

THE DANGERS OF PROSPERITY



WILLIAM BATES

Monergism

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by William Bates

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PREFACE

THE experience of all ages has verified, that none are exposed to more dangerous trials than the prosperous in this world. The great tempter has found the temptations of prosperity so insinuating and prevailing with men, that he attempted our blessed Saviour; expecting, by the pleasant prospect of the kingdoms of this world, and their glory, to have fastened an impression upon his spirit, and tainted his inviolable purity. But he found nothing in our Saviour, not the least irregular inclination to his allurements, and could work nothing upon him. It is otherwise with men born of the flesh, in whom there is a carnal heart (the centre of apostacy and corruption) that is easily inticed and overcome by charming complacencies. Prosperity is a disguised poison, pleasant to the unwary sense, but deadly in the operation; and the more pernicious in the effects, because less dangerous in the opinions of men. The temptations of prosperity are so frequent and favoured by us, that they give vigour to the inward enemy, the sensual affections, and boldness to the malicious tempter. They foment the carnal appetites, that defile and debase the soul; and are the more rebellious and exorbitant the more they are gratified.

Prosperity is the strongest obstacle against the conversion and reformation of sinners. Whilst they are plying their various pleasures, they have neither will nor leisure to advert to the voice of conscience, so reproachful and stinging to them. And many times prosperity stupifies conscience, that men are fearless of divine judgments, involved in sensual security. They will not reverence and obey God's authority, till they feel his power; they abuse his blessings to pride and vanity, idleness and luxury, and are hardened in their impenitence, died with the deepest tincture of ingratitude: they drive on through a course of sin, till death puts a period to their lusts. How destructive, how penal is prosperity to such graceless souls? When God rains snares upon the wicked; when the affluence of this world is abused to satisfy their vicious desires, it is a sad forerunner of the shower of fire and brimstone, and the horrible tempest that shall overwhelm them at last.

Others in prosperity are not openly profane, and boldly vicious, yet are corrupted, and insensibly destroyed by it. They over-value and over-delight in the good things of this world, and please themselves in an opinionative felicity in their present state. They enjoy the world with more appearance of reason, and less sensuality than the riotous and luxurious; but their conversation with so many charming objects, alienates them from God. They do not sanctify him in their hearts, placing their highest esteem upon his most amiable excellencies, and their dearest delight in communion with him. They look upon religion as a sour severity, and count nothing delightful, but what is suitable to the fleshly affections. A deceit like that of a sick person, who feeling no pleasure but in the easy intervals between his fits, and the remission of his distemper, should imagine that if he were freed from his disease, he should lose all pleasure: whereas the delights of health are more full and durable. The angels are incapable of sensual pleasures; their happiness arises from the perfection of good, not the allays of evil. The beasts are only capable of sensual pleasures, the remedies of natural evils, hunger, thirst, weariness, or accidental evils, diseases and pains: and many are so sottishly deceived, as to prefer brutish pleasures that affect the senses, before angelical joys that arise from the fruition of God's favour, and obedience to his laws. This is a sad symptom of an unrenewed heart, and an heavy presage of future misery; for God will not be our everlasting joy in heaven, if he be not our exceeding joy upon the earth.

Others surrounded with riches and honours, are neither thankful to their divine benefactor, nor careful to employ their prosperity and power for his glory. The law of mercy requires a solemn affectionate recognition of God's benefits: but the current of prosperity drowns their sense of the divine goodness: and incogitant practical atheism, is as destructive as absolute and speculative. And how many by the deceitfulness of riches, are apt to imagine, that they possess with dominion what they receive in trust: they might be rich in good works, and if their hearts were according to their ability, be fruitful as paradise, but are as barren as the sands of Africa. They are in a

mighty debt for so many received blessings, for which their account will be heavy and undoing with the highest Lord. These and many other considerations, make it evident how dangerous prosperity is to the most that enjoy it here.

It is therefore a point of high and holy wisdom how to manage prosperity so, as to avoid the impendent evils that usually follow it, and to improve it for our eternal advantage. This is the design of the present treatise, and humbly recommended to the divine blessing, from one who most unfeignedly desires the salvation of men's souls.

WILLIAM BATES.

THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY

"The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." - PROV. 1:32

IN the former verses, the divine wisdom is introduced in a very elegant and pathetic manner, reclaiming men from their miserable errors, to partake of light and felicity. The address is directed to them with upbraidings and indignation at their folly, and with tender compassion for their ruin. "How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity? and fools hate knowledge?" Thus it is said of our Saviour, the incarnate wisdom of God, Mark 3:5. "that he looked on the pharisees with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts." We have also expressed, an earnest desire of their conversion, "turn ye at my reproof." And that is seconded by a gracious promise, "I will pour out my Spirit upon you," to illuminate and conduct you in the

way of life. But for their stupid obstinacy in despising the counsel, and rejecting the reproofs of wisdom, they are surprised with utter destruction. This is described with that train of killing circumstances, that are the most forcible excitations timely to prevent that evil, which neglected, will be remediless: "because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call on me, but I will not answer: they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and despised the fear of the Lord." Vers. 24, 26, 27, 28, 29. In their distress they supplicate for mercy; but as they were unchanged, notwithstanding all the gracious calls of God to repentance, so he is not moved by all their mournful entreaties, and takes pleasure in his righteous judgments upon them. Their final ruin is resolved into its proper cause; the wilful hardness of sinners, and the abuse of those mercies that should have melted them into a compliance with the divine giver of them. "For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." For "the turning away of the simple shall slay them; and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."

The title of fool, is the usual, character of the sinner in the language of Wisdom; and it is with great reason and congruity attributed to him, in opposition to prudence, the universal virtue and supreme director of human life. For as by prudence a man so governs himself, and regulates his actions, as to avoid impendent evils, and to obtain that good that is suitable to his necessities: so it is the effect of folly, not to foresee evils to prevent them, and to neglect the season of obtaining what is good. And by how much the good is more valuable and desirable, and the evil is more pernicious and threatening; in proportion, the folly is more unpardonable and woful, that loses the one, and exposes to the other. And this is justly charged upon every wilful impenitent sinner.

Prosperity comprehends all things in the order of nature, that are so much admired and desired by worldly men; riches, honours, pleasures, health, strength, peace, plenty, and the abundant variety of what is grateful to the carnal mind and appetites.

These blessings of God, abused and perverted by the folly of men, are turned into weapons of unrighteousness, to offend God, and wound their souls to everlasting death.

The point I shall insist on, is this; prosperity abused, is fatal and destructive to foolish sinners.

In the treating on this argument, I will, 1. Show how prosperity is destructive to the wicked. 2. That it is folly and madness above all wonder, when sinners abuse the blessings of God to their destruction. 3. How just, and certain, and heavy their destruction will be.

Proofs that Prosperity is Destructive to Sinners

I. I will show how prosperity is destructive to the wicked. In order to the explicating of this head, some things are to be premised.

1st. This great world, with all the parts and creatures of which it is composed, has an inherent goodness and perfection convenient to the end for which it was formed by the Creator, and that was to be useful and comfortable to man in the service of God. There is no pestilence and contagion in the nature of things, that are pleasing to our faculties: they are dangerous, not as made by God, but as managed by satan. They do not pervert the minds of men from any noxious inherent qualities, but as they are corrupted by concupiscence. Upon this account St. John dehorting christians from the love of the world, as inconsistent with the love of God, gives this reason of it, "for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust

of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." 1 John 2:16. He signifies the objects, riches, honours, and pleasures, by the vicious affections, that make them deadly to men. The poison is not in the flower, but in the spider. And the apostle speaking of the purifying virtue of the gospel, says, "that exceeding great and precious promises are given to us, that by these we may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." 2 Pet. 1:4. This is evident by visible experience: for many holy men have enjoyed temporal blessings without the offence of God; and have been more holy and heavenly in themselves, more beneficial and good to others by mercies: whilst the sensual, like the ocean that changes the sweet showers of heaven into its salt quality, turn the divine blessings into provision for their brutish lusts. It appears therefore that this contrariety of effects is not to be attributed to the quality of worldly things that is always uniform and alike, but to the different dispositions of the persons that use them. As the same food is healthful or hurtful as the stomach is clear or foul that receives it: in some it renews the blood and spirits, strengthens and preserves life; in others it increases the sickly matter, feeds the disease, and brings death more painfully and speedily.

2dly. The primary design of God in his most free and rich benefits, is to endear himself to us, and bind us to his service: for they are the most proper and convincing expresses of his love and goodness, and powerful motives and persuasives to a grateful correspondence of love and obedience. "I drew them," saith God, "with the cords of a man, with bands of love." Hos. 11:4. Goodness duly considered, engages to please the benefactor. It is therefore said by St. Paul, "that the goodness of God leads sinners to repentance." Rom. 2. It is the most natural unconstrained consequence that the mind can regularly infer from his clemency and bounty. The hearts of men should be melted in tender resentments of their unworthy conversation towards him; and encouraged to return to their duty, since he will graciously receive those who unfeignedly repent of their sins: but the

event does not usually answer God's aim. Men are hardened in sin by his mercies.

3dly. When the wicked abuse God's blessings, defeat his kindness, and frustrate the excellent ends of it, he most righteously and severely continues their prosperity, that foment their lusts, and renders them more wilful and incorrigible, and the more guilty of their own damnation. What was said by Simeon, concerning the most glorious gift of God, our Saviour, is applicable in this case; "behold, this child is set for the fall of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against." When the riches of grace offered in the gospel, are despised and neglected, the blessed Saviour of souls is most justly ordained to be the occasion of their sorer punishment. So when the common benefits and mercies of God are ungratefully perverted by men, to the dishonour of the giver, they are by divine determination ordered, for the aggravating of their sins and sentence. Prosperity is a fatal ambush for their surprisal and ruin, according to that heavy imprecation of the psalmist, "let their table become a snare to them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap, an occasion of their falling." Psal. 69:22. This judgment proceeds from the most terrible and inexorable displeasure: it is better and more eligible to encounter all the storms of a raging world, than to enjoy the calm and security of a prosperous sinner. For the more afflicted we are by men, the more earnest are our addresses to God's propitious throne, to incline his mercy to regard and relieve us: but a sinner, the more full fruition he has of the world, the more he forsakes and provokes God, and the more he is abandoned to his worst enemies, his lusts, and satan. This will be amplified more in the following parts of the discourse.

