should be offended at a doctrine so well supported by divine revelation? And how can a man read and credit what is declared on the death of Christ, and with reason reject it? I suppose some, who are so unhappy as not to endure this clear and fundamental truth, would startle, if it should be asserted that it becomes them only to blaspheme it, who would exclude the throne of the Almighty from under the heavens; yet the observation is just, for predestination is the ground of providence. If the decrees of God exist not, or his counsel should fail, his government in the world would be at an end.

AND what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? Woe be to him who finally rejects the Lord Jesus Christ! If Jesus of Nazareth was approved of God to be the Saviour of the world, most certainly God will disapprove and cast away the man who believes not on him. He that despiseth this glorious Saviour, rejecteth the counsel

of God to the loss of life everlasting, and to the eternal ruin of his immortal soul. O careless sinner, who art tempted to content thyself short of an interest in Christ! was it determined that Jesus should be delivered, and by wicked hands crucified and slain? It is no less the determinate counsel of God, that the man shall be delivered into the hands of the judge, and be punished with everlasting destruction, who is found an unbeliever in the day of the Lord. Think not that Jerusalem-sinners alone were obnoxious to the vengeance of heaven because of unbelief; for “except you repent, you shall likewise perish.” You are not guilty with the men of Judea, or like them chargeable with the blood-shedding of Jesus; but is not your unbelief as heinous as theirs? Yea, and more so, if, as we have seen, the condemnation of unbelievers will be measured by the evidence offered them. Since our Saviour was crucified he is risen from the dead, and hath sent down the Spirit of promise from the Father; and in token of his power at the right-hand of God, his gospel hath taken a marvellous spread in the world; which, with the ruin and dispersion of the Jews, and the appearance of antichrist, events clearly foretold by Christ and his apostles, adds greatly to the evidence given of Jesus, for they amount to a stronger proof of his power and glory than even all the miracles performed in the midst of Jerusalem considered by themselves: So that unbelievers, in the present day, resist, or neglect stronger evidence of the Messiah, than the men of Judea themselves; and shall not their guilt exceed in proportion? It is an alarming consideration! Unbelief in them who crucified our Lord, was less aggravating than it is in those who now believe not, and it will be more tolerable for the men, of that generation who rejected the only Saviour, than for thee, O Reader! if thou art disobedient. Take heed then that thou fall not into this sore condemnation!

BUT I hope my address is to one that has embraced the gospel. and hast thou, my friend, received Christ Jesus the Lord, and submitted thyself unto Him? Adore distinguishing grace. The best of means, or the most able instrument, are incapable of producing this faith which is unto salvation; much less is it owing to any previous good disposition in thyself that thou hast obeyed. Be not offended when I say, the Jews were not more

averse to Jesus of Nazareth than thy heart, through pride and unbelief, was naturally set against the righteousness of God in him. Since “the carnal mind is enmity against God,” where is the man who can say, that left under the same prejudices and temptations with them who crucified his Son, he should not have been guilty of his blood? Therefore, boast not, but remember thou art indebted to grace, and let God have the glory. Shun the appearance of those apostacies, whereby some, who, after a specious show of Christianity, “have crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame;” and study to show that thou art not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of these which believe to the saving of the soul.

AND should not this remonstrance of the apostle to the Jews in Jerusalem, respecting the testimony of God unto Jesus his Son, embolden thee, O believer! under thy profession of his name? What folly and madness must have been imputed to Peter, thus openly in the city where our Lord was crucified, to call those very men whom he charged with his blood, to witness the wonders by which he was approved of God in their sight; could the fact have been denied! Yet we see he did thus, appeal even to his murderers, and no one gainsayed: Yea, so evident was the truth, that, as we afterward find, thousands were convinced and brought to the obedience of faith; but was this morally possible had they questioned the evidence referred to? How confirming then is this to the Christian! Hear ye captious infidels, who despise the Lord’s Christ! If God did bear witness unto him by evident miracles, no doubt he is the Messiah; and, admitting the truth of the history, which cannot with reason be refused, we are as certain that these real and great miracles were indeed done by Jesus, as if our own eyes had seen him perform them. Blush then, ye Deists and repent; but let the faithful bless God and rejoice, and not be ashamed of their hope.

FROM the example before us there also ariseth comfort to the poor and afflicted, who trust in the name of the Lord. Art thou small and despised, look unto Jesus; behold he was despised of men, but honored of God! It appears from the case of our Redeemer himself, that no contempt in life,

or aggravating circumstances in death, will impeach the character of the righteous, or lessen them in the eyes of their heavenly Father. Art thou trampled upon and reviled? See in thy Lord, O believer! a man may be low in this world, and little esteemed, yea he may be treated as the off-scouring of all things, under the visible tokens of a divine approbation: but hath the man any reason to fear or to be ashamed, however obscure and rejected by others, who hath a witness from above, and is exalted in the favor of the Almighty? Christian, this is thy lot; wait on thy Redeemer and be of good courage, and think it not strange that thou art partaker of his sufferings: Fear not, he will shortly bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.

IN one word, what *then* remains, but that every man see to it, that he is accepted of God? This can be attained alone in Christ Jesus, whom the Father approved by a variety of miracles, wonders and signs, his enemies themselves being judges, and who was delivered, according to the decree of heaven, to be crucified and slain, “that he might put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Wilt thou, my dear Reader, be happy? Trust in this Saviour: Blessed is the man who is washed from his sins in his blood!

LECTURE III.

The resurrection of Christ, by whom. What is implied in loosening the bands of death.

THE manifest design of the apostle in imputing to the Jews the blood of our Saviour, in a perverse opposition to the testimony of God, was to awaken them to repentance, that they might believe and be saved; and accordingly, as a further means of conviction, he proceeds to show, that this same Jesus, whom they had crucified, was risen again from the dead. This glorious and important event, on which depends our hope in Christ, Peter declares with a freedom becoming a man who had seen with his eyes, had looked upon, and whose hands had handled of the Word of life: he declares it on his own testimony, with the rest of the apostles, who were all present, ver. 32, and with a boldness which shows that, he feared no contradiction, even from the Jews themselves. And is not this a proof that the resurrection of Jesus was in fact believed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, notwithstanding the absurd story by which their leaders had shamefully attempted to deceive them? The account Peter gives of this wonderful and interesting fact runs in these words, “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it,” **Ac 2:24**. They contain the author of our Saviour’s resurrection, who is God; a periphrase of this divine act, “having loosed the bands of death;” and a remark by which this blessed truth stands confirmed; “because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

THESE particulars will lead us into the sublime mysteries of the gospel; in attending to which I shall pursue the following inquiries, namely, who is that divine person unto whom the resurrection of Jesus is ascribed in

this place? what is implied in his loosening, the bands of death? and in what respects it was impossible that he should be holden by it? And,

First, THIS adorable and important event is ascribed to God. The resurrection of the dead is a supernatural work, but it is not impossible. The Gentiles indeed, who were without a written law, discerned not this truth; they were therefore without this hope in the world. Death was not in the original constitution of things, it came in by sin; a deliverance from its power must therefore arise from the sovereign will of the offended Majesty of heaven, who might justly have held apostate man in the bands of eternal death. So that the knowledge of this truth depends on divine revelation: And it must also be confessed, that to an eye of sense there are unsurmountable difficulties, in the resurrection of the dead. If we view a corpse, there is nothing in the nature of the object adapted or disposed to revive, nor is there any created power that is able to raise it again.

NEVERTHELESS, the very heathen would be without excuse, who should say that it is not in the power of God to quicken the dead. Thus, Paul reasons with Agrippa, “why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?” That man’s notion of a Deity must be exceeding low and absurd who can question the possibility of a resurrection with God; it implies no contradiction, nor is it the least unworthy the divine Being to effect it. To the Almighty, whose power and knowledge are infinite, it surely cannot be impossible; nor is raising the dead inconsistent with his justice, goodness and truth, or with any of his adorable perfections. [*The Immediate and visible consequence of natural death on its subject, which is the body, whereof we have daily ocular demonstration, may justly rebuke the unbeliever. Who, that surveys the human frame in a living and healthful state, could discern or imagine that this curious tabernacle of flesh, with all its members and powers, was formed of the ground? This indeed is the doctrine of the Bible; but it is no less mysterious and incredible to an eye of sense and to unassisted reason, than the resurrection itself. Men, who set up their understanding against the testimony of God, cannot but own that the natural body is principled in the dust, it being visible to all: But why then do they deny a true and proper resurrection of this body from the state of the dead, no less plainly revealed, merely because the manner is not to be described, and thereby destroy the foundation of the gospel?*] **Blessed**

be his name, life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel! It is essential to the faith of God's elect to give him the glory of raising the dead. Thus, Abraham our Father, when he offered up Isaac his son, **Ro** 4:17. This was a noble instance of faith, it being before any example of a resurrection. Indeed Enoch was translated, which might be an hint to the church that the power of death would actually be destroyed by the seed of the woman, but as yet no man had been raised from the dead: And may it not with reason be concluded, that the father of the faithful, who believed that the dead might be raised, who saw Christ's day and was glad, **Joh** 8:56. was animated in his obedience from a believing prospect of the Messiah's future resurrection?

HOWEVER, Christ is risen, and God raised Him up. But who is intended? The resurrection of the dead is indifferently ascribed to Father, Son and Holy Ghost: and accordingly, the raising up the body of Christ is mentioned as his own act. "Christ both died and rose," saith the apostle, **Ro** 14:9. and again, **1Co** 15:4. "He rose again the third day;" and indeed he assumes it to himself, **Joh** 2:19. "In three days I will raise it up," meaning, as the sacred historian declares, "the temple of his body." Thus, the Son, who quickeneth whom he will, laid down his life, and also took it up again. Nevertheless, the scriptures show that the divine Spirit is the agent in the resurrection; it is he that quickeneth from sin and the grave; and by him, as the immediate efficient cause, both the body of Christ and those of his saints are revived. "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you," **Ro** 8:11. And in **Ro** 1:4. he is said to be declared "to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." So that this glorious event is ascribed to the Holy Ghost. But in the economy of salvation, both the Son and the Spirit act in office under the Father; who is generally designed in the gospel where God is used distinct from the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is obvious that the Father is here intended; it was the Father, whom David refers to, that was sworn to raise up Christ to sit on his throne, to whom he ascended, and at whose right hand Jesus is now exalted with power: And that this is the divine Person

referred to, appears from the current of scripture, to whom also is ascribed the resurrection of the dead, and the raising of Jesus. The Father raiseth the dead at his pleasure, **Joh** 5:21. And in **Ro** 6:4. we are told, “that Christ was raised by the glory of the Father.” And again, **Eph** 1:19-20 it is declared, that “the Father of glory wrought in Christ, according to the working of his mighty power, when he raised him from the dead.” This is a certain fact of the utmost importance, that the hand of the Father was seen in the resurrection of his Son; an article of faith which lies at the foundation of our hope in the blood of Jesus, and enters deeply into the mystery of Christ, as will appear from the next enquiry, to which I proceed.

Secondly, WHAT is implied in God’s having loosed the pains of death? This in general is a periphrase of Christ’s resurrection, or at least contained in it. And here I cannot fall in with those, who, as I humbly apprehend, have inadvertently given into a mystical sense, and applied it to the agonies endured by our Redeemer; and accordingly have taken occasion from this passage to expatiate on the spiritual sufferings of Jesus, which are styled “the travail of his soul.”

IT is far from being agreeable to differ from persons of superior character and abilities, nor would I by any means discourage the just application of a single passage to the sorrows of our Saviour; but whether it is proper to say, that God, who inflicted the punishment of sin, delivered him, our surety, from the pains which were upon him, may be decently questioned. The divine Father ceased not to afflict him till he had poured out his soul and yielded up the ghost: And his not being the subject of eternal death, was in no degree owing to any favor shown him by his judge, who in this righteous and awful transaction “spared not his own Son;” and since he made ample satisfaction to justice for our sins, and trampled over his enemies in his cross, may it not rather be asserted, that, like Sampson, by his death he delivered himself from the bonds he was under? However, to apply this sentence unto our Lord’s deliverance from dolorous sufferings, either inward or outward, is entirely against the scope of the place. Peter is evidently treating on the true and proper resurrection

of Jesus, agreeable to his quotation out of the Psalms, which relates to the raising up the body of Christ from the grave; this he urges in proof of his being the Messiah: So that to take death here in a figurative sense, and a dissolution of its pains of a deliverance from spiritual sorrow, is to depart from the subject in hand. The apostle had no view to sensible pains of any kind whatever; from all these the Redeemer was certainly released the moment He expired, but the pains of death, spoken of in this passage, were evidently loosened at his resurrection.

THERE is another paraphrase I cannot approve: having loosed the bands under which he lay, i.e. say some, ‘when the pains of death had done their work upon him;’ but sensible grief is not the intention of the place, nor is the idea essential to the word rendered pains. Death is a state of confinement in which the subject is held or tied fast as with bands; and in 1Ki 20:31. the expression is used for cords or ropes, with which captives are bound; and some critics note, that the allusion is to cruel creditors, who will be sure to tie their debtors fast, which agrees With Pr 20:16. Where the same word is rendered a pledge, which we know is held fast till redeemed with a price.

NOW he that understands the mystery of Christ in his death, will see the term pains in this view, exactly corresponds with the circumstances of Jesus when he became obedient to the death of the cross. Was he not taken in judgment for his people’s transgressions, and bound as their Surety? Our debts were upon him, justice seized him, and he died as a criminal! And surely, he that was thus cast under the power of death, when delivered therefrom, which is the thing recited, may well be said to have his pains or bonds loosed. Thus, our Redeemer lay in the grave for a season, while his soul was rejoicing in paradise; not that I apprehend he was now suffering the penalty of the law, which was inflicted and fulfilled in his death; “but having, in the death of the cross, put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,” his body was thus laid under the pains or confinement of the grave, in order to an open and glorious release, whereby a public and undeniable proof was given of his having made a righteous and honorable peace by his blood,

THIS opens to our view the importance of what is declared, namely, that God, i.e. as we have seen, God, i.e. even the Father, raised up Jesus: He is that divine person who laid our iniquity on Christ, in consequence of his voluntary substitution in our stead in the covenant of redemption. The Father acted as judge and rector in his demand of satisfaction to law and justice, for our offences; he stretched forth his omnipotent avenging arm, and his sword awoke against our heavy-laden Surety, and slew him. Thus, the Father brought the Lord Jesus under the power of death; His bringing him again from the dead is an act of the highest consequence, and full of encouragement to the faith and joy of his people. O what a comfortable and glorious sight is this? Christian, behold God raised, up Jesus! See the Father as judge, who had justly bound him as thy Surety, release him. The righteous and sin-hating God, who confined thy Bondsman, and required at his hands whatever was due unto thee as a sinner, in order to thy redemption from the curse of the law; lo, this same divine person sets him at liberty! Thus, gloriously was thy Redeemer delivered from his confinement in the grave, into which he was cast for thy sins! Was it to the honor of the apostles, when falsely imprisoned at Philippi, to be fetched out by the magistrates themselves, and thereby declared to be innocent, **Ac 16:39**. What glory must arise on thy Saviour, O Christian, when he was brought again from the dead by the righteous Father himself, after he had made satisfaction to justice! and how well grounded thy hope in him!

THIS is the beauty of our Lord's resurrection, we are to consider, that it is not merely Christ's being raised from the dead, or simply that God raised Him up; the gospel of this interesting event lieth in this, namely, that the Father, who, as Judge, had laid the Redeemer under the power of death for our sins, did, under the same righteous character, actually and voluntarily release Him. This is gospel indeed! The glory of which, no doubt, the angels beheld with reverence and joy: and should it not fill us, who trust in this Jesus, with triumph? But of this more hereafter; we have something still further to excite our admiration and hope. it is declared, "that it was not possible that he should be holden of the bands of death;"

So that the body of our Saviour could not be detained in the grave; he must be discharged, nor could any thing hinder it. this is a glorious truth! A truth which reflects unspeakable honor on Jesus who was slain, and must yield a proportionable satisfaction to his people, who are redeemed with his blood, and trust him for life. and this brings,

Thirdly, To show the impossibility of Jesus being held under the power of death and the grave. Now, on reflection, it will appear that it was impossible in the following respect: As,

I. IT was *naturally* impossible, both on account of his deity, and the victory he had obtained by the blood of his cross. In order to clear up this point, we are to consider whose body it was that lay in the grave from which it was raised: It was the body of him who is the Son of God. To this consideration, the term used in the passage directs us. The apostle doth not say, because it was not possible that *it*, but that *he* should be holden; thereby leading our thoughts to that divine person who took this flesh into union with himself. This “great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,” runs through every branch of the gospel, and lies at the foundation of the truth we are upon. Before this body was conceived in the womb of the virgin, it was declared by the angel, “That holy thing should be called the Son of God,” Lu 1:35. Now this holy thing, I apprehend, chiefly intends the natural body of Christ; and this is so called, because being an essential part of his whole human nature, it is united with deity in the person of the Redeemer, who is God’s own Son, equal with the Father: For this reason the body of Jesus continued under the same divine character when it lay entombed in the earth; and accordingly it is said, **Ro** 1:4. that he was declared to be the “Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead.” This ineffable union of the human with the divine nature in the person of the Redeemer, having taken place by the counsel of God, subsists for ever: What could dissolve it? If any thing, the sufferings of Christ must cause the separation; but this cannot be supposed, seeing this body was prepared and assumed by the Son of God, that he might therein suffer and die, and so “become a sacrifice for sin,” **Heb** 10:5. If any period could be pointed out in which

this union was dissolved, our hope in Christ would be lost, since the infinite merit of his obedience and blood as a satisfaction to justice, on which we depend, results from his deity; but thanks be to God, we know, that the man Christ Jesus was truly his Son when he expired on the cross; nor could any change in his flesh, no not by death itself, in the least affect, much less destroy a union which is spiritual and divine; and therefore far above the reach of any natural cause. The condition of our Saviour, while in the state of the dead, was like that of his brethren deceased; his soul and body were separate for a season, but neither body nor soul from the divine nature in the person of the Son: this union subsisted through every change, and will be eternal. And was it possible that this body, thus united in the person of the Mediator unto Deity itself, should be finally held in the grave? Could not the Son of God have risen at his pleasure? How then could he be a moment confined against his own will? We may therefore be certain, that the pains of death, which God loosed when he raised up Jesus, could not detain him.

AS it was naturally impossible that Jesus should be held under death on account of his divine nature; this over satan and death on the cross. We are told, that “through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” **Heb** 2:14. And again, “He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it,” **Col** 2:15. If Jesus by himself, through the blood of his cross, destroyed the power of satan, and consequently triumphed over death and the grave by removing the guilt of sin, how is it possible that the pains of death should confine him? It cannot be imagined that an enemy, however terrible or destructive to others, should be able to keep under that person by whom he is taken and destroyed: Shall the vanquished detain his conqueror, or bind him at his pleasure? Who can suppose it? But thy Saviour, O Christian, claimed a victory over death and hell; it was therefore not possible, in the nature of things, that they should detain him. Thus, it was naturally impossible that Christ should be held in the grave, both on account of his glory and power as a divine person, and also as the mighty conqueror of death and the devil, who had gained a dominion, through the curse of the law, over the guilty race of apostate

Adam. Either of these considerations apart, and much more when united, abundantly prove that Jesus could not be held by constraint under the power of death; no, not a moment. I do not deny that the Redeemer's lying in the grave for a season is a point of his humiliation, but I rather think it was in respect of his body; yet this may be soberly affirmed, that our Saviour's continuance in the state of the dead, after he had made satisfaction for sin, and thereby destroyed the power of death, was voluntary, and submitted unto for ends of his glory. Again,

II. IT was *morally* impossible that Jesus should be detained in the grave, in respect of the divine decrees, the prophecy of scripture, and the end for which he was delivered unto death. That the resurrection of Christ was determined beforehand, will scarcely be doubted: It was no less the settled counsel and foreknowledge of God, that Jesus should be raised from the dead, than that he should be crucified and slain. Hence our Lord speaks of taking up, as well as of laying down his life at the commandment of the Father, **Joh** 10:18. And, indeed, this is included in that glory of which the Spirit testified in the prophets, and which was spoken of by them from the beginning: So that the raising up Christ was predetermined in the counsel of heaven, since prophecy is no other than a revelation of the divine decrees. But again, these prophecies themselves show it morally impossible that the body of Christ should be holden by death. The veracity of God is engaged for the accomplishment of his word; it is therefore an undeniable maxim, that the scripture cannot be broken, but they contain the promise of the Father to raise up his Son: and this is the very thing which Peter insists on, namely, that God had sworn to raise up Christ and set him on the throne of David, which could not be accomplished without his resurrection from the dead; and accordingly he shows the Jews that the Psalmist spake of this in the prophecy quoted, ver. 25 and following: So that by the connection of the discourse and argument of the apostle, he more especially intends, by its being impossible, this moral impossibility arising from the faithfulness of God to his word, in which he had declared he would raise up Jesus. As Christ must suffer and die, in like manner there was a necessity for his rising again from the dead, for this reason among others, that the scripture might be fulfilled, it being

impossible that the word of the Almighty should fail. And this moral impossibility of detaining our Saviour under death, is still further confirmed by the design of the Father in delivering up his Son to suffer and die, namely, that his people might live through him, **1Jo** 4:9. The design of God in delivering up his Son could not be frustrated; and this was to deliver his adopted sons from death and hell, and to bring them to glory, **Heb** 2:10. But how could this come to pass if the Saviour himself had continued in the grave? Had Christ our Surety been held in these bands, we could not have been justified in him; so argues the apostle, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins,” **1Co** 15:17. But blessed be God, he “who was delivered for our offences, was raised again for our justification,” **Ro** 4:25. And further,

III. I may say it was *legally* impossible that our Lord should be held in these bands, on account of the satisfaction he had made to the justice of God. Having become the voluntary, substitute of sinners, in the covenant of redemption, he died by the hand of the Father, under the righteous imputation of all their iniquity; and in this his obedience unto death, he fully answered the demands that were upon him, “for he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,” **Heb** 11:26. This satisfaction, which appears from his being released, entitled him to a deliverance. It would have been unrighteous to have continued our Surety in prison, who had fully discharged our debts, yea and made a glorious reparation to the honor of the law, under which he was held in our stead. But is there any unrighteousness with God? It was therefore not possible, because it was unlawful. With God all things are possible that agree with the divine perfections: It is therefore possible, however wonderful, that God should raise the dead, for ends of justice or mercy, or for a display of his power; but for the divine Father to hold the innocent as guilty, or to detain our Surety in the grave, into which he was cast for our sins, after he had completely atoned them, would be to contradict his essential righteousness, and to impeach his character as a judge; Jesus having finished his work, and made a full end of sin, justice required that he should be set free, it not being equitable for that person to be held under death who had merited life, or to have with-held the victorious Captain of

our salvation from the reward of his sufferings. Thus, it was *naturally, morally* and *legally* impossible that the Son of God should be holden by his bands, which were loosed by the Father when he raised him up.

HOW glorious then is the tomb of a crucified Saviour! Look, O believer into this grave; consider who it contains, and the end for which it is there! It is the body of him who is able to rise at his pleasure. O astonishing sight! here lies the Conqueror for a season in the arms of his captive, and the Lamb in the jaws of the lion, unhurt, for the destroyer cannot consume him! The grave of thy Redeemer, O Christian! is full of mystery and grandeur. Here lies the man in whom no sin was found, though death is alone the wages of sin! yea here lies dead the Surety, who, in the ransom he hath given, had delivered his people from the sting of death, and condemned the last enemy to a final destruction; for “death itself shall be cast into the lake of fire and swallowed up in victory.” This is he that said, “O death I will be thy plague, O grave I will be thy destruction!” And “who, through death, had destroyed him that had the power of death, which is the devil.” “He laid down his life that he might take it up again:” and lies thus confined, not by constraint, but willingly, while, according to the settlement in the counsel of peace, in order to his being openly raised by the glory of the Father, to his immortal honor, and the joy of his saints. This, this truly was lying in state; not like the gods or princes of the earth, in a vain pomp of funeral decoration over their corpse, already corrupted, to be gazed at by a thoughtless multitude of surviving mortals, and then covered in the earth till the resurrection of the dead: No; the Prince of life lies in death like himself, that justice having scoffed his bands he may arise. He accordingly rose, and as it were shook off his dust and ascended to his throne, to be viewed with adoration and praise by the heavenly host, who continually ascribe to him everlasting dominion and glory.

AND was Jesus raised up by God, it being not possible that he should be holden by death? Then woe be to them who resist or despise him! Nothing can be more dreadful for unbelievers and impenitent sinners, than the deliverance of Christ from the grave. The resurrection of

Jesus proves the righteousness of God, and judgment to come, **Ac 18:28**. By this he is proclaimed Lord of all, and him by whom God will judge the world in righteousness. Reader, if thou hast not submitted to the Saviour, I beseech thee to consider that he is exalted at the right-hand of the Father, till all his enemies are subdued. Christ is risen; what then must become of the man who doth not obey him? The evidences of his resurrection abound, as will hereafter be shown, yet he is preached in vain to men dead in sins. Well said our Lord, “They will not believe though one rose from the dead.” We have ample external proof that Christ is risen, yet alas how few to whom the gospel is preached believe on his name! But know, thou careless hearer, that this same Jesus, whom God hath raised up a Saviour, is appointed his Judge. And as it was not possible, for the reasons assigned, that the pains of death should hold him, in like manner, it shall not be possible for the heavens to detain him, when the set day is come; then shall he be “revealed in flaming fire, and take vengeance on them who know not God, and obey not his gospel,” **2Th 1:8**. And be persuaded, that from the exquisite pains of this death, which he will inflict, thou shalt never be loosed, if thou art cast in judgment, for they who fall into the hands of this living God, as the avenger of sin, will surely “be punished with everlasting destruction from his presence and from the glory of his power,” ver. 9. O then, I beseech thee, deceive not thyself, but take warning, and may the Lord convince thee, that, repenting of thy sins, thou mayest flee to this only Saviour, who hath delivered us from wrath to come!

BUT, with what satisfaction and joy may you, my, dear friends, who trust in the Redeemer, reflect on his glorious release from the grave! To you this grand event is no less interesting than wonderful. Behold, O Christian, thy surety raised and discharged by the same hand which bound him for thy sins! Herein thou art justified, and here is a pledge of thine own resurrection. what a ground of triumph is this! “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.” He justified thy Saviour, believer, and it is God that justifieth thee in him; thou art therefore righteously acquitted. And with respect to judgment to come; hast thou anything to fear? “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that

died, yea rather that is risen again.” Unshaken is thy confidence, O man, in the blood of Christ for the remission of sins. With boldness come to thy heavenly Father, in the name of this Jesus he hath himself raised up; and be assured that the end of thy faith will be thy complete and eternal salvation. If Christ is risen, and it was not possible that he should be holden, no man shall perish for whom Christ died, neither can death have final dominion over him. Jesus is risen, and become the first-fruits of them that sleep in him.

HENCE, says he to his disciples, “Because I live, ye shall live also,” **Joh 14:19**. The members of a living head must a short season, for valuable ends, fall into a state of natural death, but they shall surely revive. May this strengthen thy faith, enliven thy hope, and increase thy joy in the Lord. Finally, O Christian, is there not the highest reason for thee to give thanks to the Father? Behold his faithfulness, justice, power and love, illustriously displayed in raising up thy Saviour; and consider the infinite obligations thou art under to him, that this important and interesting fact stands confirmed by so many credible testimonies. But of this in the following lecture.

LECTURE IV.

What to be understood by a witness. Who are witnesses of our Lord's resurrection. Their credibility.

THE natural prejudice; against a resurrection in general, and the particular stress laid in the gospel on the raising up Christ, requires the most ample and undeniable proof of that glorious and important event; and, blessed be God, this is not wanting. He hath abounded in every kind of evidence, which the nature of the thing and the circumstances of the case will admit, among which the testimony of his disciples hath a principal place, and is now to be considered.

THE apostles having declared, **Ac 2:24**, that God had raised up Jesus of Nazareth, and pointed out the necessity of his resurrection, to the glory of his name, proceeds to show, from the prophecy of David, that thus it was determined, ver. 25-31. and in ver. 32, repeats his assertion with a punctuality and boldness becoming a man who could prove what he said, "this Jesus hath God raised up." in evidence of this he produces the testimony of many, including his own; "whereof, saith he, we are all witness." the like declaration is made on another occasion, chap. iii. 14. and likewise again, before the high-priest and Sanhedrin, Peter boldly declares, that he and others were his, i.e. God's witnesses of these things, meaning among the rest that of the resurrection of Jesus that was slain. In attending to this article, it may be useful to state the notion of a witness, consider who are designed by the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and then show their credibility, or rather that their testimony cannot with reason be questioned.

A WITNESS in the simple and common idea of the word, is one that bears open testimony to the truth; it signifies clearly to affirm the thing that is true. And thus it is applied to a man's profession of his faith in

Christ, by an open confession of his name, and a personal subjection to him before men; in this sense to confess is to witness. Hence our Lord himself is said to witness a good confession before Pontius Pilate, when he stood to the truth and denied not his character, **1Ti** 6:13. compared with **Joh** 18:37. And the word, (μαρτυρέω) martyrs, here used is more particularly applied to them who, being called to it, seal their profession with their blood. Hence Saul pleads, saying to the Lord, **Ac** 22:20. “And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was standing by, &c.” And we read, **Re** 17:6. of the blood of the martyrs, i.e. according to the text, of the witnesses of Jesus. The same character is likewise given to the ministers of the word, who are employed to affirm and declare the truth: Thus, of the prophets, who by special unction from heaven testified beforehand of Jesus, it is said, that they all gave witness to him who rose from the dead, concerning remission of sins through faith in his blood, **Ac** 10:43. Hence also John the Baptist, is said, **Joh** 1:7. to come for a witness, to bear witness of the light, i.e. to testify unto Christ the true light; and the witness mentioned, **Re** 11:3. as some apprehend, seem rather a number of gospel-ministers than any two individual persons. However, our Lord was a witness, as he bore witness, to himself; which was no other than bearing witness to the truth, **Joh** 8:18. And in the same sense all his faithful ministers, who testify and declare the truth as it is in Jesus, may be styled witnesses of the same.

BUT this falls short of the sense in which Peter and others were witnesses of our Lord’s resurrection. a witness properly speaking is one who, being called or appointed by authority, to ascertain any fact, gives good and sufficient proof of the same; he is one that testifies a thing upon his own knowledge as certainly true. Such are the evidences required in relation to facts by the world in general or special societies, and particularly in courts of justice. Thus, every thing by the law was to be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses, and the same rule is adopted under the gospel, **De** 17:6. compared with **2Co** 13:1. And it is in this sense that the apostle declares concerning himself, and many others, that they were all witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. He intends nothing less than their being appointed of God the true and proper

witnesses of the adorable and interesting fact and which they accordingly testified upon their own knowledge, having seen the Lord after he was risen and before whom he said and did such things as amounted to a full demonstration that God had indeed raised up this same Jesus who was crucified; of which more hereafter. Thus, as Peter, James and John, were eye-witnesses of the majesty and glory of Jesus in his transfiguration on the mount, in like manner all these whom the apostle refers to and joins himself with, were eye and ear-witnesses of his being risen from the dead.

NOW, who are these witnesses, or from whence are they chosen? from angels? No; Indeed, he was seen of angels after he rose, **1Ti** 3:16. And we read that angels said to the women, **Mt** 28:6. “He is not here, for he is risen.” So that we find angels waited at the sepulchre, and report the Saviour’s resurrection; and we likewise are told, a glorious host of these illustrious spirits attended our Lord when he ascended on high, **P**s 68:17. But angels were not appointed of God, to bear witness to the world of his Son, that he hath raised him from the dead. Neither are these witnesses taken from the body of the Jews, or from any of their rulers. Christ did not appear unto them after he was risen. At this, unbelievers have frequently cavilled. If Christ, say they, indeed rose again, why did he not show himself openly to the Jews and their rulers? It has been justly replied: This would not have consisted with the state of the Jews, nor with the design of the witnesses, which was not to be a testimony only to that nation, which was soon to be destroyed, but that all the world might know that God had raised up Jesus a Saviour. The Jews, through unbelief, had rejected the Messiah as a people, and thereby filled up the measure of their sin. Hence, they were under an awful dereliction. Our Lord had some time before his death pronounced their doom, namely, **Mt** 23:38. that their house was left unto them desolate, [*To be desolate is sometimes to be understood of being left under sin and the punishment thereof. Thus, in Ps 34:21-22. it is said that the wicked shall be desolate or guilty as the word (רָצוֹן) signifies, from which they who trust in the Lord are secure, being justified in him.*] i.e. devoted to destruction as the reward of their iniquity. And in the next verse he solemnly declares, saying, “Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” And it doth not appear that our Lord once after addressed

the Jews in the course of his ministry, in order to their conviction, but only warns his hearers of their approaching destruction, and declares the many awful signs that would forerun it. There is reason to apprehend that some crafty sceptics are aware, that if in these circumstances our Lord had actually appeared to the Jews, he had surely satisfied his own prediction; in which case no doubt they would have availed themselves against him, but they have not this advantage. Christ did not show himself to the Jews after he was risen, and the reason is plain; he had professedly left them, so that his immediate concern with them as a body was long since at an end; nor was it probable that a people who had, in the hardness of their hearts, withstood the evidence of so many miracles, and even that of his raising the dead, as in the instance of Lazarus; I say, it is not likely that a people, who against all this divine testimony had rejected Christ as an imposter, and as one that had a devil, would have repented and received him, upon seeing him after his resurrection. However, we are to consider that Jesus was to be the Saviour of the world, and his resurrection to be published in every nation under heaven. The rulers of the Jews could be no better evidence than the persons chosen; for, as one well observes, ‘What greater satisfaction would it have been to the world in general that Christ appeared to the Jews, or to the magistrates at Jerusalem, than that of his appearance to his disciples, provided their witness is credible?’ Any unprejudiced person may see that the selected witness of Christ’s own disciples, duly qualified to give their testimony, was the most rational and convincing, and consequently the fittest external evidence that the world could receive. It is therefore perverse and manifest prejudice to complain that the witnesses of our Lord’s resurrection were chosen from his own disciples.

BUT to return, neither are the witnesses referred to every one who saw and conversed with the saviour after he rose from the dead; he was seen of five hundred brethren at once, **1Co** 15:6. and it is at least highly probable that each of his disciples saw him before he ascended; and that as they had opportunity, declared his appearance unto them. But to be a witness of Christ’s resurrection includes a special commission and authority, by divine appointment, to testify this wonderful and glorious

event in the world. Thus, Peter declares that they were “witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead,” **Ac** 10:41. It was essential and peculiar to the character of an apostle to bear this testimony of Jesus; and therefore when the number of the apostles was to be completed by the filling up the place of Judas the traitor, it is said, **Ac** 1:21-22. “Of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” and accordingly when Saul was converted, and called to the office of an apostle, the Lord saith; “For I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to be a minister and a witness both of the things which thou hast seen and those things in the which I shall appear unto thee,” **Ac** 26:16. One of which was that of the resurrection, which he not only preached, but likewise bare witness of having seen Jesus Christ, to which he appeals in proof of his apostleship, **1Co** 9:1. And in chap. xv. after asserting that Christ rose again the third day according to the scriptures, and appeared to many in testimony of the same, he declares, ver. 8. “and last of all he was seen of me also.” So then these witnesses are no other than those first and great ministers, the apostles of Christ, who being qualified by their own converse with him after he was alive from the dead, were chosen and ordained before God to testify, by undeniable evidence, to all the world that he raised up Jesus; and accordingly they went forth in his name, with signs and miracles attending, in proof of their mission from heaven.

IT remains to consider the credibility of these chosen witnesses, which is by no means to be taken for granted, nor is it desired. For though the enemies of Christianity have presumed to question the evidence of the disciples, it hath largely been shown by many excellent writers, and will be found on trial that their character, under the notion of a witness to this glorious and important event, will bear the nicest scrutiny, to the abundant satisfaction of every impartial enquirer; nor do I know of any thing that can be added to what has already been urged on the head, the sum of which I shall present to the Reader. In general, it appears that they had every

qualification essential to a credible witness. They had knowledge, perspicuity, and uprightness; but more particularly,

FIRST, they were competent judges. The thing to be proved was level to any man's capacity. [*It is the subtlety of a deistical writer to insinuate that the credibility of a witness can at most be only presumed; for if it may not be certainly known, there can then be no dependence on any history, sacred or profane, and in consequence the gospel itself is incapable of proof. But it is hoped that the Reader is not to be moved by any such sophistry, and that the character of the apostles who testified that Jesus is risen will appear undeniable.*] Unbelievers may attempt to raise difficulties and pretend great danger of being deceived in a case of this nature, but they have been told, and every man's reason will tell him, that evidence is easily obtained where the thing in question, as in the case of the resurrection, is manifestly an object of sense. The body of Christ is a sensible object, and the apostles had senses to discern that object. It has been justly pleaded, nor can it be modestly denied, that the resurrection was to be supported by the evidence of sense; now, as a celebrated writer observes, 'it requires no more ability to be a witness to a man raised from the dead, than a perfect knowledge of him before his decease, and a capacity to distinguish between a dead man and a man alive; and what living man doth not think himself a judge in this point?' As to a pretence that the body of Jesus was not truly and properly a body, seeing he often appeared to the disciples and withdrew from them in a sudden miraculous way, it is without any foundation, since at Nazareth before his death, when his body is allowed to be real, and in other places, see **Lu** 4:30. **Joh** 8:59. he withdrew from the midst of the people, when in danger, in a manner no less wonderful. Besides, the apostles had undeniable testimony concerning the reality of our Saviour's body, as appears from **Lu** 24:39, "Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

THE knowledge these witnesses had of our Lord's resurrection depended not on occasional or transitory visits; they had sufficient opportunity to examine his body, and to be satisfied it was Jesus himself, which, in connexion with their capacity for judging, demands our credit. Mary Magdalen, the first who saw the Lord after he rose, was forbid to detain him for a reason assigned, yet it doth not appear that she touched

not his body; however, it is plain that she had sufficient proof that it was the Lord she had seen, and accordingly makes her report, **Joh** 20:18. And with respect to these chosen witnesses we have already seen that they did eat and drank with him, yea, saith Luke the sacred historian, **Ac** 1:3. “He showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Thus, God showed his Son, whom he had raised openly, chap. x. 40. i. e. clearly as the sun shines, in the most conspicuous manner, so as to leave no doubt on the minds of his followers, for as the apostle acquaints us, **1Jo** 1:1. They heard, they saw with their eyes; “they looked upon, and their hands handled of the word of life.” A pleonasm or redundancy of expression which implies the fullest opportunity for trial by their senses, which, as hinted, were the popular judge of the fact. In a word, had Christ lived with his disciples a hundred years after he rose from the dead, they could not have obtained a more certain proof that he was risen indeed.

IN consequence of their full satisfaction on sufficient evidence that Jesus was risen, the apostles declare it without hesitation, which is another credible circumstance; they spake of it boldly at Jerusalem, as in the instance before us, and even before the high-priest and council of the Jews, **Ac** 5:33. Now it is not credible that they should thus freely and constantly declare that Jesus was alive on the spot where he was crucified, and among a people that had seen him laid in the grave, and this to the magistrates themselves, who wanted not for means to detest, nor power or inclination to punish them, if the fact had not been notorious.

INTEGRITY also is essential to the credit of a witness, and of this the disciples had every possible mark. And here I might insist on their morals, the miracles they wrought, their faithfulness in recording their own infirmities and sins, their many and great sufferings for the testimony of Jesus, and when called to it, their sealing this testimony with their blood. These are more than sufficient; and especially the last is an undeniable proof, if proof can be had of human uprightness. Men corrupted with infidelity have not spared an attempt to set aside the force of this

argument, by comparing it with that of a criminal under sentence of death, who denies the fact for which he is condemned, which hath frequently been the case. But to this it has been justly replied, that ‘there is no companion, between a criminal denying the truth to save his life, and a person exposing himself to sufferings and death by attesting a known falsehood.’ And indeed, who cannot see that this is rather an opposite than a parallel case? The apostles might at any time have quitted their testimony, and saved their lives, but they resisted unto blood, striving against sin; which, joined to the wonders they performed, is such evidence, that to resist the same is to resolve against believing either God or man.

THUS, if we consider that these witnesses were capable of judging the matter in question, the sufficient means they had of knowing the fact, the open manner in which they declared it, and the ample proof we have of their integrity, nothing but prejudice can hinder our pronouncing them credible, and receiving their testimony of our Lord’s resurrection; they are certainly true witnesses of God who testified to the world that he raised up Christ.

BUT, besides their being possessed of every qualification required in a witness, there are many other things which tend to corroborate their evidence, which are not to be passed over in silence. Their own incredulity, for which they stand justly reprov’d; their being never called in question, in relation to the fact; which, together with Gamaliel’s advice, **Ac** 5:34.. and Paul’s answer to Agrippa in the court of Caesarea, chap. xxvi, are more than sufficient to show, that the Jews themselves were far from being convinced that Christ was not risen. The testimony of unbelievers themselves is another strong circumstance in favor of the apostle’s credibility. The soldiers who guarded the sepulchre, though bribed to conceal it, at first, in their fear, scruple not to report the astonishing event. **Mt** 28:13. By some apologies of the fathers it appears that even the Roman Senate denied not the resurrection of Jesus, and it is very remarkable that Josephus the Jewish historian speaks without hesitation, that Christ rose again on the third day. But still greater is the

testimony of God by the mouth of his prophets who foretold the resurrection of his Son; this will confirm the credibility of his witnesses with them that believe. To this purpose the apostle pleads, **Ac** 26:22-23. that he said “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead.” It certainly adds to the credit of perform every way qualified to be witnesses, that in what they report, however wonderful, they declare nothing but what God had foretold should come to pass. The amazing spread and efficacy of the gospel might also be urged, and likewise the number of those who attested the same; not one or two, but twelve; and afterward the apostle of the Gentiles, who once thought it became him, and therefore to his utmost destroyed the faith; so that he cannot be supposed to join in their testimony without the most convincing evidence; together with all the other disciples who saw the risen Saviour, besides the witnesses themselves, so that many hundreds confirmed their report. Thus, it was the wisdom of God by a great variety of circumstances to establish the witness of his chosen servants to the resurrection of our Lord.

AS to the popular objections of infidels, they are trifling and perverse. Some cavil that he was not three days and three nights in the earth, as predicted, for want of admitting the known manner of reckoning the nights into the day, when we reckon by so many days. Three days and three nights are expressions equivalent to three days, or in three days. And three days inclusive take in the first and the last in the account, however small a part of either is employed, which answers exactly to the time of our Saviour’s lying in the grave. The Jews plainly understood the next day, which was the Sabbath, to be the second day, and the pains they took to set a guard on that day, lest in the night the body of Christ should be stolen away, shows that in their account, the next, i.e. the third day was the day on which he, whom they call a deceiver, said, “I will rise again,” **Mt** 27:63. The prediction was that he should rise again the third day, which he actually, truly, and properly did, as we learn from the testimony of the angels, **Lu** 24:7. also from his appearance to the women, and the discourse of the disciples with him as they walked to Emmaus, “Today, say they, is

the third day since these things were done,” ver. 25. which was the very day on which Christ rose, as appears from the context. Others deny that a resurrection is possible; this is exceeding bold if not impious; it is most unreasonable to doubt whether the Almighty who informed this curious vessel of dust with a principle of life can revive it from the state of the dead at his pleasure; and, as hinted already, there is no contradiction in raising a dead body, nor is it in any respect unworthy of God to perform it; and if the dead may be raised, the resurrection of Jesus is not to be scrupled under a notion of its being impossible. In a word, the story told by the Jews, of our Saviour’s body being stole in the night by his disciples, notwithstanding all their precaution, is too ridiculous and absurd to be received by any sober unprejudiced person. The disciples were at this time in the utmost fear and jeopardy, were themselves discouraged at the death of their Lord, and had no apprehension of his rising again, and therefore had no motive in themselves to attempt the removing his body; but if they had, they were utterly incapable of performing it; could they roll away the stone from the sepulchre, or do it without awaking any of the guard? but if the guard continued asleep, how came they to know that his body was stolen? or if it was, that his disciples were concerned? they neither heard nor saw any thing; and, as a late ingenuous writer [*Trial of the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, wherein most of the arguments mentioned in favor of the apostle’s credibility are introduced with great propriety and force.*] observes; was it ever heard since the world began “that evidence was admitted to a fact that took place while the parties attesting were confessedly asleep?” Besides, who in their senses, on such an enterprise, would have stayed to fold up the cloths, and lay them apart in the manner they were found by Peter and John?

SO then it appears that this glorious and important event, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, stands fully attested by proper witnesses chosen before God, whole credibility is not to be questioned, being confirmed by every possible mark of truth, and against which every objection of the adversary is groundless and vain. Unbelievers are therefore inexcusable; their folly is manifest, since nothing can be more credible; nor was any fact in the world more abundantly proved, than that Jesus was raised from the dead. May such obtain mercy to repent; for since

Christ is risen, woe be to the man who shall be found to have denied him when he comes to judgment!

TO conclude, he that believeth hath the witness in himself, and may be assured from his own experience that Jesus is risen. The efficacy of the gospel unto saving faith in the heart is owing to the same divine power which wrought in Christ when God raised him from the dead, **Eph 1:19-20**. And the death of Jesus is the procuring cause of such divine operation; so that the faithful have an internal evidence, whereby the veracity of these chosen witnesses is confirmed to themselves. O Christian, thine own resurrection from the grave of sin is a sure testimony to thee that thy Saviour is risen! Had not thy Surety rose from the dead, thou had been yet in thy sins, but now God hath quickened thee, who wert thyself dead in trespasses and sins; he that died for thee is certainly alive! Under this testimony of the Spirit rejoice in thy hope, give glory to the Father, who raised up his Son, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.

LECTURE V.

The Holy Ghost a witness to the resurrection of Jesus: His testimony in the believer appealed to by the apostle, 1Jo 5:10 considered and proved.

WE have seen that nothing can be more credible, than the open and united testimony the apostles gave to the resurrection of Christ; yet there is one objection boldly advanced, which if admitted throws a dead weight on all that can be said in proof of this point, namely, the fact is so extraordinary, it being, say the objectors, contrary to the laws of nature for the dead to arise, that no human evidence can be sufficient, since the voice of nature outweighs the utmost that can be said against her. To this some have justly replied, that the ideas men form concerning nature are governed by prejudices they have received and not by reason: and this is at least frequently the case. But surely, however above or contrary to the law of nature it may be supported, God is able to raise the dead; and who can say that he will not? and if he doth, will any deny that the senses are competent judges of the fact? Now it is asserted that God did raise up Jesus, who showed himself openly to his disciples, whose conviction and knowledge of their risen Lord were incontestable; which, together with the uprightness of their character, and the manner of their testimony, and especially as their report was confirmed by undeniable miracles which they wrought, render unbelievers without any excuse. Nevertheless the credit of our Saviour's resurrection doth not altogether rest on human evidence: Not only the apostles but God also bare witness to his being raised up: Not to insist on the testimony of the Father by the prophets from the foundation of the world, or that of the Son himself, from the throne in the heavens, **Re 1:18.** which will have their weight with them that believe, to establish their faith in this point; it is expressly declared that the Holy Ghost also did witness with the disciples to this interesting event, whose divine testimony we are now to consider. It stands recorded, **Ac 5:32.** where the apostle, upon declaring that he and the rest were witnesses that

God had actually raised up Jesus, and exalted him with his right-hand, adds this remarkable clause, “And so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” I shall briefly touch on the divine person here said to witness, as the apostles, to the resurrection of Christ; the view in which he is considered in this passage; on whom he is bestowed; and then show how, or in what manner he testifies of this blessed and important event.

THE Holy Ghost, or Spirit, for they are the same, is no other than that glorious, divine person who descended, as a dove, on our Lord at his baptism, in the relating of which the apostles indifferently style him the Spirit, or the Holy Ghost, **Mt** 3:16. compared with **Lu** 3:22. This adorable Spirit is joined with the Father and the Son, in the name into which Christians are baptized, under the same character by which he is described in the text; and it is remarkable that he is spoken of under this character near fourscore times in the New Testament. His proper deity and distinct personality are clearly set forth in the sacred writings, and particularly in the case of Ananias, **Ac** 5:3-4. to whom the apostle saith, “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” He must be greatly prejudiced who would attempt to evade this plain and strong proof of the true divinity, and proper personality of the Holy Ghost; and the sentence before us evinces the latter, for to bear witness is a personal act. He is styled Ghost or Spirit, not in respect of his spiritual essence, which is common to each divine person, but neither the Father nor the Son are the Spirit; therefore this distinguishing character has regard to his personal subsistence; and however some may disapprove it, the ancient opinion has not been superseded by a better account. The real ground of this divine character seems to be this, namely, the manner of his eternal procession, which is by spiration; and accordingly in **Job** 23:4. the Spirit of the Lord, and the breath of the Almighty are the same; and as for the epithet holy, it stands supported by his essential purity, and also by his being the author of holiness in them that believe. This divine person, we are told, “proceedeth from the Father and the Son,” which may be applied to his manner of subsistence in the deity, as hinted already, or to his goings-forth in the execution of his office, in which he

quickens, sanctifies and comforts the hearts of the redeemed, and likewise is a witness to their establishment and joy; and particularly as he was, and continueth to be an evidence or witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

THE Holy Ghost is declared to be the gift of God. As Christ, so is his Spirit the gift of the Father, whose office and operations are needful to accomplish the divine purposes in the salvation of sinners. He was therefore provided in the counsel of God, for he hath chosen us through sanctification of the Spirit. Hence the Spirit is promised, and hath been sent forth in all ages, but more plentifully in these last days since the coming of Christ, in the variety of his gifts and the plenty of his grace; so that this is eminently a dispensation of the Spirit, under which the faithful have been large partakers of his power and goodness, whereby they obtained a freedom or boldness unknown in general heretofore. “For ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” **Ro** 8:15.

NOW it is further declared, that God hath given the Holy Ghost to them that obey him; that is, who obey either God the Father, or his Son Jesus Christ, it amounts to the same, for in obeying of Christ we obey the Father who sent him: but in gospel-obedience Christ is the more immediate object; and to obey Jesus Christ is cordially to trust him, **Ro** 10:16 “They have not all obeyed the gospel, for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” Hence the Son is said, **Heb** 5:9. to have become “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him,” i.e. that believe him; “for he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved,” **Mr** 16:1. To obey God, or Christ, or the gospel, are the same in the language of scripture. The expression used in this place literally signifies to submit, and conveys the idea of a voluntary obedience: And it is well known that a free submission to Christ and his righteousness is included in the faith of the chosen. The apostle represents the unbelief of the Jews by their not having “submitted themselves to the righteousness of God,” **Ro** 10:3. Christ is exalted a Prince and a Saviour; he is preached Lord and Christ; or, as Peter afterward proclaimed him at Caesarea, **Ac** 10:36. “Lord of all.” As such his people receive him; they receive Christ Jesus the Lord,

Col 2:6. They willingly submit themselves and surrender to him as their Lord, to be ruled by him, who hath redeemed them with his blood. Thus, true faith in Christ as a Saviour engages the subject to him as his sovereign; and accordingly unbelievers are described to be such, “who would not that Christ should reign over them,” **Lu 19:27.** But they who are made willing in the day of his power are the voluntary subjects of his kingdom. Now to them who thus obey Christ, the Holy Ghost is said to be given of God, they are all partakers of this divine Spirit, of whom they are born again and brought to believe, being effectually called through the power of this omnipotent agent of the covenant; and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, they receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, **Ac. ii. 38.** Even all that are called, whether Jew or Gentile, are “made to drink into one spirit,” **1 Cor. 12:13.** Each believer hath a measure of the Spirit in his gifts and graces, according to the will and wisdom of our heavenly Father. So then to obey is to believe; and those on whom this divine witness is bestowed, are all and only them who through grace are brought to the obedience of faith. Thus, our apostle declares concerning the Gentiles in general who were called, **Ac 15:8.** “That God bear them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost:”

But the main point is the testimony of this glorious person unto the truth, that the Father raised up his Son Jesus, and hath exalted him with his right-hand; for, though the subject in pursuit is the resurrection of Christ, yet these cannot be separated in the testimony of the Holy Ghost. The witness of the apostles could reach no farther than the infallible proofs they had of Jesus being alive after his passion, or at farthest that after the most convincing evidence that he was truly the self-same person, and no other than the Lord who was crucified, some of them saw him ascend towards heaven; but the Holy Ghost came down from heaven in consequence of his actual session at the right-hand of God, as will hereafter be seen from **chap. 2:33.** So that the witness of the Spirit necessarily includes a testimony of the Saviour’s exaltation, which nevertheless terminates first on his resurrection from the dead, without which he could never have been received into glory. The question is, how the Holy Ghost became a witness of this wonderful, but certain and

interesting fact? And, according to scripture, the Holy Ghost may be said to witness as a spirit of prophecy, **Heb** 10:15. The Holy Ghost is styled a witness of the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin, and the efficacy thereof to the putting it away, according to the scope of the place, on account of his having spoken by the prophets concerning the remission of sins: he is therefore called a witness, even because he foretold what implied a satisfaction to be made for sin by the blood-shedding of the Messiah, through which alone forgiveness could be obtained; but this is not so directly to the purpose; our business is to consider in what way the Holy Ghost did actually testify after the ascension of Christ, that he was risen from the dead; and this he did both externally, and also in an internal manner.

First, WE may consider his external evidence, which extended to all wherever the gospel was preached in the primitive times; it lay open to the view of every spectator, or hearer of the word, called or uncalled, and was given more especially, as a sign for the conviction of unbelievers. The miraculous operations of the Holy Ghost were doubtless one kind of testimony he gave to the resurrection of Christ. These consisted in extraordinary powers communicated to the apostles for the spreading of the gospel, as by the gift of tongues, together with that spirit of wisdom, utterance and boldness with which those first and great ministers were inspired; this astonished their enemies, **Ac** 4:13. and tended to convince the world of their divine mission, and to promote the credit of the doctrine they preached; besides the miracles they wrought, such as healing the sick, casting out devils, and conveying miraculous powers to others, by the laying on of their hands in the sight of all men: so that with great power or ability, as the word signifieth, gave the apostles witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, **Ac** 4:33. Add to this their amazing success, which was not by their power or might, but by the Spirit of the living God. Thus, the Holy Ghost in a variety of instances attended the apostles in their ministrations in every place, and it might truly be said, on account of his wonderful operations, that great grace was upon them all; and this was one way in which the Holy Spirit became a witness with these chosen disciples of the resurrection of Jesus. I see no room to question that this

external evidence of the Spirit is what the apostle chiefly if not solely intends in this place, since he is speaking to the high-priest and other unbelieving Jews; besides the evidence of them who are properly witnesses of our Saviour's resurrection, and of the Holy Ghost considered under that character, was to be laid before the world; and consequently must be by something external and visible; something adapted to, and level with the capacity of men as reasonable creatures, and such as natural men can receive. Such were the wonderful works wrought by the power of the Spirit referred to. Indeed, as hath been truly observed, a miracle proves nothing, immediately; but that there is a cause equal to the effect: but since a real miracle is unquestionably the finger of God, it is a manifest proof of his integrity, by whose hand it is performed, and confirms his veracity in the attestation he makes of a fact upon his own knowledge, and consequently of the fact itself; for it cannot with decency be supposed that the omniscient and faithful Jehovah would set his seal to an impostor or a lie: we may therefore justly esteem the extraordinary and miraculous works by the apostles, and their amazing success through the efficacious operations of the Spirit, whereby they triumphed over the inveterate prejudices of Jews and Gentiles in every place, as a glorious proof of the divine Spirit with them to the world, that Jesus was risen again: which proof stands recorded to the condemnation of unbelievers; for herein, besides the abundant and sufficient testimony of men, they have set before them also the witness of God. But,

Secondly, THERE is another way in which the Holy Ghost answers this character, namely, by his internal witness; which is peculiar to the faithful, and results from his work and abode in their hearts; Thus, it is declared, **1Jo 5:10**. "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself." Nothing is more despised by many, as foolish and enthusiastical, than the work and witness of the Spirit in his saints, on which vital religion depends. I should rejoice in the conviction of any such ignorant scoffer; but my view is principally the establishment of them that believe; it will therefore not be impertinent, and I hope it may be useful, that I attempt to clear this passage from the cloud drawn over it by the false glosses and bold contradictions of some. It is affecting to see men

who have employed their superior talents with success, in stating the external evidence of Christianity, as if they were strangers to the power of the gospel; God knoweth, on every occasion bending their utmost force against the operations of the Holy Spirit on the heart, whereby he becomes a witness in the faithful! Some deny that the apostle here appeals to an inward testimony of the Spirit, and insinuate that he speaks of the extraordinary, powers which believers obtained, who could not but credit the reality of those powers of which they were conscious. According to these gentlemen therefore when the apostle saith, “He that believeth hath the witness in himself,” he appeals to the powers of the Spirit which the believer had received, manifest in their effects; and this they would have to be that witness of the Holy Ghost whereof Peter speaks: So that in reality this inward witness depends on an external evidence, and comes to nothing more than a certain consciousness of extraordinary powers received; which being exerted, witnessed to the subject that Jesus was risen from the dead. And who cannot see that, according to this, it is the visible effect of this miraculous power, and not the power itself, which is truly and properly the testimony a believer receives, but can this be styled “a witness in himself?” Besides these very men allow, yea they insist, that these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit hath long ceased in the church. Thus, we are at once secured from any enthusiastic notion of an inward testimony of the Spirit common to the faithful, and every believer is cut off from any expectation of finding this witness in himself, so plainly asserted by the apostle. It is well for the Christian that the scripture cannot be broken.

BUT a little reflection may show this confined interpretation unjust. The apostle John is not distinguishing the faithful one from another; he is considering mankind as children of God or children of the devil: and with respect to the former, he does not say this or the other believer hath the witness in himself; on the contrary the individual pronoun He, determines the sense to be universal and particular, and consequently that every renewed person hath this testimony in his own breast. And as to the passage in the Acts we are upon, Peter speaks indefinitely of them that obey the gospel of Christ; nor should any man take the liberty as some

presume, to confine the text by paraphrasing the sentence thus, ‘them that obey him;’ i.e. say they, ‘the apostles and many others who have submitted to his government,’ there being no such limitation in the scope or words of the inspired writer. That the witness which the believer hath in himself, asserted in this clause, is to be understood of a testimony, which ariseth in the heart or conscience of every one that is called, and not to be confined to the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost, with which some only were endowed even in the primitive times, is clear from the obvious design of the apostle. He wrote his epistle with a view to establish the disciples in the doctrine of Christ, relating to his appearance in the flesh, and that each one born of the Spirit might know that he believed on his name; to this end he asserts that “the Son of God was manifested to take away our sins;” and then declares the infallible proof which he and others had of this truth, even after his resurrection from the dead. He declares, chap. 1. “That they had heard, seen, looked upon, and handled of the word of life;” and goes on to certain criterions of the regenerate, among which this is one, namely, “he that believeth hath the witness in himself.” The witness of what? Why doubtless of this, that, Jesus who was God manifest in the flesh, having actually made propitiation by the blood of the cross, rose from the dead, ascended to glory, and lives with the Father to intercede for his people. Now of this, saith the apostle, the believer “hath the witness in himself;” i.e. he hath by the work of the Spirit in his own heart an undeniable proof that Jesus is risen which exactly corresponds with the nature of that hope unto which the regenerate are begotten, **1Pe** 1:3. It is a lively hope grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, raised by the agency of that Spirit which the Father bestowed in consequence of the exaltation of his Son, who died for our sins and rose again: So that whoever is quickened by the Spirit of life in Christ, hath a witness in himself that Jesus, whom he trusteth, is raised front the dead. And is there any thing absurd in this testimony? Is it not clear and most certainly true, that if quickening grace, regeneration and saving faith are of the Spirit, sent down from the Saviour, who sits at the right-hand of God, as the scriptures declare, then every one that believes hath this witness in himself, the Holy Ghost, in the execution of his office, and by these efficacious. influences of his grace, must be an infallible

witness in the called, that Jesus who sends him is risen and exalted. This divine operation is truly mysterious, and what the world cannot receive, and it is no cause of wonder that natural men should contradict the things of the Spirit they are not able to discern. But admitting this work in the soul, which, would to God he that opposeth himself to the truth; might experience, the reason of this evidence to the happy subject, for this kind of proof is purely personal, is so obvious as scarce to be denied; the Christian indeed hath not always a practical sense of this joyful assurance of his Saviour's resurrection, the ground of his hope, which results from the quickening of the Spirit; this greatly depends on his frame; but he that is the subject of a divine change by the power of the Holy Ghost, whose mission is from the exalted Redeemer, must needs be possessed of a virtual proof in his own experience that Jesus is alive from the dead. How is it possible that a man begotten to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, which belongs to the character of every Christian, I say, how can it be that this man should be destitute of a witness in himself that Jesus is risen? It is therefore most rational, and consequently without any the least tincture of enthusiasm, that the apostle in the passage referred to, is understood of that inward testimony which results from the work of the Spirit in the faithful to the resurrection of him in whom they believe; but whether it is becoming in any one to wrest the scripture, in order to contradict an appeal of this nature, and to deride the witness of the Holy Ghost in his people, the Reader will judge.

BUT this testimony of the Spirit in the saints unto their Lord's resurrection is not confined to his general work on their hearts, whereby they are quickened and effectually called. It likewise appears in the same manner it does in respect of the divine authority of the scriptures, namely, by urging on their mind the witness of the apostles and other external evidences of the important event, whereby they are powerfully convinced and fully persuaded that he is risen indeed. Till the Spirit doth thus as it were joint witness with the conscience of a man, and thereby renders effectual the arguments or motives arising from the evidence given, he is not established in this foundation of God. Now as a judicious writer [*Dr. John Edwards, a man of singular piety and learning, whose works are too full of strong reasoning*

and solid arguments, on every point, to be charged with enthusiasm, without manifest prejudice; see him on the authority, style and perfection of scripture. Vol. 1. page 48. 1693.] observes, on the like illuminations or efficacious impressions of the Spirit, in confirmation of the scriptures, it may justly be noted, that the inward witness I assert, or rather which is asserted by the inspired apostle, is by no means enthusiasm; for it is a discovery or confirmation in the mind and conscience by means and instruments; whereas every one knows, that enthusiasm, in our common acceptation of the word, is mere imagination and conceit, without any reason or motive grounded in evidence, and that the deluded subject pours contempt on those, and indeed, for the most part on all other moral causes whatever. Thus, without rejecting external evidence as a reason or motive to believe any fact that concerns our salvation, we may boldly declare, that the divine faith, proper to a regenerate man, is super-natural and not mere moral suasion, but as the apostle expresses, it is in the demonstration of the Spirit and with power; or in other words, that the faith of the chosen doth not stand in the wisdom

WE live in a day of prevailing infidelity, wherein sceptics abound, and should be furnished with arguments to stop the mouth of a scornful unbeliever; nor was the church ever so amply provided with means for that purpose. The bold libels of deists have produced many learned and solid answers in defense of revelation; but Sir, I am sorry the caution is needful; when you read some of these ingenuous and able authors, who have well defended the external evidence of Christianity, with all due respect to their character, you must beware, lest you are stumbled in relation to points of Christian experience, for it is melancholy to observe, that a deist cannot more oppose the authenticity of scripture, than some men who plead for it seem averse to the notion of an efficacious work of the Spirit of God in them that are called. Those treatises on the veracity of the sacred writings, which occasionally strike at the operations and witness of the Holy Ghost in believers, appear to me the most dangerous means of flattering men who are destitute of the life and power of godliness to their ruin. But I hope the Reader is convinced, that there is no reason for rejecting the notion of an appeal to the inward testimony of the Spirit in the clause above mentioned; for if the primitive Christians, as

these writers urge, might be said each to have a witness in himself of the resurrection of Jesus, arising from his being conscious of extraordinary powers communicated to him, much more must the quickening and comforting influences of the Holy Ghost, which proceed on a conviction of the Redeemer's being raised from the dead, be a testimony of this glorious event in the subject of his grace. In one word, the apostle expressly declares, that "he that believeth hath the witness in himself." And is it not strange, that any who pretend to the faith of the gospel, should presume to assert, that he doth not appeal to an inward testimony of the Spirit, and to make way for the credit of this confident assertion, endeavour to fix an odium on the notion of such a testimony, by styling those who avow it 'modern enthusiasts!' But surely this can never be taken for reason or argument; it only shows that men of great ingenuity and learning in other respects, may be under strong prejudices against a supernatural work and witness of the Spirit in the hearts of God's people, however clearly revealed to be the experience, not only of modern, but also, of ancient believers, even of all the faithful from the beginning of Christianity. Reflect then, O Christian, on thine own experience, and be not ashamed to own, but gladly rejoice that thou hast from the Spirit that dwelleth in thee, a sure and standing testimony of thy Saviour's resurrection.

THUS, not only the apostles, but the Holy Ghost also witnessed the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He did so by the miraculous powers with which the apostles and others were endowed in the first ages of Christianity; and likewise, by the operation of his grace in them that believed. The visible effect of these extraordinary powers was a sign to the world for the conviction of many, while his work and testimony in the hearts of them that were called possessed each happy subject of his grace with a witness in himself, that God had indeed raised up Jesus who was crucified and slain! And truly, since this work in the hearts of the redeemed, proceeds on the certainty of Christ's resurrection, which lies at the bottom of their hope, it is so far from being enthusiasm, modern enthusiasm, as some modern advocates for revelation have been pleased

to call it, that nothing can be more rational, for on a supposition of such a work of the Spirit, it is impossible it should be otherwise.

HOW undeniable and satisfactory then is the evidence of Christ's resurrection! "If we receive the witness of men the witness of God is greater," **1Jo** 5:9. And especially as this witness of the Holy Ghost terminates in the heart of every Christian by the work of his grace. Then enquire, my Friend: Hath he quickened and begotten thee to a lively hope by the return of Jesus from the dead? Without this experience, a simple credit of the scriptures, and this wonderful fact they relate, will leave thee short of salvation: But with this divine hope be not afraid, thy redemption draweth nigh, only let thy conversation be in heaven, whence thy Saviour is coming; thou must shortly see death and corruption, but thy dead body like his shall arise, "according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself."

WHAT a fearful condition must unbelievers be in, when Jesus shall be revealed from heaven to take vengeance on them who deny his resurrection! At his tribunal seat, how will they stand it, when all these chosen witnesses shall rise up in judgment against them; and the Holy Ghost also, whose testimony they have rejected, and it may be blasphemed! O that those who scornfully set themselves against the truth and power of Christianity, were awakened to consider, that they would hearken to the voice of the Spirit they at present despise! "Today, saith the Holy Ghost, even while it is called today, harden not your hearts." And against the disobedient he himself will be a witness to their everlasting confusion! On the other hand, how desirable are the renewed testimonies of the Spirit in the heart. Every sensible operation of the Holy Ghost and sealing of that divine Comforter, is a fresh witness in and to the believer. O that under the powerful influences of his grace we might daily more and more, by our faith, love and fruit, hold forth a risen Saviour, and manifest to all, that indeed we are risen with him! In a word, let us earnestly plead for this Arm of the Lord with the preaching of the gospel, that many who are now dead in sin, being quickened, may believe on the Son of God, that being buried with Christ in baptism unto death,

like as he was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so they also may walk in newness of life, to the praise of his grace.

LECTURE VI.

The ascension of Jesus. His session at the right-hand of God.

HAVING considered the witness of the Spirit, with that of the apostles to our Lord's resurrection, we now return to the famous first sermon which Peter preached at Jerusalem. That interesting point being manifest, he proceeds to show how it came to pass that the disciples were endowed from on high in the wonderful manner his audience had seen. This glorious part of his discourse is recorded, **Ac 2:33-35** verses, in the following terms, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear: For David is not ascended into the heavens; but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right-hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool." Note here in general, that the apostle doth not barely assert, but makes it evident that Christ was to ascend to the throne in the heavens, in which he is an example to preachers in every age. His call and furniture as a minister were both extraordinary, yet he assumes no dominion over the faith of his hearers, but proves his doctrine from the oracles of God, and endeavours to persuade the Jews, by an appeal to the writings of David, whom they all owned a prophet: In like manner the ministers of Jesus are to convince gainsayers, and to seek their conversion, not by dogmatic assertions, but by reasoning out of the scriptures, there being no other method adapted to affect the consciences of men with the authority of God, without which they cannot be saved.

BUT to return. In this passage a door is opened in heaven; and O how illustrious and delightful the scene! Behold, Christian, thy Saviour sits there, crowned with glory and honour, to pour out blessings on his people, and reward them that hate him! The following particulars are to be noted in this divine prospect, namely, the ascension of Jesus, his session at the right-hand of God, the hand of the Father in placing him there, what

passed between them on his being exalted, and the period of his present situation; all which afford nourishment to the faith of God's people, and are a ground of their joy in the Lord: Let us then briefly attend to each in its order,

THAT Christ lives exalted in the heavens, is a truth of the utmost importance to the faithful, for we are saved by his life with the Father; but this is impossible if he ascended not to him; the apostle therefore argues the point and proves, that he whom God hath exalted, and consequently who is ascended, is not the Psalmist but Christ. His reasoning stands thus ver. 34. "For David is not ascended into the heavens;" for he had before observed, that his body remained in the state of the dead; but he, David, saith himself; "The Lord said unto my Lord, i.e. the Messiah, Sit thou on my right hand." Not David therefore, but Christ is ascended. Can any thing be more conclusive or just? The prophet lay buried in his sepulchre with the Jews, and therefore could not be ascended; but he spake of the Messiah, whom God would raise up to sit on his throne, even Jesus who is now alive from the dead, and sits at the right hand of God, which implies his ascension; and accordingly Jesus is gone into heaven.