This being premised, we come to show how prosperity abused is destructive to sinners, both meritoriously, as it induces a deadly guilty, and makes them obnoxious to the revenging wrath of God; and effectively as it is opposite to the felicity and perfection of man, that consists in the renovation of the image of God in the soul, and in

joyful communion with him for ever. This will appear by the following considerations.

1. Prosperity is the continual incentive of the vicious affections, "the fleshly lusts that war against the soul;" that deprive it of its beauty, order, freedom, and felicity. Man is compounded of flesh and spirit; by the one he communicates in nature with the beasts, by the other he confines with the angels. By the original law of union, the body was subject to the soul; and though taken from the earth, did not oppress it, and hinder its heavenly flight:" The flesh did not lust against the spirit, nor the spirit against the flesh." But as the motion of the two eyes in the head is always uniform, and directed the same way; so reason and sense accorded, the appetites were regular and concentric with the mind. Upon this established order, the internal peace and holiness of man depend. But by the rebellious sin of Adam, the soul lost its regal power and freedom; and as in the first temptation the soul infected the body, so now the body infects the soul. The carnal appetite, the spring of lust and anger (that infernal pair that reigns so universally) overrules the rational will, and gives law to men.

The love of sensual pleasures is natural to men; as temptations are more charming and increased, it is more predominant. The senses, the fancy, and the passions, are in a conspiracy against the soul; and there is a continual circulation in their working, they excite one another. By the senses pleasing things obtain an easy entrance into the fancy; and fancy has a strange power to charm or terrify by false representations; it amplifies the evil, and heightens the seeming good of things; and by the inspiration of fancy, the passions are moved, and the passions being allured, bribe and seduce the mind, and draw the consent of the will by the actual pleasure that is mixed in the gratifying of them. And as Adam lost his innocence and paradise by his compliance with the blandishments of his wife; so the soul loses its purity and happiness, by yielding to the desires of the flesh that is in conjunction with it. For this reason, man in his fallen state is called flesh, as if there were no other principle in his nature,

and of his operations. The spiritual and more noble faculties, that were made for delightful communion with God, are sunk into carnality. The description of men in their natural state, by the apostle, is a full proof of this: "We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind." Ephes. 2. It is observable that the lusts of the flesh, that spring from the sensual part, are drawn forth into act by the concurrent wills of the flesh, and of the mind. The nobler faculties, the understanding and will are depraved, and freely indulge the carnal appetites in their pursuit of pleasures. Prodigious degeneracy of the reasonable creature! Of this we have a resemblance in the marvellous transforming power of nature. If a cion be grafted into a tree of another kind, the fruit that grows on it will not be according to the nature of the stock, but of the graft that overrules the sap, and turns it to its own quality. Thus the beast is grafted into the man, and the intellectual powers are corrupted and carnal. The mind is employed to disguise the ignominy and guilt that attend the lusts of the flesh; and the will consents to a submission to those ignoble and unruly appetites. Man has only this privilege, that he is a more ingenious brute, to spring new pleasures, to make provision for his sensual desires, and to accomplish them.

Now in prosperity, when the senses are entertained with variety of alluring objects, the fancy is more predominant and contagious: it has more force, vivacity, and extent, the more it is conversant about sensible things: and the polluted imagination is the most active and general principle of corrupting the heart: for the mind transcribes a copy of what is written in the fancy, and presents it with a false gloss to the will, that is ready to choose what brings actual pleasure. And the sensitive affections are excited by the fancy, so that the presence of a suitable object, foments the warmth into heat, and turns the heat into fire, and the fire into a flame. And the more the carnal affections are indulged, the more they are enlarged, the more importunate and head-strong they become; and the soul is utterly disabled from recovering itself from the besotted vile prostitution, to the ignoble and unruly appetites. Millions had been less guilty and defiled, and

less miserable for ever, if they had not been surrounded by pleasant temptations and entanglements of iniquity.

2. Prosperity occasionally incenses the irascible appetite: for the usual incentives of anger, are the crossing the desires, and contempt; and the stronger the desires, the more impatient they are to be controlled; and in proportion to the height of mind, is the indignation for any contempt that is offered. Now prosperity makes the carnal desires more exorbitant, and consequently raging when frustrated. Violent burning desires, when controlled, provoke violent burning anger: and anger inflamed, extinguishes the calm light of reason, becomes blind and furious in revenging apprehended injuries. It is the inquiry joined with conviction, by St. James, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not from your lusts that war in your members?" James 4:1. The voluptuous, ambitious, covetous passions when disappointed, are the common and natural causes of all the bloody disorders in the world.

The other cause of anger, is contempt, either real or supposed; and that is more provoking to those, who raised by prosperity, look with a distance of mind upon others below them. Prosperity in any kind, swells men with a vain opinion of their worth and dignity; and makes them insolent and intolerable. There is a strange distemper of the eyes in some persons, wherever they look, their own image visibly encounters them. The reason of it is assigned by an inquiring philosopher, that the visive faculty has not spirits and vigour to penetrate through the air to see other things, and the air as a glass makes the reflection of their own image. Thus one of a shallow and weak understanding, is continually representing to himself his own conceited excellencies. And prosperity increases their esteem of themselves unmeasurably above their just value. It is like a concave glass that breaks the rays, and dilates the visive angle; and by a natural enchantment, makes an exorbitant figure, a dwarf to appear a giant. Now as pride is the usual concomitant of prosperity, so there is no passion so inseparable from pride, and so proper to it, as anger. "By pride comes contention; Prov. 13:10. it is the observation of the

wisest man, confirmed by universal experience. Pride makes men imperious and impatient, boisterous and stormy against all that offend them. Pride, anger, and revenge, like serpents twine and wreath about one another. Pride interprets an offence as an high contempt, and raises anger; and anger provoked, takes proportionable revenge to the conceived injury. We have a tragical instance of this recorded in scripture. 2 Kings 8:12, 13. Hazael when foretold by the mourning prophet, that he would stain himself with the innocent blood of the Israelites, "slay their young men with the sword, and dash their children, and rip up their women with child:" he startled at it as an execrable cruelty? "And Hazael said, but what, is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, the Lord hath showed me, that thou shalt be king over Syria." When advanced to empire, he divested humanity. Pride armed with power is furious at opposition; and the flaming passion, like a frightful comet, presages and produces terrible effects. Thus it is evident how the lusts of the flesh are fomented by prosperity.

3. Prosperity inclines sinners to an impious neglect of God, which is a sin of the highest nature, and prolific of innumerable evils. All sin is an irregularity, either in the excess or the defective extreme, either in overvaluing and loving the creature, or in the disesteem and indifference to the Creator, and prosperity increases the aversion of the carnal heart from God, in the same degrees as it strengthens the propensity to the world. For the opening this, it will be necessary to consider the essential and eternal respects due from the reasonable creature to God. And they are four comprehensive of all the rest.

A solemn thankful recognition of him as the author of our beings, and all the comforts we enjoy. Supreme love to him. An humble fear of his displeasure. Entire obedience to his will. As in this regular universe, every kind of being has its proper end; so it cannot be denied, without the most evident absurdity, that God in all these respects is the chief end of man.

(1.) A solemn thankful recognition of God, as the author of our beings, and all our comforts, is continually due to him. The neglect of this is so contumelious to the majesty and glory of God, and so contrary to those most binding obligations to his mercy and goodness, that it is an offence infinitely provoking. In every transgression the authority of the Lawgiver is despised; but this immediately reflects dishonour upon the Deity. As a common felony is a breach of the king's laws, but treason not only violates his laws, but strikes immediately at his person and dignity. Now prosperity inclines sensual persons to this wretched neglect of God. The world, with all its desirable things has the dominion and full possession of the understandings, memories, and hearts of men, and serious thoughts, with warm affections towards God are banished from them. It is the character of a wicked person, but most proper to him in his prosperity, "God is not in all his thoughts." Psal. 10:4. Of this impiety there are several degrees: the highest is explicit atheism, a disbelief of God and his providence, of his being and bounty; and this is sometimes occasioned by plentiful prosperity. And the consequences are, pride that blasts the mind, as it were, with lightning, and confidence in the things of this world. Of this we have astonishing instances in the scripture. Nebuchadnezzar transported in a vain-glorious flush of joy, at the view of his magnificent works, breaks forth in those lofty insolent expressions; "Is not this great Babel that I have built, for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and the honour of my majesty?" as if he had been raised by his own power, and did not owe his greatness to the King of heaven. Thus it is charged against the prince of Tyrus, "Thy heart is lifted up because of thy riches; and thou hast said, I am a god, and sit in the seat of God; and thou settest thine heart as the heart of God." Ezek. 28:2. He presumed that his throne for glory and stability was like the divine kingdom, that cannot be shaken, and forgot that he was a frail man in a mutable world. Plentiful prosperity is so strong a temptation to atheism, that a wise and holy saint earnestly deprecated it as a pernicious snare: "Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?" Prov. 30:9. The carnal heart, in the full fruition of the world, is apt to ascribe all to the

course of nature, or to human contrivance and endeavours, without any serious acknowledgment of the divine liberality and beneficence. Prodigious ingratitude, and equal folly! As if one should imagine that a fountain of water had not its original from the sea, but from the marble stones, through which it immediately and visibly springs. Or as if it were requisite the hand of the giver should be as visible as his gifts.

Now although few arrive to this height of impiety in actual thoughts and open words; yet prosperous sinners are always guilty of an interpretative and virtual denial of God: they have not a solemn grateful remembrance of their benefactor and his benefits, and a due sense of their dependance upon him. It was the wise and holy counsel of Moses to Israel, "When they should be possessed of Canaan," a place of delight and profit, Deut 6:12. "When thou shalt have eaten, and art full, then beware lest thou forget the Lord." The caution so enforced, intimates a sinful disposition in the carnal heart, in prosperity to neglect God. There may be a notional remembrance of him in the mind, a naked ascription of all good things to his providence, a complimentary visit in exterior worship; yet without an inward cordial sense of our dear obligations for his most free favours. The apostle charges "the rich in this world, not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God. So foolishly are men prone to depend for protection, reputation, and provision of all things upon their estates, as if they were unconsumable, and neglect God their rock, who is the alone sufficient foundation of all our hopes and comfort.

(2.) Supreme love to God is an indispensable duty from men upon the account of his most amiable excellencies and benefits. "Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment, and consequently a coldness and indifferency to God, much more a strong aversion from him, is a sin of the most heinous nature: now prosperity has a special malignity to disincline the heart from God. The supreme love of God includes an act of the understanding, a transcendent esteem of his favour; "thy loving-

kindness is better than life;" it inspires the soul with ardent desires after him; "my soul follows hard after thee;" it produces the most joyful satisfaction in communion with him. The thoughts of God are unspeakably "precious and sweet;" the ordinances, the blessed means of conveying his grace, are highly valued; and sin that displeases and separates from God, is hated as the greatest evil. Now the soul must be refined to a heavenly temper, to some degrees of angelical purity, before it is capable of light to see his spiritual excellencies, and love to enjoy them. And if the soul does not make the body heavenly and spiritual, the body will make the soul earthly and fleshly. From hence it is that the affluence of things pleasing to the senses, fastens the carnal heart to the world as its happiness and heaven; it darkens the mind, and vitiates the affections, that the soul "can neither taste nor see how good the Lord is." It is the universal character of men in the carnal state; "they are lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God." And a remiss degree of love is comparative hatred. A sin of astonishing guilt, and not less odious to God, and damning in its nature, though little observed and resented by carnal men: for the highest dishonour of God is complicated with disobedience in it. A sin that deserves and inflicts the sorest punishment; for God alone, whose goodness is infinite, can make us perfectly and eternally happy:* and the spiritual separation from him is such an invaluable loss, that when truly understood, is the foundation of the heaviest sorrow.

(3.) The fear of God, is a most distant affection from the heart of the foolish sinner in his prosperity. The fear of reverence, and the awful esteem of God, that proceeds from the reflection upon his glorious greatness, is a grace that remains in heaven: the angels in all their bright degrees of excellence cover their faces before his throne. The fear of circumspection that restrains from displeasing him upon the account of his justice and power, is a proper affection to men in the present state. The blessed in heaven are above this fear, being confirmed in a state of unchangeable perfection and felicity: the damned in hell are below this fear, in that no change can make their condition worse: but it is most useful and congruous in this middle

state. This fear of God is "the beginning of wisdom," the first and chiefest part of it in respect of order and dignity. For the true notion of wisdom, consists in the foresight of evils, in the choice and use of effectual means to avoid it, and it is the best wisdom that avoids the greatest danger. This fear is the principle of conversion from sin to holiness; exciting us to make God our friend, who is so dreadful an adversary, so holy and just, that he will not connive at sin, and spare the guilty and impenitent; and so powerful, that with one stroke he can utterly destroy his most stubborn enemies. Carnal security is directly opposite to this fear of God, and nothing does more harden and fortify men in security, than a prosperous state. The voluptuous and sensual are without apprehension of danger, till imminent and in their view. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God. Psal. 55:19. Uninterrupted prosperity tempted them to atheistical security: and as none are solicitous and in anxiety, lest the sun, whose presence is the support and beauty of the world, should not arise in the morning, because its regular course is established and constant; and it would be a miracle contravening the order of nature if it should be stopped; thus the long enjoyment of plenty, and ease, and peace, renders men constantly secure and fearless, as if the tenor of their prosperity were invariable, and no evil could disturb it; or at least they will set back the expectation of evil at a great distance, like those profane scorers mentioned by the prophet, "they say, the vision he sees is for many days to come, he prophesies of the times afar off," and with a brutish stupidity, slight the divine threatenings. And from hence it follows, that none are so rebelliously and boldly disobedient, as the prosperous sinner; which is the fourth thing to be considered.

(4.) Entire obedience is due to the supreme lawgiver, who is able to save and destroy for ever: yet he is mercifully inclined to pardon the infirmities of men, and greater sins retracted by repentance. There are sins of ignorance, when a man dashes blindfold against the law; and of sudden surreption, when there is no time to deliberate, and for recollection; and the best are not exempted here from sins of this nature: there are sins of deadly malignity, when men are careless of

God's commands, and indulge their lusts, though not without some remorse. But the prosperous sinner is usually most presumptuous, he sins with a high hand, and incurs a greater guilt, and shall be exposed to greater punishment. When the fear of God is extinguished, luxury takes the reins, and breaks through the hedge of the law, without feeling the wounding thorns, the fearful threatenings in it; and drives on through all the degrees of sin. It is the aggravation of the Israelites' ingratitude; Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked; and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation." Deut. 32:15. They were like beasts high fed, that become fierce and untractable, will endure no yoke upon them. The prosperous sinner securely despises the commands of God, and by an implicit blasphemy dares his offended omnipotence, as if he were stronger than the Lord. He concludes his safety from his present success, "and says in his heart, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, and add sin to sin: the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord shall smoke against that man to his destruction." Deut. 29:19, 20.

4. Prosperity exposes dangerously to the tempting power of satan, whose subtilty, malice, and diligence, are always exercised in training men to perdition. His destructive power cannot make immediate impressions on the soul, but he tempts by objects without, and the affections within; the world and the flesh that are in combination with him. He is accordingly styled, "the God of this world," 2 Cor. 4. as he reigns in the men of the world, by using the things of the world, to obtain and establish his kingdom. He blinds their eyes by glittering temptations, deceives and surprises them by his fallacies. And although it is difficult to conceive and unfold his infernal agency, and pernicious operations; and it is certain he cannot make a forcible entry into the soul, and tempt with prevalency and success, without the consent of the will, yet we are told, that he is a prime mover in the sins of men. He entered into Judas, and by putting a lustre on the silver, exciting his covetous desires, prevailed with him to betray the Lord of glory. "He works powerfully in the children of disobedience." Ephes. 2:2. They are as it were possessed and acted by

his strong inclinations. They are said to "be taken captive by him at his will." 2 Tim. 2:1. It is an allusion to the catching of beasts; when by the address and craft of the hunters, they are drawn or urged into the toil prepared for them. Now prosperity furnishes him with the materials whereof he weaves the most fatal snares: for his strength and art to destroy principally lie in specious representations, and fallacious promises of happiness in the enjoyment of worldly things. This will appear, by considering,

(1.) That pleasant temptations are most apt to seduce the souls of men to ruin. As in sowing the earth, when there is a congruity between the soil and the seed, it is nourished and springs up to a plentiful harvest. So when temptations are suitable to the heart, they are entertained with complacency, and are productive of actual sins. "Every man is tempted (cum effectu by Satan) when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed:" the sensual appetite is drawn forth by things grateful to it: "then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Jam. 1:11, 15. When the appetite has obtained the consent of the will, the complete act of sin follows; and sin habitually indulged, ends in death.

Some temptations of satan are of such a black complexion, and so terrible to human nature, that the soul resists them, till by violence and restless importunity it is overcome: but by the attractives of pleasure he easily prevails. As in cutting of timber, if one strikes cross the grain, there is strong resistance; but if the blow follows the vein of the wood, it easily cleaves asunder. The temptations of riches, honour, and pleasures, are so delightful, that the devil commands or persuades men to a compliance with them.

Besides, his malice in pleasant temptations is less discernible; and consequently men do not by circumspection, and prayer for divine grace, preserve themselves from the mischief of them. If we are fiercely assaulted by unnatural temptations that cause extraordinary agonies of spirit, we seek for supernatural assistance, and fortify

ourselves with holy resolutions against the open enemy. But by the pleasures of sin, he insinuates into mens' hearts, and feeds the deadly disease so gratefully, that they discover not their danger till past recovery. Therefore he destroys more by his serpentine suggestions, by winning charms, than by fiery rage. Indeed he is never more a devil, than when he deceives; and we are divinely warned of his guile, devices, and wiles, that we may not be surprised and ruined by our invisible adversary.

2. Plentiful prosperity affords variety of temptations, which he makes use of to prevent the satiety and dislike that the same repeated temptations would cause. Since man was divided from God, the true centre of the soul, he breaks into a thousand irregular desires; and in the apostle's phrase, "serves divers lusts and pleasures:" and the vanities of the world do rather cloy than satisfy; that which brings transporting joy at first, by continuance becomes nauseous and insipid. Now the tempter, with the abundance of prosperity, so orders his temptations, as to take off the weariness of one pleasure by another, and keeps hit slaves in the magical circle of variety. As a rich Epicure provides a universe of luxury, commands the four elements to make a show,* the earth, the air, the water, of their treasures, and the fire of its art to dress them, thereby to excite the languishing appetite, to give a relish to intemperance, and satisfy the greedy eye, as well as the blind belly. Thus satan, the architect of pleasure, brings out of his storehouse several kinds of delightful temptations, to rekindle the carnal appetite when sated: without variety desire often fails the man, and pleasure fails the desire. Voluptuaries are dissolved in the changing streams of pleasure.

(3.) Idleness, that is often the concomitant of prosperity, gives him a tempting opportunity, and makes men more receptive of his temptations. The sin and destruction of Sodom was from hence. "This was the iniquity of Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and idleness was in her, and her daughters." Ezek. 16:49. The idle person prevents the devil, beckons the tempter to do his office. When the "house is empty," the mind not exercised with better employments, and the

heart is loose and unguarded, the tempter is invited to take possession.

Idleness is directly opposite to life, as well as felicity. To live, is to be in action. Inanimate things are only bound with a dead rest. And amongst inanimate bodies, as they ascend in perfection, they are more active. The heavens that excel in situation and qualities all things that are without life, are in continual motion. And man's felicity consists in the most perfect actions of the most perfect life; in the vision and enjoyment of the blessed God. Now man naturally being averse from a state contrary to life and felicity, if he is not employed in business becoming the reasonable immortal soul, rather than languish in idleness, is active "in making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Time is tedious, and that it may pass away pleasantly, men seek for diversions that are usually either sinful in their own nature, or connected with sins.