FROM this reasoning of the apostle it appears, that the ascension of our Lord has respect to his human nature, and is no other than his going or being carried up in the body from earth into heaven; a local remove, by which a change of place is inferred: so that Jesus no longer corporally resides in this lower world, but is retained in the heavens, in which he is received. This is variously expressed: It is declared, he was parted or taken up from them: At other times he is said to go: And again, that he went up to heaven, for he was active in ascending by his own power and right; and at the same time in reality, as will hereafter be shown, the Father exalted him. Of this ascension of the Messiah the Old Testament saints were not unacquainted. It has been thought that the translation of Enoch, and the assumption of Elijah, were shadows of this great event; instances which at least show a credibility of a bodily entrance into the heavenly state. [*Note, Not that any natural or corruptible body can be supposed capable of the heavenly glory: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," 1Co 15:50.*]

Hence they who shall be found alive at the coming of Christ, and therefore sleep or die not, “shall be changed in a moment;” In like manner, no doubt, the bodies of these saints were instantaneously transformed into a spiritual incorruptible state: Nor is there any difficulty in conceiving this sudden and wonderful change by the Almighty, though in an atom, or the smallest article of time that can be imagined; which the apostle finely illustrates by the “twinkling of an eye.”] However, Noah’s ark will be admitted a figure of Christ, out of which the patriarch ascended, as Jesus from the grave, **1Pe 3:20**. And the returning of Moses’s ark to Mount-Sion, and placing it in the tabernacle, after many years dwelling in the house of Ahimelech, some consider in the same point of light, which seems favoured by the prophet, who referring to that joyful season, cries out, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of Hosts,” **Ps 24:10**. And further, it is manifest from **Heb 9:24** that the entrance of the Jewish high-priest within the veil, on the day of atonement, typified that of our forerunner Jesus into heaven, the true holy place. Thus, there have been several types or emblems of the ascension of our Saviour into the heavens.

THERE are likewise many scripture testimonies, besides the passage before us, which plainly refer to this grand and important article of faith. Daniel saw in a vision! “The Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion, glory, and a kingdom,” **Da 7:13-14** which cannot refer to his second appearance. Since then he will come, not to *receive*, but to *deliver* up a kingdom to the Father, **1Co 15:24**. Yea these ancient prophesies go farther than barely to point out that the Messiah should ascend; they likewise enter into the glorious circumstances in which he was to go up. The Saviour did not ascend alone, and in silence, as when he descended to his state of humiliation, but in a magnificent manner, with a shining retinue as became him, who having by the death of his cross, triumphed over principalities and powers, was entering into his glory, to fill all things [**Eph 4:10**. “To fill all things,” *i.e. all things needful to the perfecting his body the church; as appears from what follows; for in respect of the omnipresence essential to his divine nature, he filled all things before his ascension, and they who understand and consider the nature of corporal substance, which cannot *i.e.* infinitely extended, will reject the notion of the ubiquity of our Saviour’s natural body as entirely false and absurd.*] for the

completing of his mediatorial kingdom. It seems no vain conjecture that the saints who came out of their graves after our Lord's resurrection went with him to glory; for is it reasonable to suppose that they returned to the earth? If not, they are doubtless received into heaven, and why not with the Saviour? But of this we are certain, that Jesus ascended with a multitude of the heavenly host, **Ps 68:17**. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand; even thousands, or many thousands, of angels; The Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high." And again, **Ps 47:5**. "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." Thus, we are told, **1Th 4:16**. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God;" which agrees with the report to the disciples, **Ac 1:11**. From whence it appears, that the ascension of Jesus was in like manner as hereafter his coming from heaven shall be, namely, local, visible, and glorious.

To the witness of the prophets we have our Lord's own prediction that he should ascend; of which he is thought to give early intimation in his discourse with Nicodemus, **Joh 3:12**. but in that with his disciples on the night in which he was betrayed, he is plain and express, **Joh 16:2**. "I go to the Father." And again, **Joh 16:28**. "I came from the Father," and am come into the world: again, I leave the "world and go to the Father." This they well understood, as appears from the following verse, "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest, no proverb." And in **Joh 14:29**. after repeating the same thing, Jesus saith, "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe." And accordingly, on the morning he rose, he says to Mary Magdalene, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend, &c." Had the disciples never understood that the Lord was to ascend, this message had been strange and perplexing; but he reminds them of what he foretold, for this reason among others, lest they should flatter themselves that he would tarry with them henceforth, and set up a kingdom on earth, now he was risen from the dead, which they still fondly expected, and that at his departure they might

be fully persuaded that he was indeed gone to the Father, as he declared before his decease.

IT has been very properly noted, that there was no necessity for the disciples to see their Master rise out of his grave, since he was to abide many days, and to afford them repeated and undeniable proof of his being alive from the dead, but the article of his ascension is very differently circumstanced. After he was taken up into heaven, he was no more to be seen in this world, it was therefore requisite that they should behold him ascend to their full satisfaction, that they might testify on their own knowledge whither he was gone, and accordingly we find them eye-witnesses of the fact in the most perfect manner that can be conceived.

ON the credit of scripture nothing can be more certain or plain than that Jesus did truly and properly ascend, or go up into heaven bodily in the sight of his disciples: They afford a particular account of this important event, relating to the time, place, and manner of its accomplishment. It was forty days after his resurrection, on Mount-Olivet, in the confines of Bethany, near if not on the self-same spot, to which Christ often retired, and where once under dreadful apprehensions of wrath, being in an agony, he sweat drops as blood: So that from the very place in which he was heretofore seen in the utmost distress, descending into an hell of darkness and sufferings, we now behold the Redeemer alive from the dead, with gladness, ascending to heaven. How different the scene! —A dying Saviour filled with horror and anguish, and covered with shame? —A risen Jesus, with joy and triumph, advancing to his glory!

BUT the manner in which our Lord was removed is still more punctually recited. The evangelist Mark thus relates it, “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them he was received up into heaven!” **Mr** 16:19. And Luke in his gospel, **Lu** 24:50-51. declares, that “he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lift up his hands and blessed them; and it came to pass while he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up into heaven.” But in **Ac** 1:9-10 he is very particular and striking, “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a

cloud received him out of their sight, and while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, &c.” This was the manner in which Jesus was parted from his disciples; not by disappearing at once, or vanishing out of their sight, as on some other occasions; No, it was not a sudden or hasty transport, but he moved up before them while their eyes were fixed upon him; so that they saw him, and steadfastly looked as he advanced to the visible heaven, till at length they beheld the cloud receive him.

To understand this cloud metaphorically of angels, as some have suggested, seems rather to prejudice the account, and to weaken the apostle’s evidence: who need be told that it is not the part of an historian to deal in figures? And the evangelist expressly declares that a cloud received the Lord; the light of which was a natural and evident proof to them that beheld it, that he was taken up into heaven. Neither Luke himself, nor any other present on the occasion, appear to have the least apprehension of angels; and if their testimony is at all to be regarded, no doubt they were in the perfect exercise of their natural senses, and could not be deceived, but in reality saw what they relate: We may therefore conclude it was truly and properly a cloud distinguished in the visible heavens; a cloud prepared to enclose the body of Jesus, in which he was conveyed to the higher regions by myriads of angels, who, though unseen by the disciples, we know attended the victorious Redeemer to his palace in glory.

It is with reason supposed, that this cloud was at a considerable distance from the earth, and it is plain, that from the moment Christ began to be lifted up, his disciples had their eyes upon him; so that they beheld him gradually mount in the air, higher and higher, till he reached the bright cloud, into which, as sometimes the natural sun, they saw him enter, lost sight of his body, and saw him no more. And that they were not mistaken is clear from the testimony of the angels, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven,” ver. 11. Upon the whole it appears that the apostles were not under a deception, neither was it a vision but a real fact. Christ was indeed taken

up into heaven, and they saw him go up in the manner described; there is therefore no color of reason for any hesitation concerning the truth of this grand and important affair; and accordingly we find that the disciples so far from doubting, or even regretting their Lord's being parted from them, that fully persuaded he was gone to the Father, they worshipped him unseen, and exalted, "and returned to Jerusalem;" and how? with tears and lamentation? No, "but with great joy, praising and blessing God," till endowed from on high, and then proceeded to preach him every where, with boldness, and with amazing success. Now, who that considers this account, and especially in connexion with the effusion of the Spirit on the apostles, can a moment question whether that this same Jesus who descended is likewise ascended to the Father? O my soul, turn up thine eyes with gratitude and joy; let thy affections ascend like pillars of smoke to thy blessed Redeemer: Behold he is gone, he is gone up before thee to prepare a place for thee!

FROM the ascension of Christ, we proceed to his session at the right hand of God. This glorious subject hath been frequently handled; nor have I any thing new to offer upon it, but shall attempt only a brief explication of this joyful assurance the gospel affords. The design of Peter is not barely to show that Jesus is ascended, but also to represent his exalted state in the heavens; and this is contained in the quotation from David, verse 34. "Sit thou on my right hand." Of this exaltation our Lord bare witness before Pontius Pilate, **Lu** 22:69. "Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God." And accordingly, we are told, **Mr** 16:19. that when Jesus was received up into heaven, he sat on the right hand of God: And indeed the passages which testify the same, are more than can now be recited; I shall therefore only subjoin the remarkable witness of Stephen the martyr, "Behold, saith he, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God," **Ac** 7:56. It cannot with decency be supposed that this holy Man uttered a falsehood in the view of eternity, or would have presumed to have committed his soul into the hands of Jesus, as he instantly did, had he been doubtful of the truth of what he declared.

BUT how is Christ at the right hand of God? And what is implied in this situation? We are not, with some, to imagine that the Father has bodily parts: God is a spirit; and the Father never was clothed with flesh. Here is therefore no comparison between the right hand and the left, as when these expressions are used of corporal beings: [*From Stephen's declaration to the Sanhedrin, admitting that the heavens were properly opened, as at the baptism of our Lord, and that the martyr actually saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, it appears that there is a visible display of the glory of the Father in the heavenly temple, adapted to the corporal sight of those, who, like the Saviour, dwell there in a spiritual and glorified body as Enoch, Elijah, &c. Now in respect of this, Jesus may be truly declared, in a literal sense, at the right hand of God. The objection to the heavens being really divided, because then it would have been a miracle if all that was present had not seen it, with submission, seems of no force; for why should a miracle be thought strange in this age, and on so extraordinary an occasion? Besides, in the case of Saul, when approaching Damascus, there was indeed a bright shining light his companions beheld, but they heard not distinctly the voice, neither did they see him that spake, both which the persecutor did; And that his sight of the Saviour was bodily, which necessarily implies the opening of the heavens, is clear from 1Co 15:8. Ac 9:17. and chap. 17:14. The heavens therefore might actually be open to this holy man. notwithstanding it was seen by none but himself: Nevertheless, the phrase of Christ's being at the right hand of God, in the language of prophecy, is rather metaphorical than literal, as in the passage quoted by Peter from David.*] And that the phrase is in this place purely metaphorical, is evident in that the prophet, soon after the words quoted in our text, represents Jehovah the Father at the right hand of his Son whom he had exalted, **Ps 110:5**. "The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath." Now the Son's sitting at The right hand of the Father, consists not with the Father's sitting at the right hand of the Son, if the words are literally taken, but in a figurative sense they are easily reconciled. The allusion here is to the custom of princes, who, it is known, on certain occasions have distinguished their favorites by placing them at the right hand of their throne; which answers to the account we have of our Saviour's situation in heaven: He is said to be at the right hand of the throne of God and of the Majesty in the heavens, **Heb 8; 1.** compared with chap. xii. 2. This however, is far from implying, that the Man Christ Jesus is made equal, much less that he is superior to him by whom he is exalted. Among men this place is frequently given in token of their superior rank; but no such thought can be admitted, even of the Messiah himself, in comparison with the Father, whose servant he is: nor is this to be understood of a local limitation, which would reduce the words to a literal sense; the

impropriety of which has already been shown. It is true, that the ascension of Jesus in the body implies a change of place; in consequence of which, his corporal presence is locally confined in the heavens, and will continue so till the restitution of all things; but the phrase in the text hath no respect to place, but is purely expressive of his state in the heavenly world, denoting,

I. THE honor and dignity to which he is advanced. Some pretend, that in the Eastern countries the left hand is esteemed the most honorable: But will any imagine that Solomon placed his mother, the queen, on his right hand to disgrace her? **1Ki** 2:19. And certain it is, that we see Jesus, who despised the shame when suffering for sin, “crowned with honor and glory,” **Heb** 2:9. Into this he was to enter after his sufferings, as foretold by the prophets. Hence in his discourse with the disciples when risen from the dead, as they were walking to Emmaus, he saith, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” **Lu** 24:26. Thus, dignified he now sits at the right hand of the throne in the heavens, receiving the honor due to his Majesty and merit, in the high praises and adorations of the angels and saints, who stand before and round about the throne, crying, “Salvation to our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb,” **Re** 7:9-10. Again,

2. THE power with which our Saviour is invested, is another thing implied in this sentence. Thus, Jesus saith, “Ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power,” **Mr** 14:62. We have already seen, that Daniel beheld in a vision, dominion and a kingdom given him by the Ancient of days, **Da** 7:14. This power of the Redeemer is supreme, universal and unspeakably great, to the glory of his name, and the joy of his people, as may hereafter be seen. Before his ascension the Lord saith, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” **Mt** 28:18. And we are told, **Php** 2:9. that “God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.” “He is over all; yea, far above all heavens,” **Eph** 4:10. The Father of glory hath set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, “far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this

world, but also in that which is to come,” **Eph** 1:21. Thus, O Christian, thy Saviour is exalted, “King of kings and Lord of Lords”, and “made higher than the heavens,” **Heb** 7:26. This is the real state of the ascended Jesus, “who became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” And further,

3. HIS sitting at the right hand of God may denote the satisfaction, joy and pleasure which Jesus has in communion with the Father. This situation implies nearness, fellowship and rest. If the ransomed find satisfaction and joy in beholding their Father’s face in righteousness, and when they awake in his likeness, **Psa** 17:15. how much more must the Redeemer himself be rejoiced in the throne of his glory? This the prophet refers to, **Psa** 16:11. “Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are pleasures for ever more.”

FINALLY, The phrase still further implies his continuance in this glorified state. Sitting is a posture of rest; and Christ will remain on his throne till he rises up and comes forth unto judgment, as the scriptures abundantly show, and our text in particular. So then the session of Jesus at the right hand of God imports his illustrious state in the heavens, as crowned with glory, invested with power, and filled with satisfaction and joy in the fruition of his Father’s presence, and the honors that are paid him on the throne, in which he shall abide till his second appearance. Thus, exalted is the Man who died at Mount Calvary, and who, being raised from the dead, ascended from earth into heaven. Great is this mystery of godliness: Still God manifest in the flesh is the person of our adorable Mediator, in whom, at the right hand of the Father, we behold the human nature, indeed infinitely below the nature of Deity, and unspeakably inferior to that of the angels; yet wonderfully dignified in honor and power, even far above the heavens themselves! Glorious reward of the cruciating sorrows and shame endured on the cross, when he made his soul an offering for sin! And how full a vindication is this of the wisdom and office of God, in ordaining the flesh of his Son to those bitter sufferings, in answer to the cavil of unbelievers, who presume to

find fault with the sovereign good pleasure of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will, to the praise of his grace?

FROM this situation of our glorified Redeemer with the Father, every pretence of his bodily presence on earth is entirely excluded. The notion of a corporal presence in the sacrament, as the Catholics teach in their doctrine of transubstantiation, is not only absurd and shocking, but it is in every sense and view absolutely inconsistent with the person of Christ, in and by the human nature, being seated at the right hand of God, in the heavenly world, as the scripture asserts, for “the heavens must receive, i.e. retain him until the times of the restitution of all things,” **Ac** 3:21. From whence he is ready to be revealed; till then, a conceit of his bodily presence on earth in any season, or under any circumstances whatever, is plainly a groundless and vain imagination. Nevertheless, Believer, his promise is sure: This local circumscription of our Saviour’s body, interferes not with that spiritual presence he hath encouraged his people to expect in his church, and with his ministers to the end of the world. He is God and man; and as, while on earth, he was in heaven, in respect of his deity, **Joh** 3:13. in like manner he is now, in virtue of the same divine nature, able to be, notwithstanding the present detention of his human nature in the world of glory, with his saints below according to his word. Wherefore, O Christian, whilst thou art looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of thy faith, now on the throne in the heavens, expect the visits of his love. “He is faithful that hath promised;” and blessed are they who wait for him.

LECTURE VII.

The Father's concern in exalting his Son, who immediately receives the Spirit at his hands; with the noble end of his continuance on the throne. Reflections.

NOTHING yields the believer more satisfaction than the glorious state of his Redeemer in the heavens; and his joy is enhanced when he considers by whom he is placed on the throne. Now it is with this the apostle begins his account: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted," **Ac** 2:33. This he likewise asserts in another discourse: "Him hath God exalted with his right hand," chap. v. 31. So then Jesus is crowned by the Father himself: He is not only at the right hand of God, but advanced to this dignity and power with or by the right hand of the Father; a mystery that demands our peculiar attention. We have seen in the preceding lecture, that the right hand of God is a phrase metaphorically used by the prophet; and this further appears by the various applications of it in the subject before us. And here I apprehend it denotes the exertion of his power according to his oath. The right hand of the Lord is his glorious power: "Thou hast a mighty arm, strong is thy hand and high is thy right hand," **Ps** 89:13. And from **Eph** 1:19-20, it appears that Jehovah the Father exerted the might, of his power in Christ when he raised him up to his throne, as he swore with an oath to David his servant, ver. 30. And this figurative sentence may also allude to the well-known ancient form in swearing, by a solemn elevation of the right hand to heaven. Thus, John saw the angel in a vision "stand upon the sea and upon the earth, lifting up his hand to heaven, and swearing by him that liveth for ever and ever," **Re** 10:5-6. In like manner it is declared, "The Lord hath sworn by his right hand and by the arm of his strength," **Isa** 62:8. Thus, Jesus was raised and placed at the right hand of God far above every name that is named. It was the Father's own act, in the character of judge, by which the triumphant

Redeemer, having made reconciliation for iniquity, was exalted, as agreed on in the covenant of peace: An article of no small importance with them who believe. This, allow the expression, is the glory of the glorified Saviour. He assumed not the throne in the heavens, which he fills, but ascended and sat down at the call, and by the power of the most High. It is true, Christ is thus well exalted as the reward of his obedience to death, **Php 2:9**. His dignified state hath a meritorious cause in himself, and is no more than the stipulated and just return for the labour and victory of his cross, by which he finished the work of redemption: Herein our glorious King far exceeds all principalities and powers in heaven or on earth: Who, O thou Prince of life and Lord of glory, is like unto thee! Who among the sons of the mighty to be compared with thee! Nor gods on high, nor gods below, whether angels or men, have any pretence to this claim; not the most illustrious seraphim, whose exalted dominion in the celestial world is nearest to the Deity, can boast his desert of the crown that he wears; but Jesus hath an equitable right in the dignity and power he holds; and the honors of his throne proclaim the merit of his blood! Nevertheless, we see he exalted not himself, but is clothed with majesty by Jehovah the Father; whose servant he was, and in whom according to the settlements of infinite wisdom, in the economy of man's salvation, the divine right of investiture remained. Hail, O Christian, thy King and Saviour is not an usurper; he is crowned by authority; his throne is established in righteousness, and it cannot be moved! This spreads a joy among his subjects, under which they are ready to triumph, in the language of the prophet, and say, "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our King, he will save us!" **Isa 33:22**.

FROM the authority by which our Saviour is exalted we are led to another instance of grace. On his appearance in the heavens, a most grand and interesting transaction immediately takes place between him and the Father. This deserves our particular notice. When we consider the mutual complacency of these divine persons each in the other, the infinite delight of the Father in his Son as his elect servant, with the satisfaction he had in his finished work on the cross, and especially if we add, how greatly the Redeemer longed after his glory which he had with his Father, as

Mediator, before the foundation of the world, we shall have reason to apprehend, that the honor and joy of their meeting in the throne, is not to be fully conceived. No doubt, as hinted before, when the King of glory entered, and was saluted by the Father, the heavens resounded with the acclamations of their blest inhabitants, shouting the honors of God and of the Lamb. But we are here called to observe a fresh occasion of triumph and praise. No sooner is the great Intercessor and Head of the church placed at the right hand of God, but behold the Father delivers the Spirit into his hands, by whom he is poured forth on the disciples, according to the promise of the covenant, long since revealed, and engaged for by Jesus himself before he ascended. "Having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." Adorable scene! See how the sacred Three are united in fulfilling their covenant-engagements for the salvation of the church! Here, in a measure, is unfolded the methods of infinite wisdom: the Father is first in order and operation in this mystery of grace; from hence, as from the fountain and head, the Son is supplied with the Holy Ghost for the propagation of the gospel and the gathering in his elect. Pause, my dear Reader, and admire. O this wonderful condescension and love! How unsearchable are the judgments of God and his ways of mercy with sinners! "Lord, what is man that thou shouldst be mindful of him, or any of the sons of men that thou shouldst thus visit them!" This is no other than the good pleasure of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. Adore then his sovereign grace! One branch of Christ's glory is his mediatorial fulness; this includes a dispensation of the Spirit, as a Spirit of grace, for the quickening those who are redeemed with his blood. Hence the chosen have been called and sanctified since the world began, yea, and the Holy Ghost, who moved and inspired the prophets of old, was the Spirit of Christ, **1Pe** 1:11. But that which is exhibited in the passage before us is, the sending forth the Spirit from on high, by whose operations and miraculous gifts, the last seal was set to the authority of Jesus, for the conviction of the world and the spread of his kingdom. Glorious sight! Lo the captain of salvation, of whom it was written in the volume of the book, "I delight to do thy will, O God," being made perfect through sufferings, appears in heaven the advocate of his people! See him advance in robes

of righteousness, to the Father, as it were with the roll of the covenant in his hand, ratified in his blood! Behold how he pleads at the throne, and with authority demands the promise of the Holy Ghost, who immediately proceeds from the hands of the Father into those of the Son, and from him to the waiting disciples at Jerusalem! The effusion of the Spirit was the wonder of those who beheld it on earth: But with what astonishment and joy must the heavenly host view the ground and amazing procession! On this blessed occasion we may reasonably suppose, that the innumerable company of angels, who pry into the mystery of redemption, and rejoice in the conversion of a sinner, with the thousands of saints who compassed the throne, were filled with admiration, and ready to unite in that new song, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!”

THUS, Jesus sits enthroned in the heavens, having sent forth the holy Spirit of promise. But, how long shall he continue in this glorious situation? Now this is declared in ver. 35. “Until I make thy foes thy footstool:” which opens to our view the design and period of that dignity and power with which the Father hath invested his Son, our blessed Redeemer. It may be proper here to remark that the glory of Christ, as head and Lord of the elect is eternal; nor will the Man Christ Jesus ever again be humbled or degraded; the Mediator shall reign on his throne in the ultimate state of happiness: And indeed whatever difficulties may attend a passage or two, relating to this divine mystery, for instance his “delivering up the kingdom to the Father,” **1Co** 15. as one justly observes, it is strange to think that Christ should lay aside his rule as soon as he has subdued all his foes; besides his people are assured of reigning with him for ever in glory, **Ro** 5:17. compared with **Re** 22:5. Agreeable to this is his prayer to his Father, **Joh** 17:24. “I will also that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.” Nevertheless the present form of his government and kingdom will be altered; the manner of which is not particularly revealed; but from this and other scriptures, it appears that he will not ever continue in the same circumstances in which he now sits at the right hand of God; but that when

the end specified in the text is answered, he will rise from his throne and come forth to judgment; with unspeakable power and glory. The exaltation of Jesus is not alone for himself, or merely as the reward of his sufferings, but also to apply the victory of his cross, to accomplish the number of his elect, and to bring down his enemies under his feet, that he may finish the mystery of God in the salvation and happiness of them that obey him in the phrase, "Until I make thy foes thy footstool," there is a manifest reference to a well-known custom of conquerors; an example of which we have in the captains of Israel, who, at the direction of Joshua their commander, put their feet on the necks of the five kings they had subdued at Gibeon. Thus, shall the Captain of salvation tread down all his enemies, and trample them under his feet, as the mire of the street, into shame and everlasting contempt.

BUT it may be useful to enquire, who are the foes of our blessed Redeemer? Can any one be so stupid and base as to oppose his glorious person, the grace of whose office, and whose condescension and love in undertaking for sinners, with the triumphs of his Cross, challenge our highest regard? Sure it must argue a vile disposition, to hate and oppose the Son of God, "who is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person;" or to reject that Almighty Saviour, who is possessed of every perfection as God and Mediator, and whose nature and power demand the obedience and love of every creature in heaven or in earth? An opposition to one so divinely great, and so immensely good, is the height of folly and madness, and must proceed from a mind most wretchedly depraved; yet, alas, the enemies of Jesus abound both on earth and in hell. The spiritual enemies of Christ, as the substitute of his people, were sin, the curse of the law, the malice and power of satan, this evil world, and death and the grave; these arrayed themselves against him, when, through death, he destroyed the devil that had the power of death, having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; he overcame them all in the blood of his cross, and virtually put them under his feet; and accordingly the prophet Isaiah, chap. xiii. represents the Messiah coming from Edom, in dyed garments from Bozrah in apparel, splendid and red, as a mighty conqueror from the field of battle after a glorious victory,

stained with the blood of his enemies. Thus, a sure foundation is laid for what follows; when the day of his redeemed is come, then will he tread down the people in his anger, and make them drunk in his fury, and bring down their strength to the earth; then the last enemy shall be utterly destroyed, never to wound or hurt any more, but death and hell shall be cast into the lake of fire.

BUT the foes more immediately intended, seem the wicked, who finally oppose the authority and grace of the Redeemer, whether men or devils. It is a humbling truth, but all mankind are enemies to Christ, the elect not excepted, though they are chosen by the Father, and the ransomed of his Son, yet while in an unregenerate state, they are enemies in their minds to the way of God's grace in Christ Jesus to sinners; of which Saul is a remarkable instance, who, though a chosen vessel of mercy, was before his conversion a destroyer of the faith he afterwards preached. And truly the opposition of a vain world to the pure gospel, is more owing to the natural aversion of the carnal mind than seems generally apprehended; and some who are called, bewail the pride and obstinacy with which in the time of their ignorance, they opposed it; but, being enlightened, and made willing by the power of God, they freely submitted themselves to Jesus as their Lord, and obtained mercy and life at his hands. In like manner all real penitents, even though they have formerly blasphemed the Son of man, shall be spared and received, when they who persist in opposing him shall not escape his just indignation, but be miserably abased under his feet; but the righteous shall be exalted in his favor.

AND if on earth, much more in hell, are to be found inveterate, though impotent foes of the glorious and omnipotent Saviour. It has been suggested, that the fall of angels was owing to the envy of satan against the throne of God's Son, to which he impiously aspired. Hence that apostate fiend, with all the principalities who joined under him in the fatal rebellion, were hurled down to hell by that divine Prince, at whose glory they presumed to strike. This may be thought a bold conjecture, beyond the line of revelation, and not to be indulged: But we may soberly

conclude, that nothing short of an insolent transgression against the Majesty of heaven could be an occasion of so fearful a doom: And we are certain that pride was the condemnation of the devil and his angels; but how this cursed root of moral evil took place in the celestial angels, so highly exalted in the creation, is a mystery; we know they were originally glorious and blessed, but that now these once illustrious and happy spirits are most vile and miserable, insomuch that they are held under chains of darkness unto a future judgment, by which they shall be consigned to the torments of everlasting fire. But it is vain to imagine the way in which these apostate angels were defected; be that as it may, we learn from the tremendous fact, that no creature is or can be impeccable, and also that sin shall not go unpunished. But what is intimated is, an opposition to the Son of God, in the character and work of Mediator: Under which consideration hell is full of his foes. The malice and opposition of satan, and the infernal host that are with him, are obvious; nor is it strange, since the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, and the whole business of Christ is to overthrow his kingdom of darkness; this seed of the woman is to break the serpent's head, in bringing many sons to glory, whose destruction he had conceived. Thus, saith the scriptures, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel," **Ge** 3:15. There is therefore an eternal enmity between Christ and the devil, an irreconcilable hatred; and whence ariseth perpetual unwearied and violent attempts, against the authority and kingdom of Jesus; and no doubt these are Christ's foes, whom the Father will subdue and bring under him; but the prophet seems to have more immediately in view, those his enemies, the children of men, whether of high or low degree, who obstinately persist unto a final rejection of his authority and grace. However, all the powers in earth or hell, that set themselves against the Redeemer, shall be brought down under his feet. This indeed is gradually performed, for judgment will not be finished till his people are gathered: **2Pe** 3:7. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to usward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But no sooner are the purposes of grace answered by this divine patience, but all things shall be put under Jesus; including

the most haughty and powerful who now exalt themselves against him; then shall come to pass that saying, “Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Not to save by the efficacy of his gospel, to which the passage is often applied, but to destroy, by the arm of his vengeance, all the disobedient who oppose him; as appears from the terms of the prophecy itself, **Ps 2:9**. “Thou shalt break them with a rod of, iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel!” See also **Re 2:27**.

REVIEW the prospect, dear Reader; lo, an ascended Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and power by Jehovah the Father himself, from whom we behold him receive the Holy Ghost, and pour him forth upon his disciples, whose miraculous gifts were seen at Jerusalem, in testimony of his exalted state, in which he will abide until all who oppose him are under his feet; then shall the Son deliver up the kingdom to the Father, having put down all rule and authority, and present his church faultless before the presence of his glory with joy. Thus, shall issue the present administration of his mediatorial work on earth, and he shall commence the visible head of the glorified creation in the heavenly world, and continue the medium of communication between God and his people, who will be happy in their union and fellowship with him for ever!

AND is Christ thus exalted? What then will become of those who reject him! It is impossible to conceive the distress and confusion that must attend them who are made his footstool, when he takes vengeance. O the contempt and anguish of infidels, who finally reject or obstinately refuse the Redeemer and his gospel. Their shame and misery will certainly be in proportion to his glory and power as a Saviour and judge. It is the wrath of the Lamb; wrath infinite as his love, his sufferings and his merit! strange and intolerable! who can describe or endure it; when the Lord shall descend from heaven, and the trumpet shall sound, “Our God shall come, saith the prophet, a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him; he shall call to the heaven above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people; and the heavens shall declare his

righteousness, for God is judge himself.” Hear then, O unbeliever, canst thou stand before his indignation? canst thou abide the fierceness of his anger; when his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him? art thou trampling under foot the blood of the Son of God, or afraid or ashamed to trust and confess him now before men? How wilt thou endure to be dragged forth in the presence of God and his angels, and trodden down among the wicked in the day of his wrath? No rocks or mountains shall be able to cover thee. O it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God for despite of his grace!

BUT I speak to him that believes, and unto whom Jesus is precious. And is it not matter of unspeakable joy, as an excellent writer remarks, to one that loves Christ, that he is now exalted, glorified, and enthroned in an everlasting and immoveable kingdom? View, O Christian, thy ascended and glorified Saviour! The scene is opened in scripture for thine eyes to behold. Contemplate the dignity and power of him that endured the cross and despised the shame for thy sins. In vain the disciples continued on Mount Olivet, gazing with their natural eyes up to the visible heavens, through which their Lord was taken out of their sight, and placed on the right hand of God; and for this they were justly reprov'd: But it is the wisdom, duty and privilege of the Christian to use the eyes of his spiritual understanding, and through faith behold him that is invisible, crowned with glory and honor, the Forerunner, Advocate, Priest and King of his people.

THE advantages that arise from a becoming attention to these things are many and great. The exaltation of Christ is the glory of the Father. If we are duly affected with this divine prospect, it will excite our praises to him, whose infinite power, faithfulness and love, are illustriously displayed in raising up his Son Jesus Christ. It will likewise possess us with reverence and esteem for the Saviour himself, and make us bow with adoration, as in heaven they cast down their crowns, before his presence. This also reflects a glory on the Christian profession. What an honor to be a disciple of Jesus! Shall any refuse to own Him before men, who is thus highly exalted with God? Must not the man who claims a relation to so

dignified a head, have reason to glory in his cross, and with Moses esteem even the reproaches of Christ, yea and rejoice if he is counted worthy to suffer for his sake? Blush then, O Reader, if conscious that through fear of the scornful, or of any other trial, thou art neglecting his orders, and avoiding the open confession to his name required in the gospel! See Jesus crowned on the throne in his heavenly kingdom! Behold the thousands of thousands that minister unto him, and the ten thousand thousands that stand before him. And canst thou be ashamed of him and his words in the face of his enemies, who are soon to be trodden under his feet?

AGAIN, should not this confirm and enliven our hope in a dark and threatening season? God raised up and glorified his Son, that our faith and hope might be in himself, **1Pe** 1:21. Since Jesus, sits at the right hand of the Father, until his foes are his footstool, fear not, O Believer, he is able to save thee! And however the enemies of Christ and his gospel may seem to prevail, and be ready to insult, their triumph is short, thy exalted Redeemer is daily advancing against them. It is indeed a cloudy day when the delusions of Mahomet, or heathen idolatry, and gross superstition, spread over so considerable a part of the earth; and especially if we add the abominations of Popery, the insolence of Deists, and the abounding disorder, and many unhappy divisions where the name of Christianity is known: but in these sad circumstances we have this to comfort us, that the adversaries of Zion are doomed to destruction. The Lord reigns, and they who oppose him must repent or be ruined. These vessels of wrath are permitted a while, but the day of vengeance is at hand, when all the enemies of Jesus shall be covered with shame and perish for ever.

FINALLY, Beloved, is the Saviour raised to this dignity in the heavens? With what freedom should his people come to the throne of grace for every blessing, and particularly for the Holy Spirit of promise he hath received of the Father? Remember that he is thus exalted in public character, and in the name of his saints and that his blessed state, is the earnest and example of thine, who art virtually raised and set together with thy glorified Head: Therefore, be of good courage in pursuing the victory given thee. "He is faithful that has promised," saying, "To him that

overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne,” **Re** 3:21.

The end of the first book.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

BOOK II.

BEING

Some thoughts on the apostle's improvement and application of his discourse to the Jews on the day of Pentecost.

LECTURE VIII.

Containing the apostle's address to his audience in general. His punctual description of the Saviour. The charge of his murder on the Jews repeated. An earnest exhortation to consider him as the Lord's Christ; and the convictions which naturally result from such a persuasion.

PETER having largely proved, by undeniable testimony and reasoning out of the scriptures, the ascension and glory of Jesus, closes his excellent sermon with a lively application which stands on record, and runs in these terms, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ," Acts ii. 36.

THE words are plainly an inference by way of reflection, in which this great preacher manifestly calls upon his audience, without exception, to consider what he had been saying, and to apply the same for their conviction, that they might no longer reject the counsel of God against themselves, but believe and be saved. Thus, the apostle winds up his discourse. And this is the end and method of preaching, owned of God, for the conversion of sinners. A glorious instance of which is before us. It appears from ver. 14, that the apostle stood up and delivered himself in an

earnest and audible manner becoming the occasion; and there is reason to suppose that his fervency rather increased than declined. No doubt, in proclaiming these words, he lift up his voice like a trumpet, and with great boldness and zeal stretched forth his hands and pressed home the consideration of the things he had spoken, on the hearts and consciences of his hearers. The particulars to be noted in this sacred paragraph are, the objects addressed, the truth which the apostle advances, and his earnest exhortation to lay it to heart. I shall consider each in its order; point out the convictions that must arise from a cordial persuasion of what is asserted, and then close with a word or two by way of improvement. And,

First, THE proclamation is to the house of Israel, i. e. the people of the Jews, so denominated from their ancestor Jacob, surnamed Israel; the Lord's people, whom he brought out of Egypt, a chosen seed from the loins of Abraham, by Isaac and Jacob, with whom God established his covenant. This people, whose number was great, are styled the house of Israel, Jacob or Israel being the immediate parent of the twelve patriarchs from whom the multitude sprang; who at length prospered into a kingdom, a peculiar treasure unto the Lord. Many and great were their privileges; and for a season their renown went forth among the heathen for beauty. Unto them belonged the oracles of God; and with them were the ordinances of the sanctuary, in the midst of whom Jehovah dwelt, while they obeyed his voice and kept his covenant. But, alas, being a stiff-necked and perverse generation, they soon and frequently corrupted themselves to their ruin. And at this time, they were in a most deplorable condition; for being left of God, whose wrath was impending, they became vain in their imagination, and were in a manner universally blinded; but still there was among them a remnant, according to the election of grace, Rom. xi. 5. And God had not cast away his people whom he foreknew: Nevertheless, we find that Peter's address is to all this house of Israel. This affords an example of preaching to the end of the world. If a minister's idea of the Father's election straitens him in his report of the gospel, so that he cannot most earnestly beseech every hearer of the word, with an ardent desire after his saving acquaintance with Christ, he seems under some unhappy mistake about this glorious doctrine of grace. Secret

things belong unto God; and there is nothing revealed concerning his counsel, which is a just exception to our addresses and prayers, yea and our warmest pleadings with each individual, that he receive not the grace of God in vain. Not the *unknown elect*, but *known sinners*, are the immediate objects of a gospel-ministry, in respect of its general report. It is true, the great end of this commission from heaven is the gathering the chosen and redeemed of the Lord: And this will be the view of him that is employed. Constrained by the love of Christ, his ministers are animated to patience and diligence, and, with the apostle, “can endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in him, with eternal glory,” 2 Tim. ii. 10. Nevertheless, the Lord knoweth them that are his. And a servant of Jesus hath not, nor can he have any rational or warrantable ground for respect of persons in his ministry, but is to preach the word indefinitely; and labour, if by any means, every one may repent and receive remission of sins, and by submitting himself to the Lord, obtain life eternal. This is the example of Peter. Indeed he was the apostle of the circumcision, and sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and therefore applies himself directly to the Jews, among whom he knew there was a chosen seed; yet his exhortation is universally extended: “Let all the house of Israel know.” Nor have we any reason to doubt but that his heart’s desire, like that of Paul for Israel was, (without exception) that they might be saved. That man who doth not sincerely desire, and earnestly endeavour after the final happiness of all who attend him, and accordingly direct his discourse to the heart and conscience of every hearer, seems under a prejudice, and comes short of the sample given of those who preached the word from the beginning.

SECONDLY, The truth the apostle remonstrates to these unbelievers for substance is this, namely, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and the King of Israel; or, as he himself on a certain occasion confessed, saying, “Thou art Christ the Son of the living God,” John vi. 69. He declares and urgeth it upon them, that “God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Note,

I. HIS punctual description of the Messiah, “That same Jesus.” It is of great importance to know the person of the Saviour, not indeed in a natural way or after the flesh, as the Jews knew him when they crucified and slew him, or as the apostles discerned him alive from the dead, and thereby became qualified, as we have seen, to witness his resurrection: Henceforth Christ is no more known after this manner; but a spiritual knowledge of his person is needful to a cordial dependence upon him. A man may trust him that is unseen, but no man can depend on an object unknown: And accordingly, we find that an understanding in the person of Christ is given to them that believe: “He hath given us an understanding in him that is true,” John v. 20. The apostle’s design is not only to convince the Jews of their guilt, but likewise to show them, that in this same Jesus, and in no other, salvation is found, and this with a view to their conversion. In like manner every true believer knows who the Lord’s Christ is; he hath a true understanding in the person of his Redeemer; nor will any faith support its subject in an hour of temptation, and especially in the views of eternity, but that which is accompanied with a certain knowledge of him in whom his confidence is placed: But the Christian is abundantly satisfied in this, and therefore can rejoice, as the apostle, when his departure is at hand, and say, “ I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day,” 2 Tim. 1. 12. The faithful are not alike in the degrees of their knowledge, but each believer hath a true acquaintance with him whom he trusts; he is so far enlightened as to know and be persuaded that his Saviour is the Son of the living God. If the experience of the saints in this point of knowledge is substantially the same, which cannot with reason be doubted, then according to the passage in John before mentioned, they all know that the Son of God is come, i. e. was manifested in the flesh, and that this his Son Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life. This knowledge includes a true idea of the constitution of his wonderful person, as God-man; for though an ordinary Christian, at least some such, may not be clearly led into every circumstance relating to the ineffable union of these infinitely distant natures in the person of the Messiah, or be capable of discoursing with judgment on this sublime subject, yet the faith of God’s people is so grounded in the person of their Redeemer, that it cannot exist without a

true acquaintance therewith. His deity and humanity are therefore known to believers, the least of whom is persuaded that Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us;” and he is likewise confident of this, that his Saviour is that same Jesus who suffered without the gates of Jerusalem, even the self-same person who was crucified at Mount Calvary. This is what Peter points out in the strongest manner to his hearers, that he, whom God hath made both Lord and Christ, is that same Jesus, even that self-same individual person whom they had slain on the cross, and no other. And this knowledge is contained in the faith of the chosen. But,

2. OBSERVE with what freedom he repeats his charge on these Jerusalem sinners: “Whom ye have crucified.” This indeed may be considered as a part of the description given of the Lord’s Christ; but I apprehend that the apostle had a further view. He seems to be exceedingly earnest after their repentance; and therefore to awaken them, takes the opportunity of rehearsing their crime, that being deeply convinced of their horrid and inexpressible guilt, they might on due encouragement be prepared to look on him whom they had pierced, and mourn. This gospel minister longed after the conversion of his hearers, and would fain have them see their wretched condition, and the eternal misery before them, that they might flee to Jesus, and escape wrath to come. And in this he pursued the counsel of God with respect to many that heard him, as appears by the sequel, to the joy and surprise of this faithful servant of the Lord, who, it is highly probable, little expected the glorious harvest he reaped in the end; but of that in its place. Sinners are for the most part hardened in unbelief, and have need to be told again and again of their evil; and affectionate ministers, who watch for their souls, will repeat their remonstrances with a view to convince them ; they will cry aloud, and spare not to show unto them their transgressions and their sins, that if God peradventure should awaken them to a sense of their folly and danger, and give them repentance unto the acknowledgement of the truth, they may recover themselves and be plucked as brands from the fire. Thus, Peter having set forth the glory and power of the exalted Saviour, fixes the attention of the Jews on him, whom they had crucified, as the Lord’s Christ, showing that he was no other than that self-same person whom

they had despised and wickedly murdered. This their blood-guiltiness he repeats, and as it were rings in their ears, that, being duly and deeply affected with their ruined state, they might repent and be saved. We may justly admire the wisdom, faithfulness and compassion of this great man of God. How worthy the imitation of all unto whom is committed the gospel of peace, and the care of immortal souls! O that such preachers abounded! Once more,

3. WE are to note the positive manner in which the apostle declares the authority of Jesus. He asserts it with the utmost boldness and confidence. This is no conjecture, however probable, but a certain undeniable fact. He, that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, is made, and made by God, both Lord and Christ. To be made is to be created or constituted by authority. So was Jesus to the office of Mediator, unto which these characters belong. He was made by the Father from whom he received his authority; it was he who called and created him in the eternal counsel of peace. Hence Isa. xlii. i. "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth." And again, "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." Prov. viii. 23. And accordingly our Lord, John xvii. 5, speaks of a glory which he had with the Father before the world was. So then Jesus was ordained and set up in the high office of Mediator, not upon his incarnation, but from the beginning, even from everlasting was he made, by a special constitution according to the infinite wisdom of God, that he might accomplish the purpose of his grace in bringing many sons to glory; and with this stands connected his appointment to a kingdom, unto which the Father stood engaged to exalt him when he had finished his work upon earth. Thus, was he created to this dignity and power in the covenant of redemption before the foundation of the world. But to be made signifieth more than to be appointed, ordained or constituted; it may intend also his being manifest or openly invested with authority; and from the scope of the place, we are led to consider it here in this sense. The apostle plainly designs that God had actually and evidently invested Jesus with the majesty and power which belonged to the Messiah, as prophesied of old, and that now he was undoubtedly and visibly both Lord and Christ. It remains to consider,

Thirdly, THE apostle's solemn and earnest exhortation to receive the truth in their heart. "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly." To know assuredly is to be persuaded without hesitation; And by this phrase, Peter doth not so much report the truth as stir up the Jews to embrace it. When the princes of the earth send forth their heralds with a 'be it known unto all men,' every man is called upon, not barely to hear or credit the report, but also and chiefly to consider and obey it; it is an authoritative sentence demanding the assent, persuasion and conformity of their subjects: In like manner, this gospel-minister, having proved that Jesus was the Christ and Lord of all, in his name calls with authority on these men of Israel to a sure belief and full persuasion of what he had declared him to be, and a submission to him as such. q. d. 'O ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, harden not your hearts, do not perversely reject this word of salvation. Lo, that same Jesus whom ye crucified, God hath raised up, whereof we are all witnesses, and so is the Holy Ghost, in this which ye now see and hear. He is therefore doubtless exalted. No longer question his power in heaven and earth, but assure yourselves that this same Jesus is indeed both Lord and Christ.'

This practical knowledge and credit, demanded by the apostle on the evidence given, is of the operation of God. It is not indeed truly and properly or at least not the whole of saving faith, by which the subject as a loft firmer, encouraged by the promise of free and rich grace, being assisted by the Spirit, trusts his soul in the hands of the almighty Redeemer, and relieth upon him for life; yet surely this persuasion cometh of him that calleth the saints, and is owing to a divine agency. When the gospel comes not in word only but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, then it comes, saith the apostle, in much assurance, and issues in conversion, 1 Thess. i. 5. The native blindness and perverse unbelief, under which the natural man is held, will not permit him to entertain this full persuasion of the authority of the glorified Jesus: and with respect to the Jews, who had been guilty of his blood, they were highly prejudiced, and under the strongest temptations, to disown him whose vengeance they had reason to dread, if invested with power; so that all the force of the apostle's reasoning must have been insufficient without the intervention of his

divine arm, who can open the heart at his pleasure; and accordingly we find that, though many believed through grace, yet it seems the far greater part of his numerous audience remained unpersuadable and obeyed not the truth. Many are convinced from external evidence, that the scriptures are true; they are morally persuaded of their veracity, and credit what they relate, and consequently believe in this sense, that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, revived, ascended to glory, and sits at the right hand of God; but, alas, what is their knowledge! It is all superficial and heartless; they dread not his wrath, nor desire his salvation; they are not affected with the gospel-report, “He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.” A general notion of being saved by Christ, without any regard to an experience of sincere repentance and faith, tends only to prove the subject under a singular and dangerous hardness; but where a full and cordial persuasion of the power of Jesus, as the Lord’s Christ, to save his people and to destroy his enemies takes place, the subject will feel a painful concern about his own eternal welfare, and be ready to cry out, as in the instance before us, What must I do? or “What shall I do to be saved?” And this will appear when we consider, as proposed, the convictions that must arise from such a persuasion. And,

1. A persuasion of this will convince the subject that Christ is a Saviour indeed. On the birth of Jesus, you know, the angel declared to the shepherds, saying, “Unto you is born in the city of David, this day, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” Luke ii. 11. To the same purpose saith Paul, “Of this man’s, i. e. David’s seed, hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus,” Acts xiii. 23. Thus, if God hath truly made this same Jesus both Lord and Christ, he is surely a Saviour mighty and great: His power, dignity, and all-sufficiency are not to be questioned. It is for want of believing from the heart this divine authority of Jesus, that any distrust or despise him. If a man is possessed of this knowledge of faith, that God hath indeed invested Jesus Christ with all power in heaven and earth, he must be convinced that he is able to answer his character. And under this conviction, he would certainly either fear his indignation or trust in his name. Where this conviction takes place, there can be no dispute, no, not a moment’s hesitation, but that Jesus is

able to save them that come to God by him, and that all others, who obey not the gospel, shall be accounted his enemies and made his footstool. Again,

2. THIS persuasion will also convince a man that Jesus is the only Saviour. There cannot be two of this supreme dignity. If this same Jesus is Lord and Christ, there can be no other. Some modern Jews, being pressed with the evidence of the sufferings and death of Jesus of Nazareth, as exactly and fully answering the prophecies concerning the Messiah, in order to uphold their vain expectation of one yet to come, have invented to themselves a notion of their being two of that character, one to suffer, another to reign, or to save and deliver them. This vain conceit, as one justly styles it, shows their perverse unbelief, and how miserably blinded and hardened they are! O When shall the veil be taken away! but nothing can be more false and absurd, being destitute of reason and contrary to scripture: "There is but one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," 1 Tim. ii. 5. And whoever considers that office, and the manner in which it is executed, will find that there can be only one of this distinguishing character. He only who being made perfect through sufferings, became the author of eternal salvation, lives at the right hand of God, to deliver his people and bring them to glory. In the nature of the thing there can be but one whom God hath exalted to this dignity: He therefore who assuredly knoweth that Jesus is that person who sustains this power by divine authority, must be convinced of what Peter declares, Acts iv. 11. namely, "that salvation is in no other, neither is there any name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." It follows,

3. THAT from this knowledge in the heart, there will arise a conviction that every man must either perish under the administration of Jesus, or be saved by his blood. He that is assured in his mind, that God hath made Jesus both, Lord and Christ, and that consequently he is the all-sufficient and only Saviour and judge, being conscious of his own guilt, cannot fail of seeing, that without a submission to and interest in him, he shall certainly perish. Hence this knowledge will prove effectual to render the

subject anxious about his eternal state, so as to become an earnest enquirer after obtaining this salvation, being sensible of his danger, and distressed in his soul while in a state of uncertainty. Thus, the word coming with power unto many of these Jerusalem-sinners, they were immediately convinced of their misery and danger; and being pricked in the heart, with the utmost eagerness and anguish of spirit, they say unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

LECTURE IX.

Being notes and reflections on Peter's proclamation and address in the close of his sermon to the Jews.

IN the foregoing lecture we considered the winding up of the apostle's discourse at Jerusalem: It consists in a remonstrance, by way of reflection, in which he excites his audience, the Jews, to consider the result of what he had proved concerning Jesus of Nazareth whom they had crucified; and calleth upon them, in a most solemn and earnest manner, to "know assuredly" that God had made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ. A persuasion of this, we have seen, must needs convince the subject that Christ is a Saviour *indeed*, and the only Saviour of Sinners; and consequently, that he is undone without an interest in him. Such was the effect of Peter's exhortation, by the blessing of God, on many of his hearers. Now this being the first sermon publicly preached in the name of the Lord after his ascension, it is doubtless the most primitive pattern of preaching; we are therefore naturally led to turn our thoughts on those points which more immediately concern that divine institution; in reference to which the following particulars deserve our attention.

I. THAT the constitution and authority of Jesus, in the character of Messiah, is a principal subject of the gospel-ministry. The divine authority of Jesus is of the utmost importance; without a full satisfaction herein no man can trust him: The least hesitation in this point leaves the subject incapable of embracing a crucified Redeemer; for he that is in good earnest about his salvation, will never confide in one whose authority is doubtful. Our Saviour declares, concerning his disciples, saying to his Father, "I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me," **Joh** 17:8. A full assurance of his divine mission was the ground of their confidence in him: In like manner

he that receives the word of the gospel into his heart, and comes to Christ for life, comes to him under a full persuasion that God hath invested this same Jesus, whom he trusts, with the power of a Saviour; without this there can be no faith, it being needful to awaken in the mind a due concern about an interest in Christ, and to engage a sinner's dependence upon him: the apostle therefore, with great propriety, urges this point on the Jews, to convince them of their danger, and of the power of Jesus to save, that they might not, through unbelief, perish in their sins. This example should be followed by the ministers of the gospel; they are to be much employed in opening those scriptures that relate to the Father's appointment of his Son to the office he bears, that their hearers, knowing that Jesus is the Christ, and that he is exalted by the right hand of God, to save or to destroy, may see the infinite importance of an interest in him, and be encouraged to trust him. In this way faith comes by hearing, through the power of the Holy Ghost, by possessing the subject, with an evidence to his conscience that Jesus is indeed the Lord's Christ, and able to save to the uttermost them who come unto God by him: In want of which conviction, some hearers of the word, with their heads full of orthodox notions, seem careless, and are little concerned about repentance unto life; but where this knowledge reacheth the heart, a man will not content himself short of being safe in this only and almighty Lord and Saviour of sinners. This being the state of the case, most certainly it is a capital branch of a preacher's business, to lay open the counsel of God in the constitution of his Son.

Again, we may note, that it becomes the ministers of Christ to exhort and excite them that hear, unto a believing application of the things that are spoken. Peter, you see, having proved from scripture the dignity and power of the ascended redeemer, closes his sermon in a warm and lively address to the Jews; whereby he labours to convince them of the glory of Christ as Lord of all, and as the anointed of God, that being duly affected with his authority and grace, they might believe on him unto life everlasting. if this may be deemed an example, it is not unbecoming the ministers of the word to go farther than a bare, however judicious report of the things which belong to the gospel of Christ, and proceed to open

the counsel of God, and to excite their audience to consider the reality and importance of what they have heard, that being fully persuaded, they may believe and be saved. The scriptures abound with the like samples of preaching; and indeed, so dull are mankind, that the warmest addresses to the heart and conscience are needful as a means of awakening persons to apply the word to themselves: and accordingly we find this account from the great apostle of the Gentiles, “Now then,” says he, “we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God,” **2Co** 5:20. Nothing I think can be more evident, than that these first and great preachers did not leave the people in a cold and lifeless manner, or without attempting to affect their hearts with what they delivered.

I AM sensible, that while some have little regard to the judgment of their hearers, and make the passions a first and principal object of address, some others have condemned all endeavours to touch the affections, and would confine the preacher to a naked exposition, or bare report of the truth, with its evidence from scripture; applications are represented as favoring of the creatures ability, yea and as intruding on the work of the Spirit, whose office, say they, is to apply his own grace. To obviate this prejudice, I shall endeavour briefly to show the propriety of addressing the consciences of men, according to this original pattern, and its consistency with the spiritual impotence of fallen man, and consequently with the absolute need of a divine agency, in order to his saving advantage.

TO stir up the hearers of the word by way of reflection, and to use every sober means of persuasion, whereby, under the blessing of God, their hearts may be affected with the truth, to the profit of their souls, is not only suited to the nature of man, but also exactly agrees with the method of our Lord and his apostle; and if, as hath been complained, any are unguarded, and seemingly inconsistent with a just idea of the truth, in attempting to copy the example, can this be a sufficient excuse for laying aside or rejecting the natural and ancient means of edification? nor is the agency of the Spirit, in an effectual application of the gospel, a cogent

objection to the preacher's addressing the conscience of his hearer; unless it be admitted against expounding of the scriptures to enlighten his understanding; for except a man is taught of God, he is incapable of discerning the things of his Spirit: So that on this pretence, all kind of preaching may be censured as useless, and indeed every means of knowledge and conviction refused, since there is no branch of the ministry, the success of which doth not absolutely depend on the power of the Holy Ghost. But moral endeavours to inform the judgment, and to touch the hearts of a Christian audience, are equally just, agreeable to the testimony of God, and perfectly consistent with the office of the Spirit, who alone can effectually teach the children of men.

VARIOUS are the talents of preachers, and also the occasions and circumstances which may occur in the course of their ministry. These, with their disposition under the guidance of the Spirit, who directs the hearts of his servants at his pleasure, hath a prevailing influence in the method they take in discoursing on the kingdom of God; nor do I more than recommend the instance before us as, what I apprehend, a genuine standard of preaching; I hope this may be allowed, and especially since it pleased the Lord to honor the pattern with so great and wonderful success.

THE example is clear. Peter preaching to the Jews, proves from the scripture, that he whom they had crucified, and who was raised from the dead, was indeed the Messiah foretold by the prophets; and having so done, though his audience consisted of the most hardened and guilty persons, who, in all appearance were held under the power of sin and unbelief, he winds up his discourse in an affectionate address to this obstinate and perishing multitude, calling on all, and every one to reflect on the things he had spoken. In this closing application he evidently points out a plain truth, which results from the consideration of what he had alleged, namely, that this same Jesus was manifestly both Lord and Christ, and earnestly beseeches them to receive it. In like manner our Lord himself, and the disciples he sent in the course of his life, laboured to convince those who attended their ministry. It appears from the sacred history, that they went forth expounding the scriptures, to open the

understanding and rectify the judgment of their hearers; and from thence proceeded to infer, exhort and excite them, that, through grace, the doctrines they taught, being mixed with faith, might be duly applied and reduced to experience and practice. This method also runs through the whole apostolic ministration; and though, as observed, there will be a great variety in the manner of preachers, I cannot but think that way which consists with this general plan most agreeable to the design of a gospel-ministry, which is to irradiate the understanding, and likewise to affect the heart, both which are needful. To aim at moving the passions, without informing the judgment, or a full persuasion of the truth; and on the other hand to rest in a bare report of the doctrines revealed in the bible, in a neglect of personal application and addressing the consciences of men, that they may be suitably impressed with the things that are spoken, seem equally wrong; the one has a tendency to flatter persons with an hope grounded in their own imaginations rather than the testimony of God, which is vain; and the other to fill them with a conceit of themselves, on account of their notions of the gospel, without any regard to the fruits of that faith which is of the operation of God: In each case the subject deceives himself; and therefore whatever tends to cherish either should be avoided as unfriendly to the interest of real religion. In a word, from the state of the natural man, and from universal experience, it is clear, that the most judicious explanations or fervent addresses, which the ablest preacher on earth can deliver, are inefficient of themselves to enlighten or enlarge the mind of a hearer. And with me it is no less certain, that from the beginning, the ministers of Christ, by reasoning out of the scriptures, and by a particular and earnest application to their audience, sought to convince them and bring them to the obedience of faith. Once more,

3. THIS instance proves that gospel-ministers should, under no pretence whatever decline their utmost endeavours to convert any person or people, however notorious their infidelity and wickedness. It may be useful to consider this point, less by any means our own carnal reason and foolish mistakes give the enemy advantage, through a neglect of the souls committed to our charge in a private or public capacity. If angular hardness, infidelity and guilt, rendered the shameful subjects unmeet for

the attempts of a gospel-minister, Peter had never taken such pains to awaken and convince these blood-guilty sinners. Men, who, in contempt of all the miraculous and undeniable testimony from heaven, in favor of the holy Jesus, notwithstanding the light and conviction they had received concerning his being a man approved of God, yet for envy in malice betrayed and murdered him; men that were hardened in the infidelity, and had no remorse for this great wickedness, but continued to resist the Holy Ghost, insomuch, as that many of them had been mocking at his extraordinary gifts; I say, the apostle would not have laboured to convince these seemingly abandoned transgressors, if the vilest of men were to be left in despair. When the descendants of those who fear God, cast away the cords of a religious education, or when such, in whom convictions have been raised, quench the light they have received, and become openly licentious and wicked, having turned their backs on the ways of God, or it may be set their mouths and faces against heaven, their consciences seem to be seared, and their condition is truly deplorable and dangerous, we may well tremble for them, left, being given up of God, they finally reject his counsel to their ruin! Nevertheless their case is not desperate, neither are even such to be excluded from the means of salvation.

CHRIST came to save sinners; nor is any sinner beyond the reach of his arm. The ministration of his word therefore waits the pleasure and power of God without respect of persons. A despised gospel indeed hath been taken away, and the candlestick removed out of his place. Hence a famine of hearing the word of the Lord, and the people perish for lack of knowledge, which is awful to consider; but where the kingdom of heaven is continued, no degree of infidelity or wickedness should discourage or prevent the ministers of Jesus from striving after the conversion of men. No nation under heaven was ever more corrupt and guilty than the Jews at this time, and especially the inhabitants of their capital city; and yet we find the disciples went forth, as the Lord had commanded, and preached repentance and remission of sins in his name, beginning at Jerusalem, as in the instance before us. and shall it ever be thought that any man's wickedness can render him unmeet for the ministry of the gospel?

IT is wrong then to say of this or the other person, he is so hardened in unbelief, and a wretch so abandoned to his lusts, that it is in vain to reason with him on sin, or righteousness, or judgment to come, or to declare unto him the power and glory of Jesus. This savours of ignorance, self-sufficiency, and a distrust of that power which alone can subdue the transgressor: Is the divine arm shortened that it cannot save? Shall man determine the counsel of God, or set bounds to his grace? When under any temptation we think or speak thus, do we not forget the success which attended the preaching of the gospel, even among those who murdered the Saviour, that the vessels of mercy are unknown to us, and that the conversion of a sinner is by the power of God, accompanying the persuasion of the preacher?

IN short, the ministration of the gospel proceeds on those principles which warrant and oblige, yea, and encourage those who are employed therein to preach to, and plead with the greatest transgressors, and most perverse unbelievers, if peradventure God will grant them repentance to the acknowledgement of the truth. The vilest sinner, or the most obstinate infidel is within the reach of omnipotent grace: The Lord's people shall be willing in the day of his power, and his servants shall find their labour shall not be in vain in him. But if any are permitted to harden themselves to their destruction, faithful ministers are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one they are "a savour of death unto death, and to the other a savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things!" **1Co 2:15-16.**

THUS, then, by the manner in which Peter finished his famous and successful discourse to the Jews, we learn that the constitution and authority of Jesus, in the character of the Messiah, is a principal subject of a gospel-ministry; that it belongs to that ministration earnestly to exhort and stir up all that hear, unto a believing application of the things that are spoken. And further, that the ministers of Christ are not to withhold their endeavour after the conversion of the most notorious transgressors.

AND now, my dear Reader, permit me, after this noble example, to exhort and beseech thee. Art thou careless and unconcerned about the salvation published in the gospel? Know thou that this same Jesus whom we preach, and who was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem, is alive from the dead, and is made of God both Lord and Christ. O that thine heart was possessed of this assurance, and no longer capable of a moments ease without an interest in this only and almighty Saviour! Satan waits to suggest those imaginations which may prevent the important conviction; and when it takes place, thy own carnal reason, and the seeds of infidelity, which grow in thy flesh, will if possible, extinguish it. But there is not the least ground to hesitate that the Father hath indeed raised up his Son Jesus, and set him at his own right hand, until his foes are his footstool. The effusion of the Spirit, the spread of the gospel, the fearful destruction of the city and temple in Jerusalem, and the present dispersed state of the Jews, are incontestable proofs that Jesus is exalted; and as sure as he ever existed on earth, and is passed into heaven, so certain it is that he is the only Saviour, authorized of God to judge the quick and the dead at his appearance and kingdom. How miserable then must thou be, if in the end thou art found among them who obey not the gospel! It availed not these Jews to be of the house of Israel, neither will it stand thee in stead to be a nominal Christian, if thou art not a true worshipper of Christ as thy Lord and Saviour. Deceive not thyself; the wrath of the Lamb will surely come down on all unbelievers and tear them to pieces. There is none to deliver. Thou wilt therefore find it a certain and eternal truth; it is the sum of the gospel, **Mr** 16:16. "He that believeth and is baptized shall he saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

BUT hast thou, Beloved, seen the Lord's Christ? and is he the object of thy trust? How precious this truth! With reverence and joy behold this same Jesus who died for thy sins, and who despised the shame of the cross, now openly invested and highly exalted universal Lord, thy Lord, and thy God! Fear not, though in many temptations, thy King is able to save thee; he lives to defend thee in life, to preserve thee in death, and to bring thee safe to his heavenly kingdom. And is he thy Lord? Then worship thou him. Nothing can more loudly demand thy professed subjection to gospel-

appointments. Hast thou never yet publicly devoted thyself to Jesus and confessed to his name? How canst thou believe him made of the Father Lord and Christ, and withhold thy obedience, or omit what he hath commanded? Doth thy conscience accuse thee of this? Blush and repent, think how ungrateful and presumptuous it is to neglect the orders of thy Redeemer who is enthroned in the heavens, and before whom thou must shortly appear! Also hear what the Father saith, “Yet have I set my King on my holy hill of Zion,” **Ps** 2:6. And attend to the honor he pays him, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom!” **Heb** 1:8. And wilt thou not bow in the name of this Jesus? or wilt thou refuse to own his authority in the sight of the world? Surely it becomes thee my friend, to adore and serve thy dignified Saviour, “who is over all God blessed for ever. Amen.”

The End of the Second Book.

BOOK III.

IN WHICH

The wonderful success of the apostle's first sermon at Jerusalem, is particularly considered and improved.

LECTURE X.

Showing the state of their hearts who fell under conviction. By what means they were awakened; and the method they took for relief.

ISAIAH complains, in reference to the Jews, “Who hath believed our report?” Yet it was not in vain that the word of the Lord was preached at Jerusalem. Peter had no sooner finished his discourse, but, lo, many of his hearers appeared deeply affected, insomuch that they cry out in the midst of the assembly. Their acclamation was not like the sound of enthusiasts, who, under a false impression, have been sometimes found to scream and toss in a wild and frantic manner: No; but being awakened to a just sense of their misery, they make a sober, though an earnest and anxious enquiry suited to their deplorable condition. The account is as follows, and is recorded, **Ac 2:37**. “Now when they had heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

IN this historical passage an amazing scene is presented; thousands of sinners awakened in an instant, alike smitten, as the Israelites in the wilderness; every one wounded, lifting up their voice, as one man, in the presence of a multitude who attended the apostles. How astonished the audience, to behold and to hear so many persons, in the utmost distress, beseeching his ministers whom, but a few weeks before, they had

crucified as an imposter! Here then is another external evidence to the men of Judea, proving the divine mission and glorious state of Jesus, in whose name the disciples appeared. An extraordinary event this, attended with peculiar circumstances: But the effect of God's grace is substantially the same in every subject of his power. One convinced sinner may be more and longer terrified under a sense of his guilt than another; but no real penitent is altogether a stranger to the distress which filled the hearts of these Jews; he is not without a taste of this sorrow: And every convert has been compelled, as it were, to the same enquiry: in answer to which, he has by some means been led to the Saviour, and found rest for his soul. May no one, employed in reading these papers, be finally unacquainted with that spiritual trouble which is needful to bring him to Christ, and to prepare him for a joyful reception of the gospel!

IT may be useful to consider the painful state of these awakened transgressors; by what means they were convinced and became thus distressed; and the method they took for relief: particulars which lead to the experience and practice of those in whom the word is the power of God to salvation.

THEIR condition was truly deplorable: "They were pricked in the heart." A sore case indeed, and grievous beyond all expression! The heart taken spiritually, and it cannot here be understood in a natural sense, is often comprehensive of all the powers and faculties of the soul, as when it is said, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart." And again, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." But in this passage, as in many other places, it seems confined to the conscience. Thus, it is written, **2Sa** 24:10. that "David's heart, i.e. his conscience smote him when he had numbered the people," as appears from his confession: "He said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done." And the word is thus taken, **1Jo** 3:21. "If our hearts condemn us not, i.e. if we have the testimony of a good conscience, we have boldness, &c." In like manner says Job, (**Job** 17:6) "My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live." Conscience in the soul of man is a kind of vice-judge; and, except in an obdurate state, it is ever accusing or excusing the subject, **Ro** 2:15. It may

lie dormant a season, but will surely awake, and with a terrible voice bear witness against the transgressor. Thus, in the instance before us; Peter having charged upon the Jews the murder of Christ, through a divine power it entered the conscience of many, who were touched to the quick, insomuch, that while he reasoned with them out of the scriptures, his words became as drawn swords, and pierced through their souls. Thus, the word of God, however unaffected men hardened in unbelief may be, when it comes with the energy of the Holy Ghost, “is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder soul and spirit,” **Heb** 4:12. So these Jerusalem-sinners found it, whose wounds are most emphatically expressed by a word no where else used in all the New Testament (*κατενυγησαν*), it signifies to vex, rend, or punctually wound, as if a man was pierced to the centre of his heart with an arrow or spear; yea some illustrate the term, by supposing the sharp points of many poisoned daggers or scorpion-stings all at once fastened in the heart, in the most cruel manner that can be devised. Thus, sorely and punctually wounded were these sinful men: and this striking expression imports the following articles:

1. THAT their convictions were deep and effectual. It was no superficial or transitory impression, neither were they merely cut to the heart, as the Pharisees were under another sermon by the same apostle, chap. v. 33: or like those at the reproof of Stephen the martyr, chap. vii. 54, in both which places, (*διεπριοντο*), a very different word is used, in which there is an allusion to a saw that tears and hacks rather than pierces, and fitly represents those convictions, which, however painful while they continue, leave the subject under the power of sin, and rather irritate than mortify the flesh. There is a material difference between being cut to, and pricked in the heart; the one sets the subject a raging, whereas the other engages him to repentance. And accordingly we find, that those affected in the former way, sought revenge on the apostles who reproved them; they took counsel to slay them, gnashed with their teeth, and even stoned righteous Stephen: On the contrary, in the instance before us, we see that these men, self-condemned, and persuaded of the authority of Jesus, with the highest esteem of his ministers, unanimously address them as the servants of God

to show them the way of salvation. They were deeply and painfully convinced, but they were not offended, as some, with their teachers: No; they appear humble and contrite; sensible of their own vileness, they were ready to perish under a fearful expectation of the wrath of the Lamb they had slain: and if they had any indignation it was against themselves, and not against those that were the instruments of possessing them with a sense of their guilt. This was their case: they were pricked in the heart---the arrows of the Almighty stuck in them—the words of the preacher, by the power of God, entered deep and fastened in their conscience—under which they cry out for direction how they shall escape. No wonder that,

2. THEIR pains were exquisite. Anguish arose from these deep and powerful convictions. This, we have seen, is a principal idea of the word. No language can fully describe the torments of being wounded in the manner implied in this term. The acute sensations that arise from being pierced in the vitals, or most nervous parts of the body, are not to be told. How intolerable then are the pains of a wounded conscience, a heart spiritually and throughly wounded, when every faculty of the soul is tortured, under a sense of guilt, accompanied with a fearful apprehension of approaching vengeance! Yet this is not all: for,

3. IT further conveys this idea also, that their wound was deadly. It was not only deep and cruciating, but no less than mortal, and left to its natural course must have been fatal. This, however dreadful, is clearly laid up in the phrase: It is well known, that an entrance into the natural heart, is at least certain, and for the most part present death to the body. Hence the soldier who pierced the body of our Saviour, while it hung on the cross, confirmed his decease. For the natural body may seem to be dead, when, in reality, it is alive, the vital principle being only retired out of sight; but it is impossible that a man should survive a wound that is truly and properly in his heart.