A lawful employment, is a double security against temptations: partly divine, as it entitles us to God's providence over us; for whilst we are obeying his command, we are encouraged by his promise, "that he will keep us in all our ways;" either prevent temptations, or afford us assistance to vanquish them: and partly natural; for whilst we are diligently exercised in a lawful calling, the mind is not at leisure to attend the temptation, and the senses do not so easily admit those objects that betray the soul. And it is observable, that God, who is merciful in his chastisements, orders that fallen man should obtain the fruits of the earth to support his life by the sweat of his brow, that his incessant labour might preserve him from idleness; which to corrupt nature is the seminary of so many vile lusts.

(4.) As the temptations of prosperity make men an easy prey to satan, so they keep them in the most perfect and miserable bondage under his power. When he has taken hold of their affections, "he leads them captive at his will." They are freely drawn by the pleasing force of his temptations: they are voluntary slaves, and in love with their captivity. It was the cruel and crafty advice offered to the

Athenians, to keep the subdued inhabitants of Egina from rebelling, to cut off their thumbs, that they might be* incapable to manage a spear, and by war obtain a victorious rescue from their tyranny, but be fit to pull the oar in the gallies. It is an emblem of satan's dealing with his slaves; for by the pleasures of sin, their hearts are weak, disabled from vigorous and holy resolutions to resist his power; they cannot make use of the "armour of God" for their defence: and their lusts are strong, they are patient of his drudgery, constant at the oar, and faithful to their chains. And from hence it is evident that men are never more dangerously under the destructive power of satan than when they enjoy prosperity.

5. Prosperity is destructive to many, in that it affords them advantages to corrupt others, and reciprocally exposes them to be corrupted by others. Persons in dignity, wealth, and power, when depraved in their inclinations and actions, are like public fountains poisoned, that convey a spreading ruin abroad.† Their evil example has a pernicious influence, and more commanding efficacy as a rule, than their laws they ordain as rulers. The manners of princes are as current as their money, that being stamped with their image and superscription, though the metal be base, passes freely among the people. The reason of it is evident, for without the restraints of shame and fear, the sensual passions are riotous and licentious.

Shame, is a displeasure at evils that are attended with dishonour and infamy, especially at sinful evils that are so shameful in their own nature, that the most sordid things in comparison are less ignominious. Now foul vices when practised by men of conspicuous eminence, do not seem with that turpitude and deformity as is inherent in their nature. As a muddy vapour drawn up by the sun, and enamelled with the rays of light, appears amiable to the eye, not dreggy and foul as it is in itself. Innumerable miscarry by the vicious examples of persons in honour; for When sins are gilded over with creditableness, many think it necessary to be unholy, that is, truly vile, that they may be fashionably noble. And when those that are in power abuse it, as a privilege for licentiousness in sin, inferiors are

viciously bold, expecting facility and indulgence in the pardoning those faults of which their superiors are guilty: and those who do not fear to be punished, do not fear to sin. Thus amongst the heathens,* lasciviousness was lawless, because they ascribed their vicious passions to their supposed deities, and did not fear their revenging justice for what was practised by them. Besides, prosperity exposes the rich and great to be more corrupted by others. Servile spirits will be cruelly obsequious to the humours and lusts of those upon whom they depend, and the ready instruments of accomplishing their irregular desires. It is their interest to please them, from whom they receive favours and benefits. And how few have so firm a virtue, as to break the twisted temptations of pleasure and profit? The rich and great in the world, are usually attended with a train of dependants, or vicious associates, whose compliance is very influential to harden a vicious disposition into a corrupt habit. These are underworkers to satan the master-tempter, and feed the double element of infernal fire, lust and rage, in the breasts of those with whom they converse. It is the peculiar misery of men in a high and flourishing condition, that they have many[†] flatterers, and few friends. Few or none dare faithfully represent their sins and danger, lest the sight of their guilt in its true reflection, should offend them. As love is blind to others, so especially to one's self; and mercenary wretches, by the most vile flattery, endeavour to make them believe of themselves, what is pleasing to them to believe. Such, to ingratiate, will commend the mere shadows of virtue, as substantial virtue; and excuse real gross vices, as but the shadows of vice. By deceitful arts they colour and conceal the native ugliness of sin, under a thin appearance and name of* virtue. The arrogant and revengeful, they call generous; the covetous, frugal; the lascivious, gentle; the prodigal, magnificent; the malicious, wary and cautious; the brutish and secure, courageous. The conversation of such is infinitely dangerous and corrupting: for under the disguise of friendship they are the most deadly enemies. What greater danger of being poisoned can there be, than when by art the taste of poison is taken away from the poison, and there is no suspicion of the traitor that gives it? Thus it is further evident, that prosperity is very dangerous to the souls of men.

6. The prosperity of sinners usually renders the means of grace ineffectual, that should reclaim and reform them, and consequently their destruction is remediless. The means of grace are internal or external: internal, the motions of the Holy Spirit, and the convictions and excitations of conscience: external, the ministry of the word, and the counsels of faithful friends; all which are usually made frustrate and inefficacious by the vices and lusts of the prosperous.

(1.) Prosperity makes sinners more incapable of receiving the heavenly impressions of the Spirit, and obstinate in resisting his gracious working. "The flesh and the Spirit are contrary:" Gal. 5. And accordingly as the carnal appetite has dominion and overrules in men, such is their opposition to his restraints from evil, or his motions to what is holy and good. "The sensual have not the Spirit." Jude. They wilfully refuse to give admission to him, when by inward impulses he solicits them; and have a stubborn and active contrariety to his attributes and gracious operations. He is styled "the Spirit of power, and love, and a sound mind." He communicates a sacred sovereign virtue to the soul, whereby the irregular passions are reduced to the obedience of the sanctified mind, and the reigning power of sin is dissolved. He is a free spirit, and restores the soul to true and perfect liberty, by enlarging the will, and making it commensurate with the divine will: and from hence it is the inseparable character of a converted person, he is willing to do what God will have him do, and to be what God will have him be. But sensual persons, by the pleasant infusions of servility from the tempter, and carnal objects, have lost their power and* desire of spiritual liberty, and resist the Holy Spirit, when he offers to break the bands of their lusts. The Spirit in converting the soul, inspires it with heavenly love to God for the ever-satisfying beauty of his perfections; and from love proceeds intellectual delight in communion with him, in affectionate ascents to him, and his gracious descents to the soul: but the sensual are fastened in the mire of their sordid pleasures, and can take no heavenly flight, and relish no divine comforts. The Spirit produces "a sound mind," to judge sincerely of things as they are. And from hence the corrupting

vanities of the world lose their attractive charms, and eternal things appear in their reality and excellency, and are chosen and sought with persevering diligence. But the sensual heart is a perpetual furnace, whose smoke darkens the mind, that it cannot discover sublime and heavenly excellencies; and whose impure heat fires the will, that it is earnest in the pursuit of fleshly pleasures. Briefly, nothing does more quench the Spirit in his illuminating, quickening, and attractive operations, than sensuality: and nothing more heightens sensuality, and increases the averseness of carnal men to the holy law of God, and makes their conversion more difficult than prosperity. Indeed, the Spirit of God can by effectual grace convert the most unprepared habituate sinner, the most obstinate enemy of holiness; he can melt the most rocky stubborn heart, into a holy softness and compliance with its duty; for creating power is of infallible efficacy; and there are some objects and miracles of divine grace, that are the everlasting monuments of its glorious power in subduing the most fierce violence of rebellious sinners. But the Spirit of God does not work as natural agents, that are active to the extent of their power. The winds blow with all their force, and the sun enlightens the air with all its lustre. The holy Spirit is an intelligent and voluntary agent, whose power in working is regulated by his will, and directed by his wisdom. There are some things repugnant to the divine attributes, that it is impossible God should do them: the apostle saith, "that God cannot lie," for it is contrary to his truth, one of his essential perfections. And it is as impossible that he should do any thing unbecoming his wisdom. He threatened the sensual world, "my Spirit shall not always strive with man, for he is flesh;" Gen. 6. that is, corrupt and indulgent to his fleshly appetites, and always opposing and controlling the pure motions of the Spirit. We read that our Saviour "could do no mighty works in his own country, because of their unbelief:" Mark 6:5. not as if their infidelity abated his divine power, but they were unprepared to receive benefit by them, his miracles would have been cast away upon such invincible persons. Who will sow the barren sands, or water dead plants, or give a rich cordial to a furious patient that will spill it on the ground? And it is an act of justice to deprive sinners of those inspirations which

they have so long resisted. Those who are tender and tractable, and unfeignedly resign up themselves to his conduct in the ways of life, shall receive more powerful influences to perfect the blessed work begun in them: "he will give more grace to the humble:" but those who are so far from valuing his graces and comforts, that should be received with the highest respect, that they ungratefully despise them, and rebel against his motions and counsels, he righteously deserts. St. Stephen in his charge against the Jews, to complete the aggravation of their sins, reproaches them; "ye stiffnecked, and uncircumcised in heart, and ears, ye always resisted the Holy Ghost." Acts 7. The obstinate sinner rebels against his authority, and contemns his mercy. The tempter with his charms is presently entertained, as the devils easily entered into the swine; but the Holy Spirit with his gracious offers is rejected. Wretched indignity! rather to obey a slave and an enemy, than the lawful sovereign.

If the saints grieve the Spirit of God, by a wilful neglect of his assisting grace, and fall into presumptuous sins, although from the perfection of his nature he is not capable of passionate grief, yet he infinitely dislikes their sins. And as grief when it is oppressing, causes the spirits to retire to the heart, and nature is as it were shut up in its springs, and obstructed from communicating agility and vivacity in the ordinary operations of the senses: thus the Holy Spirit when grieved withdraws, and there follow a disconsolate eclipse and interruption of his reviving quickening presence. But the indulgent habituate sinners, provoke him finally to leave them to their own lusts. It is true, his deserting them is usually gradual, as in a consumptive person the stomach, the colour, the strength, decline by degrees, till nature sinks irrecoverably under the disease; so the motions of the Spirit in those who have often repelled them, are not so frequent and vigorous as before; his after-calls are weaker, wasting, and dying every day, till his total withdrawing from them. How fearful and hopeless is the state of such a sinner? This spiritual judgment always proceeds from inexorable severity, and ends in the eternal ruin of sinners. For without the Spirit's supernatural working, they can never be "renewed to repentance," never

reconciled to God. They may for a time live in a voluptuous course, or follow the business of the world; and a little breath may separate between them and hell, but they shall at last die in their sins, in an unpardonable state for ever. It is said of the Jews, "they rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit, therefore he turned to be their enemy, and fought against them."

(2.) The convictions and excitations of conscience are prevented, or made ineffectual by the prosperity of sinners. Conscience is the applicative mind that respects practice; it directs in our duty, both by inhibitions from what is evil, and by instigations to what is good; and by comparing our actions with the rule, testifies our innocence or guilt, and approves or condemns us.

This intellectual ray was planted in us by the wise God in our creation, and extended to the divine law, the object and end of it, to keep us to our duty. And since our revolt, it is being enlightened and sanctified the vital principle of conversion to God, the powerful means of rescuing the lapsed soul from its prostitution to the flesh, and recovering it to a temper of purity becoming its original excellence, and relation to the Father of spirits. It is true, the law of God is the primary rule of our duty, and the Holy Spirit is the efficient of our renovation; but the enlightened conscience is the immediate rule, and the immediate mover of us to return to our duty. And if conscience, which is the eye of the soul, be covered with a film of ignorance, if it be bleared with the false glitterings of the world, if it totally neglects its office, or makes but a cold application of saving terrors that may control the licentious appetites, if it be disregarded, when it suggests and excites to our duty, the sinner is hardened and settled in his lost state. Now prosperity foment the sensual affections, that obscure the light of conscience, that corrupt its judgment, that smother and suppress its dictates, or despise and slight them, that it is powerless, though constituted God's deputy to order our lives.

Affected ignorance is the usual concomitant of sensual lusts: for the enlightened conscience will convince, and condemn men for their pollutions, and force them here to feel the beginning of sorrows, and thereby make them apprehensive what the issues and consummation will be hereafter, and this will cast an aspersion of bitterness upon their sweet sins, and lessen the full pleasure of them. From hence our Saviour tells us, "Every one that loves to do evil, hates the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved;" John 3:20. that is, by the instructed and awakened conscience. Men love darkness to cover their nakedness and foul deformity. They are averse from knowing their duty, and will not search, lest they should discover such terrible truths that cross their sensual humour. The apostle foretels, "That scoffers should come in the last days, who are willingly ignorant," 2 Pet. 3:5. of the beginning and end of the world, as if there were no divine maker of all things, who has power to destroy them, and consequently no judge to whom men must be accountable for their disobedience to his laws: they assent to the most evident absurdity, that all things were and shall continue in the same tenor: and the cause of their willing ignorance is insinuated in the character that describes them, that they "might walk after their own lusts," more securely, freely, and joyfully.

Sensual lusts do not only hinder men's search after knowledge, but obscure the light of conscience, and corrupt its judgment. There is such an intimate communion between the soul and the body, that interchangeably they corrupt one another: the sins of the flesh sink into the spirit, and corrupt the moral principles, from whence the sensible conscience springs of good and evil. And the sins of the spirit, infidelity, incogitancy, error, security, break out in the deeds of the body, and make the flesh more outrageous in its desires. St. Paul declares, that "unto the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Titus 1:15. A purged heart is requisite for a clear mind; but where lust dwells, it taints and perverts the practical judgment, from whence so many disorders follow in the life. The natural conscience in many cases, in its simple judgment of things, sincerely declares what is to be done,

and what to be avoided; but when compounded and stained with a tincture of sensuality, it judges according to the desires. The rebellious Israelites in the wilderness are described, "It is a people that do err in their hearts:" Psal. 57:10. the heart was the erroneous fountain of all their miscarriages, and forty years instruction could do them no good. Those who are given up to carnal delights, and are in a confederacy with the gross senses, even their directive and judging faculty is carnal in its apprehensions. A reprobate mind, and vile affections, are naturally and judicially the cause and effect of one another. Even natural truths that are plain and bright, as the essential distinction between moral good and evil, between virtue and vice, and the belief of a judgment to come, that is inseparably connected with it; yet through the perverseness and crookedness of men's hearts, are strangely darkened. Men wish according to their carnal interest; and what they wish, they would fain believe; and as when there was no "King in Israel, every one did what was good in his own eyes:" so if there were no after-reckoning, men would, without the check of conscience, follow the wills of the flesh, therefore they are atheists in desire, and if not scared by the pangs of a throbbing conscience, will be so in their thoughts.

The heathens cancelled the law of nature, and transgressed all the rules of duty and decorum; they securely indulged those lusts that are a derogation and debasement to the reasonable creature, and make men below men. The reason of this prodigious degeneracy was, their manners corrupted their minds. St. Paul charges the Ephesians, not to "walk as the other Gentiles, in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Ephes. 4:17, 18, 19. A dead conscience, and a dissolute life, are inseparable. And how many that are surrounded with the celestial beams of the gospel, are as impure and impenitent, as those in the black night of Paganism? They stand at the entrance of the bottomless pit, yet do not smell the brimstone that enrages the fire there: the flames of

their lusts, have seared their consciences to a desperate degree of hardness and insensibility. Of such the apostle speaks, "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time; spots they are, and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings, while they feast with you." 2 Pet. 2:12, 13. They violated all the prescriptions and restraints of natural reason, they had lost all the ingenuous bashfulness of the human nature, and pleased themselves in their false licentious principles, whereby they endeavoured to justify their enormous actions, and set a superficial gloss upon their foul deformities. Now a seduced and seducing mind, make the conversion of a sinner most difficult. Whilst the judgment condemns what the affections approve, men are not so invincibly and irrecoverably lost; the enlightened conscience is an earnest of their return to their duty. But when the spirit is deceived, the flesh always prevails; and men are most dissolute, corrupt, and desperately wicked. Our Saviour says, "If the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness?" How disorderly and ruinous will the course be? "If the salt hath lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" If the conscience, that should be as salt to preserve the soul from tainting pleasure, be corrupted, wherewith can it be restored?

(3.) Fleshly lusts smother and suppress the dictates and testimony of the enlightened conscience, that they are not influential upon the life. The dictates of conscience are in a direct line, instructing and advising men in their duty: the testimony is by reflection upon their errors from the divine rule, and condemning them for their guilt.

1st. The dictates of the enlightened conscience are suppressed. It is the observation of* the philosopher, concerning sensual persons, that they have reason in the faculty and habit, but not in the use and exercise. The practical understanding declares our duty, that it is absolutely necessary to obey God; and men assent to it in the general: but when this principle is to be applied to practice in

particulars that are ungrateful to the corrupt will, lust draws a veil over it, that it may not appear to check the sensual inclinations. Whilst the mind, seduced by the senses, is intent upon the pleasing object, it does not actually and strongly consider the divine command; and conscience is brought under the control of the impetuous passions. The light of reason, as well as of divine revelation, discovers, that the blessed beginning, and the happy end of man, is to be like God, and to enjoy his love; but when there is a competition between his favour, and the things of the world, the carnal heart suppresses the dictates of the mind, and makes a blindfold choice of things present and sensible, as if man were all earth, and there were no spark of heaven within him.

The heathens are charged by St. Paul,—“That they withheld the truth in unrighteousness.” The notion of God as the supreme Lawgiver, and to be obeyed according to his law impressed upon conscience, was a natural truth, and should have reigned in their hearts and lives; but they would not suffer it to exert its power in ordering their actions. There is a natural miracle seen in Egypt every year; when the river Nilus overflows the plains: many living creatures are half formed, and part remains slimy earth, without life or motion.

Altera pars vivit, rudis est pars altera tellus.

Such monsters were the ungodly and unrighteous heathens; half men in their understandings, and half mud in their filthy affections. And there are innumerable such monsters in the christian world.

2dly. The testimony of conscience is suppressed and neglected by the prosperous sinner. If conscience be in some degree righteous, and faithful in its office, “and reproves him, and sets his sins in order before his eyes;” he will not regard its earnest warnings. He is as unwilling to hear that sincere witness in his bosom, as Ahab was the inflexible prophet Micaiah; of whom he said, “I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good of me, but evil.” Prosperity affords many diversions, whereby the sinner shifts off conversing with conscience,

and remains engaged in his sinful state. "I hearkened, and heard," saith the prophet Jeremy, "but they spake not aright; no man repented of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?" What foul ignominious acts, how defiling and debasing my soul, how offensive to the pure eyes of God, who is so glorious in majesty, and dreadful in power? Such a sight of sin would make the conscience broil, and chill the passions, and urge sinners to return to their duty. But whilst they prosper, they are obstinate in rebellion? "Every one turned to his course, as the horse rushes into the battle." As the horse when inflamed, by the noise and other accidents of war, furiously rushes to his own destruction: thus sinners when they encounter alluring objects that divert the mind from serious consideration, either they do not discern, or will not observe the dangers before them, and with as little consideration, and as much fierceness as the beasts venture upon their own destruction. Conversion is the product of the most serious and sad thoughts, from which a prosperous sinner is most averse.

The external means for converting sinners, are usually ineffectual upon them whilst they enjoy prosperity.

First. The "Gospel is the power of God to salvation to them that believe;" and the preaching of it is by divine institution the ordinary means of conversion. God could by the immediate illumination of the mind, and influence upon the will and affections, convert sinners from the errors of their ways; but his wisdom and condescending goodness makes use of the ministry of men to convey the word of truth and life to the world. This way is very congruous, both to the compounded nature of man, by the senses to work upon the soul, and to the native freedom of his will: for though the supernatural agent infallibly changes the heart, yet the instrument can only direct and persuade men, as those who are endowed with intellectual and elective faculties; and thus the efficacy of divine grace is insinuated, in a way suitable to the reasonable nature. The ministers are styled the light of the world, to discover to men their undone condition by sin, and to point out the way to their everlasting peace. Our blessed

Redeemer saves the lost remnant of mankind by the sacred ministry; and where there are no "evangelical preachers sent," or only a doleful succession of blind guides, what* Tertullian says of Scythia, a country that by the extremity of the cold, is hard and dry, and perpetually barren, but the residence of fierce cruelty, is applicable to a nation, the hearts of men are frozen to their sins, there is no melting in the tears of true repentance, no holy heat, only their brutish lusts are ardent and active. But where the ambassadors of Christ are faithful and zealous to induce sinners to break off their sins by repentance, and to be reconciled to God, there are none more incapable of the sanctifying power of the gospel, than sinners in prosperity.