BUT our subject is spiritual. He that is pricked in the heart, as these men of Judea, dies immediately, i.e. a sentence of condemnation and death enters his conscience; and being self-convicted, under a sense of his guilt

and pollution, all hopes of being justified in and from himself are vanished away. Thus, saith Paul, “When the commandment came sin revived and I died; and the commandment which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death,” **Ro** 7:9. A human body, into the heart of which a dagger has been thrust, is not more certainly dead, in a natural, than the man whose conscience hath been pierced with a due conviction of sin is in a spiritual sense. Thus, dead in himself, he may be truly represented as having received a mortal wound, since the terrors of death are fallen upon him; and unless relieved, through faith in the blood of Christ, and by the remission of his sins, he would certainly die in despair and perish for ever. In a word, convinced sinners are not unlike the terrified Egyptians, when they hastened the Israelites out of the land, saying, “We be all dead men,” **Ex** 12:33. But blessed be the Lord, “he is nigh unto than who are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit, he healeth and bindeth up all their wounds, according to the riches of his grace,” **Ps** 34:18; **Ps** 47:3. compared.

BUT what pierced the heart of these mourning transgressors? Their guilt, even the guilt of all their sins in general, as appears from the apostle’s reply: First seized with a tormenting sense of their horrid and aggravated evil in the murder of Christ, whom they now were convinced was exalted to glory; then followed a sense of their vileness by nature, and their manifold transgressions, from the punishment of which they saw no way of escape, since they had shed the blood of the only Saviour; their fears therefore ran high, and they were under a dreadful apprehension of the vengeance of heaven. This was their wretched condition; and thus they were ready to perish. To which must be added, that this was in some degree the case of each individual: it was not sympathetic but radical; that is, one did not cry out for another, but each for himself; they might be some more and some less distressed, but every one was cordially, deeply, painfully, and mortally wounded.

BUT how came they thus sorely distressed? It was by the preaching of Peter: “When they heard this.” The whole of the apostle’s discourse had a tendency to awaken them; and it is reasonable to suppose, that they were

much moved under his preaching; but our translators, by supplying the particle *this*, seem to apprehend, that the closing address was what most affected these men, and particularly when they heard that this same Jesus, whom they had crucified, was advanced to the throne in the heavens. Yet I apprehend it is to be referred to the sermon in general. But was the hearing intended that of the outward ear only? Certainly No; this indeed was included. They doubtless heard in a natural sense. But if this was all, how comes it then that the audience in general, in like manner were not affected? Peter, we have seen, lifted up his voice, and though the assembly was large, there is reason to conclude that every one heard him distinctly. If natural hearing had been sufficient, not a soul of the thousands present would have remained insensible: but those who cry out in the text, though many in number, are manifestly distinguished from the rest of the multitude, which proves it was not the case universally.

It was, in this assembly, as in most congregations where the gospel is published with success; some hear the word under the preaching of which others, who set with them, are convinced and converted; yet, alas, they themselves feel no remorse, but remain hardened, as if they had never sinned, or stood in no need of a Saviour! Thus, when Paul, preached at Rome, "Some believed the things that were spoken, and, some believed them not," **Ac 28:24**. Truly, bare hearing, however distinct and exact, or long continued, is altogether insufficient to produce this effect. No preaching whatever is capable of possessing the hearer, who is left in his native blindness, with a due sense of sin, spiritual sorrow, or earnest concern to be saved. In vain are the weapons of our warfare employed, against the power of sin in an unregenerate man, unless the omnipotent arm of Jehovah is exerted, and the sinner is changed; the ignorance, unbelief, pride and enmity of his carnal mind, renders it invulnerable, like Job's leviathan: those scales, under which he is shut up, seals him close; nothing short of a divine power can penetrate his flesh and quicken his soul; he is proof against any argument, how strong and convincing soever: The comparison is but too just, 'his heart is as firm as a stone, yea as hard as a piece of a nether millstone; darts are counted as stubble, and he laugheth at the shaking of the spear.'

BUT the Spirit of the Lord had wrought effectually in these Jerusalem-sinners, and prepared their minds for the reception of his word; he had taken away the heart of stone and given an heart of flesh. Hence they heard with understanding, faith and attention, as in Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened, **Ac 16:14**. Convictions prevailed, and they felt what they heard; and being fully persuaded, they were not disobedient, but believing, assured themselves that God had made Jesus of Nazareth both Lord and Christ: yet their faith did not rise to an appropriating view of the Saviour; from this they were prevented by a fearful apprehension, natural in their circumstances, of being excluded from an interest in his undertaking and death, whose blood they had wickedly shed: A thought which throws light on the sense of their question, and leads to the method they took for relief. They did not as some, give up all hope, or reject the counsel of God against themselves. Convictions, which leave the subject under the power of sin and unbelief, either excite their natural aversion to the wisdom of God, or issue in despair. Such is the fatal tendency of legal conviction on the disobedient. Very different the spirit and conduct of these mourning sinners. Under a deep sense of their guilt and a full persuasion of the authority of Jesus, they are indeed in the utmost consternation and anguish of soul, and even ready to perish, yet have some distant hope. They could not discern how they could be saved by him they had murdered; nevertheless, they apply to his ministers in a manner that proves a deep humiliation of soul, and an earnest desire, if possible, to obtain the salvation of God; yea and some expectation, at least a peradventure, that his servants could direct them. They heartily believed that Jesus was the Christ; and their open and earnest application to the apostles, who preached in his name, in the presence of all who crowded the temple, was an acknowledgement of him as far as their condition could possibly admit. Hopeful penitents indeed! to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, these awakened and wounded transgressors betake themselves for advice in their dangerous state; and to whom should they go, but to them whose preaching had been a means of convincing them of the glory and authority of Jesus, as the only Lord and true Messiah, though that very conviction, under their present circumstances, subjected them to the most painful distress? It is wisdom, in this sense, to turn unto him that hath torn us for

an healing, it being often the pleasure of the Almighty to bind up with the same hand by which he hath smitten. Thus, directed by the Spirit of wisdom, these distressed sinners apply to the apostles for relief, and that with the highest respect; “Men and brethren.” Unbelievers are prone to despise the ministers of the gospel, but they who stand in need of salvation greatly reverence and esteem them. Thus, the jailor fled to Paul and Silas, though his prisoners, saying, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” **Ac 16:30.** An enquiry for substance, the same with that which is made by these awakened Jews of Peter and those that were with him: “What shall we do?” This question supposes a sense of their guilt, and implies a confession of the same, with a painful apprehension of impending wrath and destruction: It likewise intimates a persuasion of the apostle’s authority and skill in the methods of salvation, and also some hope of their compassion and readiness to direct them in this fearful dilemma: “What shall we do?” I am sensible that there is a proneness in man, under legal conviction, to seek after righteousness by his own works, hence it is remarked by some, on this clause, that awakened sinners are generally at first upon a covenant of works; but, with submission, I apprehend the purport of the question, under the circumstances of these convicts, convey quite another idea. The difference, between the persons in the text, and that of the jailor is obvious: His conscience was awakened by an alarming providence, which filled him with guilty fears, and the terrors of wrath were upon him. He might indeed have some general notion that Paul and Silas were servants of God, and no doubt he thought they could instruct him; but there is reason to conclude, that he was an utter stranger to the scriptures, and to Christ as the Saviour of sinners; hence the word of the gospel was spoken to him and his house. But these men of Judea knew the prophets; and their conviction took place under the preaching of Peter; and arose from a persuasion that Jesus whom they had slain was the Christ. The question with them, was not who was the Saviour, nor how sinners are to be saved by him. It seems chiefly, if not altogether to turn on this point, namely, whether there was any hope for them, seeing they had crucified him who alone had power to save, q. d. ‘O Men and Brethren, we are now persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth is truly the Messiah, what then shall we do? Our transgressions are innumerable, and

our iniquity great! We are vile and sinful beyond all expression, and are verily guilty in shedding the blood of that holy One, whom God approved among us. Is there any hope for us in this same Jesus God hath made both Lord and Christ? What shall we do? We that have crucified the only Saviour? How shall we escape his righteous vengeance? is it possible for us to be saved by him we have murdered? Alas, for us, blood-guilty transgressors! O tell us, we beseech you, Sirs, tell us what we shall do!’ Thus, they were sorely perplexed but not in despair, though indeed very near it, for being convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come, and of the authority of that Jesus they slew, to save and to destroy, they could not see how it was possible they should be saved: It was truly a very dark case, and extremely dangerous, insomuch, that if any awakened self-condemned sinner had reason to despair, those men most certainly had: but, adored be the riches of sovereign mercy, repentance and remission of sins was preached in his name, and even began with success at Jerusalem. It appears in the following account, that many, who were more or less concerned in killing the Prince of life, were saved through faith in the blood they had shed. Astonishing grace! O the confusion. that will seize those, who perish under the report of the gospel, when sinners, who crucified the Son of God, shall appear to inherit life everlasting! The fearful impenitent will have no just ground of complaint, or be able to plead, in judgment to come, that there was not sufficient encouragement for his hope of being saved on repentance. These examples of rich and super abounding grace will then redound to the honor of God, and the unbeliever shall be covered with shame. Art thou despairing, dear Reader, because of thine aggravated guilt? think on the mercy these transgressors obtained, whose sins were as scarlet and crimson, but were washed in his blood whom they crucified. Look unto Jesus and be saved; thou shalt not be confounded, but stand with his saints before him at his coming.’

LECTURE XI.

An improvement on the case of those who were convinced by the preaching of Peter, on the day of Pentecost.

HAVING taken a view of their sorrowful case who were awakened under Peter's discourse, and the method they pursued for relief, it may be useful to make some remarks on this first instance of success by the gospel published in the name of a risen Saviour. These, with proper reflections, will compose the ensuing lecture.

AND the first thing deserving our notice is this, namely, that from the beginning sinners have been convinced and awakened to a concern about salvation by Christ, under the hearing of the word.

THE sovereignty of God may be displayed, in opening the heart, without the intervention of a preacher; nor is it becoming to suppose that the Lord hath limited himself in the dispensations of his grace; other means are subordinate to this appointment of heaven for the conversion of men, sometimes, as with the jailor, striking providences have been subservient to the purpose of God in the call of his chosen; also prayer, reading, and the spiritual discourse of the saints; and above all, the holy, loving and fruitful lives of professors, have conduced to the convincing of others: these, I say, are often the means of promoting the faith, insomuch that many date their first awakenings from one or more of them; nevertheless, the principal stated, and ordinary method in which the almighty turneth sinners to himself, is the word preached, as in the instance before us. Peter expounded the prophecies, reasoned out of the scriptures, and applied to the conscience of his hearers with earned address; by this means many were pricked in the heart, and moved to enquire, what they must do? The consequence of which, as hereafter appears, was that, on due encouragement, they embraced the gospel, obtained remission, and were saved. In this way we are to attempt the conversion of men to the end of the world; "for it pleaseth God, by the

foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.” The preaching of the cross may be esteemed foolish by an ignorant and perishing world, but to them that are saved it is the wisdom and power of God: Thus, faith comes by hearing, **Ro** 10:17. Hence, beautiful are the feet of them who publish the gospel of peace! This being the case, we are not to wonder that Satan should, by every means in his power, set at nought, or discourage the ministry of the word, which he sometimes, when permitted, attempts, by persecutions and fiery trials, to terrify and dishearten men from the service; but at other times, by seducing men into error, disorder, and licentiousness, under the prevalency of which, there may be much preaching, and at the same time but little preaching of Christ; while those few, whose ministry and conversation answer to the word of the Lord, are under sore discouragements, yea and the very office itself in a manner despised. Whether there are no appearances tending this way in the present time, is left to the considerate Reader; but this is certain, that the enemy will attempt to disgrace and turn aside men from that sort of preaching of which we have an example in Peter; the old serpent well knows, that reasoning from the authority of God, unto the consciences of men, or arguments from scripture, are proofs against him, and fatal to his interest, being an appointed and effectual means, through the energy of the Spirit, for pulling down his strong holds, and rescuing poor captive sinners from his kingdom of darkness. And is gospel-preaching the ordinary means of salvation? How melancholy their case, who, under any temptation, withdraw themselves from, or neglect the hearing of the word! Such are in the utmost danger of ruin! Nothing is impossible with God; but we have no promise or other ground of hope, that he will follow after that man who forsakes the means of grace. Art thou tempted, my Friend, to turn away thine ear from the sound of the gospel? Beware, thou hast no reason to expect that the Lord will prevent thee; and if thou art left in thine impenitence and hardness, thou shalt die in thy sins, and perish for ever; but this God forbid!

ANOTHER thing deserving our notice, is the pungency of guilt in the conscience. We have seen how cruciating the pains endured by those awakened transgressors, thus every one truly convinced, is more or less

pricked in the heart. These wounds by conviction are deeper, and of longer continuance in some than in others; but no quickened sinner is an utter stranger to the torment of guilt, and some are grievously wounded indeed: such are ready to cry out, as in **Job** 6:4, “The arrows of the Almighty are within me: the poison thereof drinketh up my spirit, the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.” It may be useful to remember, that convictions are sometimes like sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper, piercing and burning the spirit, till it is in a manner consumed with death. Thus, David gives his experience, **Ps** 32:3-4. “When I kept silence,” i.e. from confessing my sins, “my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me,” i. e. pressing him sore with the weight of his iniquities, which now went over him as a heavy burthen, too heavy for him. **Ps** 38:2,4.

THUS, the wrath of God was like fire in his conscience, and as it were burnt him up, for he adds, “my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” Here is another instance of this, he who crieth out, “while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted,” and again, “thy fierce wrath goeth over me, and thy terrors have cut me off,” **Ps** 88:15-16. And how painful a case must that heinous backslider be in? who with deep humiliation for his vileness, thus beseeches the God of all grace “Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice,” **Ps** 51:8. One broken bone, often gives the patient inexpressible pain: how exquisite then must the sorrows of that heart be, which is justly compared to many broken bones, or rather to a body the multitude of whose bones are broken to pieces, which seems the allusion of the Psalmist! Take heed, Sirs, of sin, and abstain from the appearance of evil; for you see what dreadful havoc it makes in the soul, when the wrath of God is let into the conscience. These indeed are extraordinary instances, but he that is duly affected with the evil of sin, must be sensible of the curse of the law, in proportion to which the terrors of the Almighty are upon him, and the wound is grievous; many are soon healed by the application of gospel-grace, but some continue long under an afflicting sense of their desert as sinners, without any comfortable view of their interest in Jesus the only Redeemer, which is truly deplorable; blessed be God their case is not

desperate, he that wounds also can heal, and a fountain is opened in the gospel to him who is ready to perish: but the pains which arise from the sting of death in the conscience, are sometimes scarce to be born; and he that lies under them, being as yet without an appropriating view of the Saviour, is an object of great compassion, for his sorrows are not to be told.

WE may further remark, that the moment a man's conscience is smitten with guilt, he is anxious for relief. Slight impressions may be soon taken off, by the presumptuous and carnal reasonings of the fleshly mind, and the disturbed sinner may be able by some means to stifle conviction within himself; but those sensations of sin, which are not effectual to make the subject cry out to God or man, or to both, scarce deserve the name of convictions, at least, they are very superficial, and come short of those that arise from a full discovery of the law of death in the conscience; under which a man must die in himself, be self-condemned, and as it were flee from himself to another for relief. Hence awakened souls are enquiring souls. If thy convictions, dear Reader, have not obliged thee to cry for direction and help, thou art yet unacquainted with thy danger, and incapable of seeing the joy of salvation in Christ.

IN one word, if the conduct of these Jerusalem sinners was becoming or worthy the imitation of others under the like circumstances, it is natural and proper for them that are pierced with conviction, to open their case unto others. Indeed, if I may be allowed the expression, God is our only Father-confessor, and by his Spirit alone can the heavy-laden sinner be led unto Christ, and find rest for his soul. Nevertheless, the Lord operates by means and instruments, and many are held under terror, and exposed to the temptations of Satan for want of revealing their case. And there is such a thing as suffering in consequence of hiding our guilty fears from man as well as from God. O afflicted sinner, conceal not thy trouble! Art thou distressed about thy spiritual estate? Or dost thou labour under fearful apprehensions of wrath for thy sins, and knowest not what thou shalt do to be saved? Come, follow this early example, an example which so well succeeded—apply to some Christian friend or minister of the

gospel—be not afraid or alarmed to unbosom thyself to those who fear God—and especially seek direction of them by whom he hath awakened thee. This frequently proves a means of speedy relief; an instance of which is before thee. To these observations it may be useful to add a reflection or two.

AND first, Beloved, review the wonderful scene! How astonishing the grace and power of God! It was rich grace indeed that the gospel should be preached, and mercy lay hold on Jerusalem-sinners; that God should extend his kindness to men who had presumed thus wickedly to crucify the Son of his love! Yet such was his abounding grace! And no less marvellous that power by which the hearts of so many obstinate rebels were changed, and in an instant reduced from the utmost blindness and infidelity unto a sense of their spiritual condition, a belief in the Messiah, and an unfeigned concern about their salvation from wrath to come. O the omnipotent arm of the Lord! When that is revealed, the report is believed; and when he worketh, who shall let it? Well saith the prophet, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.”

AND what must be the torments of hell? If sin in the conscience is so painful, and the heart of a convinced transgressor is exposed to such horror and anguish under the apprehensions of wrath, how miserable must they be who are drinking this cup of the damned! Is a wounded conscience so tormenting in this world, where the gospel is preached, and a mind, pierced with conviction, liable to be so deeply affected, as to be justly compared with a heart wounded by poisoned daggers or scorpion-stings, how dreadful the avenging hand of the almighty in a state of judicial suffering! Far be it, Lord, that any perusing these papers, should hereafter be numbered with those wretched spirits, who are too sadly convinced by what they now feel of their eternal misery, to flatter themselves that they shall ever escape! Thus, in the parable of Lazarus, the rich man lifts up his despairing eyes, from the bottomless pit, without hope or desire of being delivered from thence: he pleads for the warning of others, after being denied the least drop of water to cool his own tongue, but not a word of his release from this place of torment: no; alas, such know that they are

reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day! Fearful state, where hope never comes, where justice reigns without mercy, and where no sinner has a rational ground to enquire, “What shall I do to be saved?”

FROM this instance we may also infer the hideous cries of unbelievers when Christ the judge shall appear. If a persuasion that Jesus is exalted and made Lord of all, occasioned those who crucified him to cry out as persons undone, how will they wail and lament who finally reject him, when they see him revealed from heaven to take vengeance on those who obey not the gospel! “Behold,” saith John, **Re** 1:7, “He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” Then shall the finally impenitent, who have stifled their convictions, and despised or neglected the salvation of God, see and know that Jesus is the judge who is able to destroy; they shall then cry to the mountains and rocks, saying, “fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,” alas but in vain! Now the hearts of unbelievers are stout, they refuse to submit; and many of them set their mouths against the dignity and grace of the glorious Redeemer; they deny the wonderful constitution of his person, blaspheme his deity, trample under foot his blood of atonement, and would laugh his disciples to scorn; but their tongues will then be otherwise employed, when they behold him coming to judgment; then will they, too late, be convinced, and cry out of their misery and ruin, in the awful manner described by the prophet, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” **Isa** 33:14. Alas! alas! who indeed! And what shall they do? The question is vain: They are undone; nothing can be done to prevent their immediate and everlasting destruction; the trumpet of the gospel will not then sound: No, but the trump of God as at Sinai, with thundering and lightnings, will summons the workers of iniquity to his awful tribunal; from whence being openly condemned, they shall be turned into hell, with that tremendous sentence, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and His angels. Then shall they call upon him whom they have despised, but he will not answer;

they shall seek him early, but shall not find him,” **Pr** 1:28. Thus, when trouble and anguish seize the disobedient, they will cry and call, but alas the Judge, whom they have despised as a Saviour, “will laugh at their calamity and mock at their fear,” ver. 26. If the Reader is slighting this Jesus, let him beware lest destruction come upon him as a whirlwind, there will surely be none to deliver.

BUT is any man afflicted and ready to perish? How great is the mercy to have the word of salvation near to that soul! What must have become of these men had there been none to instruct them? But happy for them, that in their distress they knew where to flee, and had those at hand whom the Lord had appointed to show unto men the way of salvation. Their bones were broken, and their hearts grievously smitten, but a skillful physician is near to bind up and comfort. The impenitent and careless make light of the gospel, and account it no favor to dwell where the faithful servants of Jesus abide; but the man who is anxious about being saved, will rejoice that the word of the Lord and his ministers are nigh: this often proves a means of speedy relief, as in the case of these Jews. However, since the pains of a wounded conscience are exquisite, and are not to be healed, but through faith in the blood of Christ, the advantage of being under a gospel-ministry, when in spiritual distress, is obvious. Nothing is more precious to those who enquire after life, than the word of the Lord, or more amiable in their eyes than the feet of those who publish his name. Then prize your happy situation, who dwell in the midst of the churches of Christ, and constantly sit under the sound of his gospel, that you receive not this grace in vain. But again,

WERE so many converted through a divine blessing on the preaching of the apostles? Who can forbear though it be with reluctance, the melancholy reflection, I mean the affecting difference between the primitive times and those in which we live? How insensible are the generality of hearers? What reason to be grieved at the prevailing hardness and unbelief of the multitude? Where are any now crying out, under a sense of their guilt, what shall we do? Do not men for the most part, hear as if they had no need of a Saviour, or as if preaching was a form, and

ministers at best appointed to entertain with a song? Now, instead of many being pierced under one sermon, as in Peter's assembly, are not many discourses delivered, and, in appearance not a single heart moved? 'Lord, where is thine arm? are thy bowels restrained? hear our groans, who labour in thy vineyard, and long after the salvation of thy chosen? It is thy work, O Lord of hosts thou knowest them that are thy people; through thy power, make the gospel effectual to save them? O let not thy faithful ministers be ashamed! Sharpen thine arrows in the hearts of thine enemies, that being pierced through the soul, they may look unto Jesus and be healed!'

AND now, my dear Reader, art thou altogether unacquainted with the evil of sin and a conscience smitten with guilt? hast thou never said, at least in thine heart, what must I do? Permit me as one who seeks thy felicity: whence is it that thou art secure and whole, while others are broken and wounded? Why so indifferent about salvation, when many, ready to perish, are with anxiety and zeal crying out for direction how they shall escape? Hast thou no cause of distress on account of thy sin? Art thou exempted from the wrath of God, or not equally exposed to his just indignation in common with other transgressors? And canst thou be easy? O thy astonishing hardness! Would to God that this heart of stone was removed! Soon, very soon will thy conscience open and witness against thee; and how wilt thou endure the curse of the law which thou hast broken? It will make thee as a fiery oven when judgment takes place; unless found in Christ it will burn to the lowest hell. Indeed, as observed, the case of the Jews was peculiar, and for the most part, the anguish of an awakened sinner is in proportion to his guilt. So that the distress of true penitents differ much in point of degree; nor is the evidence of a saving change to be measured by the pangs of the subject: It is possible, yea it seems evident from experience, that one who falls short of the obedience of faith, may endure sharper and longer convictions than, in some instances, attend the conversion of another. Nevertheless, every one will sooner or later be stung with the evil of sin; and though the convinced are not alike grieved, the man who tastes not the bitterness of death, is incapable of applying to the Saviour for life.

In a word, may the faithful, for Christ's sake, and in love to precious souls, strive in their prayers for the power of the Spirit: Under his divine agency the stout-hearted are reduced to obedience! O that this hand of the Lord, being with us, as in the primitive times, numbers believed and turned unto! And if any man is pierced with a sense of his abounding iniquity, let him know that with the Father is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption; for these men of Israel, who even crucified his Son, on a conviction of their folly and danger, cried not in vain, as the following lecture will show.

LECTURE XII.

The nature of evangelical repentance. What it is to be baptize in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins; and in what respect the Holy Ghost is given to them that believe.

WE are now come to the counsel of God by his inspired minister unto the enquiring Jews, wherein the riches of his grace are opened for the relief of a sensible sinner. The Lord respecteth not any man's person: It is therefore a standing direction to every one, who, in like manner, is convinced of his evil and danger, and would escape the vengeance of heaven. This seasonable reply is recited in **Ac 2:38** and runs in these words: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." A kind and salutary answer, in which we are to mark the apostle's direction, and the motive on which he would engage these mourning transgressors to obedience.

HIS direction is twofold; to repent, and to be baptized. The common notion of repentance is sorrow for sin; and there is reason to apprehend that some deceive themselves by resting in a superficial transitory conviction; which, however grievous, falls short of the genuine sorrow of a contrite heart, which alone is acceptable to God. No doubt repentance includes a conviction, yea a painful conviction of sin; and it must be allowed, that, conscious of guilt, a man is ashamed and afflicted. But, properly speaking, repentance, is a change, the subject of which, is not only filled with a sense of his error, and grieved for his folly, but also is bent against the evil that hath enslaved him, resolved to flee from it and amend. So that according to the nature and degree of real repentance, a reformation ensues. The conscience of some abandoned transgressors, or hypocrites, may be incapable of feeling, as the flesh of a man when seared with a hot iron, **1Ti 4:2**. Yet few are totally ignorant of remorse, sinners for the most part have at times an afflicting sense of their guilt; yea, and in some instances very sharp convictions may pierce the heart, and produce strong cries and tears, resolutions and promises of amendment;

at the same time, as it afterwards appears, the man is unacquainted with godly sorrow, and repentance unto life.

EVANGELICAL repentance is the gift of God by Jesus Christ: it flows from a principle of divine life in the soul of him that is born of the spirit; of which the convinced sinner alone is a capable subject. In the exercise of this grace a man beholds the evil of sin, is affected with its turpitude, and abhors it; and, being deeply sensible of his own vileness, abaseth himself before God with an open confession, in prospect of pardoning mercy. This repentance admits of no allowed sin, and is ever accompanied with a pursuit after holiness, and a conversation becoming the gospel. One infallible criterion of genuine repentance is faith, i. e. actively considered; for though repentance and faith may be distinguished, they are radically the same, being the exercise of a renewed soul under the influence of divine grace, with a view to salvation. Faith, in its prime act, is truly expressed by an excellent writer [Owen on justification, page 99.], to be the flight of a penitent sinner to Christ for salvation. Certainly, the repentance described, which is of a spiritual and saving nature, is not without faith, whereby the subject hath a discernment of spiritual things: And the first effect of being thus truly penitent, in the views of that free remission preached in the name of Jesus, is obedience to the gospel. A sincere penitent lays hold of the promise, and flees for refuge to Christ. Thus, repentance, under the call of the gospel, is completed by the obedience of faith. The penitent man comes to Jesus confessing his guilt and pollution; he heartily renounces all merit in himself, and believing the promise, rests on the Redeemer as the only and omnipotent Saviour. So then, to repent, to be converted, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, are synonymous phrases, at least the repentance Peter intends, and which is the subject of a gospel-ministry, issues in nothing short of trust in Christ, or a turning to him as the strong-hold and hope of them who are ready to perish. And accordingly, we find, **Mr** 1:15. the disciples were sent forth to preach, saying, "Repent ye and believe the gospel." It is repentance from infidelity and rebellion against God, as he is revealed in his word, which is accompanied with faith and holy obedience, according to the use of the expression in **Lu** 16:30. where the rich man is speaking to Abraham

concerning his surviving brethren, who like himself lived in infidelity and sin, saying, "But if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent;" i.e. of their unbelief, as appears from the scope of the place. In like manner evangelical repentance is nothing short of believing and turning to the Lord.

THIS idea of repentance in the text is confirmed by the circumstances of the objects addressed: they were deeply convinced of their guilt, and in the utmost distress. A true penitent indeed hath an habitual sense of the evil and bitterness of sin; it is exceeding sinful in his eyes, and dreadful in its effects under the curse of a broken law, and still more heinous in the light of the gospel; but where is the propriety of exhorting persons to mourn over sin, whose hearts were already overwhelmed under a sense of their great iniquity, and with the fears of vengeance to come? Nor can repentance here signify a change of mind or opinion concerning Jesus, and in consequence an alteration in their conduct, so as no longer to oppose him as an imposter, under which pretence they had taken away his life, since a conviction of his divine authority was a principal occasion of their distress and confusion; nor doth the apostle offer a word more in vindication of his character, or to prove him the Messiah. In short, these men stood in no need of being called upon to be sorry for sin, or to be persuaded that Jesus was the Christ; they were deeply wounded under a sense of their transgressions and fully convinced of his mission from heaven, but this they needed, namely, a personal application to, and reliance upon him as the Lord's Christ, without which no man's sorrow for sin, or opinion of Jesus will save him; and for this these self-condemned sinners were prepared on due encouragement, as appears in the issue: but, at present being ignorant of the extent and riches of his grace, they seem fearful of being excluded the hope of the gospel, and at their wits-end; and accordingly the apostle sends them to Jesus for pardon and life, with a joyful assurance of mercy, and he urges it upon them as needful to an escape from the wrath they deserved. This sense of repentance in the text corresponds not only with the circumstances of the persons addressed, but likewise with the motives used by the apostle, and the direction he gives them; for no repentance short of faith in Christ,

stands connected with remission of sins, or entitles the subject to baptism; and, though there is reason to apprehend that, in the primitive times, some were partakers of the Holy Ghost, in his extraordinary gifts, who nevertheless were destitute of saving faith, yet a profession of this faith was requisite to a visible claim in the promise, "These signs shall follow them that believe," **Mr** 16:17. Nor did John, the forerunner of our Lord,, in the course of his ministry, admit any to baptism for the remission of sins, without a confession of their belief in him that should come after him, whom he declared would baptize his disciples with the Holy Ghost, **Mt** 3:11 compared with **Ac** 19:4. And that a divine faith or holy trust in Christ is contained in that repentance unto which the apostles exhorted their hearers, is evident from other passages of scripture. Thus, Peter says, "Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." **Ac** 3:9. And again, chap. viii. 37. When the eunuch proposed himself to Philip for baptism, he replies, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." And further, chap. xvi. 30, 31. on the jailor's application to Paul and Silas under the like distress, saying, "What shall I do to be saved?" their answer is the same, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Upon the whole, it appears that nothing less than a cordial faith is required in baptism with hope of remission, and that therefore this faith is included in that repentance the apostle intends; in the exercise of which the Jews are directed to be baptized in the name of Jesus.

I HAVE been thus particular in settling what I apprehend the just idea of the expression *repent*, as it throws a light on many exhortations in the New-Testament, and is more especially needful to a right understanding and improvement of the passage before us. Peter is plainly directing these awakened transgressors, who were anxious to know what they should do, notwithstanding their aggravated guilt, to believe on Jesus and submit themselves to him, and publicly own their dependence upon him as Lord and Christ. To repent, therefore, must carry in it faith in the Redeemer; and this exhortation separate from the encouragements expressly subjoined, was adapted to relieve these distressed souls from the tormenting fears of being absolutely excluded from the grace of God in his Son; and is a noble instance of the skill and faithfulness of the

preacher, and also shows that the ministers of Christ are warranted to encourage every sensible sinner.

NOR is it supposed in this exhortation, thus understood, that these Jews, or any other under the like circumstances, are able in and of themselves to believe in Jesus; this direction and encouragement is given to them only who are called, ver. 39. “to as many as the Lord our God shall call.” By this the apostle sufficiently guards against any undue ascription of power in the creature, and leads our thoughts to the energy of the Spirit, in quickening grace, as needful unto saving repentance or faith. An heart or ability so to repent is undoubtedly the free gift of God, dispensed from the King of grace, wrought in the subject by the power of the Holy Ghost, under whose divine agency alone this and every other spiritual act is exerted; all which is clearly shown in different parts of the sacred writings; thus it is declared, “God hath exalted Jesus to give repentance and remission of sins,” **Ac** 5:31. And again, “Then hath God also granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life,” chap. xi. 18. “ And “we know that it is God which worketh, in his called ones, both to will and to do of his good pleasure,” **Php** 2:13. Hence, they repent and believe: It is therefore no other than cavil, in opposition to the express counsel of God, to argue from such-like exhortations to the power of man without special grace to repent and turn unto the Lord. Most certainly “no man can come to Christ, except the Father which sent him draw him,” **Joh** 6:44. Yet awakened sinners are to be directed and exhorted to repent, and to submit themselves to Jesus for the remission of sins; and the moral ends of such exhortations are obvious to any unprejudiced person; they are to convince men of the necessity there is for repentance unto life, and a means, in the hand of the Spirit, to lead, encourage, and animate perishing sinners to believe and be saved. And this answer may suffice to show the perverseness of them who will represent this method, in a gospel ministry, as inconsistent with the impotency of man, or the goodness of God, since it is evident that these exhortations are adapted to excite convinced transgressors to repentance and faith, and the Almighty is pleased to render them effectual thereunto in the hearts of his chosen: therefore no man need scruple to follow the example before us, in the course of his ministry, when sinners enquire,

what shall we do? But freely and earnestly recommend them, even every one, to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; nor should any be offended at this, since it is manifestly rational, all things considered, and a means owned of God for the salvation of men.

To repentance the apostle enjoins submission to baptism; “And, says he, be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” I shall not enlarge on the form of this divine institution, which I am sorry to say, like some other appointments of the Redeemer, is more known than practiced; but the design I am upon, and the exhortation of Peter, will not permit me to be totally silent on an article essential to primitive worship. Nothing is more my aversion than the scorn and anger, which is but too often seen in debating this point. It may be pleasing to the flesh, but this is not by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God; it is unseemly and vain. I would therefore in meekness and sobriety, with a cordial esteem for those brethren who are otherwise minded, use a becoming freedom on the subject, on which it may be difficult to offer any thing which has not for substance been urged, or at least hinted already by others.

IT is notorious that a change in the mode of this gospel-ordinance, from dipping to sprinkling, hath obtained; and in these and some other parts of the world, called Christian, become almost general; nevertheless they are plainly quite different, and cannot be made one and the same, or spoken of as such without a violation of language and sense. Sprinkling was a rite of purification under the law, but manifestly and ever distinct from that of bathing or immersion, which was also appointed, **Nu** 19:13,19. compared. To confound these different modes, or to use the one instead of the other, seems highly unreasonable, and not to be justified; and indeed, with becoming respect to those who can use this liberty, I take leave to say, that, in my opinion, to call *sprinkling baptism* is truly no better. To baptize, is to wash the subject by *bathing* or *dipping*, and not to wet a part only by *aspersion* or *sprinkling*. Nor let the Reader think that our practice of dipping is confined to a few, because it is by many neglected or

despised in this island, and some other countries; not to insist on the thousands who conscientiously adhere to this mode in our own native country, and especially in our American colonies. Dr. Wall, a zealous and learned writer in favor of infant-baptism, observes, Part II. page 309, 1st edit. "All Christians in the world, who never owned the pope's usurped power, do and ever did dip their infants in the ordinary use." And he adds, 'If we take the division of the world from the three main parts of it, all the Christians in Asia, all in Africa, and about one third part of Europe, understand by baptism *immersion* and so practice.' Every attempt to destroy or remove this native and genuine idea of baptism is vain; and I may venture to say, that it will never be in the power of man to show that baptizing is not dipping, or that this was not the mode in which the apostles and first ministers performed this Christian ordinance. Baptism is styled the counsel of God; a religious rite set up with divine authority, first by John the forerunner of our Lord, whose mission from heaven was clear. Hence when Christ put the question to the elders concerning his baptism, they feared to say it was of men. The Jews were startled when they saw him baptize and demand his authority, "Why baptizeth thou, if thou be not Christ nor Elias?" **Joh** 1:15. From whence I am convinced, the notion some propagate concerning the Jewish custom to baptize proselytes is without any foundation. And it seems unworthy our divine Law-giver, to suppose that a main institution of his kingdom is borrowed from a superstitious custom of the Jews, which must be the case if it really was in practice, seeing it is plain that Moses never enjoined it, but it seemed a new thing to the Jews. However, that this harbinger of the Messiah baptized by immersion is evident by the name he acquired from his practice, viz. John the Baptist or Dipper. Baptizing and dipping is so clearly the same, that it would have been impertinent, especially in a country where it was daily in use, to have attempted a description of the manner in which it was performed; and had no prejudice taken place in favor of a contrary practice, the circumstances related of our Lord's baptism would suffice to satisfy every serious enquirer. We are told, that "when he was baptized he went up straightway out of the water." Dr. Whitby, and other eminent authors, who plead for the baptizing of infants, notice the just observation of the Greek church on the passage, which is

this, namely, ‘that he, who ascended out of the water, must first descend down into it.’ And it is remarkable that the inspired apostle uses the same argument in reference to the ascension of Christ, which presupposes his resurrection from the dead, shadowed forth in baptism by immersion, **Eph** 4:9. “Now that he,” i.e. Christ, “ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” i.e. died and was buried; and the inference is too natural not to be discerned by the plainest capacity: But, adds the Doctor, “Baptism, therefore, is not to be performed by sprinkling, but by washing the body;” and still further, says he, “Indeed it can only be ignorance of the Jewish rites in baptism, that this is questioned.” His testimony I hope will not be altogether disregarded.

ON a supposition that the apostles, who wrote the New-Testament, used the terms of the Septuagint, which is generally allowed, and seems clearly the case, it is submitted to the learned of the paedobaptists themselves, [Letters to a Right Rev. Author, &c. Part I, Letter IV, page 29] ‘Whether it was possible for them to fix on two words in all that Greek translation that can more precisely determine this particular manner of washing the body by immersion distinct from all other purifications, than those they have actually chosen, viz. [Dr. Gale hath abundantly shown from the critics and also from the Grecian poets and historians, that (βαπτίζω) always signifies to dip, which every one who is capable may consult with advantage; besides, as that learned writer justly observes, if the expression was otherwise ever so ambiguous, yet, as it relates to baptism, the doctrine and practices of John and the apostles sufficiently determine the sense unto dipping. Gale on baptism, Letters III, IV and V. And from the same letters it appears that Mr. Wall himself, who is the historian they refer to, intimates that the clergy would gladly revive the ancient practice, and desired, according to the direction of the rubric, to baptize by dipping all that are willing to receive it in that manner, and are able to bear it; and I presume, that notwithstanding the continuance of sprinkling in the national church, with scarce any exception for half a century more, must rather have increased the popular prejudice in favor of the practice, there are still not a few of that communion who are sufficiently convinced to wish a return to the good old way.] and the same mode of baptism is confirmed by every instance, and particularly the place chosen for the administration of this divine ordinance; nor doth any other manner of washing agree with the manifest reference we have therein unto the burial and resurrection of our Saviour, and to that of the subjects being raised from the death of sin to walk in newness of life, so clearly pointed, out in **Ro** 6 and **Col** 2. This also corresponds with every allusion in

scripture to baptism, and the general concession or testimony of the most reputable advocates for baptizing of infants, since the practice existed, which is in favor of dipping. Among these, which are a multitude, the known wish of the above learned author, in his note on **Ro** 6:4 is much to the purpose, ‘immersion,’ says he, ‘was religiously observed by all Christians for thirteen centuries.’ And he laments the change of it into sprinkling without any allowance from the author of this institution, or any license from any council of the church; of which the Reader will see more at large in consulting his paraphrase. And truly the custom of aspersion, however prevailing at present, is comparatively modern in England, and is even now only permitted by the governors of the national church, as appears in their liturgy. Some speak of the supposed danger of dipping in these cold climates, and think this may be a very good reason for changing the form of baptism to sprinkling, but experience proves the safety of dipping, and this mode is still used in countries many degrees colder than ours; witness the Ruffias, and even Muscovia itself, in some parts of which it is extremely severe; nor hath it in any instance appeared injurious to dip the body, even of infants the most tender, in water. But admitting there seems a danger in dipping a weakly constitution, or in a very cold season, shall we not trust the Lord in the way of our duty? Shall we reason from thence in opposition to the wisdom of God, unto a neglect of his sovereign and gracious appointment? Or will this justify a change in the mode of a divine ordinance? It is a truth that hath been frequently urged, that ‘on a mere positive institution we cannot argue as in matters of natural or moral duty.’ It therefore becomes us to obey with humility and reverence, and conscientiously adhere in our practice to every circumstance prescribed in the word. This method of reasoning therefore is not to be defended, nor should any presume to act thereupon contrary to the express will of the Lord whom we serve. Upon the whole, it is truly astonishing, and an affecting instance of human weakness, that in a country where the custom universally prevailed so many centuries, and where the practice still stands expressly directed in the public instrument of the national church, that this form of baptism should be counted strange, novel or indecent. Is it not strange, that, under these circumstances, a people who cannot but perform this appointment of the

Saviour by dipping, should, for that reason only, be derided or censured? Alas, how fickle mankind! To what amazing prejudices are we exposed! That the general and ordinary way was to baptize by immersion or dipping the subject into the water, is so plain and clear, saith Dr. Wall [Vol II. 3d edit, p. 351.], by an infinite number of passages, that one cannot but pity the weak endeavours of such paedobaptists who would maintain the negative.’ And I am persuaded that most, who do not think it absolutely necessary to the essence of baptism, and therefore remain in the popular way, will, on serious reflection, with that learned writer, disown and show a dislike of the profane scoffs which some people give to the English antipaedobaptists merely for their use of dipping; and certain I am, that if any are otherwise minded, their zeal against this ancient mode of baptizing is not duly tempered with knowledge and charity.

NOW this baptism is to be performed in the name of Jesus Christ. The commission of our Lord to his disciples is plain and express, **Mt** 28:19. “Go ye, therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Nor are these words of Peter, “in the name of Jesus,” to be otherwise taken than consists with this order of the Saviour. No doubt this form is sacred in the ordinance of baptism; for so, as hinted already, is every article prescribed in a positive institution, which entirely depends on the sovereign will of the law-giver. It has been suggested, that the Jews, being already believers in the Father and the Holy Ghost, had need only of being baptized in the name of Jesus: but there is not the least intimation in scripture of this difference in the baptizing of Jews from that of the Gentiles, nor is the name of either divine Person to be omitted in the administration of this ordinance, seeing that would come short of the express direction of our Lord. Nevertheless, Christian baptism may well be described in the name of Jesus, as here and elsewhere, chap. viii. 16; x. 48; xix. 5. Since the authority of Jesus is the ground of proceeding, and the subject not only confesses his faith in, and adores Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the Three that bear record in heaven, but likewise in an especial manner confesseth Christ as his king, and submits to him as the Son of God and Lord of all. Baptism is an act of solemn worship and personal devotion to the Redeemer, in which

the parties own his authority, and surrender unto the Lord as his God. Hence it is styled “calling on the name of the Lord,” **Ac** 22:16. A phrase which indeed includes prayer after the example of Jesus himself, of whom we read, **Lu** 3:21, “that being baptized and praying, the heaven was opened.” But it likewise extends to the whole obedience of faith, **Ro** 10:13-14 where the apostle refers to the same prophesy quoted in Peter’s discourse, ver. 21. “And whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.” He that submits to this ordinance with understanding, is baptized in the name of Jesus, calling upon his name in the prayer of faith, and actually owns and submits to the authority of Christ, who will save him.

It is added, “for the remission of sins;” which shows what troubled the heart of these awakened transgressors; it was guilt, their sins were set in order before them, a sense of which pierced them. But will water-baptism cleanse us from sin? No, no more than the tears of the penitent. Nothing is the meritorious cause of pardon but the atonement of the Saviour: His blood alone, applied to the wounded conscience, can heal it. Thus, Peter declares, “Through his name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins,” **Ac** 10:43. And again it is written, “Whom God hath set forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness in the remission of sins,” **Ro** 3:25. And further, “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace,” **Eph** 1:7. Thus, the scriptures abundantly show, that not baptism but the blood of Jesus, in whose name we are baptized, is that which cleanseth from sin. This manner of speaking, “be baptized for the remission of sins,” is by way of encouragement and direction to these afflicted enquiring souls, and shows that there was remission even for them, and that they should submit to baptism in the exercise of faith on Christ, who, by the sacrifice of himself, obtained eternal redemption, and whose sufferings, death and resurrection, are shadowed forth in the appointed form of this gospel-institution. In a word, the exhortation is universal and without any exception, “every one of you” to show that not one person, among the thousands who were pricked in the heart, and who stood in need of pardon, was excluded from the hope of God’s mercy in

Christ; and that likewise not a single believer, who laid hold of this mercy, was excluded from a professed subjection to the gospel, or public acknowledgment of his divine authority, and devotion to his will in the sight of mankind.

TO this obedience of faith, the apostle annexeth a promise, “And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” not in his quickening or regenerating influences, whereby the subject is truly convinced of sin, and engaged to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. A participation of his grace, in this respect, is previously required to baptism. Thus, as before, Philip saith to the eunuch, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.” This promise may be understood in a sense peculiar to the primitive times, or accommodated to the hope of every baptized believer in all ages and places to the end of the world. It may refer to the extraordinary gifts which the Holy Ghost distributed among the apostles, who had also, by him, a power of conveying the same to others, by which the gospel was then confirmed among the disciples; many of whom were enabled to speak with tongues, and to perform great things in testimony of the resurrection of Jesus, and for the edification of his church, **Ac 19**. Many, I say, for we are not to suppose that every one who was baptized was thus miraculously endowed, but only some, as circumstances required. Thus, Cornelius and others received the Holy Ghost at Caesarea, **Ac 10:47**. In this view it is an assurance of their being confirmed by further instances of his wonderful operations which came to pass, when, as we are told, “Many wonders and signs were done by the apostles,” [Ac 1:43](#), and likewise that many of themselves should partake of his extraordinary gifts for the spread of the gospel. Hence we read, chap. viii. 4. that a persecution being raised at Jerusalem, by which the disciples in general were dispersed, “they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” So that the wise was taken in his own craftiness, and the malice of satan overruled to the increase of the kingdom of God, which that enemy fought to destroy. Nevertheless, if believers now have any interest in this promise, it is not to be confined to these extraordinary gifts. The promise is given to every one: And I cannot help thinking that Peter includes, if not chiefly intends, those operations of the Holy Ghost, whereby the faithful are more

abundantly enlightened, sanctified and confirmed, even that working of the Holy Spirit, by which the Christian is sealed to the day of redemption, and made meet for communion with God and his glorious inheritance, compare **2Co** 5:5. **Eph** 1:13,18. and chap. iv. 30. Certain it is that the Comforter, as a Spirit of adoption and a witnessing Spirit, is more or less given to them that obey the gospel, and that, in waiting on the Lord in his appointments, believers may expect to be established with grace, and to increase in the knowledge of him unto a meetness for glory.

THUS, Peter excites these awakened transgressors to evangelical repentance, which includes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to witness the same by being openly baptized in his name, in a certain prospect of full remission of sins; yea though they had wickedly slain the Redeemer, he assures them notwithstanding, that on confession they should be sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Joyful tidings, which, through a divine energy, became life from the dead, and healed the wounds that had otherwise proved mortal. When they heard this, they gladly received the word, and delayed not to yield themselves to the Lord. In like manner the gospel is sent to bind up every broken heart, and to comfort every sinner who mourns. And therefore, dear Reader, if thine heart is wounded receive the consolation, for a reconciled God is no respecter of persons.

LECTURE XIII.

The promise on which Peter raises the expectation of the awakened Jews, upon their obeying the gospel, briefly and fairly examined. With notes and reflections on the whole of their reply to their anxious question.

THE apostle having encouraged the men of Judea, sinful as they were, with a certain prospect of remission on repentance, and having asserted that, on being baptized in the name of Jesus, they should receive the Holy Ghost, proceeds to the ground of this blessed assurance. And his argument is this: “For the promise is unto you and your children, and all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” The promise is remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost unto them who repent and are baptized in the name of the Lord; and the passage would be easily understood, had there been no dispute among Christians concerning the subject of baptism. But since some who plead for the baptizing of infants, have pressed this text into their service, it is needful to clear up the sense, and to consider whether it affords any foundation for that practice, which I shall attempt with candor in a very few words. In general, the promise is limited to them that are called. The word rendered children is not frequently, if at all, used for infants; and a right to baptism, as hinted already, is not the thing promised.

ONE might have thought that the last clause in this verse would have effectually secured it from being applied in favor of infant-baptism, since while it extends its comfort to all that are called, it limits the objects of the promise to them. Now this call must be either the external call in the ministry of the word, or that which is internal and efficacious unto repentance and faith. If we understand of it the former, what infants are capable of that? Can babes and sucklings, in a natural sense, hear and understand the word of the gospel? Or are the ministers of Christ sent to preach unto them? No sober advocate for their being baptized will answer in the affirmative. An unprejudiced Reader will therefore easily admit, that the call here intended is that which is effectual unto repentance, a testimony of which is given in baptism. This call is of God by Jesus, and wrought through the power of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the

regenerate, and consequently peculiar to them who are born of the Spirit. Far be it to insinuate, that infants are incapable of the sanctifying operations of the Spirit, but how or when the almighty King of grace worketh in any such, according to the counsel of his will, is a secret to us; but we are speaking of what is revealed, and the rule of our duty in the administration of a divine ordinance, and we may, and must with freedom assert, that infants neither are nor can be the visible subjects of this divine work, but the promise, whether of the Holy Ghost, or the remission of sins, or of salvation, verse 21. which forms rather intended, is certainly limited to those who are called of God, and to their children as such; and accordingly, the learned Dr. Whitby himself, whose regard for infant-baptism is not to be questioned, expressly and justly declares, that these words will not prove a right of infants to this gospel-institution. See his annotations on the place.

BUT that none should be misled, or carried away by the sound of the word *children* in this passage, it may be proper to note, that it is not (παιδίον) whereby young children or infants, when distinguished from men and women, are expressed; for instance, that which is used in describing those who were miraculously fed, **Mt** 14:31. and chap. xv. 38, from which the term paedobaptist is derived; but the word is (τέκνον), quite another word, and which signifieth posterity rather than little children or infants. This is so obvious, that Dr. Hammond, [Resol. 6. 24. Edit, 122mo, p. 256.] another zealous advocate for infant-baptism, hath these remarkable words on the place: ‘If any hath made use of that very uncludent argument (so he styles it) “the promise is made to you and your children,” I have nothing to say in defense of them; I think the word children there is really the posterity of the Jews.’ So then, in the opinion of this learned paedobaptist, no good argument can be drawn from this passage to the right of the infant-seed of believers unto Christian baptism; and indeed it is strange that wise and good men should insinuate the notion, much more that they should, in any degree rest the validity of infant-baptism on an expression that is well known to have no respect to the infantile state. Besides, the promise as hinted, has no relation to baptism. Peter exhorts believers to be baptized as incumbent on as many

as the Lord shall call, upon which they are entitled to claim the promise, and encouraged to look for its accomplishment in their own experience, to their satisfaction and joy; of which, by the way, infants are incapable; nor can the baptizing of infants be inferred with any color of reason from this declaration of the apostle.

THE propriety of Peter's expressing himself in this manner will appear, if we consider that the Jews were "the children of the prophets, and of the covenant God made with their fathers, saying to Abraham, "and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed," **Ac** 3:25 To them belonged the promises, **Ro** 9:4. It was their peculiar honor and advantage to have the promise of the Messiah, and of the blessings of life and grace, which come on the called through faith in his blood. Hence the gospel was first preached to them: "Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities," **Ac** 3:26. And in chap. 13:47, we read it was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to them. Indeed the promises ascertained the pardon of no one while in a state of unbelief; nor was an Israelite, who first enjoyed the means of grace, better entitled to claim remission on repentance than the Gentiles who were originally void of the privilege; but it is easy to see the propriety and force of the apostle's argument with these awakened Jews, who were now convinced that salvation was in no other than in that same Jesus whom they had crucified. The promise being unto them and to their children, [**Mt** 27:25. (τέκνον), the same expression used in the promise.] even to as many as the Lord their God shall call, must needs encourage their hope as partakers of this calling, notwithstanding their aggravated guilt, since it showed there was mercy even for them, nor could they despair under such a persuasion. How seasonable and just was the reasoning of the apostle with the people who had not only murdered the Prince of life, but had likewise imprecated his blood on themselves and on their children, and thereby, as far as in their power, bound their blood-guiltiness on their latest posterity! O the tormenting distress that must attend a conviction of having destroyed both themselves and their children. Dreadful will be the case of parents who shall hereafter, as some through a neglect of their souls or their ill

example, be found accessory to the damnation of their offspring. These Jerusalem-sinners were verily guilty in binding their posterity under a curse for their own wickedness, and no doubt it lay with weight on their conscience, and they were terrified with the apprehension of having excluded themselves from the mercy of God by slaying his Son, and also by exposing their seed to his wrath. No, as if Peter should say, though you have been thus guilty, guilty of the blood of the Lord, and guilty in cursing your posterity and deserve everlasting destruction, yet God, who foresaw all your wickedness and knows the extent of his own grace, hath directed his promise to you; he has promised remission of sins on repentance to you and to your children, even to as many as he shall effectually call, being convinced of your evil, fear not to flee unto this same Jesus, whom you have crucified; neither ye, nor your children, not one of you are excluded from the report of salvation in the Redeemer. Therefore, O ye men of Judea, trust in the Lord and be saved! “Repent and be baptized every one of you; for the remission of sins, &c.” Thus, Peter, skillful in the word of righteousness, heals and animates the afflicted Jews, who lay bleeding under a sense of their guilt; and ready to perish, with an assurance of obtaining mercy; according to the promise made to them; and to their posterity, agreeable to the gospel-report, which declares that “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord; shall be saved” And the following things are manifest from the whole of this reply to these enquiring sinners.

I. THAT a personal and cordial repentance is of infinite moment. Repent every one of you. No man shall receive remission of sins, or be saved from wrath to come, without that repentance unto life which leads the subject into a reliance on Jesus, and is accompanied with a submission to him as the Lord’s Christ and an all-sufficient Saviour. It is of universal concern, to repent in the sense of this passage; and every one who is pricked in the heart and enquires, What he shall do? must be exhorted so to repent. Dear Reader, it is not thy hearing the word, nor any convictions of sin, under which thou art troubled; nor is it barely a persuasion that Jesus is the Christ, that will suffice thee. “God hath set him forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness in the

remission of sins,” **Ro** 3:25. This faith thou must have. He only that believeth in Jesus, shall obtain pardon and life at his hands. The scriptures afford no ideas of remission and justification, exclusive of a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The promise is to him that believeth, and they only, “which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham,” **Ga** 3:9. Many are the opinions and distinctions which even great and good men have advanced in the world, according to their different conceptions of the methods of grace, which are hard to reconcile, but they must all be reduced to this certain truth, most clearly revealed in the gospel, namely, that without repentance there is no remission. And, what less can be the concern of a wise and faithful preacher respecting each of his hearers, than that he should obtain mercy thus to repent and be saved? But,

II. NOTE the indispensable duty of every believer to be baptized. This evident truth is contradicted in the practice of those who will not be persuaded to submit themselves to the Lord in this divine ordinance. Art thou of this number, my Friend? Seriously consider! Repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus, are inseparably connected in the charter of him to whom an assurance of salvation is given in the gospel. “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved,” **Mr** 16:16. This is the substance of preaching from the beginning; and these God, who knoweth all things, hath joined together in the proclamation of his grace, and it becomes us to unite them in practice. The man that would boldly claim remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit, is no more excused from baptism than from repentance; not that the one or the other is in any sense or degree the meritorious cause of pardon, or of the bestowment of spiritual blessings, but they are both expressly and absolutely included in the description of him that is an heir of the promise. And doth not this deserve thy most serious attention? A person may doubt his own real character, and fear he is not a believer in Christ, in proportion to which his comfort is lost, and he is prevented from cheerful obedience; or he may think that what his parents did with him when an infant, is sufficient to answer the demand of the gospel on them who would hope to be saved, and on this persuasion be easy in his conscience, yea and be even bold in his profession; but what man can modestly say or soberly think, in a perusal of the promise that he

stands assured of pardon and life, while he neglects or refuseth to submit to the authority Jesus, by being baptized in his name? It is truly astonishing, that any one who conscientiously holds a good hope, through grace, of being justified in the Lord, can a moment delay his conformity to this plain appointment, and thereby exclude himself from a visible claim in the promise of life, through his blood! For me it to urge on disciples any opinion or doctrine of men, however piously designed, but the counsel of God is not to be shunned; nor could I count myself pure from the blood of all men, if I spared to insist on this great command of my Master. It is true ordinances are no saviours; but, my friend, if thou art tempted to indifferency about them, remember they are sacred, and likewise binding on all Christ's disciples, and that salvation is to be obtained in a way of gospel-obedience. Take heed to thyself. Indeed a man may conform to this external appointment of the Saviour, and nevertheless, like Simon the sorcerer, remain in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity; therefore trust not to any profession whatever, but at the same time consider that no man can sufficiently prove his repentance or subjection of heart to the Redeemer, who refuses to be baptized in his name. In one word, baptism is a plain, easy and express institution of our Lord, in the neglect of which no man can yield a complete evidence of his faith in Christ; neither will any works, however useful and excellent in their kind, without this work of righteousness (for so our Lord styles it) prove that we are his disciples indeed. "Repent and be baptized every one of you," is the language of heaven to the end of the world, wherever the Gospel is preached: and a skillful and faithful Minister, however this ordinance may be neglected or despised in his day, will not be satisfied without putting every one of his hearers not only on trusting in Jesus, but likewise on being baptized in his name, as he tenders the glory of Christ and his own future joy. But again,

III. IT is further to be noted, that in the ministration of the gospel, there is a free and open proclamation of pardon in the name of Christ to every penitent sinner. This known and joyful truth is confirmed by the instance before us. Here is no exception or difference. The most guilty of those Jerusalem-transgressors is assured of remission on his repentance; which

may serve to prevent the malicious and cruel design of the enemy in his attempt to dishearten a soul deeply sensible of abounding iniquity. Multitudes despise or neglect divine grace, from light apprehensions of guilt. The power of satan in the minds of the unregenerate lies much, in a subtle extenuation of sin; the enemy puts a false gloss on the evil thereof in thought, word and deed; thus, covers its baseness and easily obtains on apostate man, through the deceitfulness of his flesh; insomuch that, being hardened, he continues unaffected with the glory and importance of salvation by Christ. But when this flattering peace or security is broke up, by powerful convictions from the Spirit, the old serpent turns the tables upon him; he takes occasion from his sense of guilt to discourage his hope in the mercy of God, and to drive him into despair: Now he transforms himself into an angel of light; he magnifies the divine justice and holiness, and the righteousness of the law, which is broken, and its rigor as a covenant of works, that men under conviction may apprehend their transgressions have exceeded the extent of God's mercy in Christ. The afflicted, self-condemned sinner too readily listens to these insinuations, and thereby often becomes reduced to the utmost extremity. But if any man is under a temptation of this sort, be it known unto him that the devil is a liar. These suggestions directly contradict the counsels of heaven, which declare that "where sin hath abounded, grace doth much more abound," **Ro** 5:20. There are none so abandoned and vile in their state of ignorance and unbelief, but, seeing themselves lost and undone, they are invited to Jesus for life. God is faithful; and the merit of Christ is sufficient to illustrate his righteousness in the pardon of sin. "Ho every one that thirsteth, come to the waters," **Isa** 55; 1. And again, ver. 8. "Let the wicked forsake his way and return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." And, is not this correspondent with Peter's encouragement to the Jews on repentance? The infidelity, profaneness, injustice and cruelty, which attended their murder of the Son of God, and their treatment of the holy Jesus as an imposter and blasphemer, in opposition to the most striking and miraculous evidence from heaven of his being the Messiah, was a crime the aggravates of which are not to be expressed; yet we see that among the thousands charged with this guilt, who were convinced of their

wickedness, and stood in need of a Saviour, every one is directed to submit unto him they had crucified, with a promise of success. What a pattern is here of the long-sufferance of God, and the riches of his grace! Say not, O mourning transgressor, my sins, which are gone over my head, are too many and great to be forgiven! This is the language of cursed unbelief, and the devil; it makes God a liar in the proclamations of his grace, and is a virtual denial of this amazing instance of sovereign mercy, by which it appears that the divine purpose in Christ is equal, yea exceeds the most accumulated guilt of him that repents. Therefore, under whatever specious show the enemy would insinuate despair, reject the temptation as contrary to the truth of God and his Son. It is utterly inexcusable to despair of mercy after these declarations and examples of full and free pardon. Unbelief in them to whom the gospel is sent, is horrid and fatal; it admits of no excuse, but justly exposes the impenitent subject to the sorest condemnation. And further,

IV. THE promises show that no real penitent is to be refused the ordinances of the gospel, however bad his former conversation may have been. Some plead for open communion, and make light of baptism itself. If any man appears to them pious, though he is not conformed to that divine institution, they embrace him, and censure their brethren who cannot dispense with an ordinance of Christ under any consideration whatever, while they applaud themselves as persons of a truly catholic spirit; but in fact, a right to Christian communion is not entirely grounded in the piety of the subject, but requires an open confession of Jesus, and devotion to him in baptism. A man, being called, will hereafter sit down with the saints in the kingdom in heaven, who, yet remaining unbaptized; hath no place in the church on earth. The Lord knows them that are his, and accepts them; but he has commanded his disciples to be baptized in his name. And, is it the perfection of charity to presume against his express will and pleasure? But then, on the other hand, no man, who proves his repentance, is to be denied baptism, or being baptized, the privilege of the faithful, merely because he was a notorious transgressor before conversion. The men of Judea, though guilty of the blood of Jesus himself, on conviction, were directed to baptism; and we find them

afterward admitted to the fellowship of the church. Also at Corinth, persons who had formerly lived in a most shameful manner, being sanctified by grace, are numbered with the saints in that city, **1Co** 6:6. Yea and some, who once in ignorance, like the apostle of the Gentiles, would have destroyed the faith, after they were called became shining instances of holiness and zeal, to the praise of the grace they received. I hope none will abuse this mercy to their ruin; and far be it hence to insinuate that churches are not to be careful whom they receive. A profligate sinner, or one who hath openly opposed the truth, if a genuine penitent, will of himself afford every possible evidence of his conversion; the fruits of which are to be waited for. And a man may be justly suspected, who would intrude himself on others, who are not satisfied of his repentance. But to stand off, or to refuse the right hand of fellowship, to one that is truly and visibly humbled for his sins, and who gives proper evidence of his faith in the Redeemer, because of his former evil conversation, lest it should offend or bring a disgrace on religion, as some apprehend, or indeed on any other pretence, however plausible, favors of ignorance and pharisaical pride. This at best is no other than carnal reason, and contrary to the counsel of God. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and they who would reject such when penitent, forget that they themselves were once the servants of sin; they run counter to the manifest design of the mission and incarnation of the Son of God and the example of all Scripture-history. But to proceed,

V. UPON the same principle, no repeating sinner should be afraid or ashamed to confess the Lord Jesus Christ, because of his past rebellion and wickedness. It is probable that Saul, while he lay at Damascus, feared to own his conversion by putting on Christ, because he had blasphemed his name and persecuted his people in the time of his ignorance. We know that this was his objection against going to Jerusalem: "Lord," saith he, "they know that I imprisoned, and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee; and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was standing by, consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him," **Ac** 22:19. Certain it is that a view of his sinfulness occasioned his delay, as appears from the exhortation of Ananias: "And

now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord,” ver. 16. So then a view of his aggravated guilt hindered him awhile, from a public acknowledgment of the Saviour in baptism. For the like reason, many decline a confession of Christ. They have been guilty of such and such heinous transgressions in life, and therefore they are ashamed or afraid of making a profession of their faith, but without a cause; for as no man is to be refused by others, so neither should any man himself delay baptism on account of his notorious bad life in time past. If not only Saul the blasphemer and persecutor, but also every convinced Jew; even though he had been actually concerned in crucifying Christ, is directed and encouraged, on repentance; to be baptized in his name, what color of reason can there be for a penitent to decline an open confession of the Lord, or to abstain from the privileges of the gospel, because of his vileness before conversion? And is this thy temptation, dear Reader? Bring forth the fruits of repentance, and fear not to glorify thy Redeemer by a public devotion to his name. He that plucked thee as a brand from the fire, and took away thy filthy garments, hath bestowed this mercy upon thee, that thou mayest appear a monument of his in the sight of the world to his praise. Be of good courage: why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized without further delay. Once more,

NOTE VI. IT is sufficient encouragement to awakened sinners, that unto them the word of salvation is sent, this is the argument, and the only argument of the apostle with the Jews, to encourage their hope of remission and the gift of the Spirit, on their being baptized. O it is an unspeakable mercy and joy to a convinced transgressor who is ready to perish, when he finds the word of the gospel directed to him, that he is so far from being excluded from the promise of life, that Jesus invites him! This is the first ground of hope to the awakened sinner. Hence he is induced to flee, under all his guilt and unworthiness, unto him that is able and willing to save him; and with the highest reason, for surely a true penitent may safely venture on the faithfulness and power of God to glorify his righteousness in the pardon, sanctification, and eternal salvation of his soul, according to his word. And indeed, the only solid foundation of hope is the testimony of God. “I wait for the Lord, and in

his word do I hope.” **Ps** 130:5. That hope which is not grounded in the divine word, will never prove an anchor of the soul in an hour of temptation. But the perishing sinner laying hold of the proclamations of grace in Christ Jesus, as directed to him, will not fail, through the assistance of the Spirit, to hope in the Redeemer, and none ever trusted in him and were ashamed.

THESE are the truths which clearly result from Peter’s reply to the earnest question of the Jews, who applied in distress under a conviction of their sins, namely, the infinite importance of being found among those who repent and believe, and their indispensable duty to be baptized in the name of Jesus. It likewise proves that a free and full pardon is opened in the ministration of the gospel to every one that repents, and that no real penitent is to be refused the ordinances of Christ merely on account of his former bad conduct; neither should he for this reason shun a profession of his name. And finally, it appears that the consideration of the divine promise of life in Jesus being directed unto him, is a sufficient ground of encouragement to the awakened sinner, who is ready to perish, to trust in the Lord, and be baptized in his name, in a certain expectation of being saved through grace.

THIS is the sum of the gospel. And thus, our Saviour taught his disciples, that “it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem,” **Lu** 24:46. The report of this grace, in the form of an exhortation, was from the beginning addressed to every enquiring hearer of the word. Thus, Jesus himself came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,—saying, “Repent ye and believe the gospel” **Mr** 1:15,16. And unto the Jews in their blindness he saith, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,” **Lu** 13:3. And again, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.,” **Joh** 8:24. This indeed includes a credit of him as the Messiah, but carries in it more, even that repentance which stands connected with remission of sins, as appears from the terms of the threatening in case of impenitence. Nor is it becoming or safe, to lessen the importance of the

repentance and faith universally enjoined in the ministration of the gospel, on any pretence whatever. And as Christ himself, so did his apostles preach the gospel to every one wherever they went. This account Paul gives of his ministry in his appeal to the elders of Ephesus, **Ac** 20:21 testifying; (διαμαρτύρομαι) not simply publishing the doctrine, nor barely showing the necessity of “repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word signifies to call upon or charge the object addressed; and thus it is used by the apostle to Timothy, 2 epistle 4:1. “I charge thee therefore before God, &c.” This Paul did both to Jews and Greeks, not only showing them that repentance was needful to the remission of sins, but stirring them up to repent; which agrees with what he declares to Agrippa in the court of Caesarea, chap. 26:20. namely, that he “showed first to them at Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coast of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” In like manner, in the instance before us, Peter’s exhortation indeed was occasioned by the enquiry of persons convinced of their need of a Saviour; and no one without such conviction can possibly trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; yet the apostle’s address extends to the whole of his audience, and his argument comprehends every Jew to whom the promise belonged, even all the house of Israel, and every one in particular, present or absent, under the like conviction, is exhorted and encouraged by these words of Peter, to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. It is the office of the Spirit to convince men of sin; neither will any turn to the Lord, who are not ready to perish, and faith itself is the gift of God; hence they only in whom a divine power is exerted, will obey this external call in the gospel; yet every one is called, and ought to be intreated and charged to repent and believe, that is, as a perishing sinner to flee unto Jesus, who is the only and all-sufficient Saviour, according to ancient prophecy, **Isa** 45:22. “Look unto me, all ye ends of the earth, and be saved.” Thus, to the end of the world the gospel is preached to every creature, that the Lord working effectually in the hearts of his chosen, may grant them repentance unto life, and bring them to the obedience of faith.