(1.) Pride, the vice of prosperity, makes them fierce and stubborn against the holy and strict rules of the word. "We will not hearken to thee, but will certainly do whatsoever goes out of our own mouth." Isa. 44:16, 17. If a faithful minister represents the inside of their foul souls, their uncomely passions are raised against him: if he recommends the earnest study of holiness, and godliness, they entertain his counsels with derision and disdain. Those to whom the dearest and most affectionate honour is due, being spiritual fathers and physicians, are despised in their persons and office, by fools in their prosperity. They condemn what they do not understand, and affect not to understand what condemns them. They hear sermons to censure, and censure that they may not be troubled by them. What hope is there of reducing haughty scorers to the obedience of the gospel? Even the miracles and ministry of our Saviour were without success upon the pharisees, "who heard and derided him." If such are convinced in their minds, and not disarmed of their pride and self-will, they refuse to yield "themselves to the Lord." Meekness is a requisite qualification for receiving the word with its saving virtue. "We are directed to lay aside all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness; and with meekness to receive the ingrafted word, that is able to save our souls." We are prepared for "divine grace," by a serious sense of our want of it, and earnest desire to obtain it. "He fills the hungry with good things and the rich he sends empty away."

None are so insensible of their spiritual wants, and averse from the humble acknowledgment of them, as the prosperous sinner; and none more unlikely to obtain spiritual riches.

(2.) Infidelity that is occasioned and confirmed by prosperity in sin, renders the gospel ineffectual to the salvation of men. "The word preached did not profit the Jews, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Heb. 4:2. A steadfast belief of divine revelations, is the principle of obedience: without it, motives of the highest strain are ineffectual. Eternal things are not within the prospect of sense, and though set forth with the clearest evidence of reason, and enforced with the greatest earnestness of affection, yet the sons of darkness sleep profoundly in their sins. If heaven with its joys and glory be revealed in the most affecting manner, it has no more efficacy to move them, than charming music to awaken one out of a lethargy: only violent remedies, bleeding, scarifying, and burning, are proper and powerful for his recovery. If they are warned, that the everlasting king will shortly open the clouds, and come with terrible majesty to the universal judgment, and require an account for his abused mercies: their hearts are apt to reply, as the priests did to Judas, "what is that to us? see ye to it." The terrors of the Lord no more affect them than thunder does the deaf, or lightning the blind. In short, though charged and adjured by all the threatenings of the law and the neglected gospel, though entreated by all the precious promises of mercy, they continue hardened in their voluptuous sins: they despise the eternal rewards of holiness and wickedness, as incredible and impertinent, and ministers as men of vain talk and imaginations. For the infidel senses are not affected with things future, and sinners whilst prosperous, are under their dominion.

(3.) Suppose in preaching the word, a sharp ray of truth darts through the deep and settled darkness of the heart, yet it is soon damped, and without saving effect upon sinners in their prosperity. They may be terrified but are not subdued by the "armour of light;" for they presently take sanctuary in the world to escape the strokes of it. The carnal passions dare not appear before such objects as awaken

the conscience; the senses strongly apply the mind to things that touch them; the fancy is the spring of distraction in the thoughts, and these reign in their full power in prosperous sinners, so that they do not by serious consideration apply things of eternal consequence to themselves. The heart of man with difficulty changes its end; the outward actions may be suspended or overruled for a time, but the love that is natural and predominant in the heart to the present world, cannot be purified and raised to heaven, without the divine efficacy of the word applied by most solemn and frequent thoughts. How plain and convincing are the words of our Saviour; "what will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" But how few in hearing them, have found their souls that were lost in the corrupting vanities of this world? The most seem not to know they have immortal souls, whilst they live as if they had none. The reason is, they will not consider duly their invaluable worth, and the woful folly in neglecting them. When the bird often straggles from the nest, the eggs are chilled and unprolific, for want of its warming incubation. Divine truths are without life and vigour, when they only lie in the memory, without serious and frequent reflections on them. Many are enlightened, but not affected; or affected, but not resolved; or resolved, but their resolutions are not prevailing and permanent, because the word does "not sink into their minds," by deep consideration.

Secondly. The other external means of recovering a sinner from the snares of death, is private admonition, either authoritative, or merely charitable, by showing him his sins, and the fearful consequences that attend them. The neglect of this duty, is a sign and effect of the greatest hatred, as the command of it implies, "thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, and suffer sin to lie upon him" The performance of it, with prudence and meekness, with dear and earnest love, has a special advantage and efficacy, being directly applied to the person whose soul is concerned. The reproofs of a preacher are levelled in common against the sins of men, but not applied in particular to every sinner. It is the office of conscience, to bring home to every man's bosom, what is proper to his case; and

singularly to observe in himself, what is spoken in the general. But in private admonition, the superior or friend supplies the duty of conscience. And (in this sense) "woe be to him that is alone!" that wants a faithful friend to supply the duty of conscience, either to preserve him from falling into sin, or to raise him when down. Now a prosperous sinner is most unlikely to receive the benefit designed by admonition. If the patient does not assist the cure, by receiving holy counsels with humility, respect, and thankfulness, they prove ineffectual, and much more if they be rejected with averseness and contempt. When a superior, (like a father that holds a child over a pit, to make him fear where there is danger) with solemnity admonishes him of his guilt and approaching judgments, he is apt to slight his person as censorious, and his admonition as impertinent. When a friend by faithful reproof endeavours to save his soul from sin and hell, he entertains his reproof with scorn, or with conviction and indignation. Thus the wise observer of men declares the careless wretched disposition of sinners in their prosperity, by their sorrowful reflections in adversity: "thou shalt mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, how have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof? And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me?" Prov. 5:11, 12, 13. Instruction to prevent sin, reproof to correct sin, were disregarded with an implicit hatred, or rejected with absolute and express hatred.

To conclude this part of the argument; experience sadly proves that sinners are never reclaimed from their stubborn folly but by sharp afflictions. They will not believe the evil of sin, till by a real and sensible conviction they take a measure of the evil they have done, by the evil they suffer. Affliction tames the stubborn heart, and makes it humble and relenting. Even Pharaoh that was a bold atheist in his prosperity, and stood upon high terms with Moses, saying, "who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" Yet was an humble suppliant in his distress: "and Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. Entreat the Lord that there be no more mighty

thunderings, and hail." Exod. 9:27; 28. This is set forth in a true and lively comparison by the prophet Jeremy: "as a wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffs up the wind at her pleasure: "in her occasion, who can turn her away?" Jer. 2:24. When fired with lust, she ranges about swiftly, without a rider to guide, and curb to restrain her. "All they that seek her, will not weary themselves; but in her month they shall find her:" it is in vain to pursue her then, but when she is bagged and heavy, they will tame her. Thus when sinners are prosperous, the call of God, and conscience, and of teachers, do not stop them in their voluptuous course, but affliction confines and reduces them to obedience.

7. Prosperity renders men averse to suffering for the sake of Christ, when they are called to give testimony to his truth, and support his cause, Self-denial, with respect to the present life, and all the ornaments, comforts, and endearments of it, is absolutely necessary by the law of Christianity, when the preserving of it is contrary to the glory of Christ, and inconsistent with our duty to him. "Then said Jesus to his disciples, if any man will Come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Mat. 6:24. The cross implies all kinds and degrees of suffering, from the least afflicting evil, to death with ignominy and torment. And how just is it, if we expect to be glorified by his sufferings, that we should willingly suffer for his glory. At the first preaching of the gospel, many were "offended at the cross of Christ: 1 Cor. 1:23. they esteemed it folly, to expect eternal life from one that was put to death, and that he should bring them to the highest glory, who suffered in the lowest weakness. Our Saviour was concealed from their carnal eyes, by the overshadowing train of his afflictions. And the "cross of Christ," Gal. 5:11. that is to be voluntarily and obediently taken up by his disciples, is a greater offence to the world, than that to which he was nailed. It is a harder lesson, that we must obtain glory by our own sufferings, than that it was purchased by our Saviour's. The mind more willingly assents to the reasons of his sufferings, than of ours: in the first, it only encounters with false prejudices, and vain shadows that darken that mighty mystery; but in the second, it must overcome the natural

love of this life, and the pleasures of it, which are so predominant in men. The alliance to the body, and the allurements of the world, are the causes of forsaking religion, when the owning of it will cost us dear. And those who enjoy prosperity, are most easily terrified from their duty to Christ; the account of which is open to reason, both from some general considerations, and from special, that respect sufferings for religion. The general considerations are two.

(1.) The living in pleasures and soft delicacy, enervates the masculine vigour of the spirit, and damps resolution, that it presently faints when assaulted with difficulties. The spirit of a man, encouraged by just, and wise, and generous reasons, will stand firmly under heavy troubles: but fear breaks the native strength of mind, and like a secret sudden palsy, that slackens the nerves, and loosens the joints, causes a trembling and incapacity of bearing evils. The least glimpse of danger, makes the fearful to retire: like some, that apprehensive of the rising winds, will not venture any further in a boat, than that one oar may be on the shore, whilst the other strikes in the water. The timorous, when afflictions attend the faithful profession of the gospel, usually are treacherous to God, to their souls, and to the truth. To God (whose servants they are by the dearest titles) by contradicting their duty, which is to suffer cheerfully for his gospel and his glory, when called forth: and by revolting from his service, they occasion such dishonourable unworthy conceptions of him, as if he were regardless of his suffering servants, and would not gloriously reward those who are faithful to the death, the seal of their loyalty and perseverance: they are treacherous to their souls, by preferring the interest of the perishing flesh, before the happiness of the immortal part: they betray the truth, by exposing it to a suspicion of falsehood; for as the confirming religion by sufferings, doth most effectually recommend it to the belief and affections of others; so the denial of it, or the withdrawing our testimony in times of danger, will incline others to judge that it is not the truth, or at least of no great moment, that the professors of it do not think worth their suffering. How many faint-hearted persons have thus betrayed the Son of God again, and their consciences, and their religion? Their faith that

sparkled in prosperous times, when troubles come, is a quenched coal, raked up in the cold pale ashes of distrustful fears, without any divine light or heat.