AND now, my dear Reader, what dost thou think of these things, or thyself? Hast thou long sat under the report of the gospel unconcerned and impenitent? How hard is thine heart, and how great is thy danger! Thou art yet in thy sins, sensual in thy state, and void of the Spirit; and if death overtakes thee in this sad condition, thou art forever undone! Consider, I beseech thee; the Judge is at the door, and this night thy soul may be required at thine hands. The soul out of Christ must perish; in which dreadful case thy blood will be upon thee, the weight of which will sink thee in the bottomless gulp of perdition! O then repent and flee unto Jesus; there is no other name under heaven whereby thou canst be saved. Precious and wonderful are the blessings of pardon and sanctification set forth in the gospel: To be a partaker of these is of the utmost consequence to every man; yet alas, how lightly esteemed, how greatly neglected and despised! Whence is it that the least prospect of temporal riches and pleasure, or earthly enjoyments, things comparatively trifling and vain, immediately strike thy attention; while alas, the unsearchable riches of Christ, remission of sins, and the Holy Ghost, (gifts of infinite value in themselves, and of no less importance) are so obviously and shamefully slighted? The moment the things of this world are reported in the ear, and proposed to a man, he feels in himself a desire, perhaps an unlawful desire, of the object; and in proportion to the confidence he hath of obtaining it, he is prone to an excess of joy; whereas the report of these spiritual blessings, necessary to the fruition of God, are heard by most without any emotion of heart, or even the least concern about a personal interest in them.

STRANGE and lamentable this! Yet perfectly natural to a mind that is blinded by the god of this world, and hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. The conscience of an unregenerate man is not duly if at all affected with his native guilt and pollution, or the righteousness of God, or judgment to come. Hence the grace of the gospel cannot raise his attention or engage his pursuit. If this is thy case, may the Lord open thine eyes, and grant thee a sight of thy real condition. But if thou art now saying in thine heart, under a deep sense of thine iniquity, What shall I do? To thee this word of salvation is sent. It is the word of the Lord which abideth for

ever, and the voice of God to every one by the ministration of his gospel: “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.” And, as God is true, “he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.”

To conclude. Remission of sins, and emission of the Holy Ghost, are the two capital blessings of the gospel. To procure these the Son of God was manifest in the flesh, and became obedient to the death of the cross. Thy Saviour, O Christian, suffered and died a sacrifice for sin, that justice being satisfied by his complete atonement, the divine holiness might be vindicated in bestowing grace on the chosen. Hence, as we have seen, the Redeemer having finished his work, ascended to the Father; and upon receiving the promise of the Spirit, he shed him forth on the disciples, that repentance and remission of sins might be preached in his name, for the conversion and joy of the redeemed among men. And, art thou a partaker of this heavenly calling? Give diligence to prove it; “be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” But remember that “to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.” Abound then in these fruits of love, that thy faith may appear, and grace may be magnified in thine eternal salvation.

LECTURE XIV.

The converted Jews testify their reception of the gospel, in being baptized and joining the church. Notes on their visible obedience to the faith.

THE further we advance, the more we have reason to admire! It was truly astonishing that remission of sins should be preached in the name of Jesus; to them who had been guilty of his blood, and that any of them, in distress, should apply to his apostles for advice; but still more extraordinary is the real conversion of a multitude, who had defied every kind of external evidence to his character as the Messiah, and even gloried in having procured his execution. To behold thousands of these murderers of the Lord take up the cross in an open confession of his name, whom they had lately put to death as an imposter, may justly strike us with wonder; yet this was, through the power of God, the effect of Peter's discourse; for we read, **Ac 2:41**. "Then they that gladly received the word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Thus, the omnipotent arm of Sovereign grace is ever victorious, and it came to pass as the prophet foretold, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." The particulars of this remarkable account being opened, will lead us to several points essential to the experience and duty of them who are effectually called.

FIRST, We are told that they received his word, i.e. believed the gospel he preached. In believing there is a reception of the word and of Christ revealed in it. And accordingly in **Joh 1:12** they who received him, are the same with those who believed on his name; which agrees with what our Lord says in his address to the Father concerning his disciples: "I have given them thy words, and they have received them," **Joh 17:8**.

UNBELIEVERS reject the word of salvation, and like many at Antioch, **Ac 13:46**, put it from them, and thereby judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life. But these men, being awakened and convinced, believed the report, and accounting it a faithful saying and worthy of all

acceptation, embraced and applied it. They were helped, through grace, to “receive the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls.” And that to receive the word in the sense of this place, carries in it nothing less than the obedience of faith, or a receiving Christ Jesus the Lord, appears from the event.

NOTE again. The manner in which they embraced the gospel of Christ, namely, with pleasure. “Then they that gladly received his word.” They received it with all readiness of mind. As Zacchaeus, when called by the Saviour from the sycamore-tree, “he made haste and came down and received him joyfully,” **Lu** 19:6. Thus, the people of Galilee, who waited for Jesus when he returned from the country of the Gadarenes, gladly received him again: So when the word is mixed with faith, it is attended with joy in the Holy Ghost, **1Thess** 6:1. Some joy of heart hath been felt by that man who knows the sound of the gospel, which is joyful tidings to the perishing sinner. Thy frame, Christian Reader, may at present be sorrowful; but once, when first the promise of remission was received, it gladdened thine heart. And this was the experience of David: “Thy testimonies have I taken as my heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart,” **Ps** 119:111. And again: “I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil,” **Ps** 119:162, which agrees with **Mt** 13:44. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field,” Such is the effect of the gospel, when it is the power of God unto the salvation of a man that believes; he gladly receives it.

NOW they who indeed thus obey from the heart this form of doctrine, are naturally willing to testify the same in every act of external obedience; and accordingly these Jews were immediately baptized, and thereby openly and readily acknowledged Christ Jesus the Lord. Baptism is one part of the counsel of God, which the apostle had declared. The ministers of Christ are to teach not barely repentance, but the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, i.e. it becomes them to direct all who repent, to be baptized on a confession of their guilt and their faith in the Messiah. In

this manner John the baptist began in the wilderness, “baptizing with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people, that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus,” **Ac** 19:4. And after the Lord was risen, he sent forth his apostles, saying, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved,” **Mr** 16:15-16. This agrees with the history of the eunuch, in which it appears that Philip had in his discourse treated on the doctrine of baptism, on a profession of faith. Hence he takes the first opportunity to propose himself, and this is the reply of his spiritual guide: If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest,” **Ac** 8:36-37. Thus, they who receive the word are to call on the name of the Lord; “for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation,” **Ro** 10:10. And this evidence these Jerusalem-converts gave, of their having received the gospel they had heard; they surrendered to Jesus, and owned themselves his disciples; “for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ,” **Ga** 3:27.

FROM their baptism the apostle proceeds to their union with the church; “there were added unto them,” i.e. to the church, as appears from verse 47. He that is baptized in the name of Jesus is become his visible subject, and is formally meet for the communion of saints in his house; he is as it were now openly in the kingdom of God’s dear Son, and a disciple of the Redeemer; but no man commences a member of a Christian church, in which alone the seat of government and gospel-order is found, purely by his being baptized. Indeed every one thus prepared, whose character answers to his holy profession, and who is capable of the duties and ends of this spiritual communion, is to be received; but there is no necessary connection between a man’s baptism and his relation to any particular church. He that is baptized is both entitled and obliged to Christian communion, but in order to this, an union is needful; the manner of which is clear from **2Co** 8:5. “They first gave their own selves unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.” To the same purpose is **Ro** 15:7. “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” So then the formal bond of church fellowship is mutual consent. No baptized person, whom the judgment of charity is a believer, is on any

account to be refused; neither his poverty, nor the weakness of his faith, nor his being a babe in spiritual understanding, nor any other circumstance whatever, may hinder the acceptance of him who hath learned Christ; and, being baptized in his name, has a competent knowledge of the nature and design of Christian communion: This is manifest from **Joh** 1:12. mentioned already. “But to as many as received him, to them gave he power (or privilege) to become the sons of God,” What less can be intended by this power than a right to share with the disciples in every privilege of the gospel? Therefore, as many as believe on his name are entitled thereto. But still the consent of the parties is required to constitute a person a member of a particular Christian society; he must propose, and they must accept, in the name of the Lord. While therefore we avoid the pride of Diotrefes, and by no means reject a brother in Christ, or cast him out of the church; on the other hand, let us take heed that under a notion of charity we do not countenance disorder. No man can be constrained against his own will unto this relation in any gospel-church; and a pretense of right to intrude into the society of the faithful without a full satisfaction to a meetness for communion, is against the dictates of reason and scripture, and particularly of the example of Saul, that eminent instance of sovereign and omnipotent grace: after his calling and baptism he was not joined to the disciples till they, being persuaded of his conversion and character, gave him the right hand of fellowship. And if this was required in the primitive times, and among the apostles, who were to separate and go into different parts of the world for the spread of the gospel, much more ought believers, who are to continue together in the order of Christ, to be satisfied in them whom they lay into their bosom. So then you see that there must be a joining by mutual consent, in order to the communion of saints in a Christian church-state. And in this manner, no doubt, these Jews, when baptized, were added to the church

THE apostle having noted their admission, goes on to mention their number; not indeed precisely, but a few more or less; about three thousand souls. A very large gathering indeed! Now came to pass what our Lord told Peter and John, when he called them from their nets, **Mt** 4:19. “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The miraculous draught

at the sea of Tiberias, which the disciples could scarce drag to shore, was but a shadow of this, taken up by the net of the gospel. The fields were now white, and the reaper soon rejoiced with his sheaves! What a harvest of souls was here collected into the kingdom of heaven! May we not justly admire, and especially when we consider that all these were gathered and joined to the Lord the same day? This is a marvellous circumstance, but it was the Lord's doing; and who shall limit the power of God? It is easy with Jehovah to convert any number, in whatever space, at his pleasure. In a day or in an hour, yea in a moment, the victorious arm of his grace can subdue the heart of a sinner, and even turn the disobedient in thousands to the wisdom of the just! Had the change depended on the preacher, this extraordinary account might have been questioned; but since the work is divine, if any man doubt, the answer is ready; it is the same as is the case of the resurrection. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should quicken so great a number of souls in a day? Is anything too hard for the Almighty? Cannot he at his will, in an instant, reduce a multitude of unbelievers to the obedience of the faith? Surely with God all things are possible. Some, indeed, have queried whether so many persons could be baptized in a day; though it appear not improbable to them who consider the number of baths at Jerusalem, and that the apostles had hands more than sufficient to accomplish this work from eleven in the morning, by which time it is reasonable to suppose Peter had finished his sermon. But whatever difficulty is made about the baptizing these persons, there can be no room to hesitate concerning the power of God to convert them within the time above mentioned.

ONCE more, observe; this account is universal and particular: They all and every one gladly received the word; none but those who received the word were baptized; and no one baptized in the name of Jesus on this testimony was refused a place in the church, but was freely admitted. Such is the order of the gospel; nor can it be shown from the New-Testament that any person was admitted to baptism who received not the word of the Lord, or that an unbaptized person was at any time joined to the church. This is the sum of the account. A number of sinners at Jerusalem, to the amount of about three thousand, hearing from Peter the good tidings of remission

of sins, were enabled to believe; and in testimony of their cordial acceptance of the gospel, openly confessed Jesus Christ, and being in his name baptized, they were immediately added to the church by mutual consent. Here it may be useful to pause and reflect.

IN this glorious event we have a wonderful display of the sovereignty, power, grace and faithfulness, of God. Here is distinguishing mercy, they and not others. Thousands were converted; but there is reason to conclude that many more thousands, who heard the same sermon remained in unbelief. Again, how adorable the power of God in the sudden conversion of so many stubborn unbelievers, who had acted against the most striking testimonies of the Father to his well-beloved Son; and to call home and pardon these daring and bloody transgressors, who had murdered the Prince of life and crucified the Lord of glory! This was also rich grace indeed. Nor can we too much admire the faithfulness of God in thus accomplishing the promises he had given to his church. Now it came to pass that in eventide it was light. How did he multiply the nation and increase their joy? Their joy before him was truly according to the joy of harvest; and they triumphed in Christ as men rejoice when they divide the spoil, **Isa** 9:3. Alas, how different is the face of things now! Now a minister of the gospel can truly mourn with the prophet, **Mic** 7:1. and lament, saying, "Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage!" Here and there an instance, the Lord hath not utterly forsaken us. And if any judgment is to be performed by the example of these converts, how few gladly receive the word! Few indeed, comparatively speaking, are baptized and added to the church! In this respect there is but little even of the form of godliness among us. The generality of hearers seem to have no inclination to obey. O that they had hearts to turn their feet unto the testimonies of the Lord, and would glorify Christ in a professed subjection to his gospel! But in vain do ministers now wish and pray; in vain are strong arguments and earnest entreaties with many who would be thought Christians; they regard not the order of the gospel, as if Christianity could be promoted without a church-state, or there was neither authority, wisdom or grace, in the appointments of the Lord! Nevertheless, God is able and faithful to

revive us again. Let us not despond and say, our bones are dried, our hope is lost! The divine power and grace, manifested in the conversion of this multitude, should encourage us to hope and wait for the pouring out of the Spirit from on high; then shall our wilderness become as a fruitful field. Many will then embrace the word with joy, and become obedient to the faith, to the glory of God, and the increase of his visible kingdom., -

BUT for the direction and encouragement of those who are doubtful of their state, or negligent of their duty to Christ, I shall attempt a more particular improvement of this original example, which manifestly presents us with the following truths, namely,

I. THAT a saving reception of the word is accompanied with joy.

II. IT becomes every one, who hath obtained mercy to believe and embrace the gospel, to be immediately baptized in the name of Jesus. and,

III. HE that gladly receives the word, and is baptized into Christ, is obliged and entitled to the communion of saints, and should accordingly be joined to the church.

WE have seen that the example of these converts agrees with many other instances on record, which abundantly show that a reception of the word is attended with joy, and prove the first proposition; and indeed; in the nature of the thing, it cannot be otherwise. The tidings of peace, pardon, liberty, salvation, and victory, must convey joy to the subject; but all these are included in the voice of a reconciled God to perishing sinners by the gospel of his Son. The man who is unacquainted with the evil of sin, and his own sad condition under its power and curse, may take up with a notion of evangelical truth, and be a stranger to the gladness felt by these converts; but he that has been laid under a deep conviction of his misery and guilt, and, like the men of Judea, pricked in the heart, under a sense of his heinous iniquity, cannot fail of rejoicing in the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. Can a proclamation of liberty to the captive, pardon to the condemned, and glory to them who are covered with shame as children of wrath, be received without joy? It is utterly

impossible. They who are ready to perish cannot but rejoice in a prospect of deliverance, in proportion to the danger apprehended, and the certainty and completeness of the salvation revealed. In one word; it is a gospel that is received, and essentially a joyful sound, and therefore it must in some degree rejoice those who embrace it.

AND as to the other observations, they are no less confirmed by the testimony of scripture. It is implied in the general report of the gospel, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." And the commission of our Lord to teach and baptize, proves the obligation of baptism on them that are taught. And it is plain from the exhortation of Ananias to Saul when he lingered, and **Ac 22:16** that no enlightened person, under any pretence, should delay his submission to Christ, or be refused his sacred appointments. And, however some may excuse themselves, and are not to be persuaded unto this obedience, it appears from the readiness of these men at Jerusalem, and the jailor and his house on the like occasion, and especially when joined to that of the eunuch, **Ac 8:36**. I say, it appears but natural to those who receive the word gladly by a cordial faith, to be forward in presenting themselves as the subjects of baptism. Nothing can be more evident than that he who receiveth the engrafted word should immediately conform to this divine institution. And that it becomes a baptized believer to be joined to the church the first opportunity, is not to be doubted, since he is baptized in order to this communion of saints, and the observance of whatever the Lord hath commanded; so that a man who, after he has submitted to this ordinance, neglects the sacred fellowship, defeats one end of his baptism, and comes short of his engagements in that solemn devotion of himself to the Lord, as well as to the uniform practice of the primitive Christians.

SINCE therefore it cannot be modestly questioned that it is the express will of God, and agreeable to the conduct of such who were enlightened from the beginning, that they who embrace the gospel should without delay be baptized and added to the church, it may be presumed that few will controvert these points, but at the same time, as observed, the far greater number of hearers obey not the truth, among which we may hope

there are many to whom the word of the Lord is precious; such person are for the most part fearful of their meetness for these holy appointments. When one and another is asked why, upon a good hope through grace, he remains without practical and visible subjection to Christ, whom he esteems as his Lord! The common reply is, I fear I am not sufficiently qualified; I am unworthy, and not duly prepared for these institutions. And here, it must be owned, that men should take heed that they do not participate into any form of religion. A formal profession, without the life and power of godliness, avails not the hypocrite; nor will a blind devotion, however exact and externally regular, save any man; yet under this pretense, shall any true Christian omit the appointments of his Redeemer? And since we have before us a criterion of real Christianity, and consequently of an undeniable fitness for gospel ordinances, I beg the scrupulous believer to credit me awhile till I have an opportunity of pursuing the interesting point in another lecture or two; in his attendance on which, I trust, by the blessing of God, his doubts may be removed to his full satisfaction.

LECTURE XV.

What is included in a saving reception of the word, and the manner in which it is embraced.

FROM the striking example of the first converts, at Jerusalem, and other like instances, it appears that the word is embraced with joy, and that every one who receives it, should be immediately baptized, and joined to the church. Points which are scarcely debated. Nevertheless, how rarely are the waters of the baptistery used; and how few, in comparison, appear before the Lord with the sacrifice of praise, and sit at his table! Now this must be owing, either to a neglect of the gospel, or to some groundless scruple in them that embrace it, whereby they are prevented from conforming to this holy profession. But the instance of the Jews, who were baptized at the direction of Peter, is a sufficient reply to the serious enquirer: It reduces the point to this single question, namely, Have I in like manner received the word? If conscience answers in the affirmative, every just objection is removed, and the subject must find relief from his fears, and a warrant to appear under that form of godliness which becomes the disciples of Jesus. With a view, therefore, to assist those who are doubtful, and to animate the sincere penitent unto a cheerful obedience, I shall particularly consider the character and experience of those who were baptized and joined to the Lord at Jerusalem, and show the obligation of them who have obtained the like mercy to copy this original pattern.,

THE principal and interesting branch of my subject is the description of those who willingly offered themselves, and were added to the church. He that finds himself answer to this, will readily follow their example, and especially when he considers the obligations upon him, which are hereafter to be named. Now these primitive disciples are represented as having gladly received his word. To a full display of which it may be useful to show, what is included in a saving reception of the truth, how or in what manner a person gladly receives it, the source of that joy which they feel. And, as a further illustration of the point, I shall mention the genuine symptoms of this blessed experience. Now a cordial reception of the gospel carries in it,

I. AN understanding in Christ, and the things which belong to his kingdom. “He that receiveth the seed into good ground, is he that heareth the word and understandeth it,” **Mt** 13:23. Such is the profitable hearer, who embraces the gospel in his heart. This was the experience of the faithful of old. Hence saith David, “The entrance of thy word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple,” **Ps** 119:130. And in verse 25, he prayeth, saying, “Give me understanding that I may know thy testimonies.” Some are greatly offended that man in his natural state is represented void of understanding. Yet thus saith the scripture, which cannot be broken, **Ro** 1:31 “without understanding.” And again, **Ro** 3:11. “There is none that understandeth.” To the same purpose is **Eph** 4:18. “Their understanding is darkened.” Yea saith, the prophet, **Ps** 80:5. “They know not, neither will they understand.” A natural man may know all language, and be a profound critic in the letter of scripture: He may also attain to an accurate knowledge of every doctrine therein revealed; nevertheless, darkness hath blinded his eyes, he is spiritually blind; for with all his natural advantages, he cannot discern or distinguish the glory and importance of the gospel; he hath ears but heareth not; and is in the same situation with the Jews, to whom our Lord thus declares, **Joh** 8:43. “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.” Thus, the mind of the unregenerate hearer labours under inoperable prejudices, insomuch that he is incapable, without a change, of beholding the glory of the Lord, and the wisdom of God in his gospel. To which impotence, in respect of divine knowledge, the apostle is as plain as words can express it. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,” **1Co** 2:14. This is the sad state of the carnal man; he heareth the word of the kingdom, but our Lord expressly declares, he understandeth it not. So that in whatever sense unprofitable hearers may be said to receive the word, or to have it sown in their hearts, they are certainly destitute of a capacity of discerning the things of the Spirit. But this is the criterion of him who receiveth the word to life everlasting, that he understandeth it; and by this he stands distinguished from all other hearers. He hath what is styled, **Col** 1:9, a spiritual understanding, which is essential unto a saving reception of the

gospel, and is the effect of divine illumination. Hence the prayer of the apostle, 2 Tim. 12:7. “And the Lord give thee understanding in all things?” In one word, God hath given to him that is called, and understanding to “know him that is true”. Without this gift of God, no man can receive the word in the joyful manner these converts did.

AGAIN, faith is essential to this blessed experience. Concerning those who perished under the former dispensation we read, **Heb** 4:2. that “the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.” The allusion is to a mingling two or more things until they incorporate. In like manner, when the word is mixed with faith, it is not only received into the understanding, but extends to all the powers of the soul, so that the heart is conformed and united therewith. Thus, runs the margin of many copies, “because they were not united by faith.” A simple idea of the truth, however clear and distinct, yea and though attended with the highest credit of its veracity, is not sufficient. The heart must be deeply impressed, and as it were transformed into the doctrine of Christ. Indeed, this supposes an enlightened understanding, and a persuasion of the existence and glory of the things which are revealed, without which it is impossible to receive them into the heart. But a profitable reception of the word, by faith, implies more than a bare understanding, which in itself cannot produce a sufficient alteration in the subject. The whole heart is concerned in this divine exercise, as appears from **Ro** 6:17. “Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you;” are as it is read, “unto which you was delivered.” Where much the same idea is conveyed by an allusion to metal cast in a mold which receives the impression of its type, and comes out with its likeness: so is the heart transformed when the word is united by faith; yea and still more, it as it were incorporates with it, so that the things of the gospel hath an existence in the subject, as the great Dr. Owen observes on **Heb** 11:1. “It is the substance of things hoped for.” Faith, mixing with a preached gospel, gives a kind of subsistence of what is promised in the heart of the believer; it is also, saith the apostle, “the evidence of things not seen.” The subject hath the witness in himself, and a substantial evidence of the truth in his own experience. So then the word thus received, under the influence

of divine grace, become united with, and transforms the subject in a manner not unlike that of natural food, which by incorporating with the body, is a means to sustain and invigorate animal life. It is true, this divine operation is wonderful, the modus of which is not to be explained; but this is no just objection, since the like must be owned of the manner in which the food of the body unites and sustains it. The learned may describe or dilate on digestion, secretion, separation, nutrition, &c. with more or less certainty; yet after all it is allowed that nature is a mystery in respect of her actual incorporation of food as it were into herself, but that the body is sustained in this manner, will scarce be denied. And the same idea is conveyed by the word being mixed with faith in the heart, as likewise when the gospel is compared to food, and Christ to the bread of life, and also when faith in him is represented under the notion of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Spiritual and natural eating are indeed essentially different, and to compare the former in every circumstance with the latter would be absurd; but if in any particular they agree, it is in this, that each invigorate the life to which it is adapted, by being received into and incorporating with the subject; and this seems the purport of that remarkable passage, **2Pe** 1:4. where, speaking of the exceeding great and precious promises which are given us by the gospel, he saith, “that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” These promises, embraced with faith, became a means, under the agency of the Spirit, of transforming the soul into the divine image. Hence holiness, humility, and the love of God, appear in the subject, to the praise of his grace who hath called him.

It follows, that the affections are included in receiving the word, as observed; it reaches the heart. ‘Faith (says an excellent divine) sets love to work upon the objects proposed to be believed.’ And the apostle gives this criterion of the Christian faith, that it worketh by love, **Ga** 5:6. It therefore touches the inward springs of the soul, and draws out the affections towards God and Christ, and the things of the Spirit. This is the faith which, being mixed with the word, renders it effectual to promoting the divine life in the soul. Thus, all the powers of the mind are engaged, and the believer receives the love of the truth that he might be saved, **2Th**

2:10. And, indeed, love to the truth and to Christ is inseparable, from a taste of his grace. There is no receiving the word with a due sense of its glory and importance, and mixing it with faith, which implies some degree of hope in the blessings revealed, without a sincere, universal and superlative affection, which every one more or less feels on embracing the gospel; so that the religion of a real Christian is rooted and grounded in love from the beginning.

AND further, this includes a sincere and universal obedience. Hence believers are described as obedient to the faith, **Ac** 6:7. And Peter, **1Pe** 1:22 thus exhorts the disciples: “Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, see that ye love one another, &c.” On the other hand, they who reject the counsel of God are pronounced disobedient, and are complained of as not obeying the gospel. In receiving the word there is not only a submission to the righteousness of God, but the person resigns himself unto Jesus as his Lord, and becomes a willing subject of his kingdom. Thus, in **Col** 2:6. it is styled, receiving Christ Jesus the Lord, i.e. to be disposed and governed by him in all things. He that cordially embraces the gospel surrenders himself unto Jesus, and the language of his heart is with Saul, who, when converted, cries out, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” And I need only say, that in the natural course of things, this devotion of soul to the Redeemer will issue in external obedience. Thus, when the word is the power of God to salvation, it is received into the understanding, mixed with faith, engages the heart of the subject, and is attended with an unfeigned obedience to Christ.

NOW he that has obtained mercy thus to believe the word of the gospel, will appear, on reflection, to have received it in the following manner;

FIRST, with a full persuasion of its true and proper divinity: ‘For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance,’ **1Th** 1:5, i.e. of its divine original and authority; “because ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God,” **1Th** 2:13.. And this they did not barely from any external evidence

whatever, but from an inward experience of its power, for the apostle adds, “which effectually worketh in you that believe.” The word comes with a divine authority into the heart, and commends itself to the conscience. Hence though the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, yet “unto them that are called it is the wisdom of God and the power of God,” They receive the word as from the Lord, and every doctrine is embraced in his name; and its being thus apprehended, is the very ground of their faith, affection and obedience, which stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. It is this divine voice they hear, and this alone conquers the soul and compels the heart to obedience. So that the believer has an eye to the supreme authority of God; and in receiving his word he submits to and relies upon him as the all-perfect Jehovah and Sovereign of his creatures, who has a right to demand his obedience, and whose faithfulness never can fail. In a word; this reception of the gospel we are speaking of, carries in it that absolute dependence, and that unreserved subjection, which is due to God only, and therefore must be grounded on his authority; for it would be unlawful to yield in this manner to any mere creature. But again,

THE word thus received is also embraced instantaneously. The kingdom of heaven (saith our Lord) is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it,” **Mt** 13:45-46. The truth of God is not like the opinion of man, to be deliberated upon and cautiously received; what comes with a divine authority to the conscience, admits no debate. No sooner doth the entrance of the word enlighten the mind and possess it with the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Christ, but the heart is subdued and obeys. And the reason is plain; for if a man could doubt a moment whether or not he shall obey divine truth, he would prove himself perverse, and in a state of rebellion against God.

AND further, the word is embraced in an eager and resolute manner, with the utmost willingness [(ἀσμένως) the word rendered gladly in the text.] of heart. Such is the nature and importance of the gospel, that it cannot be duly received with indifference. A reception of the word in the sense we

are upon, as hinted before, terminates in faith, and includes that coming to Christ or receiving of him, which is the same with believing on his name. The truth is received by those who are ready to perish, and to such it must be as life from the dead. The frame of the penitent sinner towards the word, when he layeth hold of the promise and fleeth to Christ for life, will in some degree answer to the importance of that concern he has in it, which is no less than that of being delivered from wrath to come, and the obtaining of life everlasting. This good news is as cold waters to a thirsty soul; and he must be thirsty that drinks it. Nor are the invitations of the gospel given to any other. So, then the word is received with a longing heart, and with a holy resolution to renounce every thing for the sake of Christ and the righteousness of God in him.

MOREOVER, the gospel is received with unfeigned contrition of soul. Indeed when it enters the heart it relieves from the sorrows of a guilty conscience; it heals the subject of those wounds which the terrors of the almighty have made under legal conviction, and fills him with peace through faith in the blood of the Saviour, but at the same time it opens the sluices of evangelical repentance. Remission is received with the profoundest humility; for the subject being melted under a sense of divine love, is deeply affected with his own unworthiness, and mourns with self-abasement for the evil of his many transgressions, which are freely forgiven him. Hence also he is filled with admiration at the rich grace of God bestowed on him.

IN a word, it is plain, from the instance in hand, that an acceptance of the gospel is attended with joy. These Jerusalem-sinners gladly received the word. In like manner do all who embrace it, which, as hinted, agrees with the nature of the gospel-report, it being essentially good tidings of joy. Nor is evangelical sorrow, which belongs to a broken and contrite heart, at all inconsistent with this. The mercy of God, conveyed through the blood of his son, is adapted to both; for surely the man, who hath received remission of sins, may well blush and mourn on account of his vileness, and his having offended that Lord who hath pardoned him, and at the same time sincerely and gladly rejoice in the grace he has received.

IN this manner enlightened sinners mix the word with faith, and obey the truth from the heart. They receive it as the word of God, in an instant, without hesitation, and with ardor and resolution, as most desirable in itself and important to them. They likewise embrace it with a contrite frame, under a deep sense of their own unworthiness and the abounding grace, which they also admire; and further, it is attended with gladness, as it was with the Jews. Articles, which, I am persuaded, will find a testimony in the conscience of him, who has been called out of darkness into marvellous light. It is certain that the experience of the faithful differ much in degree; some are not so deeply sensible as others may have been; and I would be far from insisting on any thing not quite essential, and thereby stumble the weak; but it appears to me that these are genuine criterions. And I cannot but think that the least of all saints will discern, on reflection, that the authority of God is at the foundation of his faith; that however long he may have been doubtful and held back, through ignorance and fear, from resting his soul on Christ, the moment he saw his fulness and the mercy of God held forth unto him, he yielded to the sceptre of his love; and that in so doing he humbled himself as unworthy the blessing, and admired the grace of his pardon; and, in a word, that at this season he felt some degree of joy in believing. I appeal to the experienced Reader, and heartily wish these hints may prove an occasion of his establishment, that he may rejoice with them, in whom the word of the Lord abideth a seed of life everlasting!

LECTURE XVI.

The source and symptoms of the pleasure which attends a cordial acceptance of the gospel. The duty of those who embrace it to an immediate external obedience. And the joy of true faith compared with that which may be found with a hypocrite.

THE last lecture closed with observing that a saving reception of the gospel is attended with joy. We now proceed to the spring of this sacred affection peculiar to them that are called; which, together with the attending symptoms, the obligation on the subject to incorporate himself among the visible disciples of Jesus, and a word for the relief of enquiring souls, will finish our design on the increase of the church by the first sermon preached after our Lord's resurrection. This enquiry is the more needful, since it appears from the parable of the sower, **Mt 13.** that there is a joy felt by some who are void of spiritual understanding, and who have no root in themselves, and therefore, however induced to a formal profession, under which, for a season, they may boast; they are at length offended, and perish. Every considerate person would deprecate being deceived in a matter of so great importance. And it may be, my Reader is wishing to know that his joy is substantial and good. May this attempt to assist his enquiry be succeeded, and prove a happy means of our mutual satisfaction and comfort! But let it be remembered that it is not essential to the character of a believer, that he has been enabled to distinguish the bottom of his heart, or that he should view things in his own experience in the precise order laid down in the following observations. It is sufficient, dear Friend, that thou findest in thyself the substance of what is described. This premised, I go on to the enquiry proposed.

AND here I cannot but apprehend, that the grand and original source of this divine joy is the glory of God, as it shines forth in Christ. This appears just, both from scripture and experience. That which is first presented to the mind, by the light of the gospel, to engage a man to the obedience of

faith, may I think be properly considered as the leading spring of his joy in the Lord; and what is this but the glory of God in the face of his Son Jesus Christ?" **2Co** 4:6. In the same prospect a believer perseveres. "We all with open face, as in a glass, behold the glory of the Lord, &c." **2Co** 3:18. The enlightened sinner has a direct and true sight of the moral excellency and beauty of the gospel. It is a reconciled God, whose righteousness is declared in the remission of sins, that fixes the heart and fills it with gladness. He that has been troubled for sin as an offense against God, finds his rest, on a view of the harmony of all divine attributes in his redemption; and it affords him unspeakable satisfaction and delight, to behold the Almighty a just God and a Savior, and that pardon and life everlasting are set forth in a consonance with the majesty and glory of God and his government. Now this joy is more or less felt antecedent to and irrespective of his own interest in this grace. So that the joy of a Christian is rooted in the love of God, whose glory is seen in his recovery from ruin. The word is received under a full persuasion of its conformity to the divine wisdom and righteousness; and though the joy of the awakened sinner is not without some hope of personal interest in the Redeemer, or at least of obtaining this salvation, yet the glory of the Lord, and the divine excellency of the things of the Spirit, is the first and immediate source of his gladness. Thus, the joy of faith ariseth from its object. It is God in Christ, who is the image of the Father, and in whom mercy and truth, and righteousness and peace, unite and mutually embrace, that yields him delight. And accordingly, the joy of believers hath always centered in God. Hence David styles him, **Ps** 43:4, my exceeding joy; or, as it may be read, the joy of my gladness. He that is justified by faith "rejoices in the Lord, and his soul is joyful in his God," **Isa** 61:10. And in **Ro** 5:11 the apostle, speaking of the general experience of the saints, saith, "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." The center of joy is its source. Joy naturally terminates in that out of which it originally arose. Now the joy of the Christian is in God reconciled by the death of his Son; the first spring of which was a prospect of peace by the blood of his cross. A Christian may not be able to distinguish this order of his affections in a life of faith; but, on examination, he will find in proportion to his light,

that it takes its first rise from a view of the glory of God in the person of Christ, and the display there is in the gospel, of the divine perfections in the deliverance and salvation of sinners.

THE next source of gladness in receiving the word is the hope of the subject for himself. The called are begotten to a lively hope of personal interest in the salvation revealed; for the illuminations of the Spirit correspond with the word of the gospel, in which every sensible sinner is invited with an assurance of mercy, as in the instance before us, ver. 38. Appropriation is essential to faith, insomuch that however weak in its degree, there is no act of believing, properly speaking, from the first motions of the quickened sinner towards the Saviour without it. Believing is trusting; but there can be no trusting without hope. In receiving the word by faith, there is included an application to Christ, and of the peace he hath made; and consequently, the subject applies to himself the grace and glory which are the purchase of his blood. And accordingly, from the beginning, the gospel is treasured up or hid in the heart. He that receiveth the word of the kingdom receiveth it for himself, and layeth it up as his property, riches and life. Hence springs his joy; this God is his God; this Jesus is his Saviour; and that he hath a right to claim in the promise of grace. At least without some degree of hope there can be no joy; but gladness attends a receiving of the word, in proportion to the interest and advantage the called apprehend themselves to have in the glorious gospel of Christ; and unspeakable is his advantage; for, “of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption,” **1Co** 1:30. In this prospect, may not the believer well exult, and, like the eunuch who was converted by the preaching of Philip, having put on Christ, proceed in his way rejoicing?

ANOTHER spring of this sacred affection in the believer, is the happy difference which he finds and feels in himself. A stranger intermeddles not with this joy; nor is it in the power of a carnal mind to conceive the blessed alteration which a received gospel makes in the soul. While a sinner lies under conviction of guilt, self-condemned and ready to perish, his troubles are great, he is filled with darkness, and distress; and in some

instances the tormenting fears of wrath have been exquisitely great, like those Jerusalem-sinners, whose hearts, we have seen, were pierced as with daggers or swords. Their case indeed was somewhat peculiar; but the evil of sin in the conscience will ever break the peace of the soul; and for the most part, the terrors of a broken law, and the apprehensions of ruin, for a season greatly disturb the awakened transgressor. And with respect to those who are seeking relief for their souls short of Christ and his righteousness, their minds are still dissatisfied: If they flatter themselves awhile, some fresh excursion of sin, or defect in duty, plunges them into the ditch, and they are again in distress. But when God shines into the soul, and gives the light of his glory in Christ, O the liberty, peace and courage, that possesses the mind! This binds up the heart, comforts the mourner, and sets the captive free. Now, justified by faith, the sinner hath peace with God. He is solaced with divine love; and, being thus healed and restored, finds that rest, which a faithful Saviour has promised to all who are weary and heavy laden, on coming to him, and feels himself cheerful.

FINALLY. A certain prospect of glory enhances the joy of the faithful. The salvation in Christ, which a believer apprehends, includes a glory to come, in the fruition of which he shall be happy for ever. Hence, we are said to be “called unto eternal glory,” and “begotten by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, unto, a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away.” Christians in this are conformed to their head, the Messiah, who in prophecy says, “Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth,” **Ps 16:9**. And, whence this joy of the Redeemer? He adds, “Thou wilt show me the path of life.” In like manner the believer is inspired. A view of his glory with Christ fills him with gladness. Nor is this at all inconsistent with the believer’s joy first arising from a sight of the glory of God, and terminating in the Lord, since that glory in the hope of which he rejoices lies in his being with God, to behold his face in righteousness, to be filled with his love, and to celebrate his praise. Such was the expectation of the Messiah himself, in the passage last mentioned; mentioned: “In thy presence is fullness of joy and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore:

THESE are the springs of gladness in the heart of him who receives the word, or believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. It takes its rise from a view of the glory of God in him, the beauty of which attracts the beholder; for, however strange or disagreeable the gospel may be to a natural man, nothing is more glorious in itself, or more suited to the taste and desire of him that is spiritual. He rejoices in the divine wisdom, holiness and righteousness, which shine in his justification, through faith in the redeemer. Thus, the gospel is first received as it is in itself, glorious and excellent. And though this is not without hope of an interest in the salvation revealed, yet a discovery of the divine glory in this provision of grace first strikes the mind of him that is called, whose pleasure increases on a view of his personal advantage, which together with the sweet alteration the peace of God makes in his heart, lately troubled with sin, and the prospect of life everlasting fills him with joy. Now all these are more or less experienced by the faithful. No wonder, then, that the word is gladly received. Can the man be otherwise than glad, who beholds the glory of God displayed in the salvation of his soul? Or shall he who is relieved from the sorrows of a wounded conscience, and the terrors of divine wrath, being cleansed with the blood of Christ, who is now formed in him the hope of glory, fail of rejoicing? Certainly no. May this joy in the salvation of God, my dear friend; be the strength of our heart, that, persevering in the fruits of holiness, we may attain to perfection in the world to come!

NOW whoever has found this joy arise in his heart, to him the word of the gospel is precious; he esteems it as excellent in itself, and as the means of his own salvation. It is therefore more than his necessary food, **Job** 23:12. More to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey or the honeycomb, **Ps** 19:10. Hence young converts give themselves to reading, and meditation, and delight in the company of those who are ready to discourse on spiritual subjects. They also take every opportunity of hearing, to be deprived of which would be as a famine of their souls. This delight in the law of God is frequently seen to share, yea and, it may be, that very soon, which is justly lamented; and they who have forgotten the love of their espousals, do well to look back

to the kindness of their youth, and remember how they first received and heard, and hold fast and repent, **Re** 3:3. But if any man despises the word of the Lord, or thinks it's ministration needless for him, under a conceit of what he hath already attained, he is proud, knowing nothing, and hath need to beware that he deceives not himself among those who receive not the love of the truth; for where that abides in the heart, the preaching of the gospel is highly esteemed, and the preachers in consequence, which is another symptom of gladly receiving the word, as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" **Ro** 10:15. Faithful ministers of Christ are hated and despised by the enemies of the truth; but it is the property of those who believe to esteem them. And however they are treated by some who pretend to this faith, it is certain that they are highly acceptable to them in whom it prevails. And this is perfectly natural, since besides the pleasure and advantage they themselves find in hearing, it is a genuine, and indeed one of the first and most sensible symptoms of embracing the gospel, to wish it might be the power of God to the salvation of others. The same disposition is seen in every one in whom God has shined, which discovered itself in the woman of Samaria; having found Christ, and been enabled to trust him, he would rejoice at his being revealed to all with whom he is connected, that they might also believe. In a word, under the influence of this divine joy, believers are bold to confess the Lord Jesus, and to declare their experience of his love. This joy is as the light of the morning, which disperseth the clouds; the fears which overshadow and intimidate the mind through ignorance, unbelief and carnal reason, vanish before it, and a freedom and courage possess the subject, who no longer will consult flesh and blood, but resolves to observe every gospel-institution. Thus, no sooner did these disciples embrace the gospel, but they openly and joyfully joined to the Lord, though it called for the immediate and certain expense of all that they had, and was even at the hazard of their lives.

This leads to the reasons for an immediate and cheerful compliance with the appointments of the Redeemer. Obedience to Christ is of infinite importance. There is salvation in no other; nor any other way of being

saved by Jesus but through faith in him. We hope that many who are not in a professed subjection to his gospel, yet believe on his name. But how uncomely in a Christian not to be conformed to the undoubted will of his Lord? Indeed this is so against the natural tendency of faith, and the genuine influence of divine love, in the remission of sins, that one would be apt to conclude that the subject could not allow himself, on any consideration whatever, to fall short of the least command of his Saviour; yet, alas, we have reason to lament, that, in all appearance, many who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, through one unhappy occasion and another, presume to live in the omission of what is enjoined them! And, Reader, art thou in this way? Allow me to press that; examine thyself, and obey thy Redeemer in all things; remember what Peter declares, “This same Jesus God hath made both Lord and Christ. It is not the forgetful hearer of the word, but the doer of the work: “This man,” says the apostle, “shall be blessed in his deed.” Faith without fruit will as surely deceive thee as an heartless obedience: A general flight of that open confession of Christ before men, among those who sit under the word, may render thee indifferent about it; but it will be found a thing of the greatest importance when the Son of man shall confess his faithful disciples before the angels of God. And it should further be noted, that a personal subjection to Jesus is, by the testimony of God, essential to the character of him that may hope for the salvation revealed in the gospel.

It is a glorious truth, that the gospel is the “power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. But then we are to remember that Christian baptism, and a conformity to the order of the gospel, belongs to the obedience of faith, which indeed comprehends more, but not less, than a regard to every external act of homage to the Savior. From this, and many other considerations, [Folly of neglecting divine institutions, published 1758.] the folly of neglecting divine appointments is manifest. An attempt to convince men of this may now seem abortive and vain; but certainly, he who in the end is found to have despised, or shunned the Redeemer’s commands, will have no reason to glory at his appearance and kingdom. The man whose conscience tells him that he has willfully omitted and lived in a neglect of any known institution of Jesus, will find his heart fail him at the approach

of his Judge; but he that abides in Christ may have confidence, for he shall not be ashamed before him at his coming.

AS a further inducement to be found in the way of obedience, I intreat the Reader, who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, will allow me to urge the following particulars upon him:

1. THOU art certainly qualified for this gospel-service. Is the question whether thy years, condition in life, or attainment in knowledge, faith and love, come up to what is required in the disciples of Christ? The answer is at hand: “if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest,” Ac 8:37. A meetness for these holy appointments depends not on any particular age or worldly circumstances, no nor on singular advances in a state of grace. All that they require, is a new heart, and manifest repentance and faith, without which no man can be saved. And if thou art qualified through grace, must not thy confidence condemn thee for omitting thy Redeemer’s commands?

2. IT is absolutely required at thy hands. “repent and be baptized,” is the voice of Christ in his gospel to the end of the world. No man that trusts in the Lord is on any account excepted from an obligation to confess him. all and every one, who looks to Jesus for life, is enjoined in his word to be baptized in his name, and wilt thou withstand the united demand of his authority and love?

MOREOVER, the example of the faithful call for thine obedience. It was the universal practice of the primitive disciples. Of the multitude converted in the apostle’s time, not one appears to delay this profession, Saul only excepted, and he stands justly reprov’d. It becomes thee to imitate their zeal. We are to follow them in the path of duty as well as of suffering. And indeed, no kind of sufferings endured otherwise than under this profession, hath a direct tendency to glorify Christ, or to prove our faith in him. But, we have seen that when the gospel first prevailed, converts were manifest by their immediate recourse to the ministers of Christ, they willingly offered themselves for baptism, and to be joined with the church, and did not, as many now do, linger and halt year after

year, as if a profession of Jesus was a matter of indifference or presumption, but they made haste and delayed not, and in all appearance thought a day lost not spent under Christ, and this they did in the midst of temptations and fiery trials. Now, if it became them thus at the hazard of every thing dear in this world, to put on Christ, shall any in the present day, who in the general, run no such danger to the flesh, with decency neglect it? But, alas, the skepticism and lukewarmness that abounds, more effectually and fatally quenches our zeal for the ordinances of the Lord, than the severest persecutions for conscience sake. This the experience of all ages hath too plainly verified; which shows the perverseness of our natural spirits, and may justly fill us with blushing, while we bless God for the external peace and liberty we enjoy. But again,

4. IT is thy honor and advantage to be under this holy profession. However despised by the world, can anything be more truly praise-worthy than to be a disciple of Jesus? If relative honor in any character is in proportion to the dignity of him with whom we are connected, as most certainly it is, who can vie with the Christian, or what more honorable than his profession? To be a real and visible disciple of the Son of God, and a follower of the Lamb, who is exalted in the midst of the throne in the heavens, far above all, must be an honor indeed, infinitely surpassing the most noble alliance or connection on earth. It is for want of discerning the glory of Christ, that any are backward to give the most evident proof of their subjection to his authority. A due sense of this in the heart will make a man count it an honor to be vile in the eyes of the world for his name's sake. No man need be ashamed of the gospel of Christ who is not a shame to it, but adorns the doctrine of his Saviour. And further,

5. TO be baptized into Christ is as it were to have his Father's name written in our foreheads. Re 14:1. for we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, the honor of which is not to be expressed. Nor is it less an advantage to be walking in Christ. This right or privilege is profitable to him that believes, and therefore to be highly esteemed. If we may credit the scripture of truth, and the declared experience of the faithful, there is a reward in walking blameless in the ordinances of the

Lord; it is so in point of knowledge, protection, comfort and joy, in communion with God and his people; all which must be exceeding precious to him that is spiritual. And are not these motives sufficient to engage thy cheerful submission to Jesus? If any thing further is needful to convince thee; consider,

6. ON the contrary, the many disadvantages that attend a non-conformity to the evident and undeniable appointments of the Redeemer. In this state, as hinted already, the promise of salvation is given, which, one would think, should alarm the man who desires to be saved. And further, he that lives out of this order excludes himself from other precious promises, and is not in the ordinary way of communion with God, and consequently it affects his peace, holiness, joy and love, all which are greatly promoted in this divine fellowship. In a word, he is much exposed in an hour of temptation. One specious excuse which some make for shunning a Christian profession is this, that they are afraid they shall prove a dishonor unto it. But, not to insist on the power of Christ to keep his faithful disciples from falling, which is hereby overlooked, the objection supposes that a person is obliged by this holy order to walk with greater circumspection than him who is not under the same; but, is this an argument with one that fears God to justify a neglect of his precepts? Shall the man who follows after holiness, deprive himself of this sacred guard by refusing to comply with the plain institutions of his Lord? Or, shall he not readily come under every possible obligation against sin? Reasons for a believer being baptized and added to the church might easily be multiplied, but these may suffice: He is qualified; it is required at his hands: This was the universal practice of those who were called from the beginning; and the honor and advantage of walking under this profession is great and unspeakable. On the other hand, no less are the disadvantages of not being conformed to this order. If these prevail not with the Reader to be found in this duty, what hope can I have of succeeding? I must leave him to the mercies of the Lord, whose people shall be willing in the day of his power.

BUT perhaps the Reader is doubting his state, and ready to say: True; I cannot but own that the word of the Lord has come with some power into my heart. My affections have sometimes been raised, and I have felt a joy in hearing the gospel; but, alas, I am still so carnal and sensual, and find so little of the love of God in my soul, that I fear my transitory delight is no other than may be found with an hypocrite. This may also be the fear of one who has already made a profession, in consequence of which he is sometimes filled with distress.

TO relieve the enquiring soul, I shall close this lecture with a criterion or two, by which we may distinguish between the joy of the hypocrite, and that of a true believer.

AND from what has been said, it appears that the hypocrite's joy is in himself; whereas we have seen, that the first spring of joy in him that receiveth the word is in God. The joy of the hypocrite primarily ariseth from a confident and high conceit of his good state, without any reason from scripture, but purely from his own imagination. He is unacquainted with sorrow for sin, and not duly affected with the wisdom and righteousness of God in our redemption by the blood of His Son. He is taken up in self-admiration and continually boasting of his great experience, and how religious he is. Not so the man in whom the word is effectual unto the obedience of faith. The love of God is at the bottom of that man's profession, which is in proportion to the abundance of grace he has received in the remission of sins. And as the nature of sin is more his aversion, than the punishment thereof; so as hath been shown, he delights first and chiefly in the glory of God, the excellency of Christ and his gospel, while he rejoices in the saving advantage he obtains from this provision of infinite wisdom and love. Again,

HENCE the joy of a false professor is attended with self-exaltation, and renders him light and presumptuous; he is proud of his attainments; and while he thinks that he stands, the man whose foot is ready to slip, is as a lamp despised in his sight; thus, he is haughty, careless of his own conduct, censorious of others. On the contrary, the Christian's joy, which

proceeds from a view of the righteousness of God in the pardon of his sins; the evil and bitterness of which he hath felt in his conscience, is attended with humility, reverence, and a holy concern for the honor of God. His joy is mingled in his heart with evangelical sorrow. He is low in his own eyes; has compassion for them that are out of the way, is sober in his account of himself, and in this state of sin and temptation rejoiceth with trembling.

AND further, in the midst of all his vain glory the hypocrite is barren. “But (saith our Lord) he that received seed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit,” Mt 13:23. He that rejoiceth in his own attainment is an empty vine, and brings forth fruit unto himself. But the Christian’s joy, which springs from the love of God, naturally yieldeth fruit unto him, as it is written, “But now being made free from sin, and become the servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life,” Ro 6:22, which leads to another criterion, and the last I shall mention, which is this:

THE joy of the hypocrite is transitory, whereas that of the Christian abides. I mean in respect of its principle and habit in the soul, for his frame is liable to change. Nothing is more uncertain and fleeting than his joy who has no root in himself. The man, whose profession is not grounded in the love of God, will surely be offended. But he that has received the gospel into his heart by faith, though in heaviness for a season through manifold temptations, has an unfailing source of joy in the immutable counsel and favor of the Almighty, and may always rejoice in the Lord. In a view of the glory and importance of the divine word, and his own interest in the blessings of grace, he shall not be moved, but will hold out to the end and be saved. “The water (says our Lord) that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life” Joh 6:14. This is the joy of faith; it centers in God; it makes a man humble and fruitful; and it abides in the soul. But carnal rejoicing, though occasioned by the word, ariseth from some other consideration than divine grace and righteousness, and terminates in self; it puffs up the subject, who is unfruitful, and will fail in an hour of trial. Dear Reader, examine thyself;

“for who is wise and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? “For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein.” Having this testimony that thy joy is in the Lord, fear not, though now thou mayest have sorrow, thine heart shall rejoice, and thy joy no man taketh from thee for “light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.”

BOOK IV.

Being A History of the Church in her Infant State

LECTURE XVII.

The constancy and faithfulness of the first disciples in their communion together, under a profession of Christianity.

OF all histories that of the scripture justly claims the pre-eminence. Its undoubted veracity, with the importance of its various and wonderful events, and especially when joined to the noble and gracious design of its glorious Author, which is to promote the honor of God, and the salvation and happiness of man, challenge our highest regard. [Properly speaking, the Author of scripture is God, and particularly the Holy Ghost, by whose inspiration the prophesies were spoken, and under whose infallible direction both the history and prophecy of those writings were penned, and commuted to the church. This, no doubt is the prevailing sentiment, notwithstanding it is so much the custom to give this character to the apostles and others, who were the amanuensis of the divine Spirit, or writers rather than authors of the books of the epistles to which their names are affixed.]

SCRIPTURE may be considered as a universal history of the world, and the church, but especially of the latter, in which the doctrines, precepts and ordinances of God and the practice of men are faithfully reunited. Thus, the Old-Testament is the best history of the world from its creation, including the fall of man, the counsel of God, relating to the recovery of his chosen by the seed of the woman; also the methods of divine providence in raising and preserving a godly seed, amidst the corruption and desolations of mankind till the Messiah came. It is therefore, likewise a history of the church, which is carried on in the New-Testament, beginning, in the four evangelists, with the incarnation of the Son of God, whose life, ministry, sufferings, death, and resurrection from the dead, are

concisely, but fully set forth, and with this view, “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name,” Joh 20:31.

THE same design is pursued in the remaining part of the scripture to the end. Now of this divine narration no part is of greater importance to the church than the Acts of the Apostles, which contain an authentic account of the rise and progress of Christianity in the world; so that these writings, with the addition of the epistles, and the book of Revelation, which closes the sacred canon, alone afford a genuine and complete history of the purity in doctrine, worship and discipline, which prevailed among the first Christians, who are the fairest example of social religion.

THIS then is the true ecclesiastical history, to which all others wrote after the days of the apostles must be subordinate, and an acquaintance with which is to be esteemed one branch of a Christian’s attainment, as a conformity unto it is a part of his character. And it were heartily to be wished, that every one, who professeth himself a follower of the Lamb, made it his diligent study. In all probability we should then be more united in faith and worship, and animated to a more holy, spiritual and orderly temper and conduct, and also love one another more than at present in all appearance we do. I shall therefore count it a mercy if this little sketch should be an occasion of promoting the knowledge of so useful a part of divine revelation, or a means of reviving the true spirit of primitive godliness.

THE paragraph on which I have planned my design is contained in the last six verses of the second of the Acts, which run in the following words:

“AND they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

HERE then is a concise history of the primitive church in her pure infant state, before her members were scattered by persecution, or those errors, divisions and apostasies took place, which hath since disgraced and defiled her. Indeed, she was not yet arrived to maturity, in respect of that order the infinite wisdom of her Lord soon after saw fit to establish for her edification. At present the apostles supplied the part of bishops and deacons, officers who are since become needful to a perfect church-state. We view her as a lovely child, in her first appearance in the world. There are also some circumstances peculiar to her then present condition, a pretended conformity to which would be ridiculous or worse, yet she is the original pattern of piety and love. These are the lively features of a neat gospel-church, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost; and however some may plead for another manner, the same spirit and behaviour will be found when and where genuine Christianity prevails, for religion is substantially the same in all ages and places to the end of the world.

THE account divides itself naturally into three general branches.

I. THE constancy and faithfulness of the primitive disciples in communion together, under a profession of the gospel.

II. THEIR manner of life. And

III. THEIR daily increase.

THE ensuing part of the lecture will contain a review of the first of these articles. We are told that they *continued steadfastly*; and the particular instances are given in which they persevered with so great resolution and zeal.

IT is said that they continued. Some nominal Christians, like seed sown in stony ground, hear the word, and receive it with a kind of joy; but, having no root in themselves, their religion is soon at an end. Indeed, flushed with a conceit of their knowledge; they presume they belong to the kingdom of God, and hastily sprang up in a promising blade of external obedience, in which they are zealous a while, but alas they abide not; their goodness is as the morning-cloud, as the early dew it passeth away; thus, transient is their form of Christianity. Here and there one who sets out with a show, soon stumble and recover, or falling, rise up again; but from the parable of the sower, and from general experience, it appears that few are restored, whose shining profession presently issues in a shameful departure from God. For the most part they seem given up to the delusions of Satan, and being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, become final apostates; so that however in some instances such may have grace to repent, for their case is not desperate, we have reason to tremble for them who quickly throw off the name of Christ, and return to their sins, as in the highest danger of ruin. Not so these disciples; they continued in the ways of the Lord, and proved the sincerity of their love. Again,

THEY continued steadfastly. If some soon apostatize, many more, who begin with a flaming zeal, are quickly lukewarm, loose and disorderly, under the profession they hold. Hence, they become inactive and barren; and, in their spirit and behavior, fall short of the character they bear. A man may presently take up the name of a Christian, with whom it may not be easy to drop it, in a country the inhabitants of which are considered as Christians, except those who expressly and openly deny the very name, as Turks, Jews and Deists, to which boldness but few comparatively attain. It is difficult to throw off the garb of religion; and rarely seen that he who hath put himself under a form of Christianity, and joined to any particular church, is fond of yielding up his character, though alas he may be far from aiming at a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ, but in many respects behave unworthy his heavenly calling, insomuch that it may be scarcely tolerable for him to be continued in the communion of saints. But the disciples at Jerusalem not only made a profession, but *continued*

steadfastly therein: [(προσκαρτερουντες)] one word in the original, and very emphatical, which carries in it an invincible constancy, alluding to hunters who cease not to follow till they have got their pursuit: it signifies not barely perseverance, but to persevere with strength, so as to increase in their attendance, zeal and courage in the ways of the Lord. Thus, instead of declining and becoming lukewarm, these primitive Christians waxed bolder and stronger, and exerted themselves still more and more: for the expression I here used, regards not only the time, but also temper, with which they adhered to their profession, and points out their importunity and desire in this perseverance: So the word is used, Ro 12:12, continuing constant in prayer; where it respects not barely the time of praying, but likewise and chiefly, the fervent manner in which it becomes us to wrestle with God. Then these disciples continued; they applied themselves with earnestness to every branch and duty of their profession, and held fast the same without wavering; being patient, watchful and active, they pressed forward, and made daily advances towards a perfection in the things which pertained to the kingdom of God. How noble the example! and what a reflection on them who are unfruitful and fickle, and who, being led away with the wicked, fall from their own faithfulness! But blessed and honorable are those who cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.

THE particulars in which these Christians performed in so laudable a manner are recited as follows:

FIRST, In the *apostle's doctrine*, i.e. the doctrines they taught, which were truly the doctrines of Christ, and not of the apostles invention. The gospel is not the word of man, but of God. The apostles were only ministers of Christ, and spake the wholesome words of Jesus their Lord, nevertheless it is styled the apostles doctrine; as Paul, who assumed nothing to himself, but was ever deeply affected with his unworthiness to preach it, calls it his gospel, because the ministration thereof was committed to him: And it may also be styled their doctrine in opposition to the false notions spread abroad by some who perverted the gospel of Christ. Doctrine here is no other than the faith once delivered to the saints, under which all the precious truths of the glorious gospel are included; in

general it was Jesus and the resurrection; a new and strange doctrine to the world, yet it was no other than Moses and the prophets did say should come, Ac 17:19. and chap. xxvi. 22. compared. The substance of this gospel was published of old, though, not being mixed with faith in many that heard, it did not profit or save them, and they perished in their sins; which awful account is to warn us that we receive not the grace of God in vain. Since the coming of Christ, this grace has been more fully manifested by his own preaching and that of his inspired apostles, whose doctrine included every thing revealed concerning the eternal purpose of the Father, and the covenant of redemption, wherein is laid out the methods of divine wisdom and love in the salvation of the chosen, through faith in Christ Jesus: So that the apostles doctrine takes in whatever relates to the Redeemer's person, mediatorial character, sacrifice, righteousness, grace, and obedience of faith, which includes the office of the Spirit, and in a word the whole counsel of God. Many errors were soon introduced, as hinted already, by which not a few were deceived and corrupted; but the apostles adhered to the truth, and united in their report without variation. Their doctrine was simple and pure; it was not divers, as among the false teachers, not yea and nay, but uniform, confident and one; which may be another reason for its being thus styled: They one and all preached the same gospel in every place. Now it is declared that the primitive Christians continued steadfastly in this apostolic doctrine: And this denotes in the first place, their open and bold profession of the same. When sound doctrine falls into disgrace, and becomes opposed and despised, many are unwilling to own it, and are tempted to hide their conviction of its reality and importance; but these disciples were not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, it had been the power of God to their salvation; they therefore held fast this profession of their faith without wavering, and persevered in their witness to the truth. Again, it may intend their diligence in hearing this doctrine, which indeed stands connected with the former. Hearing the word is not only the means of increasing in spiritual knowledge, but also one manner of testifying a regard for the gospel; so that the man who neglects it, not only betrays a conceit of himself, but hereby, in some measure, drops his profession. Not so those disciples; they continued with constancy under the preaching of the word,

as became them who would attain to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, that they might be built up and established in the faith, as they had been taught; by which example they condemn all those who are indifferent about hearing the word of the Lord, and are not studious to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ: If such have the love of God in them, they are not likely to be steadfast or fruitful in their profession, but rather to be carried about with every wind of false doctrine, and vain imagination of them who lay in wait to deceive; such are in very great danger of falling, and have need to beware. Thus, they continued steadfastly, i.e. swerved not from their profession of the truth, or attendance on the ministration of it, but confessed and pursued after a further establishment in the doctrine they had been taught by the apostles, not giving place to the heresies that abounded in opposition to the gospel of Christ, or abating in their zeal for its honor and success.

FROM this article I would note one thing by the way, that demands our attention, which is this, namely, that it is part of the Christian character to maintain a conscientious regard, and strictly adhere to sound doctrine. They who would lessen the concern of the faithful about purity in doctrine, depart from the original pattern, and strike at the foundation of real Christianity. To be sound in faith in this sense is of the utmost importance; for truth is the standard of experience, and the sole rule of practice; and without knowledge neither the heart nor the life can be good; it is the true grace of God or true doctrine of the gospel, wherein believers stand and become fruitful, 1Pe 5:12. And accordingly it is written, Col 1:6 that the gospel which came unto the Colossians, as it did in all the world, bringing forth fruit, as, saith he “it doth also in you since the day ye heard of it and knew the grace of God in truth,” i.e. the true grace of God or doctrine of Christ, in the experience and power of them through faith. Errors in doctrine lead to errors in practice. Hence, though a mere speculative knowledge of the gospel has no saving or abiding effect, yet it is needful to guard against any corruption from the simplicity that is in Christ; and therefore Paul and Barnabas, Ac 13:43 speaking unto the people at Antioch, “persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.” i.e.

the word of God, which they had been preaching unto them. It is therefore becoming the Christian character to buy the truth and sell it not, but after the example of these disciples, to be steadfast in the doctrine of the Lord preached by his apostle and on no consideration whatever in any degree, depart from them. But to return.

ANOTHER instance in which these primitive Christians persevered is fellowship. By fellowship sometimes understand an union with the saints, or place in their society, which was our subject in a preceding lecture; and I confess that the same word is used in Ga 2:9 for the right hand of fellowship given by Cephas and others to Paul and Barnabas, in token of their hearty acknowledgment of them in the character of fellow-communicants. We have also shown that it is the duty of every believer to be found in the communion of saints, which some neglect, who, while they boast in their knowledge of doctrines, have not learned to observe this noble divine institution. But we have already seen these disciples added to the church. They were joined together in the Lord previous to this; so that their continuing steadfastly in this fellowship must refer to some particular branch of duty therein, distinct from other articles mentioned; and I apprehend it more especially regards their forwardness to communicate. [(κοινωνία), an obligation to this free and faithful communication of all our talents personal and relative, which may conduce to the advantage of the body and its members, results from the nature of that covenant Christians under in a church state, which hath respect not only to the Lord as our common head, and to all his appointments and officers in his house; but it also has a mutual respect to everyone in communion, for in this consideration the disciples clave together, so as to be no longer their own, but the property one of another. The Scriptures are plain, 2Co 8:5. "They gave themselves to us by the will of God." Again, Ro 15:7. "Receive ye one another." And further, 1Pe 5:5. "Yea all of you be subject one to another." See also Col 4:9-12; 1Co 12:12-27; Romans 12:5; Col 2:19: and Ephesians 5:20, 21. So then in church-covenant, by the will of God, his people give themselves each to the other, and are as it were the property one of the other. A selfish self-willed spirit is directly against the principles of this sacred union in the Lord. And if Christians united with understanding, according to the gospel of Christ, and were faithful to their solemn engagements, they would abound, to their power, in all liberality and good order, which would turn to their mutual comfort and edification. But there is reason to fear that many professors are ignorant of the foundation of this holy compact by divine appointment, and therefore without remorse walk after their own imagination.] In the society or fellowship of the church there is a communication of all goodness from one to another, according to the ability which God giveth, in things natural

and spiritual. With respect to outward good things, we shall find in this infant church a universal community of their substance for the benefit of the whole; a circumstance peculiar to the then state of Christianity in the world, as I shall endeavour to show in its place. If this is at all referred to here, it may intend their continuing from time to time, as additions were made of new converts, or any others who might have property come into their hands, to throw it into the common stock, as at the beginning. However, a free contribution of temporal good, for the support of the ministry, supply of the poor, and other necessary expenses for maintaining the worship of God in the communion of his saints, is an effectual branch of Christian fellowship in the present state of the church, and will be so to the end of the world, unto which, exhortations abound in the New-Testament, which some regard not, being sadly deficient in their duty to the Lord and his people. But many are of another and a better spirit, or the visible interest of Christ would sink in the world, which, blessed be God, who has the hearts of men in his hands, shall never come to pass. But this is not to be restrained to liberality, it extends to other instances of brotherly love, and takes in spiritual communications, such as admonitions, advice, yea and visiting the sick, or those who are in distress; for however thoughtless, or little exercised, some may be in the last mentioned office of love, to the grief of their afflicted brethren, it is a considerable branch of practical godliness and Christian communion, and they who neglect it do well to consider what the apostle James declares, chap. 1:27 “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction.” In short, when it is said they continued steadfastly in fellowship, it carries in it their constancy, and diligence in every act of endeared friendship, and mutual and earnest endeavor by love to serve one another, as they had opportunity, and as occasion required. Thus, these primitive Christians abounded in every social virtue, each one striving to his utmost for the comfort and edification of the church, and the members in particular; so that their religion did not rest in purity of doctrine, but, like those who have an experience of its power, and the love of God in their hearts, they were fruitful in every good word and work.

THE next article, by which their continuing steadfastly under their profession is specified, is that of *breaking of bread*. A phrase which, however, sometimes used for common and natural meals, as I apprehend in verse 46, yet here, I think, it plainly intends that spiritual repast, or divine ordinance in the church, the Lord's-supper. On this table of the Lord, are placed by his direction, bread and wine, which are appointed signs or figures of his body and blood, the constituent parts of that flesh in which he suffered, when he became a sacrifice for the sins of his people. One end of this supper being a commemoration of our Saviour's passion on the cross, as specified by himself, when he instituted the same and accordingly it is said, that "in eating this bread, and in drinking this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come," 1Co 11:26. But there is another sign of use in this ordinance. We are taught chap. x. 17 of the same a personal, which is this, namely, that hereby we testify our union with Christ, and with one another in him: for (saith the apostle) "we being many are ONE BREAD, [Dr. Dodderidge notes that many valuable manuscripts read, "and of one cup." And we find in the proceeding verse, and indeed in all other places in Scripture, the cup in the supper is mentioned in the singular number, which answers to the idea our Saviour himself gives us of his bloody sufferings, represented by the cup in the sacrament. When in an agony in the garden he supplicates his Father, he says not, Let this cup as of many, but as of one, Let this cup pass from me. But, in respect of the bread, it is expressly said to be one, i.e. as expositors generally agree, one loaf. It is well known that the order of the words are as follows: (οτι εις αρτος εν σωμα οι πολλοι εσμεν) Which Dr. Whitby paraphrases thus: 'The loaf of bread is one; and we all partake of one loaf, and therefore are one body.' This he improves against the practice of the Church of Rome, who distributes to her communicants severally an unbroken wafer; so that, as the Doctor observes, they neither are partakers of one bread or loaf, or of bread broken, as saith he, it was the custom both of Jews and Christians to do, i.e. the one at the passover, and the other at the supper. But then, why do protestants break several loaves, the pieces of which are received by the members of the same church? If they partake of bread broken, is it of one bread? The bread and one bread are synonymous phrases, and signify one lump or loaf. And Dr. Gill has given us from Dr. Lightfoot a very pertinent passage of a writer of note, whence it appears that the Jews thought it needful, in order to an association of this kind, that the bread whereof the members partake should be originally in one loaf; and on the like principle do Christians commune at the table of their Lord. I am sensible that many have the following gloss on this passage, namely, "As bread consists of many grains of corn, which being ground and kneaded together make up one loaf, so believers being many are one body of which Christ is the head." Thus, they speak, as if the apostle alluded to the composition of a loaf of corn bread; but I humbly apprehend this is not his design. He is arguing, not from the composition of a loaf, but from the original unity of those pieces in one lump, which are distributed to the several communicants, in this gospel-feast. And, in my opinion, it is not sufficient to say, that the members of a church, all partake of bread, which is of the same nature or kind. Nothing less will come up to the argument of the apostle than this,

that the bread whereof Christians partake in that divine ordinance, is at first or before it is broken, in one mass or lump. And I think we cannot be too exact in the manifest circumstances of a positive institution of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I hope there needs no other apology for detaining the Reader with this long note, which I conclude with the following lines of that celebrated poetical expositor, the late Dr. Watts:

‘We are but several parts
Of the same broken bread;
One body hath its several limbs,
But Jesus is the Head.’