(2.) Prosperity makes men unthoughtful and careless of evils that may happen. "I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved." Carnal joy, (the affection of prosperity) and folly are nearly allied, and flatter men as if their ease and calm would never be disturbed: and by supine negligence, they are unprovided for the encountering with evils. According to our circumspection in prosperity, such is our courage in adversity; and by how much the less affliction is expected, so much the more are we perplexed when it seizes upon us. The last day, that shall strangely surprise the world in its deep security, is compared to lightening for its suddenness and terror. Our Saviour therefore plainly has foretold, that the cross is the appendix of the gospel, that it is the property of error to persecute, and the lot of truth to be persecuted: he counsels his disciples to imitate a wise builder, that computes the expence before he begins the fabric, lest having laid the foundation, and not being able to finish it, he be exposed to the just censure of folly. So christians are to forecast the injuries and troubles they are likely to suffer for religion, lest when the tempest threatens, they shamefully desert it. And how heavy will their doom be? "The fearful," that are not storm-proof, "and the liars," that openly renounce what they believe, and profess what they do not believe, "shall be with infidels, idolaters, and murderers, cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." Rev. 21:8.

The special reasons why prosperity makes men so disposed to quit the truth in times of danger, are, because it weakens the principles from whence christian magnanimity springs; and those are unfeigned faith, and divine love. As in natural things the formative virtue determinates the matter to such a being, and disposes to such operations in proportion to the principles from which it results: so in moral things, the soul is disposed and regulated in its actings correspondently to its principles, and is either carnal or spiritual. The universal principle of carnal persons is to be happy here: their

eyes are ever engaged upon, and their desires ever thirsting after sensual satisfaction: "who will show us any good?" and by consequence their main care is, to obtain and secure temporal things, the materials of their happiness. The supernatural principle of a saint is to please God, and enjoy his favour. As men believe they love, and as they love they live.

1st. Unfeigned faith of the rewards of the gospel, is necessary to keep a christian steady in his course, through all the storms and tides of this mutable world. "It is a faithful saying, if we die with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him." 2 Tim 2:11, 12. The apostle usually prefaces with that strong assurance, "it is a faithful saying," when the truth is of eminent importance, and contrary to the sentiments of carnal nature, "if we die with him, we shall also live with him." Our Saviour dedicated martyrdom in his own person: his death was a ransom for us to God, and a sealing testimony of the gospel to men: "he witnessed before Pontius Pilate a good confession." 1 Tim. 6:13. The terror of the Roman tribunal, nor the rage of the Jews, could not make him retract the divine truth which he had so often declared, that he was the Son of God, come from heaven to save the world: and when the cross with its infamy and horror was in his view, he avowed his heavenly kingdom. And all those "who suffer with him," for his truth, and in conformity to his pattern, with his meekness and patience, his charity and constancy, shall reign with him. And what is more powerful for the consolation and establishment of christians, than that their sufferings for Christ shall end in glory. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5. This did miracles in the first ages of the church, conquering all that was terrible to flesh and blood. The heathens despised the hopes of christians as wretched illusions, and with impious scorn upbraided them for their constancy under persecutions:* where is the God 'that can raise the dead, and not rescue the living?' Unbelief is blind, and cannot see beyond this world to the eternal state. But faith in the blessed Redeemer, opens a prospect into the world to come, so full of glory, that no person that has an understanding and will to discourse

and choose, if he steadfastly believes it, but must despise all the evils that the wit and strength of persecutors can inflict in comparison of it. "I reckon," saith the apostle, "that the sufferings of the present life," in all their kinds and degrees, "are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed." Rom. 8:18. Enlightened christians esteemed their sufferings for the cause of God, no arguments of his weakness, but his wisdom, to exercise and try their loyalty and cordial obedience before he rewarded them; and had reason to admire his providence, not to suspect his power and love. They knew that the power of tyrants could only reach the body, the vile, frail, and mortal part of man; but the precious soul was entirely exempted from their rage; and faith assured them of a glorious resurrection after death. The body of a martyr shall be revived as a phoenix out of its ashes; when the body of a persecutor shall be quickened, as a serpent out of a dunghil, the one to be glorified, the other tormented for ever. The belief of this made them extremely valiant in the face of all their threatening cruel enemies. But "the evil heart of unbelief, causes a departure from the living God." Heb. 3:12. He that suspects God's fidelity in his promises, will suspend his own: nature will shrink at the first sight of imminent dangers. An infidel, that lives as if he were all body, and no immortal soul, judges the loss of the present life, and the comforts of it, as his utter undoing and total perishing. He has an appearance of reason to secure his present possessions, whatever becomes of religion; for he expects no future good, that will infinitely more than countervail his present loss: and that prosperity inclines men to atheism and infidelity, has been proved before.

2dly. The love of God inspires believers with a heavenly fortitude, to endure the worst evils that may befall them for his sake. "Perfect love casts out fear;" 1 John 4:18. keeps its supremacy inviolate in the midst of the greatest dangers. Love is an active invincible affection, "as strong as death," that none can vanquish. The love of God is a never-dying flame in the hearts of the saints, because it depends upon the unchangeable love of God to them. "We love him, because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19. Love esteems God as the greatest

reward. A saint does not so much love God for heaven, though a place of inconceivable glory, as heaven for God, because he there reveals his perfections to his people. This holy love, makes the christians faithful and obsequious to Christ, and to prefer his honour incomparably before the present world. The martyrs of the divinest courage, were animated by this holy affection: they "loved not their lives unto the death," but cheerfully offered them as a sacrifice to his praise. Love kindled in them a sacred vehemence, in despising all the glittering temptations of the world. Love inspired them with a victorious patience, to blunt the edge of cruelty. They never repented the choice of his religion, but rejoiced when his glory was set forth by their ignominy, and when their love to Christ appeared in its radiancy and vigour through their sufferings. Love is the principle of constancy, by which religion reigns on earth, and is crowned in heaven.

On the contrary, when riches, honours, and pleasures, are the idols of men's heads and hearts, the chief objects of their esteem and affections, they will sacrifice their souls rather than lose the world, their dear felicity. Therefore St. John earnestly dehorts christians, "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him:" they are utterly inconsistent; partly because the heart cannot be entirely set upon contrary objects, and partly because love to the one requires what is directly contrary to love to the other. From hence St. James vehemently upbraids carnal professors, "ye adulterers, and adultresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." The world is the powerful star, whose aspect he regards, and though with the dishonour and displeasure of God, he will by irreligious compliance secure his temporal interests. The pure refined truth of the gospel, that has passed the fiery trial, he will corrupt and embase by carnal temperaments: the precious truth so dearly bought by the blood of the martyrs, he will vilely sell for the things of this world. Nay of a professor, he will by degrees turn persecutor of those who steadfastly own the truth. The love of the

world so strangely enchants and infects the mind, that a false religion which a man did abhor from, yet when recommended by secular advantages, will appear tolerable, then eligible, then necessary; and consequently the divine truth must be suppressed that contradicts it.

There are such frequent examples of this in every age, that to insist upon many particular instances, were to tell great numbers of the dead to prove that men are mortal. The young man that so earnestly addressed himself to Christ for his direction how to obtain eternal life, when commanded to "give all his estate to the poor, and to follow Christ:" he would not gain at so dear a rate "celestial treasures, but went away sorrowful." Where upon our Saviour declares with solemnity to his disciples, "verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." We read of two tribes of the Israelites, that chose their inheritance on this side Jordan, and would not have a share in the land of Canaan: thus the earthly, minded prefer the present world, the object of their choice and love, before the heavenly Canaan. The ecclesiastical historian* relates, that in the time of persecution by Decius, the rich men among the christians, were most easily and miserably foiled: the love of the world was a dangerous earnest in their hearts, of their revolting back to Pagan idolatry, and the bondage of satan. And in the time of the Arian persecution, how many who by their titles and office were specially obliged to "be valiant for the truth, and to contend earnestly for the faith;" yet did accommodate their profession to their aspiring ambition and greedy avarice? The standard of their religion was the pitch of the state: they had a politic faith, and appeared either orthodox or Arian, as the public favour shined upon truth or heresy, they robbed our Saviour of the honour of his deity (O astonishment!) rather than part with their beloved dignities and riches. So powerful are human respects in those who mind earthly things. Great force is requisite to pluck up a tree that has its roots spread and deeply fastened in the earth; and it cannot be so entirely separated, but that part of the roots will be broken: thus when the affections are deeply set in the world, and by pleasures and riches fastened to it, how hardly is it rent from it! every fibre of

the heart is broken with sorrow. As Lot's wife, when by an angel forced out of Sodom, yet cast a lingering affectionate look after it, and was turned into a pillar of salt. The separation is as bitter as the possession is sweet: and none are more unwillingly divorced from the world, than those who enjoy the confluence of earthly happiness. Now when secular interest outweighs duty, when apparent danger induces to deny the truth of Christ; how terrible and unavoidable will be the punishment of that disloyalty? Our Saviour's threatening is universal; "whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven." Matt. 10:33. A most righteous and dreadful retribution; they denied him as their Lord, and he denies them as his servants. They usurped the title of christians, the relation of his disciples, and in the last day he will publicly disown them. When that sad sentence shall come from their Judge, "depart ye cursed, I know ye not;" what confusion, what anguish will seize upon them! They shall be banished from his glorious kingdom, excommunicated from his blessed society, and tormented with the rebellious angels for ever. It is true, this universal and peremptory threatening, must be understood with an exception of those who after their falling away are restored by repentance. Sometimes a christian that has deliberately and entirely devoted himself to Christ, that has sincerely resolved rather to part with his life, than that for which life is worthy the enjoying; yet by strong temptations has been faint-hearted and denied the truth: like one that disannuls in the height of a fever, the will he made in his composed mind: but afterwards such have resumed new courage, and have, by enduring the sharpest sufferings, confirmed the truth, and ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot.