Watts’s hymns, book 3, hymn 2. See also the several learned authors on the place above mentioned, and likewise Dr. Hammond, and the continuators of Mr. Henry, &c.] and one body; “for we are all partakers of that one bread.” This idea of the sacrament seems now little regarded; but, allowing the passage refers to the supper, which will scarce be denied, is not this as truly the counsel of God as the other? The first and principal design of this holy ordinance, is to exhibit the natural body of Jesus in a figure, and to manifest his sufferings and death, yet we are not to exclude from our view the design also of representing the mystical body of Christ, and our profession of a union in him, by partaking together of one and the same bread, which is broken and divided in the communion of the faithful. This idea of the supper is adapted to holiness, love, and that practical union, if I may so express it, a great efficiency in which is too justly lamented in the present time. I mention it now on occasion of this peri-phrase of the Eucharist breaking bread, which manifestly corresponds with the description of the manner in which this ordinance is administered, one branch of which lies in breaking a single loaf or lump of bread; for the above mentioned passage would be divested of all its propriety and argument, if the ancient custom was not to have one lump only divided among the communicants, there being no other tolerable sense in which those who partake in this ordinance may be said to participate of one bread, but that of the several pieces of which each receive one, being originally united in one lump and so presented on the table, and broken asunder, as the Lord hath shown us. And this is the foundation of the apostle’s reasoning from the communion, unto the union of them who partake in it, as members of one body in Christ. If a stranger was to form his notion of the manner in the sacrament from this place, he might justly be surprised, on being a spectator at this ordinance in the

usual method, to see a number of loaves divided on the occasion, and at a loss to reconcile it with the idea conveyed by the apostle in the passage referred to. How far this may deserve consideration, I leave to the Reader; but if it be lawful to conform in our practice to the reasoning of a passage, which manifestly refers to this institution, why should we not? And especially as it may easily be done. But to pass this; breaking of bread being thus a constituent branch in the administration of the supper, no wonder it is mentioned under this phrase; and that in speaking of the disciples assembling to eat it, it is said they came together to break bread, as in Ac 20:7, 11. And again, 1Co 10:16 saith the apostle, the bread which we break.”

NOW it is declared of these Christians, that they continued steadfastly in breaking of bread; they did not, as some, decline this branch of their holy profession, but were constant and universal in a frequent attendance on the Lord at his table. In this precious institution of the Saviour the sum of the gospel is collected, and sometimes the sweetest communion is found; it exhibits a crucified Jesus, and is most wisely adapted to promote the life and power of godliness, and to satisfy and rejoice the believer, who is looking for the blessed hope of his glorious appearance; and sad is the symptom of a growing neglect of this holy ordinance among nominal Christians! But these first disciples were zealous, and frequent in their attendance upon it; how frequent is not recited; some have thought daily, or at least in every meeting, but the account we have of their coming together to break bread seems rather to suppose they had other meetings of a religious kind, in which that ordinance was not administered; however, this is certain from 1Co 11:26 that they often eat this bread, and drank this cup. And from other accounts it seems to have been at least every first day of the week; to which agrees the passage in John before mentioned, and also the practice of the church for centuries after the age of the apostles; for writers, both Christian and heathen, speak of the bishop giving the eucharist on Sunday, when they were assembled to praise Christ and bind themselves by a sacrament, as the heathens, observed; but the learned and impartial author of the constitution and discipline of the primitive church, page 19, observes, ‘that in these days they

communicated at least three times a week, viz. Wednesdays, Fridays, and Lord's-days. It was celebrated in the evening at Troas, on the first day of the week, when Paul preached till midnight; and from the above-named writer, page 103, it appears, this supper was administered at the conclusion of their solemn services, i. e. after they had read, sung, preached and prayed, which solemnities were held either morning or evening, as best suited in the times of persecution. However, this eucharist was given not yearly, or once in a quarter, which by no means answers to the frequency hinted in scripture; no, nor did these zealous disciples content themselves with a monthly commemoration of their Saviour's passion, which seems much too often for many nominal Christians in this day; for, being full of love to Jesus Christ, and to each other, as members of the same body in him, they assembled every week or oftener, to join in this communion. They gloried in the cross, and delighted in their union in Christ; and, as persons longing after the presence and honor of their Lord, and their mutual refreshment and joy, they continued universally to come up together in his name, to eat at his table; thus, they glorified their Saviour, and encouraged one another! An example worthy the imitation of all who profess Christianity.

IT remains to consider the last instance in which these disciples persevered. The apostle adds and it is prayers. All prayer becomes the character of a Christian, but here is intended particularly the prayers of the church. The house of the Lord is a house of prayer; and the social worship of his people lies much in their united and earnest supplications at the throne of grace. Prayers attend every solemnity, but many are the occasions of the church in this changeable and militant state for solemn seasons of prayer; and, indeed, in the best of times there is need of these opportunities in which the saints may "build up one another on their most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." Now the primitive Christians applied themselves earnestly to this part of their duty in the house of God; they were constant, early and zealous at the appointed seasons of prayer; and not like some who are excusing themselves on every occasion. On persons first setting out in the ways of the Lord, it is generally seen that they are disposed to these meetings, and ready to come where prayer is

wont to be made; but it often appears that such are soon drawn aside, and decline their attendance. It may likewise be observed that when prayer meetings are newly set up, people flock for a while; but, as if they came out of mere curiosity, in a very little time, many neglect or forsake them. Nor should we be surprised that the carnally-minded are not to be held to this spiritual exercise; for the flesh cannot bear the circumspection, self-denial, and holiness, needful to a continuing instant in prayer; but, hearken, ye nominal Christians, who despise these appointments in the communities to which you belong! can you read this account without blushing? See how the love of Christ constrained these disciples! They continued steadfastly in prayers, being universally forward to fill their assemblies; and, are you conscious of neglecting the prayers of the church in which you have a place, and of a disinclination to join them? How dwells this love in your heart!

THUS, stands divided a Christian profession under four distinct branches, doctrine fellowship, i.e., social and mutual communications, breaking of bread in the supper of the Lord, and stated or occasional assemblies for prayer: in each particular the primitive Christians, inspired with zeal for the glory of Jesus, and love to one another, were constant and active, pursuing every duty of their calling and communion in Christ, with an increasing boldness and ardor; an illustrious specimen of that faith by which alone a man is justified, receives remission of sins, and is entitled to a claim among the children of God. It is a faith which worketh by love, and will certainly influence the subject to a steady and fruitful behavior as becomes the gospel.

THAT many come short of this noble example, it is needless to prove; but we may justly lament the little appearance there is of a general aim at the like perfection in obedience and love. The manner of living among the disciples at first in Jerusalem, to be considered hereafter, will further explain, illustrate and confirm the articles we have now been upon, and naturally induce to some remarks which would otherwise be pertinent here, I shall therefore, reserving them for a more suitable place, close this

lecture with a reflection, or rather an excitation to reflect, and labour after a conformity to this primitive spirit and conduct.

PERMIT me, my dear Christian Reader, to put you in remembrance, and to stir up your zeal. How different this behaviour of the primitive disciples to that which appears among us at this day! Instead of continuing steadfastly, what numbers, through love of the world, or distrust of the power and faithfulness of God, warp and soon turn aside! Look round and consider, who are they that continue and increase in a becoming boldness for the truth—that delight in the fellowship of the saints, freely communicating of their talents, natural and spiritual, for the edification of the church—that are frequent at the table of the Lord—and that are zealous in promoting assemblies for prayer? Blessed be God, there are some; but, must it not be owned that among nominal Christians, the generality content themselves with bare hearing, and that in a manner uncertain and careless? But, among those who have separated themselves to the ordinances of Christ, and are joined to his church, what lukewarmness, sloth and instability is seen! How carnal, worldly and selfish! Do not earthly cares, affections, and pleasures, openly engross the time and attention of many, to a general neglect of the duties and privileges which belong to a Christian profession? In a word, how few are the instances in which men so withstand the temptations they are under, and follow after righteousness, as to come up in any tolerable degree to this standard of pure and vital Christianity! Witness the manner in which, by accounts, the solemn appointments of the churches are in common regarded, or rather in all appearance despised, to the increase of licentiousness, and the grief of all who are heartily concerned for the faith and order of the gospel! O that we considered the dignity and holiness of the calling we profess, and lived up to our obligations and hope, and to the light we have received! Then should we vie with, yea, and in some respects, exceed these worthy believers; but alas they condemn us! They Thus, cleaved to the Lord with an holy fortitude, amidst persecutions and fiery trials; but as for us, though we pretend to the same divine character, and call ourselves the disciples or followers of a Captain, who overcame the world, and was made perfect through sufferings; yet alas, how vain

are the trifles that amuse us from his precious appointments! What slight afflictions, and little self-denial, will intimidate and stumble us; and, to say no more, what shameful excuses are made by many professors for their no less shameful habitual neglect of their station in the house of God! I hope this is spoken to him that can by no means allow himself in a lukewarm and fruitless profession: but, if anyone can read this account of the primitive Christians, and be careless and disorderly; if he can, through sloth, love of pleasure, or from any other cause whatever, neglect the ordinances of the Lord, pour contempt on the solemn appointments of his church, and refuse to join in her prayers, he betrays an obduracy and perverseness, yea and that want of love to Christ and his ways, which lays him under a just suspicion of being the servant of sin, at the thoughts of which who would not tremble?

NO one can doubt, but that the deportment of these first disciples is written for our imitation; let us then not be slothful, but followers of them, who thus after having adorned their Christian character, through faith and patience inherit the promises. Remember it becomes us to hold fast our profession in every branch: To be found in the doctrines of grace, to be filled with the fruits of social virtue in our fellowship with the saints, to be frequent in a commemoration of the Lord at his table, and to continue instant in the prayers of his people, are things of the utmost importance to the glory of God, the advantage of those with whom we are in communion, and the joy of them that watch for our souls, whose faithful account most nearly concerns us. By a steadfast adherence to these things, the world will know that we are the disciples of Jesus, and we may expect an increase in knowledge and faith, and to enjoy communion with God. Our boldness, both now and hereafter, depends much on our thus abiding in Christ, Ps 119:6; 1Jo 2:28. Unless we thus cleave to the Lord, we shall not be able to face the enemy with courage, nor can we use freedom in prayer; for how shall a man look up to Jesus, who is a priest on his throne, when he is conscious of neglecting his precepts? It is likewise of importance in our latest moments, if they are attended with reflection. What comfort can there be in a review of an unstable and fruitless profession? Divine forgiveness may support the heart under this sorrowful

prospect; but in proportion to a just sense of this grace, the penitent will be filled with shame, and bitterly mourn his ungrateful backslidings: Whereas he that stands fast hath this rejoicing, the testimony of a good conscience, and many sweet promises to encourage him, particularly that capital one: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Nor should it be omitted that the real character of the righteous must hereafter be manifested and confirmed, by the instances of their love to Christ and his people, and how that will appear in their conduct who are slothful and careless, such do well to consider; therefore “abide in Christ, that, when he shall appear, ye may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

IN one word; nothing short of this will possess mankind with a reverence of the Lord and his church, or induce renewed testimonies of the power and grace of God, whereby it may be known that he is in the midst of a people to bless them. When persons united under a profession of the gospel are lukewarm, disorderly and licentious, they are left of God, whose Spirit is grieved, and become contemptible; but if they keep up to the temper and conduct of these first disciples, and walk in love; as fear came on every soul around this Christian church, so it will be in a measure with them; for a church so walking together may be truly admired in the language of Solomon’s Song, (Song 6:10) with which I conclude, “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?”

LECTURE XVIII.

The manner in which these primitive disciples lived together in the church at Jerusalem.

IN this concise history of the primitive church, we have already seen the constant and earnest pursuit of her members in every branch of their profession. Impartiality and zeal are genuine symptoms of real piety, in which they abounded, and became an example to the faithful in every age. We now pass to the second general division of the account, which contains their manner of living, comprehending their pleasant situation, how their time was employed, the spirit or temper which prevailed among them, and the influence it had on those who beheld them. The whole presents us with a beautiful scene of brotherly love, and delight in the ways of the Lord!

AS to their situation, we are told, ver. 44, that “all that believed were together,” *ἐπι το αὐτο* i.e. literally *in the same*; this may be variously applied; they were in the same judgment, and the same in point of experience and worship, they had one Lord, one faith, and one baptism; but this is included in ver. 42, already explained. They were also united in their affections one towards another, minding the same thing, and, being knit together in love, as one man, they strove for the sake of the gospel, following the thing which make for peace and mutual edification. Satan had not yet excited those sinful passions, too often seen among Christians, whereof come evil surmisings, contentions and divisions, to the disturbance of their peace, and the disgrace of their heavenly calling. The malicious and subtle adversary indeed soon found means to stir up a vain-glorious disposition, and occasion schisms among them, witness at Corinth; one was of Paul and another of Apollos, insomuch that in 2 Corinth. xii. 20. the apostle saith, “I fear, lest when I come I shall not find you such as I would— lest there be debates, envyings, wrath, strife, &c.” But at present and for a while this church at Jerusalem was free from these

corruptions and disorders, and the disciples, as newborn babes, desired the sincere milk of the word, and were perfectly united in an harmonious pursuit after the glory of Christ and each other's comfort, having no party-views, or different aims in their communion together, but were of one accord and of one mind. Thus, Ac 4:32, we are told, that "the multitude of them that believed, were of one heart and of one soul."

THIS may also refer to the frequent meetings they held, which perfectly agrees with the account of their practice: "they were daily in the temple, and from house to house," of which more hereafter. In this view it shows that they did not forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is, but associated with constancy and delight, so that they were in a manner always in company.

AGAIN, they were together in one church-state. The learned Dr. Lightfoot understands it of their keeping together in several companies or congregations, according to their languages, nations, and other connections, &c. But I humbly apprehend, that if separate congregations were needful for these or any other reasons, as here among Protestants of different nations, for instance, the Dutch, the French, &c. yet it is evident they were but one church, even the same unto which the converts were added; nor do we read of any other in this famous city. On the contrary, we are told, chap. v. 11. that "great fear came upon all the church," on account of Ananias and Sapphira. And still further, chap. viii. 1. it is said, that after the death of Stephen the martyr, "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem." Still but one church at Jerusalem; and therefore, I say, if the disciples did on any occasion, or for any purposes, at times meet together in separate congregations, as observed, they were all in the same individual church-state, there being no other then subsisting, nor was the order or offices needful to form and organize particular churches, as afterwards, settled by the authority of Christ, through the hands of his apostles; and indeed it doth not appear that there ever was in the age of the apostles more than one church, at Jerusalem, or in any other city or place whatever.

AND here it may be useful to pause, and reflect on the wide difference there is between the conduct of Christians in respect of church-communion in this day, and that of those in the primitive times; then they continued together in every place, in one body, and that universally, so far as we learn, at least this was the case, while they had gifts sufficient, and were capable of doing it; but now alas, almost on every occasion professors divide, insomuch that there is scarce a little town where persons of the same essential faith and order, are not divided into what they call separate church-states, each of which are scarce able to perform the duties essential to their own well-being. It is neither my inclination nor province to censure any society whatever; but, may I not decently move for a serious consideration, whether it is agreeable to the spirit of Christianity, or for the interest and glory of the church thus to divide on every occasion?

PARTICULAR congregations of believers incorporated in the order of the gospel are certainly of divine institution, and needful for the exercise of discipline, and other relative duties in the communion of saints on earth; accordingly, there were many such societies in the apostolic age in the same country. Thus, we read of the churches in Asia, Macedonia, Galatia, and Judea; but when the disciples in Jerusalem, Corinth, Philippi, &c. are mentioned, it is always in the singular number, to show they continued together in one body in Christ. It is true in those days there were extraordinary gifts and helps; and if four, five or six thousand believers inhabit a city or populous place, a minister of common abilities will scarce be able to discharge the pastoral office among them, nor would the people be capable of knowing, loving, and performing their part to one another as members of a particular church ought to do. If therefore the number of Christians united in judgment is too many for the ordinary ends of communion, it is fit to separate with mutual consent; nevertheless it is most for the honor of the gospel, and safest when the faithful, who dwell in one place, can commune together in one church, and when this cannot be attained, through some difference in point of doctrine or order, or by reason of the multitude of professors, great care should be taken to preserve unity of affection and harmony, and to avoid every mean and low practice, whereby some have despised, or at least shown but too great

forwardness to discourage and lessen neighbouring churches and ministers, for if there is not brotherly love, a cordial friendship, and social converse maintained between gospel-ministers and churches, who thus, as it were reside together, it is a sad reproach to our holy profession, and Satan will surely get an advantage. When therefore a carnal, private, selfish spirit prevails among ministers, and the members of separate congregations are not encouraged to correspond with one another in the sight of the world, in any place whatever, it is very unhappy and threatening. This was the opinion of the great Dr. Owen, in the preface to his Eshcol, he says, ‘It is convenient that all believers in one place should join themselves in one congregation, unless, through their being too numerous, they are by common consent distinguished into more; which order cannot be disturbed without danger, strife, emulation, and breach of love.’ I apprehend there may be other reasons, of distinct congregations in one place, besides that of numbers. But the danger from causeless separation, as noted above, is too plainly verified, and should induce him that seeks peace to unite, as far as he can, in fellowship with those of another particular communion. And the primitive disciples thus keeping together, notwithstanding their vast increase, most certainly condemn those divisions and subdivisions on every different opinion, which is so frequently seen in a day of lukewarmness and declension; whereby, in some places, the visible church is crumbled into pieces, to the grief of good men. In a word, the division of any Christian congregation, who can join together in the ordinances of the gospel, under whatever specious pretence, may gratify the lusts of men, but has no tendency to promote the truth of God, and is not to be encouraged by any who wish well to Zion.

But to return. This phrase of the disciples being together, is by some understood of their associating in one place. it appears from [Ac 4:31](#) that even after a further increase of the church they met in one place, which was miraculously shaken while they were assembled. Hence it was an ancient description of a particular church, that it is a ‘society of Christians [Inquiry into the constitution of the primitive church, p. 7.] meeting together in one place, under their proper pastors, for the performance of religious worship, and the exercise of Christian discipline:’ which is, by the way,

utterly against the popular notion of a national church in any form whatever; but, as hinted already, I apprehend that we have in this clause their manner of life; they were together in a civil as well as in a religious sense; a society that communed together in natural, no less than in spiritual thing: We shall presently see that they had all things common, and lived on one stock. This continued awhile. Thus, we read, chap iv. 34. that “as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them and brought the price of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet?” Some have thought it incredible that any single house should accommodate so many thousands, particularly with lodging; for as to an apartment in one of the towers of the temple, as some have suggested, Josephus indeed asserts, that they made up a hundred beds. What is that to the number of disciples? Besides, is there any reason to imagine that the despised and persecuted Christians should have leave to dwell there? Nor is it at all needful to suppose that they dwelt in one house; persons may be in one family, and yet have apartments at some distance from each other; and it is certain, the first Christians lived in different habitations, for we are told, ver. 46. that they “broke bread from house to house:” nevertheless they were plainly one society, supplied out of the same capital stock, which was raised from the free-will surrender of the substance belonging to them who joined the church as described; the depositing and disposition of which, are recited in the fifth and sixth chapter of the Acts. And here I cannot but vindicate the character of these noble Christians from the unworthy conceptions of some.

IT has been insinuated, [Dr. Whitby’s annotation on [Ac 2:45](#). and Dr. Doddridge’s note on the same place.] that one reason of the disciples freely parting with their substance was this, namely, ‘that being resolved to cleave to the apostles, and apprehending the approach of the destruction of Jerusalem, when they knew they must flee and leave all to the enemy, they therefore were willing to part with their estates for the benefit of the church?’ This I think is a groundless conjecture, and rather ungenerous: If it was certain that the Romans were instantly coming, and would seize on the country of the Jews, it would have been natural, in them that believed it, to have parted with their estates; and since the multitude gave no heed to the prediction

of our Lord, there would doubtless have been many to purchase, for under these circumstances they must be supposed to have bought at a very low, price; but the destruction of Jerusalem was near forty years distant, and there is no reason for imputing the conduct of the primitive disciples to any such motive; their manifest zeal for the gospel, and love to each other, was more than a sufficient inducement to part with their houses and lands for the relief of other brethren; they therefore not only sold them, but (except in the case of Ananias and Sapphira) they everyone delivered up the whole of their produce to the apostles; and this they did not without cause, for it appears, that after all the generosity of those who had possessions among them, in a time of persecution they soon stood in need of the contribution of others. Upon the whole, I say it seems unworthy the character of these noble followers of the Lamb, to suppose that a consideration so low and carnal should in any degree move them to their seasonable and rich liberality.

SOME affect to imitate the primitive Christians, by attempting to live in the manner they did; and it is probable that the above suggestion was with a view to prevent this vain-glorious pretence; but we are not to have recourse to conjectures that detract from the faithful in their becoming zeal on an extraordinary occasion, to obviate the designs of crafty men, who under a specious show of religion, decoy the simple out of their property and freedom, against reason and scripture. It is plain from the sacred history that this manner of communion was owing to the peculiar circumstances the disciples were in at present; and, as has been frequently and justly observed, that it was never intended to be a precedent in a settled state of Christianity, since it appears from the current of the epistles, that members of churches are spoken of as rich and poor, and many exhortations are given which could have no place, if it was the duty or excellency of Christians in society, to have all things common as they had at this time in Jerusalem. The institutions of the gospel are not advanced on the ruins of morality. Christ's gospel (say the continuators of Mr. Poole's annotations) does not destroy the law; and the eighth commandment is still in force which it could not be if there was no property, or *meum and tuum* now." And indeed, however some may boast

in this notion, or practice of social religion, it has a natural tendency to destroy the foundations of order and government, both in the world and in the church, and accordingly to be shunned and rejected, as a delusion and unworthy the gospel of Christ.

This was the situation and manner of the disciples in the infant state of the church, all that believed were together, i.e. they were supplied out of one common stock, which arose from the substance of those who had possessions, which they sold; a conduct by no means suited to the manifest duties of believers in an ordinary church-state, all pretence to which is absurd and unscriptural, if not downright immoral. Nevertheless, it was a wise and noble instance of charity in the primitive church, by which every covetous or great person, who assumes the name of a Christian, stands condemned to the end of the world. And however disagreeable to some the observation may be, this example of love proves that, in a right state of things, the disciples of Jesus, constrained by his grace, will be as much as possible together, in order to a mutual and free communication of their talents for the support of his kingdom and the good of each other; and consequently that a narrow and selfish spirit, and a roving disposition, will never answer the end of Christian communion.

LECTURE XIX.

How the disciples at Jerusalem were employed, with practical notes on their conduct.

WE are now to consider in what manner the primitive Christians filled up their time in the situation we left them. Idle professors might find an occasion, and there is reason to fear that some would abuse a communion circumstanced as that at Jerusalem, in favor of the flesh, but great was the grace bestowed on these disciples; they seem one and all to be inspired from heaven to a diligent proof of their calling and election of God, in pursuit of which they divided their time between religious exercises and those which are civil.

THE immediate design of their union was religion, and to serve God through Jesus Christ; accordingly it is first related, that “they continued daily with one accord in the temple.” They were now of the true circumcision, who worshipped God in the Spirit, and knew that in every place where his people were gathered in his name, his presence and blessing were insured; nevertheless the temple, as an house of prayer, was not yet totally abolished; they therefore forsook not the public assembly, but daily resorted unto it at the appointed season. Thus, we read, chap. iii. that at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour, or three of the clock in the afternoon, the time of the daily sacrifice, and the hour when Jesus the Lamb of God expired on the cross, Peter and John went into the temple. Some nominal Christians would think it a burden to be called upon an hour in a week, or perhaps in a month for social prayer, except on the Sabbath; but it was the daily practice of these primitive Christians to

attend in the temple, besides many private meetings among themselves. What a weariness would this be to some professors! Indeed prayers may be followed several times in a day, in a vain and superstitious manner, yet there is no superstition in the daily prayers of the church; nor are they inconsistent with other duties in life, if things were rightly managed, persons in common might find time to wait upon God, without being ranked among the idle who neglect their civil occupation, or to provide for their families; neither are the prayers which in many places of worship are now day after day for the most part literally and properly read to empty pews, within the bare walls of our churches; these, I say, are not the relics of popery, as some may imagine, but the contempt thrown upon them a melancholy symptom of our sad declension from that piety, and delight in social prayer, which since the reformation once prevailed in the land! Indeed we are not held to set hours under the present dispensation, but it is a gospel-precept to pray without ceasing; and it surely then becomes us to be frequently, if not daily, uniting in our prayers to the Lord, for which seasons must be appointed, a neglect of which discovers want of inclination to this divine service; and the truth is that some, being eager in pursuit after the business and pleasures of life, their manner will not admit of a regular and constant attendance in the church, or the family; and it is to be feared that there are but too many prayerless people among us of every denomination, against whom, if they repent not, Papists, yea and Mahometans, who perform their devotion five times a day, and esteem prayer [Sales's preliminary discourse to the koran, p. 142.] the pillar of heaven and key of paradise, will rise up in judgment.

BUT again; as these disciples were daily in the temple, it is likewise declared they were so in "breaking bread from house to house." This is explained in the next clause, by its being said, "they eat their meat" a phrase no where applied to that spiritual repast, the supper of our Lord, and therefore must refer to their natural meals. Some understand it of friendly entertainments, which they apprehend was made at each other's houses; but, if as many of them as had houses or lands, made sale of the same and surrendered the purchase, as described, I pray, who could provide these feasts for their friends? Hospitality is one fruit of brotherly

love; but it seems consistent with the state of this society, in which all things were common, to suppose that they treated one another in this manner. I am, therefore, of opinion that this breaking of bread from house to house, was no other than their commons, prepared in different apartments or houses, in which provision was made by agreement, as suited their state, and the purposes of their communion together, which may easily be conceived in a body so compacted as these Christians. Thus, they went on from day to day, joining in the worship of God in his temple or in church-assemblies, and likewise at home, for they had houses to eat and to drink in, where they partook of the bounties of providence together.

NOW this social communion, in respect both of natural and religious enjoyments, was maintained and carried on in a spirit and temper every way suited to their holy profession. In the first place, we are told they did it *with gladness*. A sad countenance is no proper symptom of unfeigned piety; and I see no reason why this should not include a natural cheerfulness, which will be felt in proportion to bodily health, and a just sense of the divine bounty. “Go thy way, (says the wise man) eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God now accepteth thy works,” Eccles. 18:7. Who so fit to take a sober and moderate joy in the creature as the Christian, whose God is his portion? In this sense, the man whose sins are forgiven him, may be of good cheer; but no doubt a spiritual joy is principally intended; ἀγαλλίασις; the same word in [Jude 24](#) is rendered exceeding joy, and signifies not merely a gladness of heart, but a visible exultation, and supposes external symptoms, so that it may refer to their spiritual discourse, saying, as the disciples after the Lord was departed, “Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” [Lu 24:32](#). Thus, might they enquire of each other, and communicate of their experience, and, being filled with joy, sing praises together; for, however strange it may now seem, there is reason to conclude that the primitive Christians rarely parted at any time without prayer and singing. However, religion is in a flourishing state, when from the house of prayer the faithful come rejoiced in the loving-kindness of the Lord, and satisfied in the riches of his grace, they sit down together at the table of providence in their own houses with

a single cheerfulness, while feeding their bodies their souls are feasted in a remembrance of his favor. Thus, their joy is double, of which strangers to real piety can form no adequate idea.

AGAIN, with *singleness* of heart. The term, ἀφελότης here rendered *singleness* is used nowhere else; it signifies plain, upright and honest, and most emphatically expresses the utmost simplicity. It is the testimony of God, who searcheth the reins, and a glorious part of the character of these disciples, that they continued together without any sinister, private or selfish view, being free from carnal motives in their fellowship; no crafty designs, or mean underhand doings, were practiced among them. Here might be hypocrites, but in general they associated with a pure heart, and unfeigned love of the brethren, and their conduct was frank and open, like those who had a single eye to the glory of God, and their mutual honor and comfort. This stands in a natural connection with the cheerfulness that spread through their company; “for (saith the apostle) our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you wards,” [2Co 1:12](#). Thus, upright and sincere were these primitive Christians, without ostentation or covetousness. O that the like testimony could be born to the spirit and conduct of all who bear the name of Christianity, and are in communion with the faithful! But, alas, some are of a contrary disposition, and but too plainly discover on every occasion their private views. Hence strife and vain-glory, animosities and divisions, whereby the church is sometimes torn and defaced, and sore discouragements are laid on the hearts of them that truly love God.

ONCE more; it is further declared that the disciples went on in these associations praising God. As observed, the term rendered gladness carries in it a joy expressed by some bodily exercise, such as leaping, dancing and singing, &c. Now here we learn the nature of that joy which possessed the hearts of these Christians, and how it appeared; not by the ranting noise of sensualists, who sing and roar like madmen and fools; their joy, like themselves, is carnal and impious, blazing with a noise, and

transitory as the crackling of thorns under a pot; nor was it like that of those degenerate and shameful Israelites complained of in [Isa 5:12](#). “The harp, the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.” Not so at the table of the faithful at Jerusalem, their rejoicing was holy and spiritual, and terminated in the honor of their heavenly Father, whose abounding mercies, temporal and eternal, inspired them with gratitude. To God they lift up their voices together, with adoration and praise, to celebrate his love. Now they might praise God in their meetings at these repasts of a natural kind, as well as in those more immediately appointed for religious service in several ways; by their application for a blessing, with thanks, for the food of the body; which however some make light of, or scruple, is due to our bountiful Father, and a means of sanctifying the creatures we receive, [1Ti 4:5](#), an example of which we have in our Lord, who, when he fed the people with the meat that perisheth, first gave thanks unto God, [Joh 6:11](#) which is also noticed by the evangelist Matthew. And thus saith the apostle, “He that eateth to the Lord, giveth God thanks,” [Ro 14:6](#). In short, it is unworthy the knowledge of God, and much more of the gospel of Christ, to sit down to our food, and rise up, without giving thanks. But to return, the disciples praised God in their discourse; their Master had shown them to improve their meals by entering on subjects that are spiritual and divine, [Lu 7:40; 14:7](#) and on other occasions. Christians lose much by omitting this manner of edification. Hence the tongue of those who talk much and do nothing, are notoriously proud, licentious or disorderly in their conduct, condemn them; it may be just to caution against an affected loquacity on religious subjects, which is odious and vain; but this appears not to me a prevailing evil in the present generation; the table-talk of most Christian families, as far as I can learn, rarely turns on any subject that should give the least disgust to those who are strangers to the power of religion; at least in general, we seem little to be charged with this kind of imprudence, but are much more polite, or rather slow in our discourse; yet it is certain that when persons are affected with the love of God, and a sense of divine things, they are very much disposed to mention them. And if, as our Lord observes, [Mt 13:34](#), “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth

speaketh,” of which no man can doubt, is it not reasonable then to expect that believers, on returning from the enjoyment of God in his sanctuary to their own houses, for the refreshment of nature, should remind one another, and praise God together for the spiritual benefits they have received? Was this the practice, we might hope to see more spirituality among us; our children, servants and friends, who stand round about us, might be edified thereby, and be ready to bless us in the name of the Lord. And further, God may be praised by his people even at their own tables, at least before they separate from these entertainments, in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, in which manner we are directed to teach and admonish one another, [Col 3:16](#). and, why not in our own houses, or family assemblies? Is the singing a hymn confined to the sanctuary, or forbid elsewhere? Should not every Christian family be as a little church? and may not those who love God take any fit opportunity to stir up each other and to join in his praise? And shall the ignorant and malicious reproaches of worldly men, who are not ashamed of their empty, if not filthy and impious ballads, intimidate Christians from the entertainment and profit of united songs to the honor of God, and their blessed Redeemer?

THIS then is noted of these primitive Christians; they were not only joyful and upright, but cheerful and grateful, praising God. They might decently praise the food which they eat, as delicious and good in its kind; this is proper and useful in its place; but, doth it not rather look sensual to confine our discourse to this subject? However, they praised God, i.e. their conversation in general turned not on self-applause, or any thing trifling and carnal; but in all their meetings, both in the church and at home, they communed on things adapted to edify the soul, and to quicken one another in glorifying their Saviour. How different are they whose conversation is full of slander and backbiting, filthy discourse or vain jesting, which is very offensive and sinful! I hope the Reader is far from indulging a practice so shameful; such table-talk is hateful and scandalous; but, have we not too much reason to blush on reflection? How little proceeds from our mouth in ordinary converse which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers!

IT remains to observe, the influence this manner of life had upon the world about them. And it appears that this harmony, affection and faithfulness among themselves, which it is reasonable to suppose was attended with an affable and courteous behaviour to others, the genuine fruit of vital religion, gave the disciples a high reputation, for we are told, they had “favor with all the people.” Some understand this of the favor shown by the disciples to all people, i.e. say they, their charity was not confined to themselves, but extended to others who were not of their own community. And it must be owned, that we are taught to do good unto all, but especially to the household of faith, which catholic spirit is suited to the genius of the gospel, if this interpretation seems strained. These Christians indeed were kind and condescending to every one, but they had little opportunity of helping others, being themselves, as a society, often in need, as hinted before, notwithstanding the generosity of those who had property among them, which we have reason to think were comparatively few; it is therefore most natural to apply the passage to the respect shown them by the people in general. This amiable spirit and conduct gained the good-will of the multitude, however reproached and vilified by some malicious unbelievers, who envied their union and success, and afterwards raised bitter persecution against them. Nevertheless, at present, their steadfastness in cleaving together in the Lord, and their holy conversation in other respects, manifested their excellency to the consciences of those who beheld them, who could not but admire, as in future periods it is recorded they did, insomuch that it was common for the heathens to say of the Christians, with astonishment, Behold, how they love one another! Thus, these disciples, like Jesus himself, being made wise, increased in favor with God and man. The Lord was visibly with them, by the signs and wonders that were done by the apostles? so that “fear came upon every soul,” and their lovely deportment rendered them in a manner universally grateful. In this way should all who are separated by a professed subjection to the gospel adorn it, and by a favor of its divine influence in the whole of their conduct, gain the esteem of mankind, for a loose and light behaviour in persons who pretend to the high calling of God, is shameful, and usually brings them into contempt: So true is it, “that they who honor God shall be honored, but they who despise him

shall be lightly esteemed,” [1Sa 2:30](#). Thus, it is frequently seen that a man whose conversation is uncomely under a religious character, is despised even by the world; and he alone may expect to have esteem who acts up to his profession; it is the holy, just and friendly behaviour of a people united in the fellowship of the gospel that convinces mankind of their sincerity, and is likely to induce that respect, which may, under a blessing, promote the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world.

SUCH, I apprehend, was the manner of the first disciples at Jerusalem; they cleaved to the Lord and one another with purpose of heart, and were together, as we saw in the preceding lecture, not only in point of affection and judgment, and in one church-state, but they lived together as one family; though on account of their number they were divided into separate apartments or houses, yet they had all things common, being each as they lacked supplied from one stock or fund, raised in the manner described. And now it appears that in this extraordinary situation their time was employed in daily assembling themselves in the temple for divine service, from whence they returned to partake together of the bounties of providence, breaking bread from house to house; with an holy cheerfulness and unfeigned simplicity, they mingled their common meals for the refreshment of nature with those communications of a spiritual kind, whereby they were mutually excited to join in praising the Lord; thus, they lived a life of devotion to God and mutual affection, which procured an universal esteem. O happy and honorable society! How pleasant and blessed the communion, when the disciples thus walked together in the fear of the Lord, with integrity and brotherly love! These were halcyon days, when there was nothing to disturb the public tranquility, or disquiet the hearts of the faithful, but all fair and serene, to the glory of God and the joy of his people! But, alas, how transitory this beauty and gladness in Zion! It was not to last; the saints must be tried; and satan, who is the prince of the power of the air, soon obtained permission to blow up a tempest, and threaten the ark of the Lord. In a short time, as he hath ever since more or less, did the enemy, by a variety of cruel persecutions, soul apostasies and damnable heresies, tear and mangle the visible body of Christ, if possible to destroy it; but we know

the church stands secure; the gates of hell shall not prevail against her, to her ruin, or even so as to prevent her perfection in the end, yet this primitive glory of the church is in a measure gone off for a while, and her members have not that satisfaction and joy in her communion the disciples had, when in the simplicity of her infant state.

BUT now, my dear Reader, it may be proper to observe, that you are not to expect, or even wish for a communion so circumstanced, in every respect, as that in which the disciples were united before the gospel was spread, and Christian churches established. It is plain, as observed, that a community of goods, and living together as these Christians did, is now contrary to the word of God, and inconsistent with the duties of our holy profession, in the church and in the world; so that, as I have shown, every pretence of forming ourselves in this manner, under a notion of coming near to the original pattern of Christianity, is unscriptural and vain; nevertheless, the union, affection, simplicity, and manners, of the first disciples, so far as they consist with the plan laid down in the testament, are certainly much to be desired, yea and to be hoped for in waiting on the Lord; at least, keeping himself in the love of God, each one may expect a conformity in some good measure to this amiable standard, and the spirit of religion being invariably the same, I shall close the lecture with a few brief remarks by way of reflection.

AND first we may note, that it is the inclination and the interest of the disciples of Jesus, as much as may be, to associate together. It is in the nature of intelligent creatures to be social; so that they who, being called, have cast in their lot, as heirs together of the grace of life, should naturally cleave to each other in the Lord. The believer can truly appeal to his God and declare, in the words of the Psalmist, “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts,” [Ps 119:63](#). His heart’s desire is to the fellowship of the saints, the excellent of the earth, in whom is all his delight; and while brotherly love continues, the faithful are manifestly glad of each other’s company, insomuch that whatever appearance there may be of indifferency to this among nominal Christians, in a state of lukewarmness and sorrowful divisions, it is certain

that this holy and happy inclination or desire keeps pace with the life and power of godliness; a decay from this, which is the same with a defection from the love of God, is a principal source of that dangerous, and for the most part fatal drawing-back, the forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. Frequent assemblies are absolutely needful to support a church-state, and the building ourselves on our most holy faith, without which a people cannot keep themselves in the love of God, as directed Jude ver. 20, 21. Nor can believers in a social or private capacity, expect to flourish without them, but in keeping together on every occasion they knit faster in love, and become endeared to one another in consequence of reciprocal acts of kindness and friendship. It therefore is of great advantage to the interest of religion, when they who fear the Lord are seeking every fit opportunity to converse together: And this will be the case when persons are in good earnest, seeking first the kingdom of God and the things which are Christ's. They may be providentially interrupted from associating, but, being constrained by divine love, they are no sooner at liberty, but, like Peter and John, when let go from their confinement by the Jews, they joyfully return to their own company, which is no other than their brethren in Christ.

AGAIN; this example proves that they who associate in the fear of God, are disposed, and will study to improve their meetings together to their spiritual advantage. In the temple or assemblies of the church, this is directly and professedly in view; but I principally refer to Christians when met in their own houses, or occasionally from time to time in any other place; particularly their visits one among another, in which they have a hospitable intercourse, and cheerfully partake of the bounties of Providence as relations or friends; such opportunities may be employed to the purposes of religion, without infringing on a becoming regard to things of the world. I am far from censuring discourse on subjects which relate to civil and natural life, which is sometimes becoming and useful; but then, should they spend their whole time on temporal things? Is there no opportunity on such occasions to communicate something for the soul, and which relates to eternity? And, is it not decent and profitable for them who are heirs of salvation, if possible, to make every season subservient

to their meetness for glory? We have seen that there is the highest reason to conclude that the first disciples, at their common meals, refreshed one another with spiritual things. And it is certain, with this expectation Paul desired to have an interview with the Christians at Rome: “For I long to see you, (saith he) that I may impart some spiritual gift unto you, to the end that ye may be established; that is, that I might be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me,” [Ro 1:11,12](#). In which place, I apprehend, the apostle doth not so much intend his imparting extraordinary gifts, or what he might communicate in the exercise of his office, as their conferences in relation to faith and experience, since their communications were mutual, at least I think there is no reason to question that these are included; and it would tend much to a revival of a spirit of religion among us, if it was the study of Christians to accommodate their visits in this manner to the promoting of their spiritual interest. But permit, my dear Reader, a word of advice. In order to carry on this pious design two things are needful: First, that these friendly entertainments at home are so contrived as not to interfere with the appointed seasons of the sanctuary. Is it becoming a Christian to say, I have a friend on a visit, and therefore cannot come up to the house of the Lord? This is sometimes the case, through companions who fear not his name, or it may be through carelessness, which are both to be avoided by him who would profit in religion. No appointment for social entertainment in thy own habitation, should ordinarily take place against stated and known seasons set apart for assembling in the church. This may be thought by some rather too strict; but a man, who thirsts after God, will so order his affairs; and when he can, deny himself at home rather than be deprived of an opportunity in the house of the Lord. And then it is further necessary to obtain this advantage, that our civil and friendly entertainments be mingled with exercises of a spiritual kind, which consist with those meetings, such as praying together, and some serious and heavenly discourse; surely this might give life and joy to a company of believers, when regaling themselves in moderation with the good things of life, without abating a desirable relish in their natural enjoyments. Certain I am that this is the way to be filled with each other’s company, as it is expressed in [Ro 15:24](#). Whereas, through a total neglect of these things, we often empty one

another in our visits, and come together, not for the better, but for the worse, at least in respect of the soul.

IT may further be noted, that one fruit of that faith which worketh by love is a hospitable and liberal spirit. The primitive Christians are a noble example of the power of the gospel in this respect; it enlarged their hearts to be generous in parting with their substance for the common good, without any reserve to themselves; this, indeed, in ordinary circumstances, is not required, but the love of God will certainly purify a man from covetousness, and promote in him a bountiful disposition. Thus, no sooner was the heart of Lydia opened, but the doors of her house were open to receive the ministers and disciples of Jesus, [Ac 16:15](#). The apostle James asserts, that faith without works is dead, and likewise shows that works of mercy and love are essential to that which is saving: nor can any thing be more contrary to the real spirit of Christianity than a morose, narrow and selfish temper. That man who is not willing to show kindness, and do good to every one, but especially to his brethren in the Lord, as directed in the gospel of Christ, should look to himself. If we do not as it were wash the saint's feet, and minister to their necessities according to our ability, yea and also delight in showing all manner of respect to the people of God, we want an essential evidence of grace in the heart. Let no unprofitable professor flatter himself, for pure religion is love; not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

MOREOVER, it appears that the fruits of faith are abiding. These Christians continued in their harmony and love; they were not, as some, unstable as water; neither is true religion a fickle or transitory thing, nor is it partial. He that fears God, is habitually constant and universal in obeying the truth; and this will appear in his behaviour under a profession of the gospel. To which may be added, that the believer finds unspeakable delight in the ways of the Lord; they are ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace to his soul. Strangers conceive not the gladness and joy that attend the saints who walk together in love, in the order of Christ. Their communion is sweet, who can say, "Have fellowship with us; truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

FINALLY, we see that the visible and close union of Christians, and their mutual offices of kindness, is a striking evidence to all around them of their real religion. By this faith is seen, and the world is convinced. Whereas short of this testimony, the greatest attainment in knowledge and gifts, or the highest profession of zeal for the truths and ordinances of the gospel, is vain; it fails of proving a man under the dominion of grace. He is nothing who hath not this charity, in the exercise of which the doctrine of God our Saviour is adorned; but, in this practice of piety and goodness, the calling and election of the Christian appears. Thus saith the Lord, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another,” [Joh 13:35](#). May the Spirit of love and of a sound mind be poured out from on high on all that call on the name of the Lord, that, being thus found in the faith, they may abound in every fruit of righteousness, to the conviction of gainsayers, and to the praise of the glory of him that hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light!

LECTURE XX.

The daily increase of the primitive church.

AMONG all the extraordinary and entertaining things related of the saints at Jerusalem, it is none of the least that the Lord was with them. He crowned his gospel with continual success, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly; for we are told, that “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” It was their glory and happiness to be in perfect harmony and love, and in favor with man, but still more so to enjoy the visible presence and blessing of Jehovah; the beauty of the Lord their God was upon them, and he established the work of their hands. In this pleasing account the following particulars are included, namely, the denomination under which the disciples are mentioned, their daily increase, by whom these additions were made, and the peculiar description of those who were joined. A review of these articles, with brief notes upon them, and some reflections, will be the subject of this lecture, and finish our design on this useful part of sacred ecclesiastical history.

THE English term church, under which the faithful here first stand described, an expression often repeated in the New Testament, is derived from two words, which may be rendered, the house or habitation of the Lord. Thus, the temple at Jerusalem is frequently styled; and a like phrase is used of the spiritual temple, “the house of God,” [1Ti 3:15](#), over whom now Christ, who is the true God, presides sole lawgiver and king, as it is written, [Heb 3:6](#). “But Christ as a Son over his own house, whose house are we.” But (ἐκκλησία) the word used here, and in all other places where church intends a society of believers in order, is of another import, and signifies *to be called out*; so that the simple and native idea of a church, is a company of called persons assembled together, which exactly corresponds with the true notion of a Christian, or gospel-church, which is no other than a company of saints, who, being called by grace, according to the divine purpose, are built together, by a special covenant

and associating themselves in one time and place, for a mutual enjoyment of the appointments of their Lord and Redeemer.

CUSTOM has rendered it tolerable; but, however early or common the word has been applied to a house or place of assembly, as frequently to this day, it is nevertheless very improper; and though it might at first be innocently introduced, and is now used by many, who are far from intending any thing unworthy the spirituality of gospel-worship, this liberty has been abused; instead of an ordinary house or apartment, as at first, stately piles have been raised, framed and adorned in a peculiar manner, under the name of a church, by which the vulgar have been captivated to a superstitious veneration for material buildings; it is therefore to be wished, that this undue application of the word was renounced. Though some respectable persons have been otherwise minded, I take leave to say, that I apprehend the meeting-place of the faithful for divine service is no where in scripture certainly called a church. The passage in [1Co 11:18](#) is thus interpreted by some, “when ye come together in the church,” i.e. say they, into the place of meeting, which is thought to be confirmed by what follows, ver. 20. “when ye come together therefore into one place.” But, with submission, coming into the church is easily understood, and may signify no other than assembling together in a church meeting; and though it is true that such meetings must be held in a particular place, yet the original words do not determinate it topical, but rather refer to the unity of the persons who met, than to the place in which they assembled; they are the very words (*ἐπι το αὐτο*) used in [Ac 2:44](#) already considered in lecture 18. Also, in chap 3:1. And again, in the 4th chapter and 26th verse. Now it cannot in either of these passages design a place or house of meeting. And as to the church the disorderly Corinthians are suspected of despising, mentioned ver. 22. it can by no means be applied to a material building, unless we suppose it consecrated by divine authority, and therefore holy as the Jewish sanctuary of old; but however some may plead for it, no scripture-warrant has yet, and, I presume, never will be produced for this relative sanctity and material buildings under the gospel dispensation. The Church of God, whom these wanton professors are supposed to contemn, and those whom they put to

shame, by the indecent and uncharitable practice reprov'd, appear to me to be one and the same; they are described as "having or possessing nothing," i.e. the poor, who may well be styled the church, since they were a part, yea and it is reasonable to suppose the major part of the church; for, "hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?"

THIS expression is used of different sorts of assemblies; for instance, the town-clerk of Ephesus so styles the multitude of craftsmen who gathered against the apostle, at the motion or call of Demetrius the silver-smith, [Ac 19:41](#). And in verse 39, of that chapter, the same word is used for an orderly court of justice, in which he tells the seditious, their cause, if they had any just complaint, might be legally determined; other applications of the term may be produced, but for the most part, as here, it refers to the church of God; sometimes to the invisible and catholic church, which comprehends the whole election of grace, who are or shall be saved, and may be confirmed as called in the divine purpose. This is the church which is the body of Christ, over whom he is given to be head, the fullness of him that filleth all in all, [Eph 1:22-23](#), even that church whom Christ loved, and gave himself for, and ransomed with his blood, out of every kindred, tongue and nation, whose names are written in heaven, and who, being completely gathered, shall at last appear in one general and glorious assembly, and together possess the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

SOME number the passage before us with those that speak of the church in this general sense; but it is plainly historical, and refers to the saints in order at Jerusalem. It is frequently taken for the visible church on earth universally, or, as the fathers expressed it, the church dispersed through the world to the ends of the earth. [Inquiry into the primitive church, p. 2.] Thus, we read, [Ac 12:1](#), that Herod, that bloody man, vexed certain of the church. And again, [Ga 1:13](#) says Paul, "I persecuted the church," i.e. the disciples of Jesus, wherever he found them, [Ac 9:2](#). So, then it is taken for all that call on the name of the Lord in every place, [1Co 1:2](#). But the word is more frequently applied to a particular community, as in the instance before us. The disciples were now a body corporate, assembling

themselves for Christian worship and discipline, under the immediate direction of the apostles; the first Christian church existing, and which, though not yet completely organized, (extraordinary circumstances excepted) which the serious enquirer may easily distinguish, is the original pattern of fellowship in the gospel. Thus, as the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch, so in a social capacity they were first styled a church at Jerusalem. Henceforward, being thus united, and walking together in every place, they were called a church. Of these churches, we have seen, there were many in the time of the apostles. And accordingly, we read of the churches of Judea, Galatia, Macedonia, and Asia, and likewise of all the churches of the saints. These churches were originally of the same faith and order; they each held the same doctrine, and the ordinances were the same in every community, [1Co 7:17](#). and they maintained a respectful and affectionate correspondence with each other, by messengers, letters of commendation and advice, with every office of love in their power, as circumstances required; things too little regarded in a state of lukewarmness and division, being always discouraged by covetous and disorderly persons, who serve their own belly, and not the Lord Jesus Christ, but in which the first disciples abounded, as the scriptures declare; nevertheless each congregation or incorporated society of Christians was independent, in which also the seat of government, and a sufficient means of personal edification was found, under their proper pastors and guides, in the exercise of whose different functions the ordinances were duly administered. This is the denomination which the associated disciples came under from the beginning, the church; and this is the proper character of Christians joined in the order of the gospel, they are a church, or an assembly, called out and gathered from the world; not that the members of this sacred society can always be together in one place, but the propriety of this appellation is evident in that, as in all bodies corporate, their appearance and operations depend on stated and frequent assembling themselves together, which was the daily practice of the saints at Jerusalem; and the forsaking of which, in every age and place, is the first step, and an highway to apostasy and ruin, both of communities and particular persons.

WE are now to consider the increase of this church at Jerusalem. There were continual additions unto it: “added to the church daily.” A church is a changeable body, composed of individuals who are mutable. Many are the vicissitudes in providence, by which the members of a particular gospel-church are removed, and at best the persons who compose them, like the priests of old, continue not by reason of death; besides, they are liable to be corrupted, in consequence of which it is too often seen, they make shipwreck of faith, or behave to unworthy their profession, that it is needful to put them away, or to purge them out as leaven, for the preservation of the body, the honor of religion, and the conviction and safety of the delinquent himself. On these, and on other accounts, churches are often diminished, and for want of additions brought very low, yea and in some instances entirely dissolve; but the church at Jerusalem was in a thriving and prosperous condition, the word of God grew exceedingly, and multitudes gladly received it, and joyfully submitted themselves to the name of Jesus. They came daily to the apostles, and were baptized and added to the Lord. Indeed disciples were not multiplied every day equal to the number of the first gathering, in which the increase of one day was three thousand, yet the gospel had free course into the hearts of many, and brought them to the obedience of faith, insomuch that every time the disciples met, at least in general, there were some instances of the power of God in a visible subjection of sinners to the Saviour, as their sovereign and king.

BUT, who made these additions? The historian declares, “it was the Lord.” It is the Lord’s doing, and to him it ought to be ascribed. Ministers are instruments for the conviction and persuasion of men, that they may believe and be saved; they preach the word of faith, and it pleaseth God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe; but faith is the gift of God. “Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” [1Co 3:5](#). Again; those who are called, being made willing in the day of God’s power, freely offer themselves; and also, the disciples with whom they are cemented have their concern in this union, which takes place, as we have seen by mutual consent. Thus, all parties are active towards the addition of persons to any

particular church, after the example before us. Peter and John preached the word, who, with the assistance of others, baptized the penitent, and were instrumental of joining them to the church; the members of which in respect of their reception of them into their body, may be looked upon as adding such persons, and also the party received is concerned in this union, who, on account of his voluntary surrender and adherence to Christ, is declared in prophecy to have “joined himself to the Lord,” Isa. 56:3. Nevertheless, when a church is increased in the number of the faithful, and built up a spiritual house for divine service, it must be ultimately referred to the grace and power of God. Which leads,

FINALLY, to the remaining article in this sacred account, namely, the peculiar description of those who were joined by the Lord to his people. It is declared that they were “such as should be saved.” Some would confine the sense of this phrase to their obtaining the means of salvation, but then all who heard the word should have been united to the church, whereas it is manifest that some only, though a great number, even they only were added, who received the gospel, and were baptized in the name of Jesus. The ministration of the word is a distinguishing favor, and woe be to them who neglect or despise it; and he that is thoughtful about his salvation may justly encourage himself from the enjoyment of the means, in a hope that the Lord Jesus have mercy upon him; for though many indulged in like-manner, perish in their sins through unbelief, yet this grant from heaven is a leading step towards the salvation of the elect; therefore great is the privilege of a gospel-ministry, and to be highly esteemed; but it is one thing to be of them to whom the salvation of God, i.e. the word of salvation is sent, [Ac 28:28](#) and another thing to be of *such as should be saved*. *The saved* is a phrase which stands opposed to the lost or the perished, to both which the gospel is evidently preached: It is used only in two other places, which may serve to illustrate the point. In [1Co 1:18](#) we read, “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;” “but (says the apostle) unto us that are saved it is the power of God.” And again, [2Co 2:15-16](#). speaking of the acceptance which faithful ministers find with God, however some to whom they preach may treat their report, and receive or reject it, he saith, “We are unto God a

sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” Now in both these passages we see that the *saved* and the *lost* are opposed to each other, and that both the one and the other sat under the report of the gospel. It is therefore plain that these persons, of whom it is declared that they are such as should be saved, are not Thus, described, because they enjoyed the means of salvation, but to distinguish them from those who, notwithstanding they were thus favored, perished in their infidelity. So then, the *lost*, or them that perish, are the disobedient, who, being left to themselves, perversely reject the counsel of God; and though they may take up a formal profession of Christ, yet having no root in themselves they fall away and come short of the promise: and the *saved*, in opposition to these, are such, who, being effectually called, are truly obedient to the faith, and will persevere unto life everlasting, being, as it is expressed, “not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,” [1Th 5:9](#). This phrase therefore amounts to the same with that used of the Gentiles at Antioch, [Ac 13:48](#) of whom it is said, “That as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” Such who shall be saved are such who are ordained to eternal life, and accordingly obtain like precious faith with God’s elect, and having openly submitted themselves to Jesus, “are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them who believe to the saving of the soul,” [Heb 10:39](#). These are the saved, “saved and called with an holy calling, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given them in Christ Jesus before the world began,” [2Ti 1:9](#). Such are “saved by grace, through faith, and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God,” [Eph 2:8](#). In a word, such are saved, i.e. “being called they are justified by his grace, and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life,” [Tit 3:7](#). Nor shall their hope make them ashamed, for whom he justified them he also glorified,” [Ro 8:30](#).

THIS then is the sum of the account, that the Lord so abundantly owned the preaching of the gospel, and prospered his church at Jerusalem, that there were daily additions, not barely of nominal Christians, but they were multiplied with the chosen of God, who were called according to his purpose, being ordained to eternal life: Their increase was of such as should be saved in the day of the Lord. To be of this number, my Reader,

will hereafter be found of infinite importance to each individual, and it is the glory and happiness of a church to be filled with such members; therefore “give diligence to make thy calling and election sure,” and let the Lord have no rest till he thus beautifies the house of his glory, “and makes Jerusalem a praise in the whole earth, an eternal excellency, and the joy of many generations.”

IN reflecting on this true and delightful history of the first Christians in their communion together, we are led into a view of the following truths:

NOTE I. That the communion of saints is clearly a divine institution. It was under the direction of the apostles who received their commission from the Lord, and who were inspired by the Holy Ghost, that the disciples at first were gathered into church order and continued so to be in every place where the Gospel obtained.

MAN by the excellency of his nature, as an intelligent being, is formed for society, and by his relation to others obliged to associate with them; he cannot exert his utmost capacity, nor answer the end of his existence, or find complete happiness, but in social state; and since the end of his being is to glorify God and enjoy him, religious society has been argued from the laws of nature and it must be acknowledged, that church-fellowship is agreeable to natural light, but the obligation of believers to this sacred union arises from the authority of God in his word, who has directed our worship through Jesus the Mediator, in whose name we gather together. Christ is king of saints, a son over his own house, and he has not left his people without a plain direction, and a promise sufficient to encourage them in waiting upon him. The motive, form, rule, and end of this fellowship depend entirely on his will; nor is it in the power of any man, or set of men, to make laws of government or terms of communion, which are not founded in the word of the Lord, but every thing must be done as he has ordained, according to the commission he gave his apostles, [Mt 28:18](#). So then a church is not barely a society, nor merely a society of believers, with a religious view, but a society formed on the order and discipline which Christ hath appointed; and for the faithful to incorporate and walk together in church-relation, is no indifferent matter,

for it is not of human invention, however prudent and useful, but an appointment from heaven, as appears from the conduct of these primitive Christians, under the guidance of their authorized and inspired leaders, who taught them to observe all and only those things which the Lord had commanded. If the authority of this holy covenant in the Lord was duly considered, it would not be so generally neglected; for since it is of God, certainly every believer is called upon to join himself to some congregation, on whom he discerns the true notes of a gospel-church, without which no man can discharge his duty to Christ, to his fellow Christians, or to his own soul. We may therefore justly lament the growing omission of this divine order. But again,

NOTE II. The proper and authorized members of a Christian church, are such only, who, in all appearance, are of them that shall be saved. Indeed, the Lord alone is certainly acquainted with these; he only knoweth them that are his, and for wise ends permits others to intrude: but they who are in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity, notwithstanding they have a notional faith, and are baptized, have no part or lot in this matter. This spiritual house and holy city must be built with holy and spiritual persons, and care should be taken that none but those whose calling proves their election of God are admitted into the sacred society. He that yields not the fruits of evangelical repentance, and a sound and lively faith in Jesus, has no claim to a place in his church: An ignorant, ungodly, proud, or self-righteous man may impose himself on the company, but when the King inspects those who are at his table, the man who is not invested with the wedding-garment will be turned out with shame. That the Lord hath determined that his church in this state of trial should be liable to hypocrites, appears from many Scriptures, and from the instances in which some such turn apostates, and become roots of bitterness, whereby many are troubled and defiled; so that while it is meet we should think well of each in our fellowship, and pray for him as one of the chosen of God, there is still but little reason to expect that none shall be added to his visible church but such as shall be saved; nevertheless the divine decree to permit others to mingle with his saints, gives them no right to his sanctuary, neither will it justify his professing people in

receiving any into their communion who appear destitute of that grace which belongs to the heirs of salvation. This privilege of becoming the sons of God, is given only to them who are born of the Spirit, [Joh 1:12](#). And we should be careful that lively stones are placed in this temple of the most High, [1Pe 2:3,5](#). And as no other than quickened sinners are appointed, or authorized to a place in the church of the living God; so none but such can answer the end of this divine fellowship, which is to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, and to build up one another on their most holy faith unto eternal life: But are these things possible with him that is dead in trespasses and sin? Can a carnal or natural man offer up spiritual sacrifices? Can he that is in the flesh, and out of Christ, be acceptable to God who is a spirit, and who is well-pleased alone in his Son? Or, can the dead nourish the living? No more can dead sinners nourish that living body the church, but this is essential to the end of Christian communion. A formal and lifeless profession, in itself considered, avails not to the glory of God, nor to the salvation of its subject: and however the Lord may render unconverted persons, who join themselves to his people, subservient to the purposes of his grace, they are utterly incapable of spiritual communion, or properly and truly of spiritual service, neither will it turn out to their advantage in the end. Besides, though such are permitted, strictly speaking, they are not added by the Lord. Our Saviour hath shown who it is that soweth the bad seed: hence tares grow up with the wheat, [Mt 13:39](#). the enemy that sowed them is the devil. Is an ungodly person or hypocrite found in the church? Behold the hand of the Lord hath not planted him there. No, friend, all his works are according to the counsel of his will. Jesus is the same, he adds none to his people but such as should be saved. But then,

NOTE III. The hand of the Lord is in every addition of saved and spiritual members to his visible church. It is by him alone a community is enriched with these chosen vessels of mercy: and when one such is added, it may truly be said, ‘God gave the increase.’ By his Spirit they are regenerated and quickened for the Fellowship of the saints, as the stones were prepared for the temple, they are fitted to his spiritual house, and by him they are drawn to the obedience of faith. However, ministers and

churches, and the subjects themselves, as we have seen, are active, and have their voluntary concern in ecclesiastical union, it is alone by the will and power of the most High that his elect are formed and disposed for his service; and as the arm of his grace is revealed in preparing, so the hand of his providence is nearly concerned in fixing one and another in this or that particular church. If the bound of our habitations is fixed, in respect of natural and civil life, how much more will our heavenly Father lead his children unto a situation in his house for the protection and nourishment of their soul? In some instances the word and providence of the Lord apparently concur in settling his faithful in this spiritual relation; this affords them matter of joy and thanksgiving; but his concern and guidance in this respect in every case is not to be doubted by those who trust him, for he is their shepherd, who maketh them to lie down in green pastures, and leadeth them beside the still waters, [Ps 23:2](#). Yea, many a child of God hath seen reason to adore and bless him for the leadings of his providence, though by afflicting changes in life, unto a place in his house, in which they have found sweet communion, and rest for the soul. So then, when a church is increased by the union of one that is called by grace, and an heir of glory, she may rejoice and say, alluding to Rachel's prophecy when Joseph was born, [Ge 30:24](#). The Lord hath added to me another son! And, it may hereafter be the wonder and praise of the general assembly and the church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, to behold the wisdom and grace of those dispensations, whereby the chosen have been distributed in Zion on earth. However, each living member in a church is a spiritual Joseph—an addition from the Lord; and happy it is when the disciples receive one another as Christ also received his apostles, as the gift of the Father; then would the name of the Lord be magnified, and a mutual esteem prevail among his people, to their unspeakable honor and advantage! O that it was thus more frequently seen! Lord, when wilt thou again pour out the Spirit from on high? When shall the house of thy glory be filled, and converts come up to thine altar, each one presenting himself a sacrifice of joy? and when shall thy saints with admiration and gratitude say, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" Once more.

NOTE IV. That additions from the Lord are of great importance to a Christian community. An increase of spiritual and fruitful members, whose temper and conduct manifest their calling and election of God, are alone from himself, and a visible token of his presence, which is one characteristic of a true gospel church. Christ walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks, [Re 2:1](#) yea and saith, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them,” [Mt 18:20](#). The Papists vainly boast in their number, and proudly style themselves Catholic, as if their profession was universal, which, blessed be God, is far from being true; but numbers are not the note of a church. The true church is exceeded in number by the world in general, and in some periods by anti-Christ in particular, so that there can be no dependence on mere popularity; but this is certain, that the Lord is present with his people; and, since his adding unto them is one proof that he is with them, though he hath other kind of manifestations of his presence to satisfy his saints, when for a season an increase is suspended, these additions are to be prayed for. Besides, the church’s edification depends on the Lord’s adding such to her number. Formal professors may be an occasional advantage, but properly speaking, this spiritual house is built up by them that are alive unto God, [Eph 4:15-16](#). They are such who “grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying itself in love.” From this fine description of the mystical body of Christ, it appears that a particular church is conducive unto the edification of his real members, in proportion to the number and vigor of them who are vitally in him; the least of whom are of advantage in his grace, prayers, spiritual affection, and gifts, and may be helpful to the greatest particular member, and the body in general, for “the head shall not say to the feet, I have no need of thee,” [1Co 12:21](#). These additions are therefore much to be desired, seeing the spiritual fruit can proceed from natural men, but the increase of them who are in Christ Jesus, will add to the life and beauty of a church. And further, the importance of having such added will appear, if we consider that without this a gospel church-state cannot exist, but must soon be broke up. As

hinted already, it is meet to think well of all who profess the gospel of Christ, and who do not by their unworthy behavior lay themselves under suspicion; nevertheless there is but too much reason to conclude, that in every church there may be some who are not of the chosen and faithful; nor would I pronounce it impossible that vital religion may be so sunk in a Christian society, that her members in general may be no better than formal professors. God forbid! But I apprehend this may be the case; yet considering the end of this divine fellowship, it seems unreasonable to call that society a church of Christ in which not one true Christian remains; but this may, yea it must be the case with a nominal church through the vicissitudes of providence in this mortal state, and that in a very few years, if the Lord doth not add some real disciples. So, then this spiritual building, like all other structures on earth, and even the world itself, for reasons mentioned before, is subject to decay, and would fall into ruin, unless repaired by the hand of the Lord. It appears from [2Pe 3:9](#), that the world itself is suffered to continue for the sake of the chosen, that they may be saved, through the knowledge of the truth. By the reasoning of the apostle in that place, when the number of the elect are accomplished, the conflagration will immediately ensue, and the universe dissolve in the devouring flames of that fire, in which the Judge shall be revealed from heaven. In like manner, a particular church is maintained for the communion and edification of the saints; and since the purpose of divine wisdom and grace can be no longer answered in a society who are utterly destitute of living members, or hath no one quickened by grace left among them, what reason is there to hope for their continuance as a people? But if any are otherwise minded, of this we are certain, that if such a community could be pointed out, she would be no Christian church, but on the contrary of the synagogue of satan; a company of hypocrites and imposters under a sacred profession! So, then it amounts to the same, whether a society may or may not stand under this form. Additions from the Lord of his saved-ones is needful to the continuance of a true gospel-church, and therefore of the utmost importance.

THESE are the particular doctrines that result from this sacred history of the first disciples, and which stand confirmed by the closing sentence

of the evangelist's account; than which no part is more interesting and pleasing. The fellowship of saints is an ordinance of God, that the called only, who are such as shall be saved, are mete for, or entitled to this divine privilege, that these are added by the Lord, and that the addition of such by him is needful to the character, edification, and continuance of a true gospel-church.

IT follows that a Christian church is a society distinct from the world. Thus, she is described by her Lord, [Song 4:12](#). "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." Nothing can be more contrary to the nature of a gospel-church than a society laid open and common. It is further evident, that in a particular visible church alone, enclosed as the Lord hath directed, the seat of government is found. Indeed, through the careless habit of professors, discipline may decline under any form of Christian communion; and truly there seems now little reason for boasting in the order of many who separate from national establishments, which is not to their praise; but it has been found, by sorrowful experience, that a godly discipline cannot be maintained in an open church-state, the want of which is to this day justly lamented by those who fear God of every denomination. It likewise appears from these premises, that in taking up this fellowship a person joins himself to the church and the relation which results from this union to any minister or particular person depends on his connection with the body; and also that every thing done or suffered in this order, is an act of obedience to the Lord, in whom the Christian rejoiceth under the fruition of his privileges in the house of God. A due consideration of these points would check the prevailing fondness of popular constitutions, and reclaim many from the disorders they indulge, which betrays an ignorance of the nature, and subverts the design of this sacred institution.

AND here again let me entreat the Reader to consider, since this is the appointment of heaven, who can deny the propriety and obligation of every believer to submit to his Lord, and to walk before him in union with his people. If the communion of saints was no more than a lawful and prudent association, adapted to the honor of God, and their mutual advantage, would it be any instance of piety, wisdom or goodness, to

despise or neglect it? But, seeing it as a divine institution, must not the conscience of every Christian dictate his obedience? The great Dr. Owen lays it down as an allowed maxim, and I see no exception, ‘that every believer is bound, by virtue of positive precepts, to join himself to some such single congregation, having the proper marks of a true church of Christ.’ All reputable and orderly persons, however they may differ in their opinions about particular forms, agree in this: That the disciples of the Redeemer are bound to his ordinances, without delay or exception; nor will any refuse it who seriously ponder the commission given by our Lord to his apostles, to baptize in his name, and teach those who have been baptized to observe all things whatsoever he hath commanded them; yet how many linger and scruple to the end of their days, and thereby lose the opportunity for bearing their testimony to the name of Jesus in the world!

To this sacred fellowship every saint should be admitted on a credible testimony of his repentance. And here it is proper to consider in what way it becomes a believer to testify his faith to the satisfaction of the church. The propriety of Christians being fully persuaded of a meetness in those whom they receive into communion, as observed in a preceding lecture [Page 168], is so obvious that it will scarce be disputed; the question is, in what form this satisfaction ought to be given? Far be it to insist on terms of communion not prescribed by our Lord, and for which we have not the example of his inspired apostles! But my opinion on this article of social religion, in favor of an ancient, custom too much neglected, will, I hope, be received with candor; and that if my Reader is convinced that it corresponds with the scripture, and the nature of that divine fellowship on which we are discoursing, he will not despise it.

AND here I truly acknowledge that this testimony may be given in writing, or even by signs only; [*An instance of which not long since turned out, in the case of a young man born deaf and dumb, but whose heart the Lord opened, in consequence of which he was enabled by signs to give full satisfaction to the church meeting in the Pitney, Bristol, and continues an honorable member of the same.*] the sense of hearing, and the faculty of speech, are not essential to the obtaining of faith; and no believer who can by any possible method convey an idea of his conversion, and a desire

of walking in gospel-order, whose behaviour bears witness to the sincerity of his profession, which is ever to be regarded; I say, no such person is to be refused the ordinances of Christ, on any consideration whatever; nevertheless, a solemn, express and verbal declaration of faith in Christ, and the power of his grace in effectual calling, appears to be natural and scriptural, and likewise agreeable to the practice of the faithful in all ages when the spirit of religion prevailed. See [Isa 44:5](#). A profession of faith is universally approved [*The Paedobaptist Dissenters, yea and even the Church of England itself, are not without some testimony to this; the latter require a person to rehearse the commandments, creed and Lord's-prayer, and likewise to answer the questions in the catechism, antecedent to his being confirmed, without which he cannot be regularly admitted to the table of the Lord, which is essential to a full communion of saints; and, what less is this than a verbal confession of faith?*]. One shall say, I am the Lord's. The term ὁμολογία used for this Christian profession, throughout the New Testament, carries in it an open and frank acknowledgment of any person or thing as our own; and what is the Christian profession but an acknowledgment of Christ as the Son of God, and our dependence upon and devotion to him as our Saviour and Lord? This no doubt is to be done by particular acts of obedience to his declared will, and by an habitual course of external conduct, whereby, having put on his name, we bear a constant witness to his authority and grace; but he that looks to Christ for salvation, and is brought to this obedience of faith, has a reason for his hope, and should be ready to give it; which is neither more or less, in other words, than his experience of the power of God displayed in enlightening his mind, convincing him of sin, engaging his heart to trust in the Messiah; and why should the man that has obtained this mercy make a difficulty of declaring it to the faithful, or even to an infidel, if required? But it should be considered, that a confession or verbal declaration is an essential and leading idea in that profession which the gospel requires; and accordingly Christ Jesus is said, in [1Ti 6:13](#) "to have witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate." And this we know was an open and free declaration of his character, [Joh 18:38](#) where the same word is used: "Beloved, Christ is highly exalted, and hath a name above every name, that every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess unto him." A man may talk of his faith in Christ in a loose and general way, which comes not up to a solemn reverend confession of his name; or, after having made a

confession, he may be tempted to neglect his ordinances, and so fall short of the engagements he is under; but bowing the knee is a distinct mode of worship from that of confessing with the tongue. They are neither to be confounded nor separated in gospel-obedience, which demands the sacrifice of the lips in a confession of Jesus; and though some will substitute the hand instead of the tongue in this branch of duty to the Saviour, they may as soon prove that these different members of the natural body are one and the same, as that there is no essential difference in the manner of writing or speaking, or that the Holy Ghost intended the former when he expresses the latter.

OUR Lord insists on our confessing him before men on earth, [Mt 10:32](#), where it is urged from a consideration that one might expect should awaken every Christian to shun the appearance of evading the point. The Pharisees are condemned for not confessing Christ, [Joh 12:42](#). And it appears from the instance of the eunuch, and others, that the first step in a Christian profession, is to declare our knowledge of Jesus, and faith in him as the son of God. And to the same purpose we read, [Ro 10:9-10](#), “that with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.” A man’s own lips is the proper and natural instrument of confession; and indeed, to introduce any practice under a notion of confessing where the mouth is not used, appears to me no less preposterous than unscriptural. In a word, a fair and close reasoning out of the scripture, we shall find that a verbal acknowledgment is included in that profession of the name of Jesus, under which the primitive disciples were found; and therefore I cannot but think it incumbent on every believer in Christ, and am sorry that it should be even dispensed with, much more discouraged, where it may be obtained. There is nothing in a serious and humble declaration, of a person’s experience in the church of God but what is decent and honorable, or to offend the most tender and modest constitution. Nor doth it appear that the laying it aside has increased the number of those who join in communion; on the contrary, church fellowship among nominal Christians never was more neglected than in the present day, so that it is much to be wished that we returned to the good old way pointed out by reason and scripture, and that

the faithful were encouraged to say with David, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul,” [Ps 66:16](#).

FINALLY; since it is plain that the communion of saints is of divine institution, and that from the beginning the called were joined by the Lord to the church, have we not reason to conclude that this is the general method of God with his people? The pious Mr. Henry, in his remark on this verse, has the following note: ‘Those, saith he, that God hath designed for eternal salvation, shall one time or another be effectually brought to Christ; and those that are brought to Christ are added to the church in a holy covenant by baptism, and in a holy communion by other ordinances.’ This indeed is to be taken in a qualified sense, but may it not justly be inferred from this account, and from the general report of the gospel, “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved;” that this is the highway to heaven, and that, at least under the gospel-dispensation, however, there may be exceptions, for the grace of God is not to be limited otherwise than according to the revealed counsel of heaven, for the most part, such who shall be saved will hereafter appear to have been added to the church? A consideration that should awaken all who live in the neglect of this fellowship, to examine into the ground of that hope, which is not effectual to bring them under this pleasant yoke of their Redeemer.

ON a review of this authentic and interesting history of the primitive church, who can but see, and be charmed with her beauty! How lovely is her countenance in her infant state, when a constant and faithful spirit universally prevailed! With what unity, zeal, brotherly love, hospitality, honor and success, did she appear in her assemblies, daily increasing and flourishing out, still more and more, from the bosom of her Lord, who was continually saluting her with the tokens of his power and love, and causing her members to “suck and be satisfied, and to milk out and be delighted with the abundance of her glory!” O that it was with us as in these days and months, when Zion was a crown of glory in the hand of her Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of her God! Thanks be to God; he will never forsake his people. There are daily additions to his church, and we have reason to hope that they are of such as shall be saved; yet, is there no cause to bewail the present state of the visible kingdom of Christ, and the

melancholy difference when compared with what we have seen? How unstable, corrupt, divided, and lukewarm! how covetous, loose and unprofitable; yea, and in many instances, how uncharitable are professors in their behaviour one toward another, insomuch that in some places there is need for applying the caution, [Ga 5:13](#). “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” For these things let us humble ourselves, and seek for the return of the Spirit, who is grieved by this sad disposition and conduct; but he waits to be gracious, and will heal our backslidings if we return unto him. Remember, beloved, the connection there is between a lively, faithful, spiritual and fruitful behaviour, and the divine presence and blessing. The wind bloweth where it listeth; so is the work of the Spirit, among a professing people, his operations are according to the good pleasure of his will, but he works by the appointed means of grace. Order, harmony and zeal in a church are needful to warrant an expectation of its increase; so that when this is absent the aspect is threatening. Nor let it be forgot that the design of our fellowship in Christ is nothing short of eternal salvation. This is the end of our faith. With this view the Lord adds his chosen to the church, namely, that they should be saved; and this should be the aim and endeavour of his ministers and people in communion. May this therefore be our earnest pursuit under a profession of his name, that we may together appear with our Redeemer in glory at his coming!

AND now, my dear Reader, I finish this lecture and subject with an earnest entreaty that thou wouldst carefully survey and ponder the whole scene of transactions represented in the foregoing pages. What sober unprejudiced person can reflect on these things without admiration and praise! How conspicuous the sovereign love, wisdom, grace, power and faithfulness of God, in sending his Son to die and save sinners, as he spake by the mouth of his prophets from the foundation of the world; and in sealing his mission and character by so great a variety and number of miracles, unbelievers themselves being judges! And, how hardened their hearts, who reject the Redeemer, or neglect his salvation! Behold and be astonished: His resurrection from the dead; and consider the ample satisfaction, by undeniable witnesses of a sad equally interesting and

glorious, whose testimony is confirmed by the Spirit of truth! How amazing the methods of grace, that reigns through righteousness to the pardon and life of the most flagrant transgressors, who repent; not excluding the murderers of Jesus himself; but that “in his name remission of sins should be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Yea, and that so great a multitude of these blood-guilty wretches should be converted in a day, and obtain a pardon from him, whom, but a few weeks before, they had unjustly condemned, and, by the hands of the wicked, crucified and slain! And finally, that the faithful should be called into a fellowship so adapted to the honor of their Saviour, their mutual advantage, and the continuance of the gospel to the end of the world, is greatly to be admired! Who that attends to this wonderful dispensation of mercy from a holy God to sinful men, can forbear to cry out with the apostle, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God: How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

IF these things are certainly true, as doubtless they are, then the gospel is true, and woe be to them who despise it. It is highly unreasonable to question these facts, since it is not credible that the apostles would have openly appealed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem concerning these things if they had been false, or that such presumption and folly should not have immediately met with its reward, to their ruin, and still more incredible, yea it was even impossible, on a supposition of any imposture or deceit, that a few plain persons, whose simplicity and moral behaviour was never disputed; without learning, riches, power, or any other weapons, than reasoning out of the scriptures, compared with the external evidence given from heaven to the doctrine they preached, should persuade so great a multitude, who lived on the spot where Jesus was crucified, to become followers of him, through a scene of sufferings and self-denial. In a word, had there been the least hesitation concerning the facts referred to by Peter in his discourse, and on which the apostles proceeded in their ministry, Christianity must have been crushed on its first appearance, and its votaries scattered with shame and just indignation: But since the contrary is evident, how daring and perverse is the opposition of deists who openly

contradict and blaspheme the name of Jesus, and the revelation of his grace! And indeed, since Jesus is the Messiah, and there can be salvation in no other, how unhappy and dangerous the state of all unbelievers! If these papers fall into the hands of such who neglect or despise the true grace of God, and prove a means of convincing any one of them, the name of the Lord will be praised, and I shall have joy in the day of revelation. However, this attempt is humbly committed to his blessing, in hope of its finding some acceptance in the heart of the true Christian Reader; and with respect to those who are yet disobedient, I know of nothing more suitable than the exhortation of the prophet, [Ps 2:12](#), with which I conclude: “Kiss the son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

A DISSERTATION
ON THE
EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS,
FOR

**The Warning of those who are fallen into the like threatening State
of Religion.**

BOOK V.

The early declension of the church from her original simplicity.

LECTURE XXI.

Introduction. The Lord's testimony against the disciples at Sardis. In what respects a church may be dead, notwithstanding she hath a name that she liveth. The occasions and symptoms of this dreadful state. Motives to watch against it.

THAT the church soon declined from her primitive purity, order and zeal, is notorious, and a subject more needful than pleasing. On the spread of Christianity tares grew up with the wheat, insomuch that the worst of errors and most shameful apostasies appeared, even in the days of the apostles; this their writings in general show, but no where more plainly than in the epistles to the seven churches in Asia, contained in the revelation of Jesus Christ by his angel to his servant John the evangelist. Some writers of note have shunned an explanation of this mysterious book, as though an attempt of this kind was presumptuous and vain; on the contrary, some others, no less eminent for piety and learning, seem to have ventured too far and miscarried: Time hath shown them greatly

mistaken in what, like prophets, they have been bold to assert, concerning the accomplishment of its several predictions. This temerity should warn us against intruding into things not mentioned in scripture, but it is no reason for laying aside the study of a divine prophecy, unto which we are encouraged with an assurance of a blessing, chap. i. 3,

THERE are those who contend that these epistles are prophetic of the visible church in different periods, succeeding each other to the end of time, and some go about to assign them precisely, to which others make considerable objections; but it answers my present design that it is generally allowed that a Christian church did really exist in each city mentioned, and that these churches were actually in the circumstances severally described at the time the apostle John wrote, for he is expressly directed to write the things which are, as well as those which *shall be hereafter*, chap. 1. 19. So that, if a mystical sense may be admitted, a literal one cannot be refused. The facts then related of these churches are doubtless historically true, and the exhortations, promises and threatenings, and likewise the reproofs and commendations, are of universal instruction. Indeed there are some articles in every epistle peculiar to the community unto whom it is sent, but we learn from the close of each, that what is said to one is spoken to all, and therefore the contents are to be applied to the churches of Christ under similar circumstances, in every age, to the end of the world.

THE present state of religion, which is justly lamented, seems much to resemble that which appeared in the church at Sardis, which is the subject I have chosen, and accordingly some who take it prophetically apply it to the period we are in; if their notion is just, the epistle to her very nearly concerns us, and demands our most serious attention; however, on comparison, the likeness is but too visible, so that a dissertation upon it cannot be unseasonable.

THE plan of these epistles is uniform. After an order to write, they are each directed to the angel or minister of the church from Jesus Christ, whom the apostle at large in a vision, as described chap. i. and from which description this divine speaker assumes some distinguishing character

adapted to the peculiar state of the community, which being laid open, with proper rebukes and exhortations for the awakening of backsliders and comforting the faithful, is followed with a gracious promise unto him that perseveres, and a solemn excitation to hearken to the voice of the Spirit.

CONFORMABLE to this plan our epistle to Sardis runs thus:

1. UNTO the angel of the church in Sardis write: “these things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

2. “BE watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.”

3. “REMEMBER therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

4. “THOU hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy.”

5. “HE that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

6. “HE that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

I SHALL endeavour to open and apply this divine message from Jesus to his people, in a lecture on each verse, in the order it stands; the first of which contains the following particulars, namely, the direction of the epistle, the character which our Lord assumes, and his account of their shameful and dangerous state.

THE superscription runs: “unto the angel of the church in Sardis.” Sardis was the metropolis of Lydia in Asia Minor, formerly an important city of great magnificence, where the celebrated Craesus once kept his court, but it is long since reduced, there being now only a village of this name a small distance from the ruins of the former, which some think was

the seat of this Christian church; but all these churches were situate in capital cities, and there is no reason to question but that Sardis was famous in the apostles time. A popular and opulent city, the riches and luxury of which might be one occasion of the sad declensions complained of, for experience shows that the business and pleasures which abound in such places are often destructive of vital religion; however, unto the angel or minister of the church, as it is explained chap. i. 20 this epistle is directed; not that it concerned him only or principally, he might be to blame; sometimes a minister is tempted by the perverseness and ill-treatment he meets with on account of his faithful reproofs, to let men alone in their folly, or he might be fallen into the same carnal frame which prevailed in the church; or if chosen into office since she declined, no wonder that his spirit and conduct was conformed unto theirs, for in a state of lukewarmness people naturally seek out for one like themselves, whose ministration and conduct shall give them no disturbance in their disorderly walk, and there are but too many in every age who are ready for their purpose; hence the old proverb, 'Like people, like priest.' Be this as it may, the pastor or elder is not charged with neglect of his duty. The letter is directed to him as her principal officer for the church, and manifestly concerns every member who is commended or reproved, and exhorted with a promise or threatening, according to his integrity or effect, in whatever station or character he stood.

To engage their attention the divine Jesus prescribes himself in terms under which he appears in a grand and most important light: "These things saith he that hath the seven spirits and the seven stars." They are not the dictate of any creature, however dignified in nature or office, but of the great Son of man, who is the Alpha and Omega, the true God and eternal life, the exalted Head of the church, who, being alive from the dead, hath all power in heaven and earth. "He that hath the seven spirits of God;" under whom not only the angels of heaven minister to the heirs of salvation, but the Spirit himself proceedeth, the fulness and variety of whose gifts and graces are dispensed in Christ Jesus; yea, and the seven stars, those angels in office, or ministers of the word, who are appointed to edify the church, these are all in his hand, to be continued or removed

at his pleasure. This character of the Saviour hath a twofold aspect; it carries in it a threatening if they remained disobedient, and a promise of his blessing in case of repentance, unto which they are called; q. d. 'O ye, the minister and people in my church at Sardis, unto whom I now send, consider who it is that saith these things unto you; it is he that hath the disposing of all spiritual gifts and graces, means and instruments, whereby you can flourish or even exist: If you hearken not to me, or despise my counsel, remember I am he, at whose instance the Spirit of life and grace withdraws, and the stars disappear, in consequence of which churches decay, and at length entirely dissolve; on the other hand, if you take warning and repent, under a sense of your backslidings, behold I am ready to furnish you with every needful supply for the continuance of my gospel with success among you, that you may revive, and that your beauty be restored to the glory of my name.' And now who cannot see the propriety of this introduction to the reproofs and exhortations which follow? Could any thing be more adapted to awaken them out of that state of supineness and negligence into which they were sunk, and to encourage their return to the Lord?

MANY are the works to be performed in a church-state, to a due discharge of which it is needful that each member fills up his station, according to the measure of grace he hath obtained. The work or business of a church is to maintain the doctrines and orders of the gospel in their simplicity and glory, to hold forth the word of life, for the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints, to oppose satan and his kingdom, and to promote the knowledge of thrift, and cherish the members of his body, to the utmost of their power; this requires that diligence and an expense of mind and body, which a slothful or selfish professor will not exert. By this labour and self-denial frequent assemblies are to be held for preaching the word, administering the ordinances, striving together in prayers, an holy watch over one another in the Lord, and all works of charity, such as brotherly admonition, visiting the sick, and relieving the poor, with every office of kindness as occasion requires, in which the saints are to abound in love to God and each other. All these works are required in a church; to be zealous in which becomes the disciples of Jesus, though they seem

little regarded by some who pass under that name, but every community is established in proportion to her diligence and faithfulness in these things which are in a degree essential to the form of a community, and accordingly that at Sardis had her works, the knowledge of which is the first thing asserted, "I know thy works." It is a perfect knowledge which Christ here assumes, such as men obtain of an object within the compass of their understanding after the most careful inspection, and accordingly he declares, "I have not found thy works perfect, &c." Thus, he whose eyes are as a flaming fire, discerning the thoughts of the heart, declares his exact and universal acquaintance with the works of his church, which shows that his eye is upon the ways of professors who come short of their duty, how little soever they think of it, and that his judgment is according to truth. What Christ says against a people he says not on the report of others, but on his own knowledge, and the facts are not to be disputed; he is himself a witness against those he condemns, therefore woe be to them who will not repent.

NOW what report doth the omniscient Jesus give of the state of this church? No doubt a just, but alas it is a melancholy account! This is the testimony he bears against her: He declares it to her face, "that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." 'This is thine appearance and character; thou wouldest seem a church of the living God, in whom he is worshipped in simplicity and truth, and hast a name that thou thus livest; but this character which thou bearest is false, I know thy works; and this is thy true but shameful condition, thou art in reality dead.' Thus, the church at Sardis stands charged by the holy Jesus himself.

BUT was she absolutely and totally without any life? Certainly no; she was yet alive, her church-state existed, nor had she, as hinted already, wholly ceased from her works; some things remain, though they are ready to die; these she is exhorted to strengthen. Indeed the generality of her members seem very defective, and it is probable many of them were hypocrites, nevertheless there were a few names in Sardis of a different character, as will hereafter appear; and while any who live unto God, and hold their integrity, remain in a church, though their number are few, and they are incapable of withstanding the tide of corruption, it cannot be said

that she is totally dead. This charge must therefore be taken in a qualified sense; our Lord plainly intends that she was comparatively dead, i.e. lifeless, unprofitable, and very imperfect; dead in comparison of what is required; her vigour and fruitfulness fell short of what she professed and the character she bore, and, in a word, that she was sadly declined from her primitive zeal and faithfulness, and that, under these circumstances, she was in a dying condition, and if she did not repent, would certainly come to a speedy dissolution. This, I say, was the shameful and dangerous state of the community referred to, and to the like sad condition the most famous churches are liable, and are for the most part reduced before they dissolve. What appearances we have of a similar declension in the present day, I shall not here stay to enquire, but that we may be warned and improved by this affecting example, I propose briefly to consider in what respect a church may have a name to live and yet be dead, show whence it is that a Christian community, although dead in the sense of our text, may nevertheless have a name that she liveth, point out the symptoms of this state of things, and then offer some motives to be watchful against it.

AND first, a church may have the character of being sound in the faith and zealous for the doctrines of grace, and yet be so far degenerated as that on examination it will be found, that those in her communion have no just regard for them, or it may be are fond of vain notions which directly oppose them. Thus, in several of the Asian churches, who are styled golden candlesticks, as in Pergamos and Thyatira, the hateful doctrines of Balaam, the Nicolaitans, and the subtleties of Jezebel, were connived at; doctrines which tended to idolatry and uncleanness; and if, as some think, these are typical of Rome, her abominations are notorious; she assumes the name of the apostolic church, but is far from being steadfast in the doctrine of Christ, for she is not built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Christ Jesus is the corner-stone; her foundation is not in the scripture, but in human traditions, so that her tenets are beside the authority of God, whose precept in many instances she disannulleth, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, and particularly in the article of justification; human merit, and the works of the sinner, are made a cause of his acceptance with God, and a title to life, against all reason

and scripture, for, since “we are altogether as an unclean thing,” most certain it is that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” [Isa 64:6](#). And the gospel-doctrine in this point makes the obedience of Christ and his perfect righteousness, imputed and received by faith, the sole ground of glory in the sight of God, declaring that believers are “justified, freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,” [Tit 3:7](#). But if, as hinted, the Sardinian church-state under her declensions was a figure of the reformed churches, who cannot see too great a likeness? The very name of a Protestant is opposed to the doctrines of Rome, and those of the reformation were levelled directly against that root of all popish inventions the merit of works, but alas how are many Protestants, both at home and abroad, swerved from the true grace of God! Those precious truths, by which, through the power and blessing of the Almighty, anti-Christ was expelled, and this and other nations were rescued from popish superstition and tyranny, are now set at nought, and in a manner universally denied! May not a church be said to have a name that she liveth and at the same time is dead in respect of her doctrine, when her public confession and sworn articles are full and strong, for instance, for the Holy Trinity, the Deity and satisfaction of Christ, the deplorable state of man who is born under the guilt and dominion of sin, his total impotence in himself, and the necessity of the regeneration of the Spirit, together with justification alone by the merits of the Redeemer, and at the same time the generality of her ministers and members contradict these great and important truths of revelation, and to their utmost promote a set of notions in direct opposition unto them? And need we go far for an instance so amazingly perverse and affecting? Nor is this confined to any particular denomination of Protestants. It is sad to relate, but even among Protestant Dissenters, whose separation from the public hath a form of zeal for the purity of the gospel, it is notorious that there are some even among them most shamefully corrupted with the leaven of those who subvert the truth as it is in Jesus, insomuch that in all appearance they have scarce any thing of the gospel of Christ to be found with them.

AGAIN; this may be the case with a church in respect of her discipline. It belongs to a church to watch over the life of her members, and to warn

them of errors in doctrine and practice, to admonish them that go astray, to censure the disorderly, and if required, as in case of perverseness, to put the offender away; and this is so reasonable in itself, and so plainly revealed, that no one denies it. Indeed it is needful to the purity and preservation of every corporate body to exercise discipline, the objects, manner, and end of which, in a Christian community, are described in the word, with many exhortations to be faithful in this trust, yet alas it is but too much neglected even among those who separate from others under a pretence of a conscientious regard to the authority of the Lord in the order of his house. At Thyatira they are condemned for suffering that woman Jezebel, and in Corinth the disciples are blamed for not putting away the incestuous person; and if he that searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins was to examine his churches in the present day on this head, there is reason to fear he would have many charges against them for suffering those who ought to be dealt with. If Protestants, who have a name for order and purity, were truly alive and faithful, we should not find erroneous, proud and loose persons walking about with their names in the churches of Christ, as they do in some instances, to the grief and scandal of many. But, when a people profess a holy discipline in the house of God, and at the same time connive at sin, are they not dead notwithstanding they have a name that they live? And this was the case among the churches in Asia at the time when these epistles were wrote, and it will ever be thus in proportion to our decay from the life and power of godliness.

AND further; this may be the case in reference to the affection which is required in the communion of saints. A people may have a name for love to each other, when at the same time, on due examination but little may be found of that goodness, sympathy and delight among them, which is the genuine fruit of true Christian charity. Love is the leading grace to the works of faith, a defect in which is manifest where contentions and divisions abound, which is sometimes the case; but where things are not come to this pass, the members of a church may be far from continuing in that desirable harmony and intimate affection which belong to their character: At a distance it may be thought that they are in a state of cordial friendship and union of soul, when alas to them that are within there

appears an unhappy spirit among them, or at least, that instead of cleaving together as chosen companions, and being kindly affectionate in their behaviour, they scarce know one another, and through an unnatural distance and shyness are incapable of that mutual assistance and comfort which becomes their profession. This strange conduct among Christians in fellowship, is sometimes owing to a corruption from the simplicity of the gospel, the doctrines and ordinances of which are adapted to unite the disciples; but when errors take place, iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold. However, brotherly love is not always answerable to the same of a Christian society; and when this is the case, in proportion to her deficiency, she is truly styled dead under a name to live, to the grief of those who seek her prosperity.

ONCE more; she may have a name to live and yet be dead in respect of her assemblies. Frequent and general assemblies are essential to the performance of the works which belong to a church, in a forsaking of which, their fall is inevitable. Now the gatherings of a society may be defective, and far short of what they seem to spectators, or are reported to be. It may be thought strange, but experience hath shown, that a church state may decline, and in a manner dwindle to nothing, in the midst of a popular audience. Many may attend the ordinary means of grace in a Christian community, the members of which are very remiss in those special meetings, on which that discipline, and works which are needful to her with welfare and increase; and when this becomes habitual among a people who are of repute in the churches, they fall under the description before us, are in very great danger, and do well to take warning.

THESE false appearance and threatening declension in any community no doubt arises from the bad disposition and conduct of those who compose it, for this lifeless state is inconsistent with the order and zeal of her members, so that even such who, by their future repentance may appear to be disciples indeed, must at present be in a sleepy and carnal frame, while there is reason to apprehend that some, and those not a few, are mere formal professors, of whom it may be truly said that they are spiritually dead, notwithstanding their name among the living in Jerusalem. However, the reputation of a church so different from her real

condition as at Sardis, may be owing to one or more of the following occasions:

1. TO the gradual manner in which she declined, from her original perfection and vigour. When a church is first gathered her members are for the most part lively and active, they are full of zeal and good works; hence they have a name among the brethren, and this their character may remain after they have left their first love, from whence they go off by slow degrees, even almost imperceptibly, at least to others. Or again,

2. IT may arise from comparing their state with that of another community still more declined. By this false rule of comparison both particular persons and bodies of men, sometimes flatter themselves to their ruin; but it should be considered that in some respect or degree we may be better than others, and at the same time be a very bad state, yea and even nigh to destruction; so dangerous is that deceitful line by which we are but too much inclined to measure ourselves and others. And,

3. THE character of a church, even after she is greatly declined, may awhile be supported, at least with some, by the favor and good conversation of a few belonging to her who yet maintain their integrity, for persons at a distance judge of the whole by the part they are conversant with, which shows, by the way, how much the reputation of a community depends on the good behaviour of her members, and should be one motive to virtue in every one who stands in the sacred relation. On the other hand, it is not impossible but that some may be deceived by the misrepresentation of vain-glorious persons who are this orderly themselves, yet boast of the community to which they belong. These are the ordinary occasions or means by which the good name of a church for purity and zeal may in some degree prevail, although in reality she is very much sunk, and her things which remain are dying away; namely, the gradual manner of her declension; the still more deplorable state of some other communities, with whom she is compared, the reputation she receives by a few of her members whose walk is agreeable; and the like false idea may also be promoted by the deceitful talk of some men.

BUT from whatever quarter the deception may arise, in this sad hypocritical state, a church is in the utmost danger of being dissolved, for in proportion to her deadness she is barren; a principal means of fruitfulness is wanting. It is true, the uprightness and zeal of a church, or the vigor and spirituality of its members, are not the efficient cause of increase; it is alone by the power of God that sinners are converted, planted and flourish in the house of the Lord, yet the promise of the Spirit is to be expected in the way of our duty, both in a social and private capacity; and accordingly the Laodiceans are threatened with the loss of the candlestick; and even to be cast out with abhorrence, if they did not repent of their lukewarmness. Besides, it appears from example, that the liveliness and activity of saints in communion, is a means subservient to the work of the Spirit among them, for many are indebted to the earnest prayers, the godly discourse, and to other instances of piety and zeal in the faithful, as a means of their conversion, which is often confessed in the church by them that are called. The order and steadfastness of a people likewise engage the godly to join them, but it cannot be expected, and it is rarely seen that such unite or continue with a church in a like state with that at Sardis; and indeed where disorders and hypocrisies prevail the Spirit is grieved and departs, whose divine agency, as already observed, is needful to any degree of success. In a word, the analogy between natural and spiritual things is obvious, and though I am far from apprehending that they are in all respects the same, yet that the Lord in his ordinary course, works with and by the graces of his people, and renders their faithfulness and zeal a means of conversion and a flourishing state of his church, cannot be modestly denied, insomuch that Abraham had as good reason to hope for a child by Sarah, when her body was dead in the course of nature, as the most able and active minister in the world has to expect an increase of spiritual seed, from a people sunk into the formality and coldness described.

ANOTHER melancholy symptom of this sad and shameful condition, is an unpersuadable obstinate spirit. It is exceeding difficult to convince a people in these circumstances of their danger, for the most part they are insensible and secure, yea, and often so conceited of themselves, that, in

a manner, it is vain to exhort them; a remonstrance of their folly and pre-supposition they impute to an uncharitable jealousy, and are displeased, or it may be treat their faithful monitor with contempt; they reply in such language as this: The former times were not better than these, others are still more deficient; and in short we are as well as can be expected, and thus they excuse themselves from amendment till they become incapable of bearing reproof; but are immediately offended with every attempt to reclaim them; so that, like Israel in the days of Amos the prophet, being set on their own ways, they hate the man that rebuketh in the gate, and abhor him that speaketh uprightly unto them.

AND now, who that fears God will not deprecate being in any degree the occasion or subject of this odious and threatening role of religion? May it never be a general case in our land! But, have we no alarming symptoms which call for a speedy reformation, lest we fall in like manner? To awaken our indignation at every thing which tends to this shameful condition, remember, that though the Lord is mercifully pleased to call such a people to repentance, their hypocrisies are hateful in his sight. To rest in a formal communion and be careless and unfruitful, is to affront our holy Redeemer, who is jealous of his honor. By allowed partiality and neglect in his house, a people despise his authority, abuse his love, disgrace his name, and in a word, as it were provoke him continually to his face; and who can stand before him when he is angry? If he is offended that hath the seven spirits and the seven stars, in whose power is every gift and divine operation, on which the welfare and even the existence of a church-state depends, what less can be expected but dissolution and ruin? Woe be to them whose sinful conduct and long provocations, bring down his judgments; they must answer the consequence; for when the kingdom of heaven is removed from a land, many temporal miseries attend the unspeakable loss, of which there are awful instances; but we shall have occasion to speak of the punishment that awaits those who sin away the gospel, and leave their posterity in darkness, in the following lecture. I conclude the present with a prayer, in which the serious Reader will certainly join me:

‘Lord, send down thy Holy Spirit to purify and quicken our hearts, that thy love may constrain us to a becoming zeal for thy glory, and that as we have a name that we live, we may show that we are alive indeed unto God, and abound in every good work, to the promoting thy visible kingdom in the world!

LECTURE XXII.

The disciples at Sardis exhorted to repent; their works are impeached. How the Lord appears a judge of what a people perform in his name. The measures to be taken to restore a church when declined. Reasons for attempting it, notwithstanding her things may be dying away.

THE omniscient and holy Redeemer, having warned his church of her hypocritical and dangerous state, goes on to exhort and rebuke her, the particulars of which, with proper reflections, are now to be considered. This part of his message is contained in the following words: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, and which are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” We are told, [Mt 13:24](#), that “the kingdom of heaven is like to a man that sowed good seed in his field, in which while men slept the enemy sowed his tares.” Decays in a church originally sprang from a defect in herself, and the adversary gains his first advantage by the inattention of her members. If Christians were on their guard, Satan could have no opportunity of introducing those poisonous errors, and formal professors, which are the bane of religious society. Thus, it appears that these disciples are very remiss. Hence temptations prevailed, and they were daily declining; they are therefore admonished to return to their watch. The first step towards a recovery is to renew that discipline which, in the sad state complained of, must have been greatly neglected; a watch is to be set over ourselves, and against the enemy, that no further place may be given him, without which we cannot with reason expect to reform; and accordingly we see a guard is placed at the door of this church, and at the hearts of her members, by way of prevention, and, this done, all hands are required to repair the house of the

Lord, in the following words: “strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die.”

It has been thought by some, that the things referred to are the graces of the spirit, from the exercise of which, no doubt, there must have been a general decay among these disciples; nor could they hope to revive as a church unless they were restored to a more vigorous habit of faith and love in Christ Jesus; but they are wrong who would insinuate from hence that a principle of grace may become extinct, or cease to exist in the heart of a regenerate man, for it is expressly declared, that “whosoever is born of God, his seed remaineth in him,” [1Jo 3:9](#). And again, that the grace, or water of life, given by Christ to him that is called, “shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life,” [Joh 4:14](#). So that nothing can be more certain than the final perseverance of the saints; and therefore, however, the visible interest of religion may be on the decline, and particular churches decay or dissolve, yea, and a child of God be found dead in his frame, this man that hath root in himself shall endure to the end; supposing therefore that the graces of the Christian are here intended, it cannot be justly inferred, because he may in this imperfect state seem to languish awhile, and partially fail in his fruits, that therefore he shall totally fall from grace, and perish at last. All that can be fairly concluded is this, that the real saint is liable to decays, against which it becomes him to watch, or that, when he is fallen, means are to be used for his recovery, which are truths universally acknowledged.

THEY seem nearer the purpose who understand by these things backsliders among them, who, in appearance, were on the point of calling off their faith. In this view it is a seasonable exhortation to the church to admonish and reprove them, and, if possible, prevent their total apostasy and ruin. But I apprehend that the works of this people, on which the Lord hath an eye, and which he declares to be imperfect in the very next clause, are the things chiefly, if not solely intended. And the things or works, which belong to a gospel church-state, are recited, [Ac 2:42](#). namely, doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, which comprehend the whole of the faith, worship and discipline essential to Christian communion. Now it seems there remained some works among this

backsliding people, they were not totally departed from the truths of the gospel, nor had they entirely forsaken the assembling of themselves for the worship of God, and the discipline of his house; their united prayers were not wholly ceased, neither were they utter strangers to those offices of kindness and love which are the genuine fruit of a cordial fellowship in the Spirit. Had there been nothing of this found among them, they had not existed as a church; but alas, they were slothful and partial, and scarce saved appearances; they were so backward and unstable, that these things were hardly maintained; they were sinking daily, and seem almost expiring and gone. Under this shameful and dangerous declension, they are called upon to restore and confirm their feeble and dying state, each one to return to his duty, and to exert himself in repairing those decays that were found in the house of the Lord.

AS one means of awakening these backsliders to repentance, the holy Redeemer makes the following report, which might justly alarm them, “I have not found thy works perfect before God!” q.d. ‘I that search the heart and try the reins, have examined thy works, and reject them as unsound and imperfect in the presence of God; they are such as cannot be pleasing to him, nor will he accept them.’ Thus, the services of these degenerate people are as it were thrown back in their faces, or returned upon them as naught. But, can we look for perfection in the works of a community composed of imperfect and fallible men, which is the case with the purest society upon earth? No church ever yet pretended to infallibility, except that apostate one, whose errors, superstition and idolatry, notoriously contradict her arrogant claim; what then is intended by a want of perfection? The native idea of the expression here used, is fulness, and this complaint manifestly intends a criminal [*In like manner the Israelites who perished in the wilderness are charged with not having fully followed the Lord, as Caleb and Joshua did. See Nu 14:24. The word אָמַל there used signifies complete, or rather filled as a ship under sail carried strongly with the winds, as if she feared neither rocks nor sands, Leigh’s Crit. And much the same idea is fixed by the late excellent Mr. Hervey to πλουσίως on 2Pe 1:11. This slackness and deficiency through neglect is highly provoking to the Lord, as appears from the above awful instance of his displeasure; and ensample to warn us against sloth and unfaithfulness, in what concerns our holy profession.*] defect, or that she did not exert herself with the integrity and diligence required. We are told that at Corinth they came behind in no gift; but, alas, at Sardis they are charged with not coming up

to their ability, which amounts to no less than a charge of hypocrisy itself, and answers to the character already given of this church. The works of a church are imperfect, when her members deal deceitfully one with another, and are each making idle, it may be false pretences for not applying his part; so that her assemblies are small, and her works, however comparatively tolerable, come short of the power she hath, and what is required at her hands. In a word, when a people can do more and better than they do, and are short for want of exerting the gifts they have received, then their works are not perfect; they may seem so to men, and to the delinquents themselves, who, like those of Laodicea, ver. 17. may boast that they are rich and increased in goods, but to the Lord, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, their sinful imperfection appears, and on which account they are highly displeasing in his sight, and though he is gracious and long-suffering, yet he is jealous of his honor, and will one day condemn those who trifle with his name, and neglect the sacred institutions of his love. Thus, as in the hand-writing of Belshazzar, TEKEL is inscribed on this fallen church, she “is weighed in the balances, and found wanting,” by the King of saints. This charge is the more affecting, as it is laid on her works without any exception — “I have not found thy works perfect before God.” Awful sentence indeed! and the rather as it is a sentence confirmed by the infallible truth of him that pronounced it. Had this charge proceeded from the lips of a creature, it might have been false; but who will dispute what Jesus, the Amen and faithful witness, declares? Many are the false accusations which are laid against the righteous, by the world and satan, from which they shall hereafter be cleared, but that people are certainly guilty who are charged by the Lord himself; their mouths will therefore be stopped, neither shall any plead for them, no, nor save them from his just indignation, for as this rebuke implies his abhorrence of their sloth and hypocrisy, it likewise bespeaks his coming upon them in judgment unless they repent, according to a subsequent threatening.

FROM this account it appears that the Lord is judge of those works which are performed in a gospel church-state, and that when his people are sensible of threatening declensions, they are required to exert

themselves in order to recover; and it may be useful to consider in what points of light the Lord is a judge of his people, the measures to be taken to revive an interest that is dying, and the reasons there are for attempting it.

AND first, the judgment of Christ in his church is manifest in respect of his omniscience. He is a God of knowledge, by whom actions are weighed, [1Sa 2:3](#). This was the resort of Peter in a time of distress, “Lord, thou knowest all things,” [Joh 21:17](#). And in [Heb 4:13](#). says the apostle, “All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” An excoriated beast, slain of old for a sacrifice, hung up and opened to view, or even the anatomized body, and doth not lie so exposed to the eye of the skillful beholder, as our works to the Lord Jesus Christ. He discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart, and hath an exact and intuitive knowledge of their number, nature and springs of action in his people, so that nothing escapes him. Again,

THIS character our Lord sustains in respect of his office. He is not only Judge as a divine person, but also as Mediator. It belongs to him as the great Shepherd of the Sheep to inspect and judge his people; to this he is appointed by the Father, who hath committed all judgment to his Son; so that Christ is invested with this power in his pastoral capacity, being seated on the throne in his church. Every community under a profession of his name, and each particular member thereof is subject to his examination, and must stand before his judgment seat. And further, the Redeemer is judge of his people in a practical sense; i.e. he actually and constantly inspects their work in the character of a judge. We cannot with decency suppose that the holy Jesus doth not execute the commission he hath received, or exert this authority in the midst of his churches; and the instance before us proves that he is active in judgment upon them, for when he saith, “I have not found thy works perfect,” he speaks as one that had examined and proved them; so that his eyes are on his people, not only as their Saviour to preserve them, but also as their judge to try them; he has a balance or measure in his hand to weigh and adjust all they profess to do in his name, and those which are not perfect or full according to their ability he will surely reject, and regard not the persons of any. In

these respects, our Lord is judge of what is done in the character of a church; in respect of his essential omniscience as a divine person, in respect of his office, and in respect of his certain actual inspection into their spirit and conduct. It is therefore of the utmost importance when things are dying away in any community, that they hearken to his voice and repent, as will hereafter more particularly be seen.

BUT what are the measures to be taken in order to revive an interest that appears on the decline? Before we enter on particulars here it may be proper to note, that when things are come to this pass, and a church is sunk so low, through long and repeated backslidings, as to be ready to dissolve, her awakened members are prone to despond, and may be tempted, through guilt and unbelief, or from sloth and self-love, to leave her, which is mean and ungrateful; yet this has been the conduct of some, in regard of the community to which they belonged, when she seemed to be going; as a ship in distress is left by her company, who apprehend she will sink or be otherwise lost, so hath a church in danger been forsaken by her members, till broken to pieces and ruined; they could not endure the pains and self-denial which peradventure might have saved her, but this is unbecoming a disciple of Jesus, and against his direction before us. It must therefore be highly displeasing to him, when any thus evade their endeavour to preserve and revive his declining cause; therefore let those who would have boldness at his coming see to it, that nothing is wanting on their part to restore the sinking interest of religion in their hands, and the measures to be taken in order to effect it are as follows:

1. A STRICT and impartial enquiry into the state of the community, and the condition of its several members. In exhorting the disciples at Sardis, to strengthen the things which were ready to die, there seems an allusion to a natural body, which having long languished under a threatening distemper, is, in all appearance, nigh unto death: And every one knows, that when a physician is called in this dangerous case, he first examines into the nature of the disease, the parts affected, the time, occasion, and progress which the disorder hath made, with every other circumstance relating to the patient's complaint: In like manner, when a people find themselves on the decline, in order to their recovery, they must discern

what errors and ill habits prevail, and consider who are defective, and in what degree, under what temptation, and in a word, how far the corporation is degenerated from its natural and primitive state. Without a just idea of her real condition, in these particulars, the means of restoration cannot be applied, and things will grow worse, till a dissolution ensues, if not timely prevented. To this method we are directed in the following words: “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and repent.” Of which in its place; for the present it may suffice, that in general this certainly implies a reflection on her fallen state, that she might be sensible of her declensions, and even know the worst of her case. This enquiry among a people sufficiently awakened, who are in the way of recovery, will be personal, each affected will examine his own spirit and conduct, and say, “What have I done? [Jer 8:6](#). And the same will be carried on in public, by the inspection of the pastor and other officers, and likewise by the Church herself, who, as a body corporate, will, in her discipline assemblies, be looking diligently; that by her seasonable admonition, and even censure, if needful, she may prevent a further spread of disorders, and at length be perfectly restored. Again,

2. ANOTHER means required, is united and earnest prayer to the Lord to heal our backslidings. We have destroyed ourselves, but our help is in him. The character Jesus assumes, when speaking to this people, implicitly directs them to himself, as possessed of all those gifts, and that grace which are needful to a flourishing state. When the Lord is as the dew on Israel, then she will revive as the corn; but for this he will be sought unto, without which his blessing cannot be expected. Besides the fervent prayers of the faithful, are in themselves a means restoration: in prayer the graces of the Spirit are exercised and strengthened. Prayer in the Spirit is of an edifying nature; by this the heart is humbled, melted, purified and refreshed: Hence, [Jude 20](#). the brethren are directed, in a time of falling away, to build up one another on their “most holy faith, praying in the holy Ghost.” The declining state of a church, appears in nothing more than in a neglect of her prayers: in proportion to this the love of God most surely decays, insomuch that there is little or no hope of recovery: When a people are not to be induced to wrestle at the throne of grace, they

must grow more and more formal and lifeless, and be in the utmost danger of ruin.

3. WHEN the things of a community are thus reduced, they are not likely to revive, unless there is a mutual activity and diligence in her members, in their several stations; every man to his post, and all hands employed in the work. As the recovery of the natural body from a threatening disorder depends much on a due circulation, and each member performing its function, so is Christ. It is not sufficient to behold our declensions, or to bewail them, either to the Lord or to one another: Like Israel of old, [1Ch 22:16](#), we must arise and be doing, in hopes that the Lord will be with us. “Why stand ye crying? saith the Lord to Moses, speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.” In a word, inspection and prayer are vain without a resolution in the strength of the Lord to hold fast and repent. If prayer meetings are ever so frequent or full, they will come short of a remedy, unless individuals fill up their places; for the works of that church can never be perfect, whose members fail of their duty: To complain of defects without endeavoring to supply them, is highly absurd, a conduct which tends still more to weaken the cause. Now if any man would know his particular duty, under declensions in the society to which he belongs, his conscience will tell him; and the Scripture is so plain, with respect to that noblest of societies, a church, that no one can plead ignorance. He that will not attend her assemblies, and exert his ability in the station he holds, turns away his ear from the voice of Christ, and will not regard the welfare of Zion.

ONE motive in them who love God and his people, for exerting themselves, in restoring the affairs of a church when gone to decay, is her imminent danger. Hence the Lord notes to this people, that the things which remained were “ready to die;” q.d. consider how near you are to a total loss of those things which belong to your state; if they should entirely cease you are utterly ruined. Now the more threatening the case of a disordered constitution, the greater the concern of him who desires to preserve it and his diligence after its recovery will be in proportion: In like manner when things are made to expire in a Christian community, an

argument is drawn by her prudent and affectionate members, from the danger apprehended for being speedy and active to revive her. Again,

A PROSPECT of her recovery is another inducement. This also is suggested in the warning before us. A command from God to repent and return to duty, implies a promise of remission and success to them that obey. This call on the church at Sardis was a kind intimation that she might be recovered, and a seasonable encouragement to arise for her help, and especially as the Lord revealed himself to her under characters expressive of his power and grace. This was a token for good, and an argument with every wise and considerate person to do what in him lay to restore her, it appearing that however dangerous her case, it was not yet desperate, yea, there was the highest reason to conclude that his labour should not be in vain, since he that called him to this service is able to render it effectual. While there is life, we say, there is hope. The animal frame may be in a languishing state; through a prevailing disease, or a complication of disorders, it may be brought very low, scarce any pulse to be discerned, yea, and the vital principle so retire as to be out of the view even of a skillful physician, and at the same time it may exist, and recover its visible force, so that it is not always easy to determine whether or not it is actually dead; but this we know, that as long as any sensible warmth and motion remains, there is hope that in the use of means the spirit may revive, and a vigorous circulation return, whereby the body shall again be strengthened for the actions of life. In like manner the symptoms of spiritual life and the love of God, in which true religion substantially consists, may, through a prevailing carnality and corruption, be reduced very low, and scarcely perceived in a Christian community, of whose recovery we are not to despair; there may yet be life in her; many of her members, who seem formal and dead, may be concealed in darkness, discouraged and fearful under various temptations, who on due application may be animated and show themselves alive; their graces may yet be drawn forth into exercise, by whose activity and diligence the church will be restored and flourish again. Thus, though things are apparently dying, they may still revive; and there is always ground to hope that a people however declined, being sensible of their condition, on

returning to their Lord and their duty, shall not be dissolved or destroyed; and is not this an argument for seeking to revive her again, even in the most dangerous circumstances?

AND further; the excellency and use of a Christian church-state, is another strong motive to an endeavour after its preservation and welfare. We are fallen in a time when the yoke of Christ seems rather grievous to some, whose pretence of knowledge runs high, and have reason to lament that the communion of saints suits not the popular taste of the day; yea, some even presume to plead a liberty from it, and, as it were, glory in their neglect of gospel-appointments, as if it was the privilege of a Christian to live free from the orders of his Lord, or becoming his character to despise them; but that notion of Christianity, which includes not a personal subjection to the ordinances of the Redeemer, is preposterous and vain, and a more threatening symptom cannot appear among nominal Christians, than a prevailing omission of that divine fellowship in which the called bind themselves to walk together in the Lord. If this becomes general in a nation, where the gospel is preached, the kingdom of God will soon be removed, and along with it departs liberty, civil and religious, in consequence of which a country is debased and enslaved; witness all Asia, and other parts of the earth, formerly the seat of flourishing churches, like the city of Sardis, once famous, while the golden candlesticks adorned her, but, as already observed, she now appears a poor contemptible village. So, then gospel-churches are the glory of a land, with which stand connected all that is dear, and this will be an argument with every sensible person to exert himself in restoring the church to which he belongs, when her things are declining. Indeed the continuance of the gospel doth not depend on any particular congregation, yet every society of believers, in which the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ is maintained, is a part of his visible interest in a nation; it must therefore be a grief to those who lay to heart the glory of God, and the good of mankind, when they behold such a society in danger of dissolving.

THE importance of maintaining a gospel-church will also appear, when we consider the promise she hath of the redeemer's presence and blessing, which is a further motive to preserve it: by a dissolution of an orderly society of believers, who are entitled to this gracious assurance, we are deprived of one precious means of communion with God, the manifestative glory of Christ, the conversion of Sinners, and the comfort of them that believe; who then that hath any regard for the honor of Jesus, or the welfare of souls, can fail of being excited, on reflection, to use his utmost endeavour to prevent it?

BESIDES, it will be an argument with the awakened backslider to a speedy and vigorous attempt for restoring a church that is near a dissolution, if he himself hath contributed to her threatening declensions. Things never come to this pass in a community without the defect and folly, at least of many individuals; it is probable that few, if any, are entirely free from being in some measure the occasion of this deplorable state; however, in proportion to a sense of the injury done a society by a man's own conduct, must his readiness be to repair it. If we behold a natural body languishing under pain and sickness, and in danger, will not humanity itself demand our immediate assistance, if possible, to revive it? But if, as may be the case, we are conscious that our own neglect, or abuse of this body, has been the shameful cause of its perishing condition, are we not still more obliged to lay out ourselves with a view to its recovery? The application is easy. Every ingenuous person will be careful about restoring an interest, the declension of which is in some degree owing to himself. And if they who seem little concerned at the dying state of a community to which they belong, and who are practically saying, Let the cause sink, were duly sensible of their own conduct, they would see it highly incumbent on themselves, more than on others, to arise for its help. Add to these, the reward which is insured to those who seek the honor of God, which is another just motive for restoring the beauty of his house. This is expressed in a following clause: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment;" of which in its place. It requires self-denial and courage to stand up for the purity and order of the gospel when it is generally neglected or despised. A man must exert his ability, and it

may be endure the resentment and scorn of those who, wedded to their lusts, will oppose a reformation; and if he has heretofore, in any degree, complied with the evil of the time, or been off from his watch, which, as hinted, is probable, it will be still more difficult for him; he must first cleanse himself, and forsake every sinful indulgence that hath turned him aside, and may expect many reflections to dishearten him from uniting in the work, but the man need not fear whose repentance is evinced by a return to his duty; he shall not only be forgiven, but likewise share in the recompense promised; for no man's labor shall be vain in the Lord.

IT appears then that the Christian ought not to forsake his station in the church, when things are declined and seem ready to vanish away; no, by no means. The members of a community in decay have reason to mourn, and it may be, to be covered with shame for their own backslidings, but can have none to despair; however threatening the danger, if they awake and repent, and diligently follow the things they have neglected, there is still a prospect of recovery, which, with the excellency of this gospel-constitution, and especially when the subject is conscious of being an accessory to the declensions lamented, and the certain future reward of the righteous, are cogent arguments for an attempt to restore a church-state, even under the lowest circumstances that can be supposed. And, can the love of God dwell in that man, who is not to be engaged by either or all of these motives, unto a zeal for the welfare of Zion?

WHILE we mourn the dying interest of Jesus among us, may we not justly admire his love and patience, thus to warn his backsliding people, and graciously meet them with a promise on repentance. But, Reader, forget not that religion is a personal thing, and allow me to say, that in whatever state the particular community may be with whom thou art connected, as an hearer or member, thou thyself may be in a similar condition with that of this church; in thy own religious experience and practice the things which remain may be on the decline, and almost expired. Permit me, with freedom, to ask thee, how stands it with the frame of thy soul? It may be thy case. In time past sin pierced thy heart, and thou wast then anxious for repentance and pardon; thy breathing was after an interest in Christ, and the inheritance of them who are sanctified

by faith, in order to communion with the Lord and his people, but now, alas, these convictions are worn off, and, through the cares of the world and the pleasures of life, thy former desires are abated or gone, thou art ready to quit all concern about the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and to lay aside the thoughts of living to the Saviour, under a profession of his name. Doth conscience tell thee that thou art in this manner gone backward, and that thine heart is almost a stranger to this holy concern and affection? Great is thy delusion and danger! I beseech thee to hear what Jesus saith by his Spirit to this fallen church, “strengthen the things which remain.” It is of the utmost importance, therefore repent in due season, for if thou art not conformed to this exhortation, behold, he cometh to judgment, when thou and thy religion, such as it is, will perish together.

BUT again, my dear friend, how is thy private devotion maintained? Enter into thy closet, true religion first appears there, and there a decay from its power is first to be discerned. Once every opportunity of retirement was embraced, to pour out thy soul unto God, to contemplate his law, and for self-examination; then it was thy custom to come forth from thy chamber into the family, thy children and servants there assembled for prayer, reading, and other exercises of a spiritual nature. Thus, some begin, and it may be go on for a while, till worldly business and carnal company interfere; alas, they cannot withstand the temptation, their goodness is as the morning-cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away. And are any like symptoms on thee, Christian Reader? Are these things omitted, or are they attended in an uncertain, cold and indifferent manner, insomuch that there is danger of their being utterly forsaken? O be wise, and consider, arise from the dead, flee from those lusts that have enticed thee, and return immediately unto him from whom thou hast foolishly departed.

FINALLY, is there a sensible and visible alteration for the worse in any public or social religion? Formerly thy feet were prepared for the temple, and hearing the word of the Lord was delightful, it was a pleasure to sit at his table, and his ordinances were highly esteemed, insomuch that the return of his sabbaths was the joy of thy soul: But hast thou lost thy relish

for these sacred and precious enjoyments? are they become weariness to thee? and dost thou excuse thyself on every occasion, and of choice absent from the sanctuary, or make light of thy deficiency in the relative duties of communion? It is indeed a sad case to become thus unfruitful, and for the leaves of thy profession to fade and fall off in this manner. Thus, hypocrites often slide away and turn apostates to their ruin. Far be it the Reader should have in the end his portion with unbelievers! But I would hope better things, even things that accompany salvation. And hast thou escaped or overcome the temptations by which many are cast down and destroyed, and in a flourishing state, in these points of religion; thou art highly favored of heaven? Adore the grace by which thou hast stood, be still on thy guard, and whoever draws back, cleave thou with purpose of heart unto the Lord. In one word, may all who call upon the name of the Lord hearken unto the words of Peter, in the close of his second epistle, and with which I conclude this lecture, “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware, lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: To him be glory, both now and forever. Amen.”

LECTURE XXIII.

A repetition of the Redeemer's call to repentance, with particular directions; and a threatening in case of disobedience.

OUR Lord having called upon the church at Sardis, to restore the things that were dying away, graciously directs her how to proceed, but at the same time threatens her if she did not repent: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." An awakening message, by which they who are on the decline in their religious character are instructed and warned, and which may be applied to Christians in every age, in a private or social capacity.

THE principal thing to be considered is that which stands first, an exhortation to look back and review past experience and conduct from the beginning: "remember therefore how thou hast received and heard." Hearing is the means of the obedience of faith; and this degenerate people are directed to reflect on the manner in which they embraced the truth, or the spirit and behaviour which prevailed among them at the beginning. It is a call on the church, or on her members in particular. In respect of society, it refers to their original simplicity and zeal in the faith and order of Christ, from whence she was fallen: "Remember how thou hast received and recall to mind the manner of entrance the gospel had when first preached among you, with what readiness and joy ye received it, on what foundation the church-state was raised, how watchful, diligent, and

lively her members, and compare it with her present secure and lukewarm condition. .

SOME apply this to the present state of the Protestant churches, who are in general but too much gone off from that purity in doctrine, worship and discipline, for which they were famous, when they first renounced the errors of Rome, as observed in a proceeding lecture and particularly in respect of the grand and capital article of justification by grace, in opposition to the merit of works. It cannot modestly be denied, but that the religious sentiments and practice, which now prevail in Geneva, Holland, and other foreign Protestant states, differ wide from those that were avowed on the reformation: And, O that our native country could be excepted! But, alas, the pulpit, the press, and the popular taste, unite in declaring our shameful departure. This also appears when we compare the tenets which are in a manner universally spread, with the instruments of original union and articles of faith, which, notwithstanding the contempt cast upon the truths contained in them, are still extent by public authority, together with the writings of the first reformers in every place; all which loudly testify against us!

BUT, passing this, the people at Sardis were greatly corrupted, insomuch that few had escaped the general pollution; so sad was their departure from the simplicity and holiness which originally adorned the church in that place, the remains of which glory was fading away. In these disgraceful circumstances she is bid to remember. In a disordered state of body, no faculty is sooner impaired than the memory; and a Christian society, when sunk and depraved, are forgetful of their former zeal and good works; a serious reflection on which might bring them to repentance. The precise date of the epistle is uncertain, but doubtless this church, with others in Asia, had subsisted a considerable time; so great a declension could hardly obtain in a few years only, yet some aged persons, as the evangelist himself, might remember her gathering, and witness the melancholy difference.

UNDER these decays the same reflection becomes individuals; every person should examine himself, and enquire, how did I come under a

professed subjection to the gospel? Was it from a deep conviction of my miserable state as a sinner, and a persuasion of the authority and grace of Jesus, as the only and all-sufficient saviour, that I trusted in him, and surrendered myself to his will? O my soul, now so unsavoury and careless, call to mind the love of thine espousals, and the kindness of thy youth! How didst thou receive Christ Jesus the Lord, and hear the tidings of his mercy! how precious then was the word of his grace! With what sweetness and power did it come to thy heart! O the readiness and joy with which thou laid hold on the hope set before thee! Thou wast then impatient for seasons of communion with the Lord and his people; but now, alas, how indifferent towards them, the new moons and sabbaths are almost a weariness to thee; consider how thou art fallen; the danger thou art in, and how provoking thy conduct, and repent! When a backsliding Christian is enabled thus to reflect on his first setting out in religion, there is hope of his recovery, and that he will be steadfast in every branch of his holy profession, which is the next thing required. “And hold fast,” i.e. keep diligently (τηρέω) the precious doctrines and ordinances thou hast received, with a watchful eye, that they be not lost or taken away, which agrees with the following sentence, and implies the danger they were in through the subtlety of Satan, to whom they had already given place, and likewise that it required their utmost solicitude and strength to preserve them. It is added, “and repent,” i.e. be wise and turn from your evil, as persons convinced of their folly, return unto me. The word signifies afterwit, and alludes to the madness of those who depart from the Lord. Thus, the prodigal, who is an emblem of a penitent sinner or backslider, is said to come to himself. When men wander from God and the order of the gospel, it may truly be said that a deceived heart hath turned them aside, they are as it were infatuated through the deceitfulness of sin; and when such are restored to their spiritual senses, they will be covered with shame, and thankful for the grace that has prevented their ruin, and their change will be attended with future diligence in every duty.

AS a further means of awakening this church, she is threatened in case of disobedience: “If therefore thou shalt not watch;” if, after all my patience and warning, thou continuest supine and careless, and will not

awake and be on thy guard, “I will come upon thee as a thief.” Many are the chastenings in store for a loose and hypocritical generation of professors; sometimes they are hewed by the prophets of the Lord, and slain by the words of his mouth, [Ho 6:5](#). He animates his servants to cry aloud, and spare not, but show them their transgressions and sins, who are sure to meet with their resentment, unless they are reclaimed. At other times the hand of his providence is against them, and they are diminished by sickness and death, as at Corinth. Again, he hides his face that they cannot behold him, or it may be his Spirit is withheld, and the dew is not on their fleece; they are barren and comfortless, their breasts are dry, and a miscarrying womb is their portion, [Ho 9:14](#). Or, once more, when joined to their idols, as Ephraim, he lets them alone. These are tokens of his displeasure, which a sensible people will deprecate: But the threatening before us is still more alarming, it is not to correct but to destroy; a threatening of vengeance, the terror of which will appear, if we consider,

1. THAT the Lord himself was to come upon them. If an angel, or even but a man had been commissioned from heaven to chastise them in anger, they might justly have trembled at the thought of his approach, but how fearful to fall into the hands of the living God, of Jesus himself, whose power is infinite, and whose face, as an angry judge, neither earth nor heaven can endure! Every attribute ascribed to the redeemer in that grand and awful description, chap. i. and elsewhere, is properly applied to this threatening, “I will come upon thee:” I, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, who searcheth the heart and the reins; I, whose feet are as fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, to tread down mine enemies and trample them in my fury; I, whose voice is as the sound of many waters, as the roaring of the sea; I that have the seven stars in my right hand, and out of whose mouth goeth a sharp two-edged sword; I, whose countenance is as the sun shining in his strength, before whom no flesh can stand; in a word, I, that have the keys of death and hell, and kill and make alive at my pleasure; I, even I will come upon thee.” Awful expectation! Who among the guilty is prepared to meet this offended God in his anger! But,

2. THE comparison used by our Lord to illustrate his coming, is another considerable aggravation, “as a thief.” This denotes the manner and the

end of his visitation. 1. It implies that he would come on a sudden; which indeed is contained in the phrase itself, *come on*, [1Sa 2:34](#) but the idea is still more enlivened by the comparison, the thief cometh unawares. Hence saith our Lord, [Mt 24:43](#). “If the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, &c.” And that this is principally intended, appears from the following sentence, “thou shalt not know in what hour I will come upon thee.” In this manner the world of old was destroyed, and thus it will be in all divine judgment, “the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night,” [1Th 5:2](#), and particularly in removing the candlestick out of his place, for the sins of a backsliding people: “behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments,” Revelations 16:15, which agrees with the condition in the text, already considered. Besides this, 2. It also intimates the end of his coming, which is to deprive [Christ cannot be said to come as a thief in an evil sense, morally speaking; his essential goodness and righteousness forbid our entertaining so base or unworthy idea of his coming, as that it is with any unjust or cruel design, but certainly the end of his judgment is the destruction of unbelievers and hypocrites, and the comparison is only in respect of such; “for ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you “as a thief,” 1 Thess. v. 4.] and ruin the impenitent: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill and to destroy,” [Joh 10:10](#). Thus, the wrath of the Lamb comes on willful and stubborn transgressors, but with this difference, that, whereas the conduct of the thief is unjust and sinful, the judgments of the Lord are righteous. And,

3. THIS threatening is the more dreadful, as it leaves no hope of further warning or patience: it is the last message, in contempt of which they are doomed to immediate destruction; nothing can be more absolute than the terms of this awful declaration, “If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee.” Woe be to them who are at ease in Zion; they are threatened with sudden destruction from the Lord, who will himself come upon them, except they repent.

SEE then, O Christian, the displeasure of thy redeemer with those who are unfaithful and fruitless under a profession of his name; he is a holy and jealous God, and cannot endure a lukewarm and deceitful conduct in them that approach him. He hath compassion on the frames of his saints, yea, and when they sin through infirmity, he is their advocate with the

Father, as it were, to cover their involuntary failings, and to plead against every accusation of the adversary; but when a people, having the form of godliness, become habitually negligent and partial, it is an affront to all his perfections; such persons provoke him to be his face, and if after due warning, they presume in this manner to despise him, his anger will smoke against them, and utterly consume them!

BEWARE then of settling on the lees, and resting in a name for religion; thou art under a profession and wast formerly active and fruitful, but art thou now become lifeless and formal? Remember the zeal and good works of this fallen church in her primitive state was no excuse for her present defection and sloth, she is threatened with the vengeance of heaven notwithstanding her former goodness, and the same she now had for being alive, these things availed not with the Lord in whose sight she was false, and came short of her character; therefore be not secure in the opinion of men, God is not mocked; and when he comes on impenitent transgressors, the works they have forsaken will witness against them, rather than justify their present hypocrisy and negligence, or hide them from his wrath; therefore, boast not thyself, thou backsliding professor, in what thou hast been, or in what others now take thee to be; arise from the dead, and repent, so shalt thou be approved of thy judge, and his anger shall not fall upon thee.

HOW deplorable the condition of those who are overtaken by an injured and offended Saviour! The suggestion is strong with respect to this church, that if Christ came upon her, as he threatened, she would be miserably destroyed: "I will come on you;" q.d. and what will you do? whither can you flee? Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him? If I am against thee, who can be for thee, or save thee? This is the language of the threatening before us; it is the word of a King, and it comes with power, for he is able to "destroy all those who hate him." If satan or the world come on a church, or the Christian is attacked from any other quarter, the temporary suffering and loss may be great, yet a deliverer is at hand, but when the omnipotent Jesus himself

overtakes the sinner in judgment, there is no escape or remedy, destruction will ensue; he is terrible in righteousness, when he comes to take vengeance on the workers of iniquity, and more especially on hypocrites in Zion. Hear what he says when he uttered his voice and roared out of Zion: "I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I will tear, and go away; I will take away and none shall rescue him," [Ho 5:14](#). He is still the same Lord, who will judge his people, and this will be the measurable end of all who despise him.

NEVERTHELESS, the patience and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ are displayed, and demand our attention; he is slow to anger, and warns the generation that provoke him to jealousy before he comes on them to their ruin. Thus, he waited long in the days of Noah before the flood come upon them, and forty years was he tempted by them who fell through unbelief in the wilderness; also the like space was granted to Jerusalem after the time of our Saviour, and since the spread of his kingdom in the world. No nation or people was ever deprived of a gospel church-state till after many warnings and great provocations. The language of Christ in his word and providence, with respect to a fallen people, is like that by the prophet to Ephraim, "How shall I give thee up?" As if his heart turned within him; his repeated exhortations and much long-suffering shows that he delights not in the destruction of a people, or in removing the candlestick out of his place; they speak against the dissolution of churches, and call loud on delinquents to repent and be saved.

IT appears then, that nothing but a perverse and impenitent spirit will bring down the wrath of God on a people; however long a church may have been on the decay or low she is sunk, though she hath years been declining, and her works are very imperfect, insomuch that, as at Sardis, her things which remain are ready to die, yet, if it at length, by any means, her members are awakened, and return to the Lord, he will have mercy upon them; and the like may be observed in regard of any one person who is under declension; a penitent backslider is not cast into despair by the severest threatenings of Christ, whose love, grace and power are more than sufficient to restore him, and who is ready to heal his backslidings and accept the calves of his lips. This should engage us when chastened

for our sinful departures, to excite one another in the language of Ephraim and Judah, [Ho 6:1](#). “Come, let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.” In this confidence every repenting sinner, and the backsliding people, may come to the Lord, and find rest of their souls.

To conclude, let this divine message be improved by the faithful in a way of prevention. This fallen church is directed to remember how she had received, and heard; a step which was needful towards her recovery; and the same means will be of excellent use against every temptation to sin, and of keeping up a lively sense of religion in the soul. Christian, let thy first setting-out in the ways of the Lord be ever before thee; daily recollect the grace and power exerted in thy conversion; remember Bethel, where thou anointed the pillar, and began thy vows unto thy God; when no eye saw thee, and thou gavest thyself unto the Lord; also frequently consider the manner and motives of thy public surrender; with what reverence, hope and joy, wast thou baptized in the name of the Lord, came into his house, sat down at his table, and numbered thyself with his saints. O the grateful sense of his power and grace on these solemn occasions! How did it melt thee, and cause thee to pour out thy soul in secret, with fervent supplications, and holy resolutions to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart! A frequent review of thy experience in these gracious seasons hath a tendency to preserve thee in an hour of temptation, and prevent those backslidings which if many have made work for bitter repentance; but if any man is already fallen into sin, this recollection will revive the evidence of his calling, and promote his recovery, since this is the language of a covenant God to his people, who mourn their declensions: “Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you.” And again, “Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you.” Hast thou been thus mercifully restored, my dear Friend? it will appear in thy holiness and love; keep thyself unspotted, and, notwithstanding thine unworthiness, thou shalt have honor with thy Redeemer at his appearance and kingdom.

LECTURE XXIV.

The faithful distinguished in a time of general defection, with the promise of a glorious reward.

HITHERTO the epistle has borne a gloomy and threatening aspect; but to the upright there ariseth a light in darkness; an illustrious example of this now appears for the encouragement of those who fear God in a degenerate age: “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy,” ver. 4. Amidst the lukewarmness and hypocrisy which in a manner universally prevailed, here are presented to our view, chosen and faithful persons excepted from the general indictment, and owned of the Lord, with a promise. The names of God’s people ([Lu 10:20](#)) are written in heaven, and ever before him. This, no doubt is true in the most literal sense, for it cannot with reason be questioned but the omniscient Jesus, that great shepherd of the flock, [*Joh 10:3. Accordingly, some persons were prophesied of by name two or three hundred years before their birth, witness Josiah and Cyrus. See [1Ki 13:2](#); [2Ki 22; 23](#) and [Isa 44:28.](#)]* calleth his own sheep by name; but, in the passage before us, names are evidently persons, and the term thus applied conveys an idea of reputation and honor; for instance, Eccles. 7:1, it is said, “A name,” i.e. a good name, “is better than precious ointments.” And again, [Job 30:8](#). speaks of base men, i.e. literally, men without name; not but the vilest of men are sometimes exalted; as is the days of Malachi, [Mal 3:15](#). the proud were called happy, and they who worked wickedness were set up; then the name of the righteous is rather a prey than a praise; but, however despised or traduced by men, they are a sweet savour to God,

and shall be honored by him: so then these names are no other than eminent and honorable persons of real character, and not of report only, as with the church in general, but good men and true, in the sight of him who trieth the reins, and accordingly are esteemed and rewarded. This account contains a description of the persons commended; their recompence of reward, and the propriety or fitness of conferring this honor upon them. and they are described,

1. BY the smallness of their number, a few. The flock of Christ is little compared with the world, “Many be called but few chosen:” But the comparison here is with the members of this church, the generality of whom were sadly declined, only here and there one, through grace, had maintained a good conscience, whom the Lord distinguishes from the rest. Numbers are no certain note of truth, and the smallest part of a divided society may appear to be right; however, as we shall presently see, the character of the faithful, when religion is on the decline, is in proportion to the number of those who are defected.

2. THEIR purity is another part of the description, “which have not defiled their garments.” the allusion is obvious. Garments are what men invest themselves with, and in which they appear according to their rank and condition: Spiritually taken, they are the religious habit and course of nominal Christians, in the sight of God, angels and men. Thus, we read, [Isa 61:10](#). of the “garments of salvation, and the robe of righteousness.” These, at least the latter of these, is no other than the righteousness of God, which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, with which all true believers are clothed and adorned unto their complete and everlasting justification; but here it seems principally, if not solely intended, of the profession and behaviour of those honorable disciples, and points to their order, the steadfastness of their faith, and their holy conversation: Thus, holy Job declares, in vindication of his character, Job 29:14. “I put on righteousness and it clothed me; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem.” In like manner these upright souls were not turned from the simplicity of the gospel, nor tainted with the common pollutions, but held fast, having nobly withstood the prevailing corruptions, and kept themselves clean, “hating even the garment spotted with the flesh,” like

the virgins mentioned, [Re 14:4](#). who had “not defiled themselves with women.” These, I say, as chaste virgins espoused to Christ, were free from the spots by which many had disgraced themselves and his name; not that we are to suppose they had no defects to lament, or were totally free from occasional and error; it is not said that their garments were not defiled, but that they had “not defiled their garments.” Whether the Reader sees a real difference between these forms of expression or not, I presume he will readily admit, that this account shows they had not willfully corrupted themselves, but preserved their integrity, and bore a testimony, at least in their practice, against the disorder and licentiousness which prevailed in the church, and had reduced her to so threatening a condition. Thus, they were without guile before God, and free from the general charge. And,

3. THE integrity of these worthy persons is further illustrated, by a glance on the exceeding degeneracy of the people with whom they stood connected, even in Sardis. The particle is justly supplied; it being wonderful indeed that any should be clean in so degenerate a company, among whom the life and power of religion was in a manner extinct; yet this was the fact, notwithstanding the community was declining apace, and even nigh to a dissolution, through the depravity of her members, there was a number, though but few, who were enabled to retain a spirit and conduct becoming their holy profession, with whom the Lord was well-pleased.

THIS report is made to the angel or minister of the church: “Thou hast a few names, &c.” I apprehend, not so much to inform him, for can it be supposed that these singular professors were unknown to their pastor? Not without highly impeaching his character. Formality and sin in a people are a snare to their minister and when errors and disorders prevail, it requires peculiar fortitude and grace to withstand the tide of corruption, so as not in any degree to connive at some evil, and deserve reproof; but though I would not insinuate that pastors are never, or even seldom to blame, the contrary of which is notorious, nor would I cover or extenuate their faults, which are more heinous than the errors of persons in a private capacity; yet, as formerly hinted, it doth not appear that the minister at Sardis is particularly charged; it seems therefore natural, in charity, to rank him

among those faithful servants of the Lord who are grieved to the heart to see things dying under their hands: In the like sorrowful case we see some have been overwhelmed. They have dwelt on the declensions and apostasies of the multitude, and overlooked the exceptions there are from the general decay, till they have almost despaired of a recovery: Thus, Elias thought he was alone, and that true religion would expire with his life, when at the same time a very large number were reserved from the idolatry of the times. And this notice from the Lord to his servant at Sardis seems to be to comfort him, and also to inspire him with courage to attempt a reformation: Be that as it may, in this instance we see, and it may justly be admired, that the exalted Saviour, the great and chief Shepherd, graciously stoops from his throne, to give his under-keeper an account of the state of his flock, before whom, as their judge, both he and his backsliding people were shortly to appear.

NOW the recompence insured these upright disciples, is not any present or temporary reward, but an honor and happiness far exceeding every thing to be enjoyed in this world, and is couched in the following terms, "They shall walk with me in white." Some respectable writers [*Aynsworth on Ge 5:24 and Ge 6:9.*] have thought that this of walking with or before God, is peculiar to a pleasing administration of an office: Thus, did Enoch as a prophet, and Noah as a preacher of righteousness. And [1Sa 2:30](#), the Lord saith unto Eli, "I said indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever;" i.e. as appears from the context, in the office of a priest: But, with submission, the phrase is extended to the behavior or walk of the faithful in a private capacity. Abraham, though possessed of a promise that his seed should be multiplied, seems not invested, properly speaking, with an office when the Lord said unto him, "walk before me, and be thou perfect," [Ge 17:1](#). However, it is certain that "to walk humbly with thy God," [Mic 6:8](#), is not confined to persons of a public character, but that it becomes every Christian to "walk worthy of the Lord well-pleasing," according to [Col 1:10](#), and other passages in the New-Testament, where the same idea is conveyed. In this sense, they who defile not their garments, walk before God with an holy awe of his divine Majesty and presence, and hatred of sin; and in keeping his

commandments they are often indulged with that sweet communion, and those manifestations of his love, which greatly over-balance every trial they meet with; but the reward here intended is manifestly future; and accordingly it is laid out in terms, frequently used by the Holy Ghost, to set forth the blessedness of the righteous in the world to come, which it may be useful to consider: And,

1. IT IS said, “they shall walk.” In natural walking the powers of the body are exercised, and the subject makes a delightful progression to the end he is pursuing: it denotes life, strength, freedom and joy, and most fitly represents their happiness who are entered into life, free from weakness and sin, and filled with joy in the presence of God: This agrees with [Isa 35:10](#). The redeemed shall walk there. And again, chap. 57:2, it is said of good men departed, that “they rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.” And further it is affirmed, [Re 21:24](#). that “the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of the heavenly city.” Again,

2. TO be with God or with Christ; i.e. in their immediate presence, is another known description of the saints in paradise. Thus, in [Php 1:23](#). Paul declares his desire “to depart and to be with Christ.” And our Saviour in [Joh 17:24](#) prays to the Father, saying, “I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am,” namely, in heaven, “that they may behold my glory.” And,

3. THIS honor of the faithful is still more strongly expressed by their walking with Jesus in white; this will occur in a subsequent lecture, but it is needful to touch on it here. White is an emblem of purity and glory: Thus, appeared the angel that rolled back the stone from the sepulchre; we are told, that “his raiment was white as snow.” In like manner when our Lord was transfigured on the mount, his vesture was white as light, a brightness more resplendent than the meridian sun. It may allude to the garments of the priests, who were dressed in white linen, to signify their consecration and acceptance with the Lord, who is holy, or rather to the white robes which conquerors anciently wore in their triumphal processions; both ideas are suited to the character of the faithful “who

overcome” through the blood of the Lamb, being made kings and priests unto God, and his Father,” [Re 1:6](#). In a word, if it be enquired, when this will come to pass? No doubt it will commence in a degree in the separate state of the righteous, but the reference is more directly to the second appearance of Christ, even to that grand procession of Jesus in the day of his revelation from heaven, when he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe; or rather it terminates in the ultimate glory of the redeemed, which shall be everlasting. Thus, each member of the promissory sentence corresponds with the language of scripture, when it points out the future glory of the saints, and together they yield a full and most lively description of the reward which is laid up for those who maintain their integrity, and hold out to the end.

IT remains to consider the propriety or fitness of conferring this honor on these holy men, and the reason assigned is no other than this, “for they are worthy.” Now methinks the sincere believer is ready to blush at this gracious expression: Can worthiness be justly ascribed to a sinful creature, redeemed by the blood of Jesus? O my soul, what is thy faith, or what are thy works? Suppose thou hast not defiled thy garments, is it more than became thee? Thou art then an unprofitable servant, and still more indebted to the sovereign mercy, and power of God, by whom thou hast stood, and thy boasting is for ever excluded. In this manner will the purest saint upon earth, on the apprehension of there being any glory attributed to him, however comparatively perfect his works, in point of integrity, check the first rising thought of merit in himself, and with unfeigned humility and gratitude declare: “By the grace of God I am what I am.” But the truth is, that no such worthiness is intended. The labourer, we say, is worthy of his hire; he hath earned his wages, and it is his just due; also the wicked righteously suffer the vengeance of the Almighty, they strictly and properly deserve the punishment they endure, [Ro 1:32](#). but worthiness in this sense cannot be ascribed to the heirs of salvation by grace.

NOR will it suffice to say that believers are graciously accepted through the merits of Christ; doubtless the work which the Redeemer finished on his cross, when he made complete atonement for sin, is the deserving cause of his people’s fruition of glory, but this does not come up to the

terms in the text, for it expressly declares that they are worthy; these very persons are the real, proper and immediate subjects of this worthiness, whatever it be. To clear up this point we must note, that a person may be worthy in respect of merit or meetness, now, as already hinted, a worthiness of merit is disclaimed by the Christian, nor can it be decently ascribed to him in relation to his future inheritance. All the works and self-denial which attend the strictest profession of godliness, or the holiest conversation, however distinguishing, exalted or valuable in its place, weighs not a single grain towards the kingdom of heaven. A title to glory lies in the donation of the Father, and in the purchase of his Son, in and with whom the saints become heirs; it follows that these disciples are declared worthy in respect of their meetness for glory to come, which appeared in their faith and evangelical obedience. Thus, the apostle is to be understood when he tells the afflicted Thessalonians, [2Th 1:5](#), that their tribulations were with a view to their being counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they also suffered. And again, verse 11, he saith, “we pray always for you, that God would count you worthy of this calling.” But how? By reckoning their sufferings, however great, the meritorious cause of their enjoying this kingdom? God forbid we should thus attempt to rob the Redeemer of his glory, in whose obedience unto death alone this cause is to be found! How then? The answer follows: “and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.” This counting them worthy, therefore, is no other than to finish the good work begun in them, and thereby complete the evidence of their effectual calling, that their real character as saints may be manifest. By this divine operation and influence, the faithful persevere, and even, if required, will resist unto blood: and their sufferings for righteousness sake shall manifest that they are of those to whom the promise is given. Now this is the sense in which these men of Sardis are said to be worthy, i.e. they appeared by their purity in doctrine and life, amidst abounding corruption, to be holy persons, the subjects of like precious faith with God’s elect, and consequently Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. Thus, in the last and great day the righteous Judge will count, i.e. having completed his work in his saints, he will show them to be

worthy; their works of holiness shall prove that they are his disciples indeed, to the glory of his name, and the shame of those who accuse them.

THUS, even in Sardis, when the church in that city was formal and lifeless, and her members in general sadly corrupted, insomuch that her things were dying away, there was a remnant of excellent persons, who, by the grace of God, escaped the common pollution, and retained their integrity; of these the Lord most graciously condescends to bear witness unto his servant, their pastor, pronouncing them holy, and worthy, or meet for the reward of the inheritance, and accordingly declares, that having finished their course and overcome, they should walk with him in white, or in robes of immortality and light. So then, like Enoch before he was translated, these worthies, even in the present state, obtain this witness that they please God, which is at once a pledge and vindication of their being admitted to the glories of his everlasting kingdom.

FROM this example, we learn that apostasy proceeds from corruption. It is owing to the indulgence of the flesh that men turn aside from the ways of the Lord. If the skirts of those whose works are not perfect are exposed, it will be found that they themselves are unclean, and the source of their slumber and hypocrisy will appear. The members of the natural body are not deficient or useless but through some prevailing disorder, although for a season it may not be discerned: In like manner, however awhile, church-members may cover their defects with deceitful pretences, it generally turns out that they are cold and unprofitable through a secret allowance of sin; some error or lust is harbored, which, like a worm at the root, eats out their strength. Hence they are slothful and partial, as it is written, "Men love not the truth, because they have pleasure in unrighteousness;" "wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," [Eph 5:14](#). An alarm occasioned by the presumption of some of whom it is said, "It is a shame even to speak of these things which are done of them in secret." Accordingly, some error, in principle or practice, lies at the bottom of an unfruitful behaviour under a profession of religion, and unless the old leaven is purged out, the hypocrite will increase unto more ungodliness, till his iniquity is full; and his end is destruction.

AT Sardis, as in every city, there was but one gospel-church, which, considering the popularity of the place, and the success which had attended the preaching of the word, must be supposed very large, and when such a community became depraved in the degree represented, the danger was great, yet a few are preserved. Thus, in the worst of times the Lord hath a people that fear him. In the old world, when violence covered the earth, Noah was righteous in his sight; also in Sodom pious Lot dwelt; and, what saith the Lord to Elias, when he thought himself alone? as referred to before: "I have reserved seven thousand that have not bowed the knee to Baal." So in the days of Malachi, when sacrilege and infidelity abounded in Israel, we shall find persons who thought on the name of the Lord; and in ages since, particularly when antichrist spread through the nations, and the world wandered after the beast, witnesses arose who are famed in history for the noble testimony they bore to the truth, through sufferings, and even at the expense of their blood.

AND shall the righteous be overlooked or forgotten? Far be it; Jesus remembers these few names in Sardis; he will ever be mindful of those who cleave to him, when others forsake him. The Lord is a God of judgment, and separates the precious from the vile. In an evil time the faithful may lie in obscurity; they may be driven into corners, or obliged to conceal themselves, but the eye of the Lord is on them who sigh and cry for the prevailing abominations, and he will certainly mark them in love; for a season they may be in heaviness, but their sorrows in the end shall turn to their unspeakable advantage; in the meantime their singular purity and zeal shines the brighter, by reason of the darkness of transgressors with whom they are cotemporary; besides such are frequently taken from the evil to come, or hid in the day of God's anger, or it may be they are wonderfully preserved in the midst of his judgments; but if he has allotted them to fall with the wicked in a general destruction, which is sometimes the case, they are gathered to himself, and his promise is sure.

WHAT then is the loss or shame which may attend those who cleave to the Lord, compared with their reward? Holiness and zeal in a degenerate age, when a lifeless profession is current, will expose a man to contempt

and ill-will; the ungodly will turn upon him, and on every occasion reproach him; he will be sure to meet with the resentment of those who are content with a name; this, joined to satan's temptations, and the conflicts he has with his own flesh, together with his concern for the honor of religion, and in a word, what he feels for those whose god is their belly, and who are hastening to ruin, may at present distress him, but a joyful harvest of the tears which he sows to the spirit is insured him, he shall remember his sorrows as waters that pass away, and find that reckoning just, that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in the saints."

BUT shall every one who is advanced to the kingdom of glory, hereafter appear a meet subject? Shall his works be found perfect, and prove his faith and true holiness in the day of revelation? Then the divine purity and justice, and every moral perfection of Deity, will be vindicated and honored, in crowning the saints with immortality and life; but what will become of the licentious professor, who presumes on his religious character, and holds the truth in unrighteousness. Would God there were none of this appearance! But alas, the spots which are seen on the garments of some who call themselves Christian! How are they wandering from God, and making provision for the flesh, to the grief of those with whom they are in communion, while the enemy blasphemes! Such may have a name that they live, but in the sight of God and good men they are dead; they lived in the pride and pleasure of life, and are dead while they live; yet they hope to be saved, and it highly offends them to question their state. Fatal delusion; unless they repent! The Lord convince such men of their folly and deceit, lest, overtaken as by a thief in the night, they fall short of the heaven they boast, and are covered with shame and everlasting contempt.

AND now, Christian Reader, dost thou expect to join in the illustrious procession, and to walk in white with the Lord at his coming? Dost thou look for this reward and for a place among the saints in the regions of light? Then hate and shun the appearance of evil; let unbelievers and hypocrites, who have no hope or desire of this blessed inheritance, live as they list; their disorders and licentiousness suit their character and end;

but thou art a candidate for glory and honor; the least stain of sin is a disgrace to thy profession. In the prospect of triumph with Christ, at his appearance and kingdom, the believer is proof against every temptation to lukewarmness and apostasy; it will inspire his soul with resolution and courage in a season of trial, and especially when he attends to the animating assurance which follows: “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” but this will be the subject of another lecture.

LECTURE XXV

The honors decreed the believer in the day of Christ; being a description of his white raiment, the book of life, and likewise what is implied in not having his name blotted out of that book.

THE plan on which all the epistles to the churches in Asia are formed, among other articles, contains a promise to him that overcometh; and in the lecture immediately preceding, we have seen that a glorious reward is laid up for the righteous, an assurance of which is repeated with enlargement in the following proclamation, the subject of our present discourse: “He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life; but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.” A declaration from the throne in the heavens, not only to animate the few whose garments were clean, but likewise for the encouragement of every convinced backslider to repent, in confidence of pardon and life: So wonderful is the patience and mercy of God. And the man who can be impenitent under this blessed report, is manifestly perverse, and will in the end stand self-condemned, and justly perish with the workers of iniquity.

THE promise is exceeding punctual with respect to its object. He, the same, that very identical person, under whatever age, character, or circumstances he may fight the good fight, shall be clothed with honor and glory. Hence note by the way, that the eye of the Lord is on each nominal Christian, and that he will not misapply the rewards of his grace.

FAITH is a warfare, and every believer comes under the notion of a soldier: he may not be an officer, who is rationed in the front, and thereby

more particularly exposed to the fire of the enemy; but I say every Christian is a soldier, under the Captain of salvation. This is the general character of the faithful: they are all swordsmen, and should be expert in this war, that subduing their enemies they may triumph at last. Thus, we have the situation, business and end of the believer in this militant state, he is one that overcometh. To overcome, supposes powerful and dangerous opposition. It carries in it an actual and toilsome conflict, consists with many fears, and even temporary foils; it requires a resolute perseverance, and is perfected in final victory. Our text, therefore, is as a trumpet blown in the midst of an engagement, while the enemy is pushing, and threatens, that the believer may be inspired with courage, and conquer.

THE powers against whom the Christian is engaged, are known to be the world, the flesh and the devil; but, alas, in appearance this knowledge is often mere speculation. Can a just idea of these subtle and vigilant forces, admit of the wanton and careless manner which prevails in the conduct of many? Surely, if we really apprehended danger from so many quarters we should be more on our guard. These enemies are uncertain and various in their manner, but there is no place, character, or circumstances, in civil or religious life, secure from their attempt to injure and destroy. Now the trial is more sensible from one of these parties, and then from another, and frequently they are both to be discerned in the attack; however, their interest is united, they are subservient to each other, and their view is the same; to conquer and ruin. In most temptations satan is the principal, the flesh gives occasion, and the world affords the materials. In a word, there is an endless change in the measures taken by these restless adversaries, as permitted, according to the different situation of the believer, or state of the visible church in his day. Sometimes satan ranges as a roaring lion, he comes down, as in the days of persecution, [1Pe 5:8](#). At another time, like a serpent, as when he enticed mother Eve, he corrupts in a more imperceptible, but not less effectual manner: Then his artillery are not deprivation of goods, exile, fire and sword, but by heresies, delusions, and snares of this world, which he is the god; he insinuates and deceives men into lukewarmness and disorder, till the

example of formal professors are more than sufficient to answer his end. And thus, it often comes to pass, as at Sardis, that a people have a name that they live, when, alas, in truth they are dead, and are in danger of being overtaken in judgment by an offended God, who is jealous of his glory, and whose anger is more to be dreaded, than all the malice and power of men or devils, who would turn us aside from his ways. Whether there are any symptoms of the like condition on the Protestant churches, at home or abroad, in the present day, the Reader will judge: But when this is the case, the upright are under peculiar temptations, from the number of apostates, some of whom may have been famous for their seeming knowledge and zeal for religion: They are likewise in danger from the specious show of time-serving men, who often make a sound of liberty, charity, goodness and virtue, but at the same time they are full of all subtlety and mischief, to captivate men from the faith, experience and order of the gospel. Moreover, the ill treatment which the faithful sometimes meet with for their steadfastness, by those who fall in with the corruption of the times, the burthen laid on them, through the deficiency of others, with whom they are connected in society, their fears of being overcome, and it may be of a total dissolution of the church in the place where they dwell; these, and other things that time would fail to mention, are a sore trial to them who love God, in a day of general declension. “Blessed is he that endureth to the end: He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.” A glorious promise, which Jesus himself stands engaged to fulfill! It is laid out in three distinct branches; they correspond with each other, and together yield a most animating prospect, of the honor of the saints, at the coming of the Lord. The two first are highly figurative, and are explained by the last, which runs in plain language.

1. IT is declared, that the victorious saint “shall be clothed in white raiment.” The same metaphor occurred in the foregoing lecture, in which it was noted that *white* is an emblem of purity, glory, conquest and joy. Thus, [Re 15:6](#), “the angels came out of the temple with the vials of wrath, clothed in pure and white linen,” in token of their holiness and splendor.

For the same reason, [Re 4:4](#), “The four and twenty elders sit round about the throne clothed in white raiment, with crowns of gold on their heads.” And further, as hinted, it was the ancient custom to make triumphal procession in white: to which agrees, [Re 6:2](#). The Captain of salvation, the Lord of hosts, is beheld “on a white horse, with a bow in his hand, when a crown was given him, on which he went forth conquering and to conquer.” And in [Re 19:14](#), the armies that followed him are also invested in white. Once more, to the same purpose also is [Re 7:11](#). “John beheld, and lo, a multitude stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;” which is another established token of victory. Some indeed confine this to the martyrs, who, on account of their sufferings for Christ, may be said to “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” and style it the ensign of martyrs; but, with submission, however the phrase may be peculiarly adapted to those who sealed the testimony of Jesus with their blood, it is not confined to them; there is indeed a noble army of witnesses to the truth, who shine in the kingdom of glory, and whose crowns may be of singular lustre, but the vision seems rather to comprehend all the redeemed who have attained the heavenly state. However, there is another way of being washed in the blood of the Lamb, besides that of martyrdom, and without which even the martyrs themselves could not stand before God in his temple above; and it is certain, that the promise under consideration hath respect to the faithful, whose sufferings and trials arose from a different quarter than that of persecution.

IF one state is intended by the whole of the promise, which will scarce be denied, it cannot terminate in any future period of the church on earth, as some are of opinion; the finishing clause manifestly refers to the day of revelation, when the saints shall appear with their illustrious Head in a glorious manner. 1. As invested with the robe of righteousness brought in by the Messiah, when he made reconciliation for iniquity by his obedience to the death of the cross. This is fitly compared to white raiment, [Re 3:18](#), for its infinite purity and ineffable glory, being the righteousness of a divine person, though wrought in and by the human nature, which he assumed, in order to redeem us. This spotless robe is now upon every one

that believeth, [Ro 3:22](#), in which he stands justified, and perfectly comely in the sight of God, like Joshua the priest, [Zec 3:4](#), his iniquity is passed away, and he is clothed with change of raiment, no charge can lie against him, [Ro 8:1](#). Thus, the church is described; “Her clothing is of wrought gold, massy and bright,” [Ps 45:13](#). And sometimes the Christian can rejoice in his God, beholding himself herein decked as a priest, and adorned as a bride with her jewels; yet this is not always the case; a believer may be in the dark, and doubt his own state, but when Jesus is revealed from heaven, his saints shall be arrayed in this garment of salvation, and shall find themselves honorably acquitted in the presence of all. But, 2. Another branch of his glory will be the beauty of holiness: “The King’s daughter is likewise all glorious within.” A perfection in holiness is laid up in the hope of the gospel; it is the earnest desire and expectation of every true Christian, and towards which some make greater advances in the present state than others; at best he is deficient, but in the future world his spirit is made perfect; and when he comes with his Saviour from heaven, his whole spirit, soul and body will be wholly sanctified, he shall appear blameless and without fault: so that his righteousness in this sense will break forth as the light, the splendor of which will cover his malicious accusers with shame at the resurrection. For, 3. The Christian will be clothed with white in respect of his glorified body. We have seen the raiment of Jesus on the mount was white as light; a figure and earnest of his future glory, when risen from the dead; and to this we know his saints will be conformed, [Ro 8:29](#); [Php 3:21](#). “for we shall see him as he is,” [1Jo 3:2](#). Of this blessed hope, the resurrection of Jesus is an infallible pledge, [1Co 15](#). Now the Christian may be said to be clothed with vile raiment in respect of his sinful and mortal body, but when it is fashioned like that in which his Saviour sits at the right hand of God, it will be an essential part of his glory. Finally, the lustre of each believer will, I apprehend, greatly arise from his visible union in the church, unto Jesus the head, and to every member of his glorious and mystical body, who will then appear in their brightest apparel before the Father and his angels; then will the saint that overcometh, sit down with his Lord in his throne, in exceeding white raiment, with all the ensigns of victory and triumph, and with him enter the kingdom, where the wise shall

shine as the sun in the firmament, and as the stars, for ever and ever. These are the shining garments which the sons of Zion shall put on in the day of the Lord; they shall be invested with the righteousness of their Redeemer, as with gold; the fine linen of perfect and spotless purity shall adorn them, their bodies shall then be spiritual and glorious; and further, they shall be clothed in robes of everlasting light, as members of Christ and one another, who have gained a total and final victory over all their enemies, and are crowned with honor in the eternal kingdom of the Father. In one word, then shall come to pass that saying, “He will beautify the meek with salvation.”

WE now come to the second branch of the promise; “And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.” As hinted already, these are figurative terms, and they plainly allude in general to a well-known instrument, in which things are noted down to be brought to remembrance as occasion requires, and particularly to the use of books in a court of judicature, where causes are tried and determined. Our concern in attending unto them, is to avoid every idea unworthy of God, or of divine revelation: With this caution I attempt to show from the Scripture, our only sure guide, what may be understood by the book of life, and the import of this promise, namely, that Christ will not blot out the believer’s name out of his book.

DANIEL, chap. vii. relates his vision of the father, who is styled “the Ancient of days; by whom he saw all judgment committed to the Son of man, who also appeared with the clouds of heaven. A grand and awful vision, which enters deeply into the mystery of God! The prophet declares, that “the judgment was set, and the books were opened.” The like scene is presented to John in the Isle of Patmos, [Re 20:12](#). “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened; not that we are to suppose that, properly speaking, books will be wanted, or used at the tribunal of Christ; he is not like earthly judges, unto whom, as observed, the allusion is made, who, with all their superior ability, stand in need of such means to assist and direct them: the infinite understanding, and other perfections of the divine Jesus, who is judge, forbid this low conception; before him all things are present and naked from the end to

the beginning; no witnesses, no records are needful, no; he hath ability in himself to execute his important commission, and not a man shall have cause to complain of his judgment, or be able to appeal from his bar. Yet this is the repeated language of Scripture, the books shall be opened, and something no doubt is referred to by this term, which demands our attention; we may therefore soberly enquire, what are these books? I answer, in general, every object sensible or spiritual, which the Holy Ghost has thought fit, directly or indirectly, to present to our view under the notion of a book, may be justly numbered among those that shall be opened in the day of judgment; it will therefore be pertinent to mention these books, at least the principal ones, in our way to that expressed in this promise. And, 1. In [Ps 19](#). universal nature is compared to a book, which declares and speaks as it were, in words or lines, the existence, infinite wisdom, and other perfections of its glorious Author. This extensive volume contains the visible heavens and earth, with all its amazing furniture and innumerable inhabitants; it lies open for the instruction of man, and so put him in remembrance, that, beholding the eternal power and Godhead therein expressed, he might adore and serve his bounteous Creator and Lord; by this the heathen stand condemned for their idolatry and immoral behaviour, [Ro 2:1](#). And again, conscience is another thing represented as retaining to the view of man things past or present; it generally speaks now to every man; but if, through the indulgence of sin, the transgressor is feared, or finally impenitent, and this book is shut, it will open at the tribunal of God to his confusion and condemnation for ever. There is likewise the book of scripture; that solemn guard on the sacred writing, [Re 22:18](#), styled the words of the prophecy of this book, is not to be confined to that which is commonly called, The book of the revelation of St. John the divine, but is to be extended to the oracles of God, without any exception. This code contains the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets, and likewise the evangelists, the Acts, and every epistle of the New-Testament, out of which those shall be judged who enjoy the benefit of divine revelation. And further, we read of the book of the law, I mean the covenant of works, which whether considered as written in the heart, or exhibited under the dispensation of Moses, demands particular notice; in this dreadful book every transgressor is

written accursed, [Ga 3:10](#). It is a ministration of condemnation and death to every man who is under the law, and no doubt this will also be opened when the judgment is set, when all that are in it shall perish with a miserable destruction: But, here is another book still, which is pointed to in the promise before us, namely, the book of life; this book or roll, we are expressly told, will be unfolded, and that it will appear distinct from, and after all the rest, [Re 20:12](#).” And another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the book, &c.” Paul speaks of this book, [Php 4:3](#) and mentions some persons whose names he was persuaded were in it. We also read, [Re 13:8](#), of them that worshiped the beast, that their names are not written in the book of life, and the same is referred to in several other places. Now, what is intended in divine revelation by this important and interesting book? There is a record in heaven concerning the spirit and conduct of the faithful, which is styled in [Mal 3:17](#), a “book of remembrance,” and said to be written before the Lord for them that feared him; of which in a subsequent lecture. God is not unrighteous to forget the love of his saints, but will remember their works in the day of account; but I apprehend this book of life is no other than the roll of electing love, or, in other words, the decrees of God concerning his chosen and redeemed among men; in proof of this I shall show that the decrees of the Almighty in general, and consequently those which relate to the counsels of his mercy in particular, are mentioned under the idea of a book, and then point out some circumstances revealed concerning the book of life, which is the subject in hand.

NOTHING can be more clear than that the secret purpose or decree of God, in reference to nature and providence, are represented under the notion of being written in a book. In reference to our natural frame, says David, [Ps 139:16](#). “Thine eyes did see my substance yet being imperfect, and in thy book all my members were written,” i.e. determined or decreed, before thou gavest them actual existence. The same may be observed in respect of providence. Remarkable to this purpose is the passage in Daniel ([Da 10:21](#)) to which I crave the Reader’s attention. The angel says to the prophet, “I will show thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth.”

This agrees with the property of a book in which things are noted. Now the scripture of truth in Daniel cannot be understood of the written word in his time, for the prophet was well acquainted with all divine revelation then extant; and it is manifest that the angel refers to an event yet to come, and which hitherto lay concealed in the bosom of the Father; here is therefore an undoubted instance of the secret purpose of God being represented as it were noted before him in a book; and doth not this prove the doctrine of which some men blaspheme? Indeed the election of God lies at the foundation of all the grace communicated to any of fallen Adam's race from the beginning, in time, and in the glories of eternity; and if the decrees of God may be considered as a book which contains all his purpose and counsel in reference to creation and providence, there is no reason against conceiving in like manner of the things which concern the still more wonderful work of redemption. In this book of life are written all things relating to the salvation of the elect, and particularly the certain objects of that foreknowledge, or love, which was displayed in their appointment to glory by Jesus Christ; nor is it strange that he who recorded the various parts of the human body before it was formed should note, as in a book before him, all the members of that mystical body, the church, who shall enjoy him for ever; they are "vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory," [Ro 9:23](#). Their names are in this book of decree, yea, doubtless strictly and literally, as hinted before, the very names by which they are known in this life are included, for in some instances, as in Josiah and Cyrus, proper names of persons were expressly revealed, even centuries before they were born; but this is not peculiar to the chosen, nor unfitted on here; the phrase is metaphorical, and it is enough that the heirs of salvation are marked in this book, and that, being found written therein in the day of judgment, they will then take possession of the kingdom prepared for those whom the Father hath blessed, from the foundation of the world.

NOR is scripture silent or even sparing concerning this wonderful and interesting volume. We read in [Lu 10:20](#) that the names of the saints are written in heaven; and again, [Heb 12:23](#), that the church of the first-born, i.e. the names or persons that make up that general assembly, are written

or enrolled in heaven, which is thought to allude to the enrollment of the first-born of literal Israel, [Nu 3:40](#). However, it is well known that the ancients wrote on rolls of parchment; now this roll or book must needs be originally in heaven, since it existed from eternity, which is the next thing recorded; [Re 17:8](#). the book of life is said to be “from the foundation of the world.” Moreover, in chap. xxi. 17. it is styled “the lamb’s book of life.” and in chap. xiii. 8. these criterions are united; where we read of some whose names are not written in “the book of life, of the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” a passage which throws a light on this divine code, and agrees with the current of prophecy, the general subject of this book is no other than the redemption of the elect by the blood of God’s Son, whose name is at the head of the chosen, as the first-born among many brethren, predestinated to the adoption of children by him, and co-heirs with him in the heavenly inheritance, to be enjoyed on the completion of his suretyship-engagements, one essential branch of which was the expiation of sin. Hence, when the Redeemer appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, he saith, “Lo I come (IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK, it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.” In the volume κεφαλιδι i.e. in the head of the book, or roll, it is written of me; they who would confine it to the written word, or to the writings of Moses, which is emphatically styled the book, by the Jews, apply this to the first promise, [Ge 3:15](#). But, I think this address of the Son to the Father is justly considered as ultimately referring to the covenant of redemption, in which divine compact he solemnly engaged to die for the sins of the people; certain it is that the sufferings and death of Christ were particularly noted in this eternal volume of decrees, for we have seen that he was “delivered according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” From this ancient record, treasured up in the archives of heaven, previous to the commencement of time, the book of revelation is drawn, even the whole gospel, which is a record of eternal life, promised in Christ before the world began. So then this idea of the decrees of the Almighty is afforded in scripture, they are noted as in a book before him, and the book of life in particular appears to be the same with the Lamb’s book of life, which is frequently mentioned, and which contains the names of the elect, and the method of infinite wisdom in bringing them to glory by the sufferings

of Jesus, the only, begotten of the Father. And surely, my Reader, if the divine decrees in general are in Scripture compared to a book, as you have seen, those which concern the salvation of the church in Christ may well be styled so, with this singular and illustrious epithet, the book of life.

NOW the Lord declares concerning him that overcometh, saying, “I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.” It appear; in [Re 20:15](#) that, in the judgment to come, whoever is not found written in the book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire; this part of the promise therefore proves that an interest therein is of the utmost importance. I am sensible that some say, that to have a name written in heaven, is only to have a present right to the inheritance by virtue of our faith, which, they suppose, may be lost. This groundless and uncomfortable notion is induced from a prejudice against the doctrine of election, and that of the final perseverance of the saints, but such do well to consider the following particulars: 1. That nothing can be more evident than it is from the Scripture, that God hath a people chosen unto salvation in Christ Jesus his Son, and that by this line of election all spiritual blessings are directed, and descend on any of the children of men, [Eph 1:4](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:13](#). 2. A title to the inheritance of the saints, though it be received by faith, is not grounded in faith, but originally in the donation of the Father; and the believer’s right to the possession and enjoyment, is derived from the merit of the Son, through whose blood it descends to them who shall be heirs of salvation, in a way of righteousness; this is the truth and the glory of the gospel; the inheritance is by promise, as to Abraham, and the fruition of the faithful in time and eternity is not of debt, but of grace, [Ro 5:21](#); [Eph 1:14](#). Besides, 3. It is highly indecent to imagine that the immutable and eternal God shall change his purpose, or repent of his gift, or, to speak freely according to the figure of this passage, that he should write any man in this book, and then blot him out again, and so vice versa, as he rises or falls in the obedience of faith, not to say, that if the divine Advocate with the Father prevails, the faith of his people cannot totally and finally fail, [Lu 22:32](#). Again, 4. This strange notion contradicts the word and oath of the most High, who hath revealed unto the heirs of salvation the immutability of his counsel, which is their strong consolation, [Heb](#)

6:17,18. And further, this conceit is inconsistent with a full assurance of hope, and leaves no room for the believer's rejoicing that his name is written in heaven, which our Lord himself recommends to his disciples, [Lu 10:20](#). In a word, this imagination directly opposes the tenor of the gospel-report, which runs in these absolute terms: "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." Thus, it appears, that to assert that an elect person, who is redeemed and called according to the purpose of God, is liable to an erasure from the Lamb's book of life, or that the Lord will blot him out from thence, is to deny the testimony of God, to impeach his perfections and to make an attempt on the foundation of the righteous; but we know it is vain, for the counsel of the Lord shall stand. As to the phrase in this place, that the Lord will not blot out the believer's name out of the book of life, it is purely figurative, and, according to the allusion, amounts to this, and no more, namely, that in the end, when this important volume is opened, he shall certainly be found written therein; or in other words, that the man who overcomes will appear in the future judgment blessed of the Father, who hath given him the victory, and that he shall accordingly be admitted to the honors and triumph of the redeemed in that day: and, what more can the Christian desire? It is a glory which will infinitely surpass his utmost present conception.

THE light in which we have considered these metaphorical branches of the promise, is confirmed by the following sentence, with which it concludes: "but I will confess his name before my father, and before his angels." This settles the period of its accomplishment, namely, the last and great day, when the Son of man shall be revealed from heaven to judge the world, for it is manifest from [Mt 25](#) and many other parts of the New-Testament, that then the righteous will be owned by the Lord; and in these words to confess his name, being set in opposition to his blotting it out of the book of life, determines the sense of that difficult phrase, for by this antithesis it appears, that when Jesus says, I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, he intends precisely this, namely, that he would acknowledge him at his appearance and kingdom. To be blotted out of the book of life when the judgment is set, is not to be found written therein, [Re 20:15](#), and positively consists in being rejected and disowned

by the Judge, as all the workers of iniquity will be; but, on the contrary, Christ in this promise engages to own and honor his victorious saint, he will not deny, but confess his name; he will declare his righteousness, own him to be a son, and an heir of salvation and life.

THIS is the sum; every man that holds fast his profession, and overcomes in the end, as the real Christian most certainly will, the same shall be found written in the Lamb's book of life at the day of judgment; Christ will then own him to be chosen and faithful, on which a glory shall be revealed upon him answerable to a triumph; yea, far exceeding the most beautiful diadem placed on the head of the greatest conqueror or prince of the earth, even a crown of glory which fadeth not away.

NOW, the man must be hardened indeed, who can question the importance of being in this book, or remain indifferent whether or not his name is found there. But, Reader, dost thou inquire for thyself? Look; hath the Gospel reached thy heart, and reduced thee to the obedience of faith? Dost thou believe on the name of the Son of God, and hath his Spirit made the word effectual to thy repentance, and brought thee to rely on Jesus as thy Lord and thy God? Thou mayest then rejoice that thy name is written in heaven, [1Th 1:4](#). This ground is sure. Think not, enquiring soul, to ascend up to heaven and there enter the bosom, or search the eternal record of the Father; it is a fruitless attempt, and needless; that book will not be fully opened to any creature till the day of revelation, but there is a transcript sufficient on earth to satisfy him that is conformed to the gospel of Christ; descend into thine heart, and compare thy experience with that divine standard. Dwells the love of God there? Is his law in thine heart? Fear not. A conscience purified from the love and allowance of sin, and possessed of an hope in the salvation of God, is an undeniable effect of that power of the Holy Ghost, which leaves no room to doubt that the subject is enrolled in the Lamb's book of life: "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called," [Ro 8:30](#). This is the only safe rule; other methods of judging thy state may amuse but deceive thee; thy attainments, thy profession, thy name for religion are no certain criterions, much less doth this knowledge depend on visions and private revelations, imaginary or real, but if the desire of thy soul is to the name of the Lord, and to the

remembrance thereof, thou mayest easily conclude that his desire is to thee, and that thou art numbered with his saints.

AND, art thou acquainted with this power of the gospel in thy heart, my dear Friend? Mayest thou conclude that, unworthy as thou art, thy name is written in heaven? Then let me intreat thee, dwell much on the glory contained in this promise; be not conformed to this world; and if thou art under sore trials, or suffering for righteousness sake, let the honor and triumph of the saints, when Jesus shall appear, inspire thee with courage; shun not a testimony for the Lord in the way of his appointment; remember that not to own Christ is to deny him, and the man who will not confess him lets go the promise of this glorious reward unto them who obey him; then be not ashamed of the name of thy Saviour in the sight of an unbelieving world, or to live up to thy holy profession, in the midst of the disorders that prevail in a sinful generation, this is unworthy thy character and hope; therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light, in a certain expectation of being crowned in the day of the Lord, when shame shall cover thine enemy, with all who forget God and despise the Lord Jesus Christ. “Behold he comes quickly, and his reward is with him, to give every man according as his work shall be,” [Re 22:12](#). In a word, attend to the exhortation, which concludes this and the other epistles to the disciples in Asia, “he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” With the opening of which we shall finish our design on this subject.

LECTURE XXVI.

The universal obligation of Christians to attend to the Voice of the Spirit.

THE epistle to Sardis closes, like the rest, with a Solemn excitation to hearken to the Spirit. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” A like exhortation is repeated by our Lord in the course of his ministry, and is always needful, since they who are endowed with this distinguishing faculty are liable to be dull, which is a case too frequent to admit of debate. Some take the passage as expressive of the consequence of the word being preached, namely, that then, the man that hath an ear will certainly hear; but experience denies it.

OUR text is a demand on him that hath an ear, who is directed to hear what the spirit saith to the churches; i.e. in his epistle to the churches in Asia, which no doubt is to be regarded by the faithful to the end of the world, yet the phrase will admit of a more comprehensive idea, and may be justly applied to the whole of divine revelation.

THE existence, office and operations of the spirit, are so much the subject of scripture, that one might have hoped for a unity of faith concerning him, but alas, many are the fancies advanced against the dignity of his person and grace. Some nominal Christians intend by the Spirit no other than natural conscience, or the inward light of human reason; and if this is thy notion, my Reader, take heed, lest “the light that is in thee be darkness.” Others conceive of the Spirit as a mere quality in the divine Being, and style him the virtue, influence or power of God; but these are low and false conceptions, which contradict the scripture-account of the Holy Ghost, whose personality is so fully set forth in those sacred writings, that even some who stumble at the adorable Trinity, overborn with the evidence thereof, are compelled to confess it, and have

recourse to a stupid and vain imagination, [*Dr. Owen on the Spirit, p. 46.*] that he is some eminent angel or created spirit, who own account of his highness and intimacy with God, was singled out and sent from heaven to sanctify the church; this strange conceit shows the wretched shift to which men are driven when they leave the testimony the Lord hath given of himself. The personality and deity of the Spirit are manifest in the word, in which there are prescribed to him, in numberless instances, understanding, will, power, and every thing essential to and intelligent voluntary agent, which complete the idea of a person; and his divinity is clear from his being joined with the Father and the Son, with whom he bears record in heaven, [1Jo 5:7](#). and also is worshipped, particularly in baptism, [Mt 28:19](#). His proper deity and distinct personality are clear in the instance of Peter's rebuke of Ananias, who declares that he had lied to the Holy Ghost, and that in so doing he had not lied unto man, but unto God, [Ac 5:3-4](#). Now this glorious divine Spirit, thus equal in nature with the Father and Son, from whom he proceeds, appears to be the great Agent of the covenant, whose operations are needful and effectual to accomplish the purpose of grace in the salvation of the chosen, in a subserviency to which he moved the prophets, [2Pe 1:21](#). who spake by him the counsel of God. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," and this is never ascribed to the Father or the Son, but to the Spirit alone, by whom the Son himself prophesied when he ministered on earth, "He whom God sent speaketh God's words, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure to him," [Joh 3:34](#). Thus, the Spirit is the author of Scripture, when, or by whomsoever it was uttered, not excepting the Lord Jesus Christ. So then the whole of divine revelation is his voice, which voice is to the churches, for though some things were originally directed to particular persons, or to mankind in general, yet it was in the church the Spirit spake by the mouth of his servants, and whatever is written is for the universal learning, patience and hope of the faithful, [Ro 15:4](#). And moreover, to the church hath been committed these oracles of God, as of old to the Jews, and since the gospel has been established, scripture, under a wise and wonderful providence by the will of God, has not been left in private hands; and neither Jews nor Gentile have been unfaithful to their trust, the former, although sadly corrupted and sunk so low, through ignorance and vice, that they knew

not the voice of Moses and the prophets, read in their synagogue every Sabbath, [Ac 13:27](#). yet it is notorious that they scrupulously adhered to the letter of Scripture, and are never charged with altering it in any one instance; and with respect to the Christian church, even the unhappy divisions, and opposite sentiments of its nominal members, have been subservient to the keeping them entire, each party, having a jealous eye over the other; it has been out of the power of either to alter Scripture in favor of their own particular scheme. Thus, what the Spirit saith he saith to all the churches, even to every church and to each of her members, who are therefore everyone required to hear; for sacred prophecy is not a dead letter, which is now silent and past, but the lively oracles of God, even the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, [Ac 7:38](#); [1Pe 1:23](#), compared.

BUT what is this ear with which a man must or can hear the voice of the spirit? No doubt, as observed, it is a distinguishing talent. If an ear, in the sense of this passage, was common or universal, the form of the text would be impertinent. What then is this ear? The fleshly ear, or organ of natural sense, is out of the question, being common to all who dwell in the body; besides, the object to be regarded is moral or spiritual, the faculty therefore must be intellectual. It may be useful to note by the way, that to have an ear in a natural sense, is to have that useful member perfect and clear, which, through one or another occasion, may be obstructed. The ears of some men are dull, they are in a manner stopped; that curious membrane is so out of tone that the subject can hear but little, yea it may be nothing at all, which is very discomfiting, particularly to them that have known the pleasure of sound. To be totally deaf, is inconvenient and dangerous, and a trial to the Christian, particularly on this account, that it deprives him of hearing the word of the Lord, a principal means of his comfort. Thanks be to God, there are other ways of hearing the voice of the Spirit than that of attending to the word preached; nevertheless, it is a great affliction to him that delights in the testimonies of the Lord to be prevented from hearing them published in his name.

THIS ear is no other than an ability of soul or heart to praise and embrace the voice of the Spirit, or a capacity for discerning spiritual

objects, which the natural man hath not. It is not the natural understanding of any man, however cultivated or enlarged. Man, as a reasonable creature, with proper assistance, may understand the words of Scripture, he may perceive the doctrines they contain, and also discover the just connection and harmony of gospel truth, and at the same time fall short of this divine faculty: neither is it an ability for discoursing on points of faith to public edification which is a singular talent. The ear we now speak of is common to regenerate persons, who being savingly enlightened, can distinguish the glory and importance of the gospel, and cordially embrace it, as when the heart of Lydia was opened, she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul. A certain writer, who is not to be suspected of undervaluing human power or attainments, thus defines it: ‘It is, says he, a good inclination to, and a good judgment and perception of divine things, so as thoroughly to weigh, and consider what is spoke:’ All which are certainly included, for we shall presently see, that in the use of the spiritual ear, every power is engaged; but, if the scripture is true, it is impossible that the natural man should thus know the things of the Spirit of God, [1Co 2:14](#), a veil of ignorance and prejudice covers his mind; nor is one man by nature better disposed or more capable than another of attaining to this: It is for want of considering the bad moral state of fallen man, that any, in opposition to the testimony of God, conceit that the fine sense, liberal education, or any other comparative excellency, in an unregenerate state, brings the subject a jot nearer to this divine sense, the wisest and noblest of the world are as far off from it as the foolish and vulgar; there is no foundation for this capacity in the carnal mind; and if the sinner cannot, with the greatest external advantages, attain the true idea or discernment of spiritual things, much less can he apply them to himself. What our Lord said to the Jews, [Joh 8:43](#) may justly be applied to a natural men without any exception, “why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word.” Carnal reasonings and pride blindeth the eyes of the sinner, and fill him with insuperable prejudices against the spirituality and purity of the gospel; till these are removed he is not able to distinguish their excellency or relish their sweetness. So, then this ear is not any speculation or human attainment, have ever refined or exalted, but a supernatural and experimental thing of

the Spirit of God. The phrase, even when applied to a capacity for natural hearing in the common sense of mankind, conveys an idea of something extraordinary, to have an ear for music: What is it less than to have a distinguishing judgment and taste for the harmony of sounds, which yield the subject unspeakable pleasure? But will any deny that this is a peculiar talent, a kind of personal sense, which is not to be acquired or described, though it may be greatly improved? A person must be naturally formed for delighting in music: In like manner no man can feel the happiness of knowing the joyful sound till Christ is formed in him, or he is a new creature. This hearing ear is the special gift and work of the Lord, [Pr 20:12](#). which he bestows at his sovereign pleasure: Hence says Moses to rebellious Israel, “The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day,” [De 29:4](#). In a word, the necessity of regeneration, in order to hearing the Spirit, is evident from our Saviour’s declaration, “He that is of God heareth God’s words; ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God,” [Joh 8:47](#).

To hear in general, is to exert this distinguishing faculty, in attending to the things of divine revelation; and it implies a diligent search into the mind of the Spirit. “Let him hear;” i.e. let him exercise his spiritual sense that he may perceive the mind of the Holy Ghost, and attain a just conception of divine things, till he arrives to a full assurance of understanding in the mystery of God. Now he that doth this will embrace every opportunity for hearing, reading, meditation and prayer. It also carries in it a serious reflection on the excellency and importance of what he discerns, that his heart may be duly and constantly affected. And further, this hearing is to be extended to practice. The man who doth not conform to the orders of his superior, can in no proper or honorable sense be said to hear him, nor can that man be esteemed a hearer of the Spirit, whose temper and conduct are not conformed to his dictates; without aiming at this, or indeed unless this is in a good measure attained, all pretence to hearing the Spirit is vain: for a man to talk of hearing what the Spirit saith to the churches, and live in pride and sensual pleasure, or go on in a course of disorder and sin, is to mock the Almighty, or rather to

deceive his own soul, for God is not mocked. In short, to hear in the sense of this exhortation, comprehends the whole obedience of faith.

SOME resolve this spiritual ear into a holy desire, or purpose of heart to attend to the voice of God, and give the sense in these words, “Let him that has an ability and is desirous of hearing:” And most certain it is, that to hear is freely to open the ear. A willing heart is essential to the hearing of the Spirit. The people of Christ are a willing people, and their will, being sanctified, is much concerned in hearkening to the Lord: they are also impartial, and open the ear without any reserve. This is the language of the obedient soul, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” And again, “I will hear what God the Lord will speak,” [Ps 85:8](#). Moreover, he is constant in this divine exercise, it is his habitual and daily practice, and finally, it is that in which he delights. The wisdom and goodness of our adorable Creator are wonderfully displayed in so constituting the human body, that in a healthful and temperate state, the exercise of its senses is highly delightful. Thus, in the exercise of faith, that spiritual sense of the new creature, in whatever manner it is exerted, affords the subject a singular pleasure; the very opening of the ear to the Spirit, though it call for great self-denial, is grateful to the Christian; his love to Jesus, and his prospect of glory to come, yield him unspeakable joy, even in sufferings for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

MANY are the motives which induce the believer to hearken to the Spirit; as for instance, his dignity and love. Dost thou find thyself dull, my dear Friend? Consider who speaks; the infinite majesty of this divine Person, and the grace and power displayed in the execution of his office, demand thy regard; it is the voice of God, of the Holy Ghost, of that Spirit which proceedeth from the Father and the Son; he is the almighty Agent that formed the body, thy Redeemer assumed, in which he bore thy sins away on the tree; by his power also that body was raised from the grave, and thou thyself wast quickened when dead in trespasses and sins, and obtained the ear with which thou canst hear, and on whom all saints depend for the resurrection of their bodies in the last and great day. To

turn a deaf ear to the Holy Ghost; What is it less than to affront those divine Persons by whom he is sent, and to despise him as a Spirit of revelation and grace? But, far be the sinful and fatal presumption!

AGAIN, another inducement is *what* the Spirit delivers, which is important and glorious. There is nothing spoken by the Spirit to the churches that is false, impertinent, or trifling; all his sayings are true, they are holy and wise, and most nearly concern us; he speaketh great things, things deep and mysterious, which call for the utmost attention to discern, and the knowledge of which is of an interesting nature; whatever he saith in his word hath a real connection with the believer's present peace, and will have some influence into his future happiness, or promote the honor of God in his eternal felicity; yea, he is also a comforter in all that he says to his people. There is no awful threatening, or self-denying precept in the whole book of God, but, if rightly understood and duly applied, imports some consolation to the believer: "He will speak peace to his people and unto his saints."

IT is also an argument with him that fears God to hear the Spirit, when he considers *unto whom* his words are directed, even to himself. The voice of the Spirit, particularly in his exhortations to perseverance, and promises of salvation, victory, and glory to the churches, is to every disciple of Jesus. "He that hath an ear." If thou hast an ear, the Holy Ghost speaks unto thee; and this is the argument of wisdom, "Unto you, O man, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men," [Pr 8:4](#). And besides, we are to remember that the Lord speaks in kindness and love, [Heb 12:5](#). saith the apostle, "Ye have forgotten," i.e. neglected, "and not hearkened to the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children."

AND further, the importance of obeying the Spirit, is not the least motive to hearing his voice. In the instance before us, we see, from the epistle itself, how awful the expectation of those who would not hear, hold fast, and repent! On the other hand, the glory and joy of him that attended this divine message is great beyond all expression. In like manner it is in respect of the whole of sacred scripture: The divine author is the Spirit of Christ, that great Prophet, concerning whom, thus saith Jehovah,

“whosoever shall not hearken to my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him,” [De 18:19](#) i.e. punish him with everlasting destruction, as appears from Peters discourse, [Ac 3:23](#).

THE amount is as follows: the ear demanded in this exhortation, is a singular faculty, peculiar to the regenerate; it is the ear of faith, which is a kind of spiritual sense, by which the subject is able, through divine assistance, to discern the things of the spirit, and is duly affected with their importance and glory. The attention required is no other than the exertion of this ability in searching into the mind of God, that he may be conformed unto it in heart and life. The motives to which are, the majesty and grace of the divine Speaker, the excellent and interesting nature of the things he declares, his direction to the subject, and the infinite importance of obeying his voice.

IT appears then, that a new heart is needful to a saving improvement of the gospel. A man must have an ear before he can hear. Without a faculty suited to the object, it is impossible to discern and embrace it. But of this the natural man is destitute, in respect of spiritual things, he must therefore be born again, for, conceived in sin, his heart is corrupt and totally alienated from God, so that he neither doth nor can delight in his law. In vain are the most striking representations of divine objects from the word, to the carnal mind; it is void of spiritual sense, and the conceit is absurd, that any spiritual object, how glorious soever in itself, or however justly or nearly presented, or indeed finely illustrated, should properly affect it. Hence the most skillful and affectionate preaching is frequently abortive, and the grace of God is faithfully preached to many in vain; or until the Holy Ghost is given from on high, and a new spirit is put within the hearer, as promised, he cannot discern or relish the things of God, so then “Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God must give the increase.”

I HAVE already hinted, and it should be remembered, that the Christian himself stands in need of frequent and earnest exhortations to hearken to the Spirit. No man can hear in any sense without an ear, but he that is endowed with this faculty may be dull of hearing, yea, and scarce hear at all to any advantage. Permit me, my friend, to excite thee: open thine ear

to this divine voice; let this be thy care when in private or in public devotion, yea and in every situation and concern of life. Alas, our ears, how often are they turned aside to vain imaginations! The suggestions of satan and the fancies of men captivate, impoverish, and darken our minds, and betray us into sin; but, if our ears hung on the lips of the Spirit, with what reverence, delight and profit should we hear!

AND wouldest thou examine thyself, my dear Reader; the following criterions may assist thee. This hearing by faith is accompanied with the love of the Spirit, and his voice; his mouth is most sweet; and no wonder, seeing it is the voice of thy beloved who speaks by him; thou art also imploring his divine aids, that thine ear being opened may be perfect and sound; likewise the preaching and the ministers of the word are highly esteemed; thou wilt not, as some, under a conceit of hearing the Spirit, despise the means, an attendance on which he hath prescribed to his saints; moreover, the hearers of the Spirit, are thy chosen companions, and every notion or invention of man, contrary to the testimony of God, thy utter aversion. And further, thou wilt try whatever is proposed in the name of the Lord by the Scriptures, and adhere to nothing in respect of doctrine, worship or experience, by what they declare to belong to the faithful. And are these symptoms upon thee, my friend? Then, be not afraid; whatever may be thy infirmities or involuntary defects, thou mayest soberly rank thyself with these who have obtained mercy to incline their ear to the Spirit of holiness and grace.

TO conclude. This solemn demand from the exalted Redeemer, proves religion a personal thing, and that liberty of conscience is every man's privilege and duty. Nothing can more effectually cut off every pretence of authority over another man's conscience than this exhortation; we are not allowed to hearken to any who would arrogate to themselves a power of imposing upon us their sense of scripture, or presume to direct our faith, or the manner of our worship. He that hath an ear, which is requisite to vital godliness, and which, as we have seen, is the special gift of divine grace, is called upon, not to hear what the *churches* dictate, but what *the Spirit* saith unto the churches. No man therefore, nor any body of men, however sacred in their character, or at any time to be regarded, in point

of religion, farther than they agree with the voice of the Holy Ghost. Conscience is sacred to the authority of God; yea, and by this demand of the Lord every man is not barely *permitted*, but even *commanded* to hear with his own ear; he therefore that interposes his authority between my ear and the voice of the Spirit, acts a tyrannical and impious part, for every man by this word of the Lord is not only *entitled*, but also *obliged* to maintain the rights of his own conscience, as he will answer it to the Almighty. Thus, liberty of private judgment, that first and great privilege of Protestants, and of all true religion, is fixed on a solid basis, and never to be shaken to the end of the world. Thanks be to God, and our excellent prince and constitution, in these happy nations, we enjoy this freedom in its utmost extent; no point of faith, mode of worship, or whatever relates to that dear thing religion, is attempted to be imposed upon us. O that we may lead peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, and that our sensuality, lukewarmness, unbelief, and carnal contentions, may never deprive us of the invaluable privilege, or prevent our improving the same, to the glory of God, and our own everlasting advantage!

End of the Epistle to the Church at Sardis,

A DISSERTATION ON THE CONDUCT OF THE FAITHFUL IN THE DAYS OF MALACHI.

BOOK VI.

LECTURE XXVII.

The degenerate state of the Jews. What is implied in the saints speaking often one to another; topics of discourse. Reflections.

IT appears from the letter which we have opened and read, that a few remained upright amidst the threatening declensions at Sardis. Thus, in times of the greatest defection God hath reserved a people for himself; and it may be useful to see the measures they took, that, following their laudable example, we may in like manner preserve ourselves in an hour of temptation. No doubt these worthy persons, who stand commended of the Lord, were active in their duty; and, while they mourned the sad state of Zion, used every means in their power to maintain their integrity and hope; of this indeed we have no particulars, but, from other like instances on record, we may gather the inclination and practice of the saints in a time of disorder, of which none is more directly to our purpose than that of those in the days of Malachi, when religion and manners were sunk to a degree, perhaps below the mark of any former period of the church. I have therefore chose to subjoin a view of their conduct and the memorial taken of their zeal in the presence of the Lord. It is written in the third chapter of the prophesy, the 16th and 17th verses, as follows: “then they

that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” In this account we have the custom of the faithful, the regard which the Lord paid to them, and his gracious resolution in their favor; the first of these is the subject of this lecture.

THE imagination of some, that Malachi was an angel in the form of a man, seems whimsical and groundless; his name, though it signifies an angel, will not support their conjecture, for the same word is applied to the Messiah himself, chap. iii. 1. where the Father styles him *my messenger*; so that we may as soon question the proper humanity of Christ, as of this servant of the Lord. We are told, [2Pe 1:21](#), that the prophets, with whom Malachi is numbered, [Mt 11:10](#), were holy *men*, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Some take him to be the same with Ezra the scribe, who indeed was a preacher, and expounded the law to the people, but hath no criterion of a prophet in his character; it is thought, with more color of reason, that he was contemporary with Nehemiah; this, however, seems plain, and is generally allowed, that he was the last inspired messenger to ungrateful backsliding Israel, and that from his death prophecy ceased till the incarnation of the Son of God, being about the space of four hundred years, whose appearance was the more conspicuous for this long night of darkness and silence.

BUT our concern is rather with the moral and religious state of the Jews in his day, and, as hinted already, this was shamefully dissolute. Far be it that such a deluge of iniquity should again spread over any people or nation! They indulged to all manner of evil, and were sunk into the very dregs of corruption and wickedness. In ver. 5, they are charged with sorcery, adultery, false-swearing, oppression, injustice, and cruelty. It likewise appears that the most daring infidelity raged, insomuch that they impudently said: “Every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them,” which is in some respects worse than atheism itself; and, taunting the prophets who threatened them with vengeance,

they said, “Where is the God of judgment?” Chapter 2:17. No wonder these scoffers should profane the holiness of the Lord, and married the daughter of a strange god, yet they called themselves the children of God, and pretended to serve the most High; but at the same time were partial, hypocritical and presumptuous; like some niggardly Christians whose pitiful offering fall short of their ability as required, they deceitfully covered the altar with tears, while they polluted it with their torn and lame sacrifices, and feasted themselves with the lambs of the flock, having plenty of males to answer the appointments of the law; but the table of the Lord was contemptible, it was a weariness to serve him, and they scornfully snuffed at the provision of his house; yea, the priests themselves were ignorant, slothful, mercenary, and despised the name of the Lord, for which they were rendered base in the eyes of the people, a curse which seems entailed on time-serving and corrupt ministers in every age; for mankind in general, however void of religion themselves, seldom fail of heartily despising wicked men under a sacred character in short, the vileness of every rank in this depraved generation is scarce to be paralleled, and almost incredible; and though they were sharply reprov'd they received not correction, but, instead of repenting, were stout, and with insolence replied to the Lord: “Wherein have we robbed thee? wherein have we despised thy Name?” And, to conclude this melancholy subject, so wretched was the time that the more proud and wicked any man was the more he was caressed and applauded; such was the hateful and deplorable condition of Israel when Malachi was sent in the name of the Lord, and accordingly as a thick spreading cloud clothes the heavens with blackness, and as it were makes sackcloth their covering; so high and heavy charges on these heinous transgressors, and fearful threatenings of divine vengeance, extend through all this prophecy, insomuch that short of the account before us, so dark is the scene, that one might be tempted to think with Elijah, that not a saint was left, as if the Lord had totally forsaken his people; but on a sudden darts forth from this threatening cloud a ray from the Son of Righteousness to cheer us; a remnant appears that “feared the Lord, and that thought upon his Name!”

BUT what could these pious souls do? Their number was small, and it is probable also their outward condition comparatively mean, for it is seldom that others escape the pollutions of the day; and, from the sacrilege and profaneness complained of, with what is declared in this prophecy concerning men of that order, it seems no breach of charity to suppose that not a priest was to be found in this little company, at least no one of dignity or power was among them; what then was a few, poor and despised, though godly persons, capable of, in opposition to these floods of impiety and vice? Could they stem the rapid tide of corruption, or be likely to reform this abandoned race? Or to what purpose was it for them to open their lips to this scornful and hardened generation? In such evil times the righteous are silent, they have no safe or promising opportunity of speaking to the public in behalf of God and religion, yea, it may be, watch the door of their mouth against bosom friends and relations, [Mic 7:5](#). What then could be done? Must each, like a solitary dove, tabring on his breast, bewail himself alone? It is likely they mourned much apart, being greatly perplexed, though not in despair; they could find no satisfaction or relief in popular assemblies, but one way was left among themselves, and though it was attended with trouble and danger, this way they took, a path little trod in a day of licentiousness and carnal security. This track is no other than religious conference; they frequently discoursed together in uprightness and love: then, when immorality, profaneness and infidelity so much abounded, “they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another.” And their voice, as we shall presently see, came into the ears of the Lord of hosts with acceptance. In like manner they who love God, without riches, power, learning, or any other shining gift of nature or providence, by their holy converse, in his presence may greatly edify one another; an expedient more especially useful in a season of general departure from the ordinances of the Lord, and the habit of life which becomes those who fear him. This was the custom of these pious Israelites, however inferior they might be in many respects, with hearts full of concern for the glory of God, and a view to their own preservation and comfort, they were enabled by grace to confer together, to their unspeakable honor and advantage, as will hereafter be seen.

NOW this practice supposes, 1. That they had *frequent assemblies*. It was impossible to hold these conferences without meeting together, to which they who fear God have been always inclined, and particularly when they perceived any remarkable danger. Man is social in every state. “The companies of the wicked (says David) have robbed me; but I have not forgotten thy law,” [Ps 119:61](#). When the impious meet daily to countenance one another in their abominations, and to uphold the wretched course of infidelity, shall the righteous, whom they hate and oppose, forsake the assembling of themselves together, and lose the things they have gained? [Joh 2:8](#). They certainly will not; the saints, in the exercise of grace, will associate for their mutual support, and in defense of the truth, when the enemy comes in like a flood; and he that can allow himself to neglect this natural and necessary means of his own preservation, and of promoting the cause of piety in the world, does well to consider how the love of God dwells in his heart!

AGAIN, it implies that they *freely opened their minds to each other*. The Scripture is unacquainted with silent meetings, which are really vain and absurd. Religious assemblies are for the glory of God and our mutual profit; but, can these ends be answered where nothing is said? How can our united supplications and praises ascend to the Father, or instruction and comfort be conveyed to our hearts, in a meeting where a word is not uttered? It is therefore highly unreasonable to plead for or practice a total silence among the saints, when gathered together in the name of the Lord. The faithful referred to were otherwise taught; they opened their mouths, no doubt, to the Lord, in prayer and thanksgiving; but the report we are now considering is confined to their speeches one to another, which might be according to their ability from the word; but here is not so much a regard to the preaching of one qualified and called to that important service, which may be one means of establishing the children of God in their private assemblies; it refers to conference-meetings, in which they more freely and universally discoursed, everyone bearing his part; for in convention, like a bank, each companion has or should have his share; at these meetings of the faithful all in general speak in their order, in a

manner suited to the occasion and circumstances they were in, as the expression implies.

THIS leads to observe, that we are not to imagine that this was a light or common discourse. The Hebrew word דָּבַר rendered *spake* in the account, is very emphatical; it points to the order of their conferring together, and the propriety of what they delivered. The term is applied to God when he spake to Moses, and it is also used to express the eloquence of Aaron, whose lips were prepared to speak well, or in an excellent manner; it is not barely to say, but it signifies an orderly continued wise speech, such as may delight and profit the hearer, and shows that these pious souls were greatly assisted in this humble attempt, and endowed with a Spirit from on high; the confused and rude way of some, under a pretence of freedom in their assemblies, is carnal, indecent and vain, and no more to be compared with the conference commended in scripture, than the babbling of fools with the serious and pertinent discourses of the learned and wise, in the most respectable society. These holy men met under a deep concern for the name of the Lord, and their mutual safety and encouragement in his ways, which were despised; and when the people of God come together in this frame and view, whether in a formal or more familiar manner, the Spirit is often poured out from on high; hence their lips move sweetly and wisely. O the reverence, fervor and propriety with which they who fear the Lord sometimes speak to one another, under the influence of his grace, which he hears with delight!

IT is neither presumptuous nor vain, but may be useful to conjecture the topics or heads of this course the faithful went upon in these meetings. Indeed, no man now living was present, but, from the nature of the thing, and from universal experience under the like circumstances, we may easily apprehend, and even venture to affirm, that the following subjects had a place in their conference:

I. "THE name of the Lord." This includes his nature, counsels and cause, as we shall have occasion to show when we enter on the character of the pious. These Israelites spake the truth in their heart, and no doubt their discourse turned on that which occupied their thoughts. They spake

one to another concerning the holiness, justice, power and faithfulness of the Lord their God. Every one in his temple speaks of his glory. Discourses on the name of the Lord in this sense are very strengthening to the faith of God's people, and tends to engage their hearts towards him. Besides, we may suppose that they conferred on the prophecies, history and promises contained in revelation. Indeed, before the invention of printing, copies of the Scripture were scarce; Bibles are now very cheap; but in those days a few leaves of that sacred volume would fetch a considerable sum; nevertheless some of the company might furnish the rest, and others from their memories assist the assembly; hence they might speak to one another on the promises of the Messiah, God's covenant with Abraham, and his repeated engagements to save them that fear him; they might likewise discourse on the seasonable and wonderful appearance of the Almighty for the preservation of his church, and the reviving his cause when in danger, by Noah, Moses, and also in the days of Elijah, when faith seemed to fail, and true religion was ready to expire. These considerations, with the immutability of the divine counsel, which ensures the completion of the elect, afford strong consolation to the faithful, and fill them with courage under the darkest scenes of providence.

2. THEIR hearts were full of concern about the abominations by which the name of the Lord was blasphemed, and therefore no doubt they dwelt upon the threatening errors and disorders which prevailed. In this sad state of things, as hinted before, they might be rather discouraged from speaking to others who, being hardened in their iniquity, would only deride and abuse them, and thereby add to their guilt; but to one another, in those conference-meetings they freely unburthened their minds on the melancholy subject, which might be useful to excite a becoming indignation against the provoking transgressions of the times, to keep them on their guard, and to animate them in holding fast their profession. And further,

3. IT may be presumed that they spake to one another concerning the snares that were about them, and the temptations they were under, at least in some measure, to comply with the sinful custom of the day, and thereby to fall from their steadfastness. In a season of general defection, men full

of subtlety lie in wait, if possible, to pervert from the ways of the Lord, and there are commonly popular acts in practice, by which some are overtaken to their hurt; these differ according to the taste of the times, and are craftily adapted to the temper and circumstances of the object; but whatever may be the form of the nets which are spread, it is natural for those who are on the watch, to acquaint one another with what they perceive, and mention the instances in which they prevail, that, being sufficiently warned, they may escape the paths of the destroyer. To this it may be needful, at times, to call to remembrance their frailty, and how liable the best are, through the deceit of the flesh, to be overtaken and fall into sin.

BUT, of all the subjects which may turn up in the conference of the saints in a time of apostasy, there is none more common or useful than that of their own experience. By experience I mean the efficacy of the gospel in the heart, which is through the operation of the Spirit, and that communion with God and sense of his love, which the believer may have found in his attendance on divine institutions. That the word comes not in word only but also in power, sufficient to invest the subject with an assurance of the truth, and that they who embrace it with love, and obey it from the heart, have enjoyed delightful fellowship with the Lord in his ways, must be owned by those who pretend to the credit of divine revelation; and indeed, he who has felt nothing of this internal effect by the word unto repentance and faith, is a stranger to vital religion; for we are expressly told that the word thus “effectually worketh in them that believe,” [1Th 2:13](#). It is not barely a fact which has in some degree once been found with the Christian, much less is it confined to those who are strong in faith, this effect is common to them who believe; nor were the faithful of old without this experience, the symptoms of which are, hatred of sin, desires after holiness, and joy in the Lord; now, however some under a specious pretence of humility, and the deceit of the heart, would take Christians off from a regard to this as an uncertain and transitory thing, if any such experience exists, to hesitate which is to favor of deism itself, let reason judge if a remembrance thereof is not a natural and powerful means to establish its subject in an age that is loose and profane,

for this man has the witness in himself to the truth from which he is tempted to despair; he has felt the power of those doctrines, which the wicked contradict and blaspheme; and can a man be easily moved from the truth which hath been effectual to his growth in grace, and communion with God? He that doth the truth cometh to the light, and will bring the feelings of his heart, as well as his external obedience, to the standard of scripture, for he is concerned to manifest its sobriety, and that it is agreeable to the analogy of faith, and to the common testimony of the saints, for even experimental religion is substantially the same in the called, and nothing can be more rational than to improve that experience, the reality of which is evident to his conscience, into an argument for holding fast his profession, for though no man's private experience is a proof to another that his religion is divine, yet to himself a more solid evidence of this he cannot possess, miraculous testimony or immediate inspiration alone excepted, even that best of internal evidence which belongs to the Bible, namely, the purity of its doctrines and precepts, is not equal to that of its sanctifying effects in the heart, of which the believer is conscious on reflection. This being the case, it is easy to see the advantage that must arise to the faithful by a free communication of their experience to each other, to confirm them and to animate their perseverance amidst the scorn of unbelievers, or licentious professors, for, what man who hath this evidence of the truth in his heart will despise or forsake it? The apostle was animated by this effect of the word upon others: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to the salvation of every one that believeth," [Ro 1:16](#). How much more shall a man be encouraged to abide in his profession, who finds himself the subject of this divine power? May the Reader manifest his knowledge of the like testimony by his walk, for I presume that he is convinced that no article or topic of discourse is more profitable among the children of God, in a perilous time, than what relates to their acquaintance with experimental religion. Other particulars might be subjoined, namely, their infinite obligations to Jesus, who was sacrificed for them, the contradictions he endured, and the shame he despised when he suffered on the cross; they will likewise remember their solemn engagements to him and his people, the miserable end of apostates, and

by every argument in their power excite one another to strive against sin and to hold out to the end; and, to say no more, they will not forget the grace there is in Christ to support and deliver them, nor the glory they shall obtain at his appearance and kingdom; but time would fail, and the Reader will think these hints are sufficient.

IT appears then, that Christians are not silent when together, for want of subjects adapted to their comfort in this state of trial. The things of the Spirit afford a rich variety of matter for discourse; yet, alas, how often is it been that, being straitened in themselves, they are dumb, or rarely converse on what relates to the kingdom of God; but when they are enabled to open their bosom and speak freely on these divine topics, they find comfort by the mutual faith of each other; it knits them together in love, and has a powerful tendency to revive their Spirits when drooping, insomuch that sometimes they meet in heaviness through manifold temptations, and return with thanksgiving and joy, being ready as it were to take off their harps from the willows, and with melody tune them to the God of their life, so that they who omit such opportunities little think how much they lose by their absence, and lie out of the way of their own great advantage.

FROM this instance of piety, it also appears that true religion is social. Indeed, the godly man is obliged to shun the vain multitude. He is in a manner sequestered from the world, and must often retire, it may be sometimes from the best of company, for, however some live, private devotion is needful to a close walk with God; to be unacquainted with this, is to be a stranger to faith, or at least such are declining apace from its virtue, and will one day bitterly weep for their folly; now, on account of these necessary withdrawments, the believer may be thought an unsociable creature, but this is for want of understanding or considering the nature and tendency of his life, which, while it induces him into his chamber to converse with himself and his Lord, that the life of religion may be maintained in his soul, by that very means preserves an habitual sense of the love of God to him, and his approaching salvation, which naturally create a desire, yea, and sometimes a longing after those assemblies in which he may hope for a taste of that joy, in the fulness of

which the spirits of the just sing round the throne of God and the Lamb. Thus, the believer's closet fits him for the sanctuary, and his private intercourse with heaven, prepares and disposes him for the communion of saints; nor is any effect of divine love in the heart more certain, than that of a readiness to meet them on every proper occasion, and a delight in their presence. Some under a high profession of the gospel may be cynical and reserved, but it is unjust to charge their disagreeable temper on the religion of Jesus, the genius of which is quite the reverse; nothing can be more directly opposite to an evangelical spirit, to which brotherly love is essential, than any thing that favors of a monkish life, which some men, through weakness or design, plead for and practice. The gospel leads its subjects to associate often, and to an open frank conversation one with another; so that it is no good sign, and far from being amiable, when persons affect the unsociable habit which some men wear; a habit which as it is contrary to Scripture-example, is no less prejudicial to the interest of religion, for it tends to deprive the faithful of one principal means of their confirmation and joy.

IT is an observation grounded on universal experience, that a man is known by his company. Thus, the friends of the believer are those who fear God; his natural or civil connections in life may expose him to very unpleasing society at times; but he that walks in the Spirit will not choose to associate with the ignorant and profane; he is, with David, "a companion of all them that fear God;" and he delights in the saints who are the excellent of the earth; hence he is earnest with the Lord in such language as this: "let those that fear thee return unto me, and those that have known by testimonies." Art thou, Reader, a companion of the ungodly, thou art either ungodly thyself, or strangely seduced; beware of the plagues that are coming on the wicked, but I would hope thy fellowship is with the righteous; be thankful for thy happy situation; it is a singular advantage to enjoy their favor and company, but a mercy still greater is an heart to improve it.

AND, are the advantages of Christian conferences so great and important? May we not justly lament that it is so much neglected, or rather laid aside? That there is now little of it in the ordinary discourse of

believers, almost every one knows, a sorrowful symptom of their hearts being too seldom employed on heavenly subjects; hence many are lean and unfruitful, but, as the perfection of Christian society lies in a gospel church state, the interest of religion is most effectually promoted by the gatherings of those who are joined in the Lord, it is therefore melancholy indeed, when members of the same church either speak not at all, or rarely say any thing to one another about the things of God. Casual and ordinary meetings of the faithful ought to be improved to their spiritual profit, but the principal and only sufficient means of promoting the kingdom of God, is the fellowship of the saints in the order of the gospel, to which every other pious endeavour must be subordinate; hence the old serpent, in every age, would entice men from a regard to this divine institution; in some instances, they who belong to this or the other community, omit the assemblies of their brethren, and seem to be religious abroad, which is strange; but, from what we have seen, the advantage of conferring together is manifestly great, it should therefore be encouraged in every church, without which one considerable end of communion and means of keeping up the power of godliness is lost. O that these ancient worthies were followed! Can any thing be more highly approved than their practice? or can it with reason be doubted whither their conduct is transmitted for the imitation of posterity? Why then, Beloved, is the laudable custom discouraged or forsaken? Things are not so bad with us as in the time of those whose example is before us; but, are there no appearances to awaken our concern for the Name of the Lord, and to put us on every method to quicken one another in his way? Why then do we omit this excellent means of promoting the knowledge and love of God? Will you say that religious conferences have been abused? Be it so; what means of grace may not be abused by vain and self-confident persons? Shall the children of God be silent, or refrain from speaking one to another, because some base hypocritical men have taken occasion from these exercises to intrude and exalt themselves, against the order and peace of the church? This method of edification is so natural, that it is scarce to be avoided by them who are earnestly seeking the things which are above, insomuch that whenever the work of the Lord is going forward, conference-meetings abound, and the enlightened gladly lay hold of every

opportunity for speaking on divine subjects, and the constant use of this practice in a church is of great service towards the mutual acquaintance and love of the members, discerning of gifts for the ministry, preventing apostasies, and prompting the power of godliness among them. O that the faithful were enlarged, and their lips circumcised to speak to one another, that they were free to communicate their experience and knowledge, and to lay open the temptations, fears, hope and joy, which exercise their hearts in a life of faith; nothing can be more rational or becoming their character. By this means many a church has been preserved, or revived, yea, and in some instances long sustained without a stated minister, till one has been obtained, with a blessing, under whom it hath flourished again; it is therefore to be wished that the example before us was universally followed, and spiritual concurrence encouraged in every Christian community. A practice so highly pleasing to the Lord, and conducive to the interest of personal and social religion, must surely be the object of their desire, who hope to be his in the day when he makes up his jewels, which will abundantly recompence the self-denial that may attend their zeal for his Name.

LECTURE XXVIII

What included in thinking on the Name of the Lord. His hearkening to his people's discourse, and book of remembrance, explained. Reflections.

WE have seen the righteous in conference together at a time when the Name of the Lord was profaned, and have heard, as it were, the subjects on which they discoursed. These exercises are esteemed, in proportion to the increase or decay of vital godliness, insomuch that we may in a measure discover the state of religion among any body of people, by their regard to such pious and needful assemblies. When the work of the Lord is going forward, the affections of his saints are raised towards heaven, then they delight in those interviews before him which tend to promote his interest, and their mutual advantage. At first conversion men naturally desire to tell what God hath done for their souls, and to be further enlightened, and it is the joy of more advanced believers, when in a becoming frame, to assist their young brethren. Hence, they gladly embrace every fit opportunity of coming together. To this some object and say, that these meetings interfere with the Christian's obligations in other respects; but, however some idle persons may have neglected their duty, and given just cause of complaint, it is far from being impossible for the disciples of Jesus, who are nearly situated, to hold *frequent*, I had almost said, *daily* [As hinted p. 288, if people delighted in spiritual exercises, they might contrive frequent meetings without a neglect of their civil concerns. The daily prayers, and other religious service in the Established Church, and also among the dissenters, in almost every market-town and city in the kingdom, not excepting the metropolis itself, evidently prove that our forefathers found this to be fact, otherwise, what should be the occasion or motive to the many donations and voluntary subscriptions for the support of such opportunities? We may flatter ourselves; but, for the most part, absence from these appointments is not owing to necessary business, but to a want

of inclination, and the truth is, that we are too plainly now become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. I take leave further to observe concerning these occasional meetings of the faithful, that, however in the general they were promiscuous from the beginning, there are instances recorded in which they were composed of women only, who exercised, at least in prayer, one among another; in all appearance this was the case in the house of Mary, Ac 12:12. At this meeting for prayer many were gathered, but not a man seen among them; and from what Peter says, ver. 17, it should seem that neither James, nor any of the brethren were there; but, that in which Lydia was converted, an account of which we have in chap. xvi. is still more to the purpose. We are told that Paul spake to the women which resorted thither; and will any person suppose that the men withdrew on the entrance of the apostle, or that he spake not to all who were present? To say that the greater part were women, or that Paul discoursed with these women before worship began, is at least an improbable conjecture, and as it were begging the question; no circumstance is mentioned that would induce an unprejudiced person to conclude that a man, besides the apostle and his companions, came to this meeting: And, why should not women, endowed with grace exercise one among another in private? Indeed their silence is required in open and public assemblies it being, as declared in 1Co 14:35 a shame for women to speak in the church; nor should any presume to encourage a practice in direct opposition to the testimony of God; but, if it is absolutely unlawful for a woman to pray or to open her mouth on points of religion, in any assembly whatever, where is the pertinency or design of the apostle's discourse in chap. 11:5,6? Several other passages show that women were employed in a spiritual way for the benefit of the disciples, namely, Ac 18:27; Ro 16:1; Php 4:3; Re 2:20 &c. which the Reader may consult at his leisure. Indeed, it seems unreasonable to restrain Christian women from any manner of edifying one another, in their power, that is decent, and that consists with the order of the church, by the Lord, and his inspired ministers. In one word, I see nothing in nature or Scripture that forbids a woman the liberty of praying, or otherwise exercising her ability, in private or special society, which I the rather mention, because without this allowance, in some circumstances, one means of religion is entirely lost, particularly family-prayer, and that even where the rising generation is nearly concerned, and there is reason to fear that this groundless prejudice against a woman's being exercised in a social way under any consideration whatever, hath occasioned a sad neglect of that branch of worship in some, who might otherwise have led those under their care to the throne of grace, with advantage, though, to their praise be it spoken, a few of that sex are not ashamed of their duty to God, and the souls committed to their charge.] assemblies for spiritual exercise; this may certainly be done without any impeachment of their character in civil and natural life, and it has always been the case in a flourishing state of the church. Widely different from this, was the period in which the faithful referred to were accustomed to meet; there was then not a bare coldness or neglect, but an aversion to the way of the Lord, which is ever attended with a popular contempt of those who delight in waiting upon him. Under these circumstances we may suppose that their meetings were private, or that they who followed them were exposed to reproach and derision; but the God whom they served disdained not to own them, whose record on high in their favor, infinitely overbalanced

the disgrace and trial they met with from men, which we are now to consider. “And the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his Name.” To think on the Name of the Lord is a criterion of genuine piety, it may therefore be useful to open this critical note, and show unto whom it belongs, and then see the attention which Jehovah gave to the godly in their meetings, and the transaction which ensued this gracious notice of their zeal for His glory.

THE Name of the Lord, in this place, is his public authority, worship and interest; or in other words, it is his truth, ordinances, and visible church, and comprehends every thing that relates to real piety, in its power and form; it is the cause of God and truth, and stands opposed to infidelity, profaneness and vice, of every kind and degree, whereby the most High is dishonored and blasphemed, as in the corrupt and degenerate age of Malachi: To this agrees [Mal 1:11](#), “My Name, saith the Lord of hosts, shall be great among the Gentiles,” i.e. as appears from the sentence immediately following, “in every place incense shall be offered to his Name, and a pure offering,” which came to pass through the obedience of faith, when the gospel obtained in the world.

NOW to think on this Name, is not barely to have a thought about it, which the wicked may have; nor doth it preclude all concern about civil and temporal things, without which no man can fill up his station in providence, or adorn a Christian profession; neither is it impossible for a man who is entitled to this character through one occasion and another, to have the Name of the Lord out of his thoughts for a season: his experience was rare, who laments in his diary, that on a certain day, for the space of an hour, he was a stranger to a thought of Jesus and his name. Alas, how many hours and days pass away without an affecting sense of his love, and concern for his glory!

THIS regard for the name of the Lord, lies, 1. In an habitual concern for his honor, and the interest of religion, which is inherent to a principle of grace, and inseparable from the love of God in the soul. The new creature breathes after the glory of its divine Author; so that it is as natural for the

righteous to think on the Name of the Lord, as the thought of foolishness is to the wicked. This sacred habit in the faithful appears to be universal from [Isa 26:8](#). “The desire of our soul is to thy Name and remembrance of thee.” Herein lies a critical difference between the natural and spiritual man’s thoughts of God, that in one it is forced, disagreeable, against the prevailing bent of his mind, and what he would gladly dismiss; whereas in the other it is of choice, accompanied with delight, and what he seeks after, as David, “My meditation on him shall be sweet,” [Ps 104:34](#). Which leads, 2. To observe, that the first sensible and actual exercise of this divine habit is a fixed and deep intention of mind, contemplating the interests and glory of God: The word imports a close inspection, as the ingenuous artificer turns about a curious work, and views it on every side, that he may finish the same: so that one obvious and essential idea, is that of employing our faculties in ruminating on the Name of the Lord. He therefore who is a stranger to the study of those things which belong to the kingdom of God, has no pretense to this character; nor is it merely to meditate, but, 3. To think, with a solicitude of mind, about its prosperity, with contrivance how to promote it. This thoughtfulness turns not only on the excellency and importance of the Name of Jehovah, but also on the danger it is in through the declensions and apostasies of the times, and implies our chief care and study to save, revive, and increase it. The word is sometimes rendered desire: and he that doth not lay to heart the welfare of Zion, and contrive what in him lies towards the interest of Christ in his day, falls short of the description. In a word, it imports doing to our utmost, whatever may tend to the honor of God, or exerting our talents of every kind for his glory. Some observe from this clause, that here is comfort for the poor and weak, who can scarce say or do any thing for promoting the cause of the Redeemer in the world; the promise is not to them who do, but to those who think on the Name of the Lord; but every one who answers this character will be active according to his ability. In vain do they pretend to a cordial regard for the cause of God, who withhold any thing in their power to promote it; and what man is not capable of doing something? who cannot pray for Zion, appear in her assemblies, and be more or less active for the peace of Jerusalem?

THUS, to think on the Name of the Lord is no superficial transitory or fruitless thing, but a solid, permanent, and choice experience of the faithful, and carries in it the utmost solicitude and endeavour of the subject for the glory of God. Now whoever is thus employed will find himself grieved, or rejoiced, as the interest of religion declines or prospers; he will also deny himself, when needful, and, if called to it, submit to the lowest or most difficult office of love, for the sake of Christ and his people. Happy the man who hath this noble testimony of his conscience! The Lord will think upon him in a time of trouble, and great is his honor, as will hereafter appear.

AND, hath the Reader a claim in this note of the righteous? Is he conscious of a like solicitude for the Name of the Lord, and concern for his interest in the world? Alas, some nominal Christians openly discover a want of this regard for the welfare of Zion; they live in a sensual manner, and are not grieved for the apostasies of the times; but awful is the threatening: "If ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my Name, saith the Lord of Hosts, I will even send a curse upon you." O that careless backsliders, who neglect the honor of God, could tremble at his word, and repent of their folly! But, my Friend, is, "hallowed be thy Name," engraved in thine heart? Hast thou a cordial concern for the cause of religion in a degenerate age? Rejoice; cherish every thought which the love of God may excite in thy breast for his glory, pursue it with vigor, and seize the opportunity for action; it may call for much self-denial; the world may scoff, and wanton professors reproach thee, but the eye of the Lord is upon thee; dare to be holy, and zealous in his ways; thou shalt not lose thy reward!

DECENT conceptions of Jehovah will prevent low and carnal ideas of this report of his grace; when we speak of the Lord's hearkening to his people, we are to guard against every conceit unworthy his glorious perfections, and not indulge a thought to the dishonor of his infinite mind. Far be it to imagine that the eternal God is at any uncertainty about what is spoken in secret, or that his acquaintance with what passes in the most private assemblies of his saints, depends on that formal attention, by which they attain to the knowledge of one another's discourse; bodily

parts and gestures are no doubt attributed to God by way of allusion, and denote a similitude in his dispensations with the conduct of men under the like circumstances; Thus, his supporting grace is described by holding with his hand, and putting underneath his arm; his regard of the state and supplications of his people, by opening his eyes and his ears; and when it is declared that he hearkened and heard what these gracious persons said in their meetings, I apprehend the following ideas are included, 1. That he is *present*. They who listen to discourse are supposed to be in company, or near, at least within hearing: it is true the Almighty fills heaven and earth, and in this sense is always at hand and not for off, [Jer 23:23-24](#). But we know that there is a special and gracious presence vouchsafed to them who fear God; He is nigh unto all who call upon Him in truth, [Ps 145:18](#). Of this there was a symbol in Solomon's temple, and the promise is given to the smallest assembly of his saints, [Mt 18:20](#). And it is frequently found, that when two or three are gathered in his Name, they have reason to say: Is not the Lord in this place! Again, *silence* is another idea connected with hearkening. The Lord is said to keep silence when he speaks not in judgment to the wicked, [Ps 50:3](#). Also [Jer 8:6](#), it is said, that he hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright, no man repented him of his wickedness, i.e. the Lord gave them space for repentance, but they did not improve his long-suffering and grace; so that this may intend, among other things, the forbearance of the Almighty, who could have looked on the proud and abased them, but he saw meet, as it were, to stand still in the course of his providence, and suffer the wicked to prevail, which, however a trial to the righteous, gave them an opportunity of testifying their zeal for his Name, which turned to their advantage. It also implies his *peculiar attention*. Men listen in order to observe what is said; and the Lord hearkening to the conversation of those who think on his Name, essentially includes his particular notice of whatever they spake; with this stands connected an idea of his *perfect knowledge* of all their discourse; the end of hearing is to understand the report; indeed among men this end may be lost; through distance, the lowness of the speaker, or some occasional obstruction, a person may hearken in vain, but nothing can prevent the all-perfect Jehovah from an exact and full acquaintance with every thing which passeth in the conference of his people. Finally, it

denotes his *approbation and delight*: “let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice,” [Song 2:14](#). A melodious sound engages the attention, and the Lord harkens to the prayer and pious discourse of his saints, in their religious assemblies, as one who has a taste for music inclines his ear to a sound and good instrument, played by a skillful hand. These are the natural and principle ideas contained in this wonderful sentence, namely, the presence of the Lord in the assemblies of his saints, his silence, his attention, his perfect knowledge of every thing they say, and the pleasure he takes in their concern for his glory: their earnest supplications, and affectionate speeches one to another, out of love to his Name, ascend up before him, as pillars of smoke, “with myrrh and frankincense, perfumed with all powder of the merchant,” [Song 3:6](#). All which is very inciting, and may well induce us to follow this noble example of piety, and especially when we consider the honorable notice which is taken of these eminent saints, to which we proceed.

“AND a book of remembrance was written before him.” It has already been shown that there are many kinds of books mentioned in scripture, to be opened when the judgment is set. A book of remembrance is a register of names or events, to which recourse may be had on proper occasions. The allusion is to the custom of princes, who order their scribes or secretaries to write down certain important events, in their presence. Thus, when the conspiracy of Bigthen and Teresh, certified by Esther in Mordecai’s name, was proved, it was written in the book of the Chronicles before the king at court, i. e. in the royal presence, which was afterward produced, and his faithful servant, who discovered the matter, rewarded, chap. vi. 3. In like manner the Lord is here represented, seeing with his own eyes a true record of what he had heard with his ears from those who feared him, whose pious affection, fidelity and courage, he determines to recompence, with a glory not to be fully expressed. The eternal omniscient Jehovah needs no memorial; but this manner of speaking after the usage of men, denotes his delight in these saints, his everlasting remembrance of their love, and the certain reward of his grace, as may be seen by comparing the passage with [Isa 49:16](#). and [Ho 7:2](#). This memorial was written before him, i.e. under his eye and inspection, to be continually in

his sight, or laid up in the archives of heaven, above the reach of any who would erase or destroy it, that nothing might be lost, but that every instance of their holy zeal might appear in that day, when the righteous shall be crowned in his presence. Considerations of a most enlivening nature, and admirably adapted to inspire them with an unshaken resolution to the end of their course.

THE particulars of the glory assigned these advocates for God and religion, are at present referred, but in general we are told, that the record was for them. It was not like that which Isaiah was directed to inscribe against the degenerate children of Israel, in which was inserted their rebellion and ruin; no, this is a register highly in their favor; indeed it contained the names and conference of these holy persons, but the phrase expresses more than its being merely of or concerning them, and points at the tenor and design of this writing, namely, that it was to their honor, and to secure their future and eternal advantage. In a word, this memorial is revealed not for their sakes only, who lived in Malachi's days, but also for the consideration and joy of them who think upon the Name of the Lord in every place, to the end of the world; and he that believes will hold fast his integrity, however tried, and reckon that his present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the dignity and steadfastness of his acceptance with the Lord at his coming.

HOW much to be admired is the condescension and grace of the most High! That the infinite and adorable God should thus bow down to his creatures, or hearken to the feeble voice of his imperfect saints in their little assemblies, is truly astonishing! May we not justly adopt the words of the Royal consecrator, when, on his knees in the temple, and with expanded hands towards heaven, he draws back as it were with holy amazement, and say, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth!" The thrones in heaven bend, to behold this wonderful kindness of Jehovah to his people! That the glorious Lord of universal creation, who also, in his state as mediator, is far above all principalities and powers, and whose ears are continually saluted with the adorations and songs of the innumerable spirits above, should stoop, and be taken with the groans and tears, and broken conferences of them that fear him below; this is

wonderful indeed, and can only be resolved into that Sovereign love which passeth understanding, and which first brought him down from his glory in which he shone with the Father, to humble himself to the shame and death of the cross, that he might redeem us to God by his blood!

THIS throws a lustre on the conference of the faithful, and should engage them to be frequently speaking one to another. The presence and ear of the Lord are a glory on the assembly of his people, however small or despised. The reputation of any society draws many after it; and if men sought the honor which comes from God only, they would certainly delight in those meetings, which they too often shun. It is natural to frequent the assemblies we apprehend to our credit and advantage; how strange is it then that a good man can be unsociable in this respect, or refuse to join in an exercise so rational, so approved of the Lord, and so beneficial to himself, and to the dearest interest he has!

UNDER a persuasion of this divine pretence and notice, with what reverence and sobriety should we behave in our assemblies! In a meeting where every thing that passes is recorded in heaven, and the Lord is present himself, who can allow a vain thought or trifling expression? Would a man of sense or modesty behave unseemly, or say any thing disagreeable in the presence or hearing of a wise and respectable governor or prince? Would he not be careful to avoid whatever might offend his highness and study to honor and please him? Impertinent and foolish discourse among them who profess to fear God, on any occasion, is *low*, and unworthy their character; yet, alas, if this book of remembrance was laid open before us; could we read without blushing? How many hours that are spent, even in the company of Christians, stand ready to accuse us? Our speech should always be good, that it may minister grace to the hearers, but in religious meetings, more especially we should keep our hearts with all diligence, and behave in an orderly, decent, humbly and cautious manner, as in the sight of the Lord. A due sense of the record taken in heaven of what is said among the saints on earth, would check the boldness of some, who speak, or rather prate, without thinking, and give just offence. Beloved, we are not to be rash with our mouth, but pray for a spirit of wisdom, that we may know how to conduct ourselves in the

house of God, who dwells in the midst of his people. This holy guard in the assemblies of the saints is perfectly consistent with a becoming freedom in expressing our thoughts and experience, or whatever may tend to the promoting of vital religion.

BUT, thou art ready to object, my talents are mean, I can say or do little or nothing for the cause; and on that account am tempted to absent from the meetings of the brethren. Thou hast the greater need to attend them; they are an excellent means of strengthening the weak, and increasing the light and capacity of those who fear God, and, where is the uprightness of thy complaint, if thou art not seeking more grace? It is possible that pride may lurk at the bottom of this specious pretence; is it decent to say, I will not employ the capacity I have, because it is not equal to that which some others obtain? Wilt thou refuse to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in the distribution of his gifts? Or, canst thou with reason, expect to be further entrusted, if thou dost not improve the talent thou hast? Be clothed with humility, and do not think thyself utterly incapable of serving the interest of religion. A personal appearance among the saints, is in itself a means of those assemblies, in which they contrive and act for the Name of the Lord; and, is not this in thy power? Thou hast not the eloquence of Aaron or the tongue of Apollos, yea, it may be thou canst scarce speak at all, yet, if with real concern for the honor of God, you assist with your presence before him, he knows thy desires, and his ear is open to the voice of thine heart. It is an honor to be qualified for pleading the cause of God, and for edifying his church, but his gracious memorial in behalf of his people is not confined to those who speak best, or even to them who do most, but extends to all who think on his Name. Upon the whole, it appears that there is no reason to be discouraged on account of thy weakness, nor is that an excuse for thy non-attendance with the faithful in their conference-meetings.

AND, what is the contempt, ill-will, or reproaches of men, or any other trials to be met with in thus seeking the kingdom of God? The world may deem it weak and superstitious, and they who are addicted to pleasure, and attend all assemblies but that of the saints, may pronounce it affected singularity, or even doubt the sincerity of those who follow them; they

will object and lay every stumbling block they can in thy way, if not maliciously watch for thy halting, and magnify every failing against thee; yea and further, thou mayest be forsaken by some who were once thy zealous companions, see little success, and even for a season be in darkness of soul. Thus, the Lord may hide himself, and keep silence awhile, nevertheless thy name is written in heaven; a book of remembrance is there; not a thought, a sigh, a tear, a word, or an action, shall be lost or forgotten. Then be not ashamed; though out of the books of some men, to thy present disadvantage, and the contempt of vain persons; thou art noted in this book of God, precious in his sight, and shalt receive at his hands a crown of glory which fadeth not away,

To conclude: should not the gracious inclination and regard of the Lord to his Saints when discoursing together on his name, excite their attention to him? It belongs to the faithful to hear whatever the Lord God will speak, and his hearkening to them is one motive to this obedience of faith. “The companions hearken to thy voice,” [Song 8:13](#). It is not only disobedient but ungrateful to neglect his voice, whose ear is attentive to ours. Blush, Christian, if thy conscience tells thee thou hast at any time discovered a want of regard to the authority and love of thy Lord, who is ever waiting to be gracious unto thee! In a word, is a book of remembrance written before him for thee? Let a memorial of his free and wonderful grace be written on the table of thine heart; bind it on thine arm, or rather let it be graven on the palms of thy hands, to animate thy zeal for his glory, that thou mayest appear to be his in that day when he makes up his jewels.

LECTURE XXIX.

Lord of Hosts; whence that magnificent title; the day when he will make up his jewels; and what implied in so doing.

THAT a book of remembrance was written before the Lord, in favor of his people, might justly inspire them with courage under all their temptations, but he is graciously pleased to make a further revelation of his will, and to unfold this sacred memorial; not to indulge a vain curiosity, but that they might be filled with peace and joy in believing, and press towards the mark of this glorious prize. This is the record: “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” Other passages intimate the notice God takes of the thoughts, affections, resolutions, prayers, tears and services of his saints, and they warrant us to conclude that these are all punctually inscribed in this book; but here we have an express recital of its contents, from whence the faithful may certainly know what is written in heaven concerning them. And, who can forbear with the Psalmist to admire and say: “O Lord, how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!”

THIS is not the conjecture of man but the counsel of God, on which alone that hope depends, which is the anchor of the soul; it is what the Lord of hosts saith; a distinguishing character first adopted by Hannah, when she vowed in the bitterness of her soul, [1Sa 1:11](#). Jehovah is the Lord of hosts, as he ruleth in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, in which respect the number of his forces are not

to be told, they comprehend every creature on whom his light shines, [Job 25:3](#). In this illustrious character, are displayed the majesty, power, and glory of the most High over all; but I apprehend it chiefly respects him as King of saints, and as the commander of the people he hath redeemed; it seems a title peculiar to Jehovah the Son, and to be originally derived from his conducting the Israelites out of Egypt into Canaan, of whom it is said, [Ex 6:26](#). that they were brought “from the land of Egypt, according to their armies or hosts.” And again, chapter 12:41. “In the selfsame day it came to pass that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt;” and accordingly the ark on which the Shekinah rested was called by the “Name of the Lord of hosts, who dwelt between the cherubims,” [2Sa 6:2](#). This agrees with the character under which he appeared to Joshua, [Jos 5:15](#). “The Captain of the Lord’s hosts,” to whom divine honor is paid, which corresponds with [Isa 55:4](#). where the Father saith, “I have given him—a leader and commander of the people.” Now this significant and singular character is assumed in the proclamation before us; and this was the grand and striking manner in which the prophets came forth: “Thus, saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts,” from whose mouth the report comes to the heart with authority, and being mixed with faith, produces an assured expectation of the promise; for who shall question the word of the omnipotent and unchangeable God?

AND what ear is not open when the Lord of Hosts speaks? Who is not waiting to know what the King of heaven will pronounce at the head of his troops? he will surely declare something great and good, like himself, to the joy of his saints; of this David was confident, [Ps 85:6](#). “The Lord will speak peace to his people and to his saints” nor was he mistaken: he utters his voice from his heavenly throne, under whom rank, in order, the innumerable company of angels, archangels, cherubims and seraphims, with the patriarchs, apostles, and a multitude of spirits made perfect, who were redeemed unto God by his blood, all silent to know, and swift to perform his sovereign pleasure; and lo his command is to inscribe this decree from his lips! “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him” no less honor is insured them who think on

the Name of the Lord: it contains all their salvation and all their desire; less could not satisfy them; more is not wanting to render them completely happy for ever.

THE period referred to is the last and great day; for though the destruction of the Jews is pointed at in this prophecy, on the credit of which, as confirmed by our Lord, many fled [*To Pella, a city of Macedonia.*] and escaped, whom some count these jewels; yet this fearful instance of vengeance, however like that yet to come, did not amount to the description given of this day of the Lord, which we are told, “shall burn as an oven, and utterly consume all that do wickedly,” insomuch that it shall leave them neither root nor branch: but this was not the case in the destruction of Jerusalem; indeed multitudes perished in a terrible manner, yet their posterity remain to this day in sin and unbelief; neither did the righteous then tread down the wicked as ashes under the soles of their feet; nor shall we discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not; all which is declared of this day, till Jesus is revealed from heaven to judge the secrets of men, and render to every one according to his deeds.

IN this gracious declaration from the Lord of hosts, we are to note, whose property the righteous shall be at his glorious appearance, the mercy they shall then obtain, and how that solemn and interesting period is described. It begins with the claim which the Lord will make in his people at his appearance and kingdom, “they shall be mine.” Every creature is the Lord’s, who is the Maker of all things; he hath an absolute propriety and universal dominion over the works of his hands. All souls are his, angels and men; nor doth the apostasy and rebellion of either deprive the most High; but there is no certain connection between being the Lord’s by creation and natural right, and an escape from his wrath, as a righteous judge, who will not acquit; but this, we shall presently see, stands connected with being his in the sense of the text, “They shall be mine,” *to me*, as it literally runs; i.e. my sons, each one shall be to me as an own, dutiful, and beloved son to his affectionate and generous parent: This appears from their being spared as a son, according to the promise; for the infinitely wise and unchangeable Jehovah cannot misapply the

blessings of his love. He is undoubtedly a son in whom the Lord deals with as such. Again; “They shall be mine,” i.e. *my jewels*. Now the jewels of a man are his treasure, and this claim the Lord hath in his people, [Ex 19:15](#). “Thou shalt be to me a peculiar treasure above all the people of the earth.” The expression carries in it more than bare property, however valuable, it is an allusion to jewels purchased and appropriated to a man’s own use, and for the display of his personal glory on certain occasions, of which more hereafter. These ideas correspond with the relation subsisting between God and his people, whom he hath chosen, redeemed, and set apart for himself: “The Lord hath chosen Jacob for himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure,” or jewels, for the word is the same, [Ps 135:4](#). “They shall be mine.” But are not the righteous now his? Doubtless they are; being called by grace, they appear to be his; under a persuasion of which they may boldly say, “I am the Lord’s,” [Isa 44:5](#). or, as in [Song 7:10](#), “I am my Beloved’s, and his desire is towards me.” Thus, saith the Lord to the seed of Jacob, “I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine,” [Isa 43:1](#). This is the characteristics of them who fear God, by the testimony of his word, and in which they can sometimes rejoice, when sealed with the Spirit of adoption; and in many instances the Lord hath owned his people in the dispensation of his providence, by which their enemies, who oppressed them, have been made to know, to their cost, that he “that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye;” nevertheless, in this state of imperfection and trial, they are often obscured in infirmities, afflictions and persecutions, under which they lie concealed, and their real character questioned by themselves and others. In this dark and doubtful situation, the enemy is ready to insult, and they are but too prone to fear that they are not the children of God; but in the day when Christ makes up his jewels, these clouds shall vanish away, they shall be manifestly his, and be filled with courage and joy when he will confess them before his Father and his angels. “They shall be mine,” saith the Lord of hosts, evidently mine: I will invest myself with them, and be glorified in them; then shall small and great know, and every creature, in that universal assembly, acknowledge they are mine, when my glory is revealed upon them; it shall then be manifest that they are mine, whom the Father hath given me, my sheep, for whom I laid down my life, my chosen, called and faithful ones.

WITH this honor and joy, stands connected the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, expressed in these words, "I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Some refer this to the dealings of God with his children in time; q.d. they shall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels, till then I will spare, i.e. have pity on them; I will not enter into judgment with them; but pardon and accept them, notwithstanding all their imperfections; and no doubt the believer is indebted to the sparing mercy of the Lord while in their natural state, till called into fellowship with him; and in all his dispensations, even in his chastening's, he correcteth them as a father a son in whom he delights; but it is reasonable to refer both clauses to the same period, even to that day of the Lord when vengeance shall be taken on the wicked. The word (למחן) properly signifies to be propitious, favorable, or compassionate, even to show mercy to them who in justice might be destroyed. "As I live, saith the Lord, I will not spare, neither will I pity," [Eze 5:11](#); i.e. I will execute justice, "because thou hast defiled my sanctuary." Thus, God spared not the angels that sinned, but *cast them down to hell*, nor *the old world*, [2Pe 2:4-5](#). In this sense also the Father spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to justice for our sins, which indeed is the legal ground of that mercy which the righteous shall obtain according to this promise. I will spare them, so as not to inflict the punishment or evil their iniquities deserve; as a prince spares the life of a criminal, or traitor, which he might justly have taken away, or rather as a parent dealeth with his own son, whom he will not punish according to his desert. This sparing mercy is a kind of pity proceeding from love, by which the subject is saved from deserved punishment; and this mercy is looked for by them who think on the Name of the Lord, [Jude 22](#). In that awful day, when the righteous vengeance of a sin-hating God shall consume the wicked as with fire, those devouring flames shall not kindle upon them, they shall be wholly and perfectly spared; not a drop of wrath shall fall on them! Yea, saith the Lord, "I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that *serveth him*," they shall be treated as innocent, or as though they had never offended: Wonderful mercy indeed! They shall not only be entirely secure from the punishment of sin, but they shall be justified and openly acquitted at the tribunal-seat, which justification stands inseparately connected with life everlasting. So

then, to be spared in the sense of this promise, is nothing short of complete and eternal salvation.

IN this illustration of the mercy which the righteous shall obtain at the appearance and kingdom of their Saviour, we may note, the character under which this grace shall be brought unto them, viz. that of own sons; this bespeaks new covenant-relation, out of which covenant no sinner shall be spared in that day. Christ is the judge, by commission from the Father, and the mercy he dispenses from his throne, terminates on those adopted sons, whose safe conduct to glory was the end of his sufferings and death; and accordingly we find that he invests them in the following terms, “Come ye blessed of my FATHER” to which agrees [Re 21:7](#). “He that overcometh shall inherit all things., and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” We are further taught by this allusion, the pleasure and joy with which the Lord will thus spare them that fear him. When a father corrects his own son, he still delights in him, though his conduct requires chastisement; but if a parent, in the character of a judge, is called to sentence and punish condemned malefactors, among whom his own child has been numbered, can in justice acquit, or spare him from the miserable destruction of the guilty, with what transporting joy must he discharge and defend him; who can say, or fully conceive, the delight an affectionate Father must take in thus sparing his beloved Son? This is the time, O believer, when thy God will “rejoice over thee,” [Isa 62:5](#). “He will rejoice over thee with joy: he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing,” [Zep 3:17](#).

THIS notable day is described from a singular and interesting transaction which is then to take place; “in the day when I make up my jewels. “It has already been shown, that the jewels of the Lord are no other than those who love, and think upon his Name; these are his dear and precious property, prepared and reserved for his glory; now these jewels he will make up. (קָבַץ)The first and obvious idea or of which is *collection*. It alludes to a prince or rich man whose plate and jewels, being deposited and dispersed in different places, or on some grand occasion gathered together for the display of his magnificence. Thus, on set-times the great men of the earth make up their vessels of gold and of silver; and likewise,

their diamonds and other curious stone of beauty and value, with which they adorn themselves and make their appearance, on marriage-feasts, or on other public locations, to be admired in their affluence and grandeur: In like manner the Lord will collect his people, who, as we have seen, are his peculiar treasure. “Gather my saints together unto me, those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice,” [Ps 1:5](#). And again, “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heaven to the other,” [Mt 24:31](#); both which places evidently refer to the day of judgment, when all the redeemed shall be together in one body, with their glorified Head.

BUT simple collection is not peculiar to the saints, for in that day small and great, without exception; shall stand before God; the wicked will be gathered as well as the righteous. The expression also imports their lustre and beauty; and points to the glorious manner in which the righteous shall then appear together with Christ; “when I make up,” i.e. when I finish, polish; or complete them, that they may appear in the utmost perfection. This is the gradation of the Lord’s work in His people, [Isa 43:7](#). “I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea, I have made him,” or, according to the rendering before us; for it is the same word, made up; and it is well known that in the making up of jewels, in order to a magnificent appearance, they are cut, set and polished, that their brightness may appear. Thus, the saints shall be gloriously finished at the coming of their Lord, when called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb, and shine in the kingdom of their Father. They who fear the Lord have the principle of glory and beauty in themselves, not indeed by nature, in which respect the comparison fails; they are naturally polluted and guilty, naked and bare, which is shameful, but, being partakers of grace in Christ, they are the excellent of the earth, and have a real and substantial glory belonging to them: covered with the spotless robe of his mediatorial righteousness; their clothing is wrought gold, and their brightness as a bridegroom which decketh himself as a priest, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels; but the finishing these spiritual jewels respects their internal holiness and the personal beauty, as renewed in the image of

God, unto a divine and eternal life, which is the honor and happiness of the creature, and will he extend to their whole persons at the resurrection. Grace is the essence of glory, which cannot be fully displayed in a state of sin and morality, but when Jesus makes up his jewels, they shall not only be complete in their number, not one being missing, but each shall be finished in the highest manner. In that day they who are the Lords, whether found among the quick or the dead, shall be brought forth in his likeness; then each site will be wrought up to the greatest perfection and bear his part in new Jerusalem, when that holy city comes down from God out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband.

THERE is yet another thing implied, without which a number of jewels can never appear with advantage, namely, their due disposition. The beauty of all precious stones, however excellent in their nature, or polished by art, will be seen in proportion to the order in which they are placed; a proper adjustment in this respect is needful to a complete view of a brilliant diamond; or other precious stone, and accordingly some read the words, I dispose, i.e. order, my jewels, as the stones of a crown, set by a skillful hand, for a display of their lustre in every point of light, to charm the spectator; for then the saints, thus collected into one stately body, will be as a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God. In all bodies who make their appearance, individual members shine in their place, and the glory of the procession depends upon order; a saint out of order, is like a loose jewel that is scattered or concealed in a corner; he cannot display the beauty of holiness, the obedience of faith, or his love to the Lord Jesus Christ, but lies as it were in obscurity and contributes nothing towards the lustre of his Redeemer's kingdom on earth, which is greatly eclipsed by a neglect of an orderly profession, or not walking in the Name of the Lord, as becometh his saints; but at the resurrection every man will appear in his own order, [1Co 15](#). There will be no confusion or misplace in that general assembly and church of the first-born, every jewel shall be in its place; from whence it will appear in the most striking manner to its own advantage, and the glory of all with whom it stands in connection.

THIS is the gracious assurance from the mouth of the Lord, in favor of those who think on his name. In the last and great day, when all the workers of iniquity shall be rejected and punished, and the vengeance of a sin-hating God, by the wrath of the Lamb, shall cone down on the wicked, to their eternal perdition, these saints shall appear to be his, his dear and valuable treasure, to his honor and glory; he will then make them up as his jewels, gather them together, perfectly finish and duly dispose them in his illustrious mystical body, when he shall present her a glorious church to himself; then shall all his faithful servants obtain mercy, be spared from the just desert of their manifold transgressions, yea, and treated as innocent, being justified and accepted, as though they had never offended; and in one word, as the sons of God, with joy and delight, the Judge, their Redeemer, in the name of his Father, will possess them with life everlasting.

IT appears from this account, that the Lord hath a people set apart for himself, his peculiar treasure; that these jewels are at present scattered and divided, but that on the day of his appearance they shall be made up, or completed, when they shall obtain his mercy unto eternal life, in which they will find an ample reward for all their sufferings for righteousness sake, and their love to his Name. An improvement on these points will be the subject of another lecture, which will finish the design we are upon; for the present it may suffice to observe, that the expectation of the believer is sure, it rests not on any uncertain conjecture, however probable, nor is it a conclusion drawn from the most plausible reasonings of man; his hope is in the testimony of God, and its foundations lie deep and secure in the immutability of his counsel, and guarded by every perfection of deity. "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, in his word do I hope," [Ps 130:5](#). Nothing short of the express declaration of the Lord himself, lies at the bottom of our hope in Christ, it holds in the promise, and centers in Jehovah, who abideth faithful, for he cannot deny himself: "In hope of eternal life which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began," [Tit 1:2](#). The Lord hath spoken, and who shall disannul it? His "word is forever settled in the heavens, and his faithfulness established above the clouds;" he is the Lord of hosts, he speaks and it is

done, he commands and it stands fast; the soul that depends on his Word may challenge the universe, and look upon every creature as an instrument in the hand of God, so far as it may affect him, to bring about his expectation and hope; “all things work together for good to them that love God,” whose purpose, according to which they are called, shall stand, certainly stand, “for if God be for us who can be against us!” This then is the chorus of the church, or the repeated song of the faithful in society, “the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge, Selah.” This hope is infallible; that every one who thinks on the Name of the Lord shall be his, in the day when he makes up his jewels, and that he “will spare such, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him; for this is as the waters of Noah, [Isa 54:7-10](#). As the Lord hath sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so hath he sworn he will not be wrath with his people, nor rebuke them in the day of his anger. Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto them. He will be their hiding-place, and compass them about with songs of deliverance,” [Ps 32:6-7](#).

NOR shall the happiness of the saint be delayed; his salvation slumbereth not. Under some circumstances he may now be impatient, not making the testimonies of the Lord the men of his counsel, but rather leaning to his own understanding, and especially when his enemies insult, and tauntingly say, where is the promise of his coming? The Christian may then be ready to cry, O Lord how long! or in the mother of Sisera’s words, in relation to her son, “why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?” But the Lord is not slack concerning his promise; the day is at hand when it shall come to pass that, as sure as the Lord brought forth the children of Israel, the selfsame day appointed four hundred and thirty years before its commencement; in like manner the salvation of God shall not tarry; “of that day and hour no man knoweth,” it is a secret in the bosom of the father, [Mt 11:27](#). and it will be suddenly revealed; but of this we are certain, that a time is fixed, and that it nearly approaches, when Christ will make up his jewels; nor shall earth or hell be able to procrastinate the hour of this blessed hope; he sayeth, “Surely I come quickly;” Amen; even so, come Lord JESUS.

LECTURE XXX.

Christ's people comparable with jewels; their dispersion in time; the certainty of their accomplishment at his coming. Reflections.

FROM the promise explained in the preceding lecture, it is evident that the Lord has a peculiar people, who are styled his jewels; that at present these are dispersed, but that a day is at hand, when he will complete them, and that then he will own and honor them as a father his dear and dutiful son. the Reader's attention is once more intreated, while I attempt to improve the delightful subject, by showing the propriety of the metaphor under which the chosen are described, in what respects they lie scattered abroad, and the reasons there are to conclude that they shall certainly be gathered and spared, according to the word of the Lord; these particulars, with a glance on the ample reward the righteous will find in this grace, and suitable reflections, will finish my design.

IN this glorious prophecy, the Lord mentions his jewels, which he will make up at his coming; now, that these are no other than his people, who think on his name, appears from the assurance he gives them that they shall be his at that time, which amounts to a promise of being counted in his treasure in the day of revelation, and the aptness of the description before us will appear when we consider,

I. THAT *their number is certain*. The jewels of a prince or great man, are known and determinate portions or parts of his peculiar treasure. For a man to make up his jewels, we have seen, is to accomplish their number or gather them altogether, but how can this be if their number is uncertain with the owner? Can a rich man be supposed unacquainted with those precious things which he hath set apart for himself, or his personal glory? Much less is it decent to imagine that there is any uncertainty with the

Lord in respect of the saints, the knowledge of whom is essential to the idea of making them up, it being impossible to complete an indefinite number of objects: The people of God are a certain chosen generation, whom the Father has adopted to himself in Christ, who hath redeemed them with his blood, and is charged with their recovery and salvation; these are vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory, being ordained to life everlasting, whose number cannot in the nature of things be increased or diminished. I am sensible this holy doctrine of the Bible is disagreeable to the taste of men who lean to their own understanding; but however, they who submit not themselves to the divine sovereignty in the dispensations of grace, may contradict and blaspheme, this foundation of God standeth sure; “the Lord knoweth them that are his:” This sober and rational truth, is supported by many express and strong declarations, and indeed by the current of scripture, yea, it is inseparably connected with the way of salvation opened in the gospel; for take away the doctrine of election, and the notion of a proper sacrifice of atonement, and redemption by the Son of God, as the substitute of sinners, is not to be supported; but the scriptures declare that “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us,” [Ga 3:13](#). And again, “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,” [2Co 5:21](#). This idea of the saints, seems couched under the figure before us, which shows its propriety. Jewels are a certain known number of precious vessels, which however deposited at present in different places, are to be collected, in order, on particular occasions for the honor of those who process them. In like manner we have seen, “that the Son of man shall send his angels with the great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” But,

2. THIS figure stands illustrated by the *very high esteem* of the Lord for his people. Jewels are exceedingly valued by their owner; and our Saviour hath observed what universal experience confirms, [Mt 6:21](#). “that where the treasure,” i.e. the peculiar portion and joy of a man is, “there will his heart be also.” Now the Lord hath set his affections on his people, and therefore he chose them, [De 7:7](#). They are sealed on his heart, [Song 8:6](#).

They are the objects of his special unchangeable and eternal love, precious and honorable in his sight. This choice and esteem arose not from any motive in them. Neither a foresight of their misery, or their faith, or any thing comparatively better or worse, properly and simply, induced the Almighty to regard them above others; no, they are esteemed as his elect, and he set them apart, of his mere good pleasure, as the Sovereign of grace; but, having thus chose them for himself, they are dear to him, insomuch that he that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye,” [Zec 2:8](#). Again,

3. THEY may well be thus styled on account of the *price* he paid for them. Jewels are costly, and usually obtained with a very great sum. Thus, of wisdom it is said, “She shall not be exchanged for jewels of fine gold, and her price exceeds that of rubies,” [Job 28:17-18](#). To the same purpose we read, [Mt 13:46](#) of the having found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. As hinted already, there was no singular excellency in the people of God, in their natural or creation state, much less as involved in the fatal apostasy of man, to commend them in the sight of Jehovah; but having set his love upon them, and they being under a sentence of death, and children of wrath and disobedience as others, they were dearly bought out of the hands of justice; redeemed, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with blood; not with the blood of bulls or of goats, but with the precious blood of the Son of God, who was manifest in the flesh, and who, in respect of his innocence as man, and the designation of the Father, was as a lamb without blemish or spot. “Ye are, saith the apostle, bought with a price” [1Co 6:20](#). No trifling or inadequate consideration ransomed these vessels of pleasure and mercy; the expression is strong, and carries in it that a full price was paid for them; it points to the equitable, yea to the unspeakable value of that which the Lord laid down for his people. Ineffable indeed; he gave himself for them. and poured out his soul unto death, that he might possess and enjoy them! No jewels, however comparatively immense in their value, were purchased at the rate of Christ’s people; their price, on the highest possible

computation, falls infinitely below that by which the chosen were redeemed. And further,

4. THE allusion is just in respect of their *virtue and goodness*. Jewels have an intrinsic worth, and are of real value to him that possesses them. So are the Saints, they are the excellent of the earth, [Ps 21:3](#). In their apostate state they are vile and unprofitable; and since their conversion, their flesh which cleaves to them is base; yet being called, and chosen, and faithful, they are dignified in the righteousness of God, which is by faith, “unto all and upon all them that believe.” In this robe they are decked, as a priest with his jewels, [Isa 61:10](#). They are likewise choice in regard of their inherent righteousness; there is some good thing wrought in them by the Holy Ghost; they are really, though in respect of degree but imperfectly, sanctified, and in proportion to their light, faith, love, and fruits, truly valuable, and accordingly, [La 4](#), these stones of the sanctuary, the precious sons of Zion, are compared to fine and pure gold. Moreover,

5. AS jewels, the people of God are most carefully preserved. Men lock up their treasure in a cabinet or place of great safety; and the Lord preserves them that love him; they are hid and preserved from being lost or destroyed: they dwelt on his heart and were secured in the covenant; chosen in Christ who is the secret place of the most High, from everlasting. In the time of their ignorance when in the world and in the kingdom of Satan, they were preserved in him, and, being called, they are secure in his hands, his eye is continually upon them, and he keeps them, as with a garrison [*(φρουρουμενους)* [1Pe 1:5](#), compared with [2Co 11:32](#)]; by his power, for “as the mountains are round about Jerusalem so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever,” [Ps 125:2](#). And,

6. THIS metaphor is proper on account of the glory they reflect on the Savior. Jewels are for ornament; in them, on certain occasions, persons of rank make a magnificent appearance, agreeable to their distinguishing character. In like manner, Jesus doth and will shine in his chosen; he is now adorned by their obedience of faith and fruits of righteousness, which redound to his honor and praise, and in some periods the Lord has shone in the beauty of Zion in general, when his glory has risen upon her; then

this flock of his people, whom he hath saved, are as the stones of a crown lifted up, [Zec 9:16](#), and [Isa 62:3](#), as “a crown of glory or a royal diadem in his hand,” but at his coming, when he shall descend from heaven, in the glory of his Father and his angels, “he will also be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.” Once more,

7. AS jewels he will possess them for ever. A noble person, who regards his honor, will part with any thing rather than his jewels; for without these, on particular occasions, his appearance will fall short of his character, and disgrace him. No man will dispose of his peculiar treasure, but in case of necessity; nor will the all-perfect and blessed Jehovah, who hath set apart the chosen for himself, suffer them to be lost, or resign them to any, for he rests in his love, and will eternally rejoice in his people. So then they who fear the Lord may fitly be counted his jewels; they are a certain known number, precious in his eyes, and which he hath purchased at a very high rate; besides their real beauty and worth, considered as saints, his care to preserve them, the honor they do him both now and hereafter, and, in a word, his determination to enjoy them forever; these are sufficient to justify, yea, and finely illustrate the propriety of the metaphor.

NOW these jewels are united in the purpose of the Father; their names are together in the Lamb’s book of life; they are from the beginning, before God, in a mystical union with Christ, who is the head of his body the church, and of the flock committed to the charge of Jesus, the shepherd and bishop of souls; nevertheless it appears that for a season they lie in a scattered and divided condition, and that in the following respects,

1. IN the period of their actual existence. The all-comprehensive mind of the infinite Jehovah, from eternity viewed the objects of his love, and chose them at once, but they are produced by degrees, both in nature and grace; in respect of the former, which is the point before me, they descend by ordinary generation from Adam, and are brought forth, some in one age and some in another; hence they were as it were dispersed in different ages and nations of the world, from the creation to the dissolution of the heavens and the earth. This natural division or separation in time, no doubt

is under the conduct of Infinite wisdom; and in the day when he makes up his jewels will turn out to the glory of God, and the satisfaction and joy of his saints. Again,

2. THESE chosen, who are contemporaries in this world, are scattered abroad in the earth; the bounds of their habitations are fixed in common with others; and it is probable in some instances, with a special view, subservient to the purpose of divine grace, for many have been called in consequence of their situation; however, the children of God are locally dispersed, some in one place, and others elsewhere, insomuch that few of them comparatively can assemble together and have personal and frequent interviews; hence a particular church-state is appointed, and needful to the support of social religion. The like might be observed in respect of their different stations and circumstances in the present *life*; but, in *death* they are still more divided. Under the dominion of this last and great enemy, for a while, they are not only separated from others, but each individual is in a state of dispersion; his spirit is gathered to the throne of God and of the Lamb, while the tabernacle of his body, having seen corruption, is dissolved into ashes and dust; and thus these bodies lie scattered in the grave till the morning of the resurrection. In short, if we take a general view of the people whom the Lord hath set apart for himself, and who are styled his jewels, as they appear in the glass of the word, at the instant period we shall behold an innumerable multitude already passed through the revolution of time, who are through faith and patience inheriting the promises. In the unseen and eternal world, as already observed, they are in a kind of personal dispersion, their bodies and souls being at present in a state of separation; we shall likewise see many now living, who may be considered as called, or in a state of nature, for though revelation doth not discover the particular vessels of mercy, while in the kingdom of darkness, yet they bear witness to a chosen seed who shall be saved in every age and generation, so that we have a general and certain knowledge of faith, that, besides visible saints, there are some of these jewels existing on the earth, who surely shall be gathered, though the number of such which remain in any period, or any individual of them, is reserved till the appointed time of conversion. And further, if we look forward, it appears

from the word of the Lord, that there are children yet unborn, who shall in the succeeding ages be a seed to serve him, and that in the latter day a glorious harvest shall be gathered, both of Jews and Gentiles. And, finally, that at the revelation of Christ, though the greater number of these precious saints will be gathered from their graves, some will descend with him in their glorified bodies from heaven, and at the same time not a few will be found alive on the earth. Thus, divided are the peculiar treasure of the Lord in time under providence, through the universe, in every generation, past, present, and to come; some dead, some alive, some yet rebelling in the kingdom of Satan, while others are reduced to the obedience of faith, and are rejoicing in the Lord as their God; and when the last trumpet sounds, the elect shall be gathered from heaven, earth, and hell, or the grave; but, however dispersed, they are secure and forth coming. The Lord will certainly make up these jewels; their number shall be completed, and not one shall be wanting, when he appears in his glory, of which blessed hope the following particulars are a full confirmation:

1. IT hath already been shown that they are his chosen dear property; he hath set his love upon them, shed his blood for them; they are his treasure and his glory as Mediator, and will he suffer one of these to be lost? What man would lose a jewel of his treasure, or suffer it to lie in a total and final obscurity? The delight the Lord hath in his people, and especially when joined to his purchase, is an abundant security for their being gathered to himself in due time. And,

2. IF these are not made up, the end of his choosing and redeeming them is lost. It was to show the riches of his glory, that these vessels of mercy were selected and ransomed; the ultimate view of all this grace, is the honor of God, in the perfection of his people; this was the end of the divine counsel from everlasting; for this purpose the Father chose his saints in Christ, and constituted his Son the head of the church, and the Saviour of the body. Agreeable to this, Christ having loved his church, gave himself for her, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, [Eph 5:27](#). But this will not be accomplished while a jewel is missing, there would then be a defect or schism in the body, nor, will the glory or happiness of any one saint be absolutely, and in all respects

complete, till the whole election of grace appear united in one body, and each member finished and set in his place. In a word, Jesus died “that he might gather together in one, the children of God that were scattered abroad,” [Joh 11:52](#). Not only those of the nation of the Jews, but also the chosen among the Gentiles; so that if any one is left behind, Christ died in vain; a notion to be utterly rejected. See [Ga 2:21](#). But again,

3. OF this the believer hath an earnest in his effectual calling. Every Christian may safely argue from the beginning to the completion of a divine work in his soul, [Php 1:6](#). Shall the Almighty forsake his own work, or leave it unfinished? It cannot be decently supposed. What should hinder the Lord from making up, or, as the word imports, finishing any one of his jewels, which he hath set apart, redeemed, and called, by his grace! Not the unworthiness of the subject, nor any, however seeming unsurmountable difficulties that lie in the way, seeing what he hath already done with respect to this chosen vessel of mercy, and especially in turning him from darkness to light, and slaying the enmity of his mind; this I say is no less, if not a greater instance of grace and power that is required unto the perfection of him who is already washed and sanctified; nor can any reason be given why the unchangeable and living God should suffer his mercy to fail, contrary to his solemn engagements to maintain it for ever. He then who hath been gathered by the hand of the Lord out of the world, and is numbered with them who are sanctified by faith, may be assured that they shall be made up, and counted among his jewels at last, and especially when we consider further,

4. THE infinite perfection and glorious power of the most high, with whom all things are possible. These have already been displayed in their existence and conversion; it is highly unreasonable to question whether he that created his people, and redeemed them from the dominion of sin and the power of satan, can make them perfect in holiness, and present them faultless, and finished, in the day of his appearance and equally absurd to imagine that any thing needful to complete the saints, can lie out of the reach of unsearchable wisdom and divine Omnipotence; nothing of these jewels, however dispersed, is hid from the Lord, or beyond the reach of his arm; their being made up carries in it the resurrection of their bodies,

which at present, as we have seen, are dissolved and scattered in the grave, insomuch that to an eye of sense, their return seems impossible, yet reason proclaims that God is able to raise the dead; we are indebted to the gospel for this light of life and immortality from death, yet reason is not more incapable of discovering this redemption of the body, to which the saints are adopted, than it is forward to attest its credibility, on the testimony of God.

SO then, the affection the Lord hath for his people, the end of his choice, his purchase, and what he hath already done for, and wrought in them, and his almighty power, and other perfections, leave no room to question but that he will make up his jewels according to the word of his grace.

NOR is the hope of that mercy which stands connected with the glory to be revealed on the saints, in the day of Christ, less certain. Its foundation is laid in the substitution and sufferings of the Son of God in their stead; all their iniquity was laid on him, and he took away their sins by the sacrifice of himself. If God spared not His own Son, and Christ died for them, the faithful may be assured that they shall be spared in the day of his wrath; surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto them; the Redeemer is their hiding-place, and will compass them about with songs of deliverance; this may also be gathered from the compassion already exercised towards them when in a state of death and condemnation; he that patiently endured their enmity and rebellion, and plucked them as brands from the fire, will surely have mercy on them and spare them in the day of his wrath; besides, they are covered with the robe of his righteousness, and washed in his blood; the righteousness of God is upon them, and being now justified freely by his grace, they shall doubtless be saved from wrath through him, [Ro 5:9](#). Yea, and further, the experience of the Christian confirms it. Indeed the patience and goodness of the Lord in his providence, is no security against the vengeance of the Almighty, who endures with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath; yet, alas, how often do sinners presume on an escape, because the execution of their sentence hath not taken place; but the present mercy and favor of God in a way of special grace to his called, ascertains this blessed

assurance, the gift of his Spirit, the light of his countenance, their communion with God at any time, in his ordinances, their freedom of access to him as their Father, and in a word, every instance of spiritual supply, or promise applied to their heart, is an evident token, or rather a taste and earnest, of that mercy the righteous shall obtain at the coming of Christ; so that there is not the least room to hesitate their being spared by the Lord in the day when he makes up his jewels, even as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

NOW, that the honor and glory of being owned of the Lord, and spared as a dear and dutiful son, is beyond all expectation, and that it will turn out an ample reward for the tribulation and tears of his faithful disciples, in a time of general apostasy, appears from the promise itself. No other consideration is offered to satisfy and encourage his suffering people under the sore temptations which befall them. The Lord doth not say, I will now avenge myself on the ungodly who profane my name, and despise them who fear me; or, I will immediately descend as the dew on Israel, and remove the occasions of her sorrow, which is sometimes the case, at the intercession of his mourners, but here is no absolute promise of any alteration for the present, all that is proposed to animate and comfort these gracious and afflicted souls is, that they should be his, and that he would spare them in the day of his coming; but the divine wisdom and goodness would not leave the righteous without a sufficient reward; we may therefore be assured that in the accomplishment of this promise they shall find a full recompence for all the self-denial and grief to which their piety may have exposed them. To this agrees the express declaration of our Saviour and his inspired apostles, and also the judgment of the faithful to all generations. Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, and even esteemed the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, having respect to this recompense of reward. And we read of many, who, being tortured, would not accept deliverance, on the condition of resigning their hope, that they might obtain a better resurrection, [Heb 11](#). If the honor and joy of the saints, at the day of Christ will not abundantly compensate for all the shame and sorrow which they may endure in this world for his Name's sake, these worthies were

certainly under a delusion, and of all men most miserable; but “we know our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” so that we may justly “reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us.” Compare [2Co 4:17](#) with [Ro 8:18](#). Of this reward many, whose trials have been great, have had a joyful earnest in the witness of the Spirit, and the solace they have found in the house of the Lord; they who have endured the most for the testimony of their conscience will acknowledge that the pleasures of fellowship with God, and the satisfaction they have found in the communications of his grace, and especially when they behold themselves in Christ, through the Spirit of adoption; their delight and joy in God have far over-balanced the pain and disgrace of their sufferings. Thus, David, from his past experience in the sanctuary, rejoices in this expectation, saying, “My mouth shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,” [Ps 63:5](#). And many like instances might be produced. Now if believers are so abundantly satisfied in what they at present enjoy, and find such ample return for the self-denial they are called to for the sake of religion in their experience of the love of God in this world, what must be their glory and joy on being made up and finished in the last and great day? To be the Lord’s, and to be numbered with his jewels, when he appears in his kingdom, must be an honor and reward, of which they who attain to the highest degree of knowledge in the present state, can form no adequate conception. “It doth not yet appear, saith the apostle, what we shall be,” [1Jo 3:2](#). But we may soberly conclude that the reward of this inheritance will exceed the highest expectation of the most eminent saint on earth and it may be of those who in a separate state are already admitted to the throne in the heavens, however it certainly passeth the understanding of every mortal, and will fill the happy subjects with triumph and praise unto him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God, and his Father.”

HOW melancholy and miserable the case of those whom the Lord will reject, or leave behind in the day when he makes up his jewels? If it is the peculiar privilege of the righteous to be his, and to be spared in that awful

day of decision and justice, let the Christless sinner beware; God will not spare thee; but will execute the fierceness of his anger! O how unconcerned are many about an interest in Christ, and being gathered with his peculiar treasure at his coming; they consider not the vengeance he will then take on them who disobey him. It were better, Reader, thou hadst never been born or existed, than not be found among the Lord's jewels at this season referred to; when they shall shine forth in their beauty, ascend up to glory, and possess the everlasting kingdom of the Father, shame shall cover unbelievers, who will be then. O tremble, ye careless ones! Cast into the lake of fire, and lie down in sorrow and darkness for ever!

BUT, art thou, dear Friend, waiting for the hope of righteousness by faith? Hast thou found the pearl of great price? Is Christ thy dependence and delight, and exceeding precious to thy soul, so that all things are as nothing compared with his excellency and grace? Is his name so dear, that it occupies the thoughts of thine heart? And art thou grieved at the contempt cast upon it by the ungodly, and when licentious professors disgrace it? These are genuine symptoms of that holy fear which belongs to the children of God; and they who thus think on the Name of the Lord, are entitled to expect the honor of being Christ's at his coming. And, Reader, is this thine experience? Doth thine heart rejoice in prospect of being found among the people of the Lord, before the Father and his angels, in the day of revelation? Manifest this in thy professed subjection to the gospel of Christ. Can any man, with reason, be looked upon as a successful candidate for the glory and joy of being the Lord's, when he makes up his jewels, to whom it is an indifferent matter, whether he appears to be his among men, or who will not confess him on earth. The importance, credit, and advantage of a public acknowledgment and worship of Jesus, has been a principal design of these papers, how far they may succeed will hereafter appear; but I think it must be allowed an awkward and inconsistent part, for a person to boast in the view of being numbered with the saints in the day of revelation, and at the same time allow himself to be nameless among them in the sight of mankind. Is it not strange, that he who expects to be owned, spared and glorified, as a visible member of Christ, in the universal assembly, at the tribunal of God,

should not think it his duty and honor to be openly joined to the Lord and his people, or that he should not be ashamed to live separate from the visible heirs of salvation? One would think it almost impossible that a man whose heart is fixed in the hope of being revealed in the church triumphant, could rest short of appearing in the church in her militant state; it is a conduct so ungrateful, not to say absurd, a sensible person will blush to find in himself, and it is hoped will repent; however, this is certain, that nothing can be more unreasonable than to presume we shall appear with Christ in glory, when he is revealed from heaven, in a neglect of his honor on earth; and it becomes those who amuse themselves with this expectation to see if it stands supported by the testimony of God, for an hope void of that foundation will surely deceive.

AND now, Beloved, I take my farewell with an earnest exhortation to my own soul and yours. Press forward, and hasten to the coming of the Lord. Blessed is the hope of his second appearance! A day awful and fatal to the wicked, who shall be utterly consumed, but, oh how delightful to the righteous who fear him. Then will their eternal glory commence when every jewel shall be finished, disposed and set in the most beautiful point of light, and, the number of the elect, being accomplished, the adorable Redeemer will present his beloved church, faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy. Animated with this divine hope, may all my dear Readers, with their unworthy writer, keep themselves in the love of God, looking for the mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life; who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

FINIS.

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