Lastly. The prosperity of sinners is the great temptation to delay repentance till their state is desperate. Nothing fills hell with so many lost souls, as the putting off repentance till hereafter. How many diseases would be cured in time, if they threatened present death? But their malignity being of a slow operation, they are despised as not worth the trouble of a cure, till they are desperate. It is in spiritual diseases, as it is in those of the body: for sin that is a

sickness unto death, might be prevented by speedy repentance; but many, not apprehending present danger, neglect the precious remedy till they are desperately ruined. "To day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Heb. 3:7. The command respects the season as well as the duty. As our obedience must be entire without reserves, so it must be present without delay, even in our early age, and continued in the whole tenour of our life. The worm of conscience sometimes nips security, and there is a strange union of contrarities in the breast of a sinner, that makes him inexcusable and incurable. He complains of the bondage to his lusts, yet takes pleasure in it: he is convinced it will be destructive, yet voluntarily continues in that sweet captivity. If conscience be troublesome, he pacifies it with an intention to reform hereafter, and thinks that a future repentance will be sufficient to prepare for a future judgment. And none are so easily and willingly deceived to their everlasting ruin by this pretence, as those who enjoy the present world. Prosperity makes them forgetful of the grave, and human vicissitudes, and hardens them in deep security. It was the divine prayer of Moses, "so teach us to number our days, as to apply our hearts unto wisdom;" implying, that the great cause of men's destructive folly, is from not reflecting upon the shortness and uncertainty of their time here. Death is certain to the old, and life uncertain to the young. There are many back doors to the grave, and men are led surprisingly thither. The time of their residence here is fixed by the divine determination, and concealed from their eyes. How many in their youth and prosperity have presumed upon a long life, yet unexpectedly have "returned to their earth;" as a wall covered with ivy, that falls on a sudden with its green ornaments, by its weight and weakness. The hour of death, is the hour of men's destiny for ever. There is no space of repentance in the interval between death and judgment; but the soul immediately after its departure, receives a decisive irrevocable doom, that is in part executed, and shall be publicly and entirely executed at the last day. Yet men boldly venture to continue in their pleasant sins, upon the forlorn hope of a season to repent hereafter. Astonishing enormous folly! as if they were assured of time, and the divine grace. And thus

it is fully proved how fatal and destructive prosperity is to the wicked.

The Folly of Prosperous Sinners, It is Voluntary, Culpable, Ognominious, Most Woeful

II. The second thing to be considered, is the folly of prosperous sinners. Folly is the cause of their abusing prosperity, and the effect of their prosperity abused. The most proper notion of folly is, that the understanding mistakes in judging and comparing things; from whence the will slides into error, and makes an unworthy choice: and according to the weight and consequence of things, the more remarkable is the degree of folly in not discerning their differences. Now when men value and are delighted in temporal prosperity as their happiness, and heaven with its glory and joys is neglected and vilified in the comparison, it is folly above all wonder; folly of so rare and singular a nature, that if the judicative faculty were not corrupted, it were impossible they should be guilty of it. This will appear by considering the essential and inseparable properties of man's felicity; it is perfective and satisfying of man in his supreme faculties.

1. The perfection of man does principally consist in the excellencies of his spiritual and immortal part:* as in the various kinds of creatures, there is something that is their proper excellency, for which they were made, and accordingly are valued: as strength or beauty, swiftness or courage: so, the first and chief and proper excellency of man, is the rational mind, that distinguishes him from the brutes, and gives him a natural and regular dominion over them. It is the highest and divinest faculty of the soul; and from hence the deduction is clear, that our felicity consists in the perfections of the mind. If the excellencies of all other creatures were united in man,

they could derive no true worth to him, because they cannot adorn and perfect what is his proper excellence. Now, according to the quality of the objects, about which the mind is conversant, it is either tainted and depreciated, or purified and exalted. To apply it to sensual worldly things, how to "increase riches, and make provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts," is more truly vilifying, than if a prince should employ his counsellors of state, and the judges of his courts, in the offices of his kitchen, or to dig in the coal-pits. The mind is corrupted and debased by application to inferior perishing things, as gold and silver are allayed, and lose of their purity and value, by a mixture with copper and tin. God alone is the sovereign object of the mind, with respect to its dignity and capacity, its superior and noblest operations: and by contemplating his glorious attributes and excellencies, who is best in himself, and best to us; the mind is enlightened and enlarged, renewed and raised, made holy and heavenly, full of beauty, order, and tranquillity, and transformed into the likeness of the divine perfections.

2. All the prosperity in the world cannot bring true satisfaction to him that enjoys it: for it is disproportionate to the spiritual and immortal nature of the soul. This is so clear by reason, that it may seem as needless and impertinent to insist on it, as to use arguments to prove that gold and diamonds are not proper food for the body: but the self-deceiving folly of the carnal heart, so enamoured of the vanity of this world, (that like the pleasure of a charm, is counterfeit and deadly) makes it necessary to inculcate known truths, that men may timely prevent the sad consequences of such folly, and not be accessaries to their tormenting conviction by experience. It is true, carnal and material things, pleasantly affect the outward man; yet such a vanity is in them, that they are neither a pure nor a prevalent good, with respect to the natural and civil state of man here. Riches, and honours, and sensual pleasures, are not without a mixture of bitterness, that corrupt the content that men expect in them; they are not efficacious to remove or allay the evil to which all are exposed in this open state. A sharp disease makes all the joys of the world insipid and despicable. But suppose them in their elevation, they

cannot supply the wants and exigencies, nor satisfy the desires of the soul. They cannot restore men to the favour of God, and blessed communion with him; nor renew the image of his holiness in them. They are but a vain name, a naked shadow of felicity, and entirely depend upon the simplicity and fancies of men for their valuation. The apostle therefore tells us, that they "that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish lusts." Those who resolve and labour to get riches, thinking to find felicity in them, are misled by as gross folly, as those who presume by their costly preparations to turn brass or lead into gold. For if it be folly to desire and attempt what is impossible, it is equally so in those who seek for joyful satisfaction in wealth, and in any other secular things, as in the Alchemists, that waste their real estates for imaginary treasures.

Besides; the happiest condition here, as it is like the moon, that at the brightest is spotted and imperfect; so eclipses are not less strange to it than to that planet. The world is at the best of a transient use, and the pleasant error of the carnal mind, will be of short continuance. Within a little while, that which was declared with such solemnity by the angel in the Revelation; "He lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that lives for ever, that time shall be no more;" will be true of every mortal person. The rich man that was surveying his estate with carnal complacency, and extending his hopes of voluptuous living to many years, was surprised with the fatal sentence; "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? Luke 12:20. Now, can that be our happiness that is of such an uncertain tenure, that every hour may be snatched from us, or we from it? If one should with great expences build a mansion-house, and plant gardens in a place subject to frequent earthquakes, that would overturn all into confusion; would not his folly be conspicuous? Yet how many practice themselves what they would deride in others? They set their heart upon the things of the world, that are liable to a thousand changes, and must shortly be parted with for ever. The slaves of honour, that are so swelled with airy titles of greatness, and the flattering respects of others, must shortly be

divested of all; and when laid in their tombs, the trophies of vanity, will be insensible of the renown and applauses of the world.* Alexander the Great is long since dead to the pleasure of his immortal name. And death will make a final separation between the rich and their treasures, and put an end to all the delights of men. Now what folly is it to prefer a felicity, that is deceitful in the enjoyment, and leaves the soul empty when it most fills it, that is so vain and transitory, before an eternal heaven; a blessedness that surpasses our hopes, that secures our fears, that satisfies our immense desires; a blessedness that the human understanding in all the capacity of its thoughts is not able to comprehend; a blessedness becoming the majesty and magnificence of God that bestows it. What madness, to despise heaven, as if the eternity of the next world were but a moment, and to love this world, as if this momentary life were an eternity. The full aggravation of this, dies the love of the world with the deepest tincture of folly: as will appear by considering,

(1.) It is a voluntary chosen folly. Thus the divine wisdom with passion reproaches wretched sinners, "How long ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" Prov. 1:22. This heightens their character to love so obstinately, what is so unlovely and unbecoming the reasonable nature. The light of reason and revelation discovers the vanity of the world: it is not for want of evidence, but for want of using the light, that men do not discern their wretched mistake. God complains in the prophet, "My people doth not consider." Isa. 1. The means of restoring men to a sound mind, is by due consideration. The soul retires from the world, and makes a solemn inquiry; for what end am I created? For what do I consume my time? If my endeavours are all for the earth, what remains for heaven? What do I prepare, what shall attend me, what shall I meet in the next state? How long will it be before I must leave this visible world, and after the irrevocable step into the next, immediately appear before the enlightened tribunal of God, whose judgment is so strict, that the "Righteous are scarcely saved," and so heavy, that the strongest sinners cannot endure? Can the world prevent my doom to hell, or release me from it? Will the remembrance of the enjoyments here, afford any

refreshment in everlasting burnings? By such sad and frequent soliloquies, the vicious sensual affections are eradicated, and the heart is transplanted from earth to heaven. If men would wisely ponder things, if conscience, the sincere and unsuspected judge did hold the balance, and put into one scale the glory, the riches, and pleasures of this world; and into the other, the promises that belong to godliness here, and hereafter, how despicably light will they be found? It was truly said, that false scarlet appears with lustre, till compared with the rich and true; so the fictitious felicity of this world is very specious, and ravishes the mind of men, till compared with celestial felicity. Worldly honour is counterfeit, because it is no certain argument of inherent worth: vain-glory and real infamy, often meet in the same person: yet it is admired, and ambitiously sought, till compared with the "Honour of the saints." What is a reputation and honour with the worms and moles of the earth, compared with the honour that comes from the esteem of God, and angels, and other blessed spirits above, who incomparably exceed all mortals in number, and infinitely in understanding? What is a vanishing shadow of reputation, against an eternal inestimable weight of glory? What are the riches of this world, gold, and silver, and jewels, for gaining of which so many lose their souls, but vile trash compared with the sacred treasures of heaven, the graces of the saints? What are the empty delights of the senses, compared with the "Peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost," that can sweeten all our sorrows here, and the fulness of joy that springs from God's presence in heaven? If men would make judicious comparisons, their affections would cool towards perishing vanities. But they will only look upon what is pleasant and attractive in the world, without regarding its miserable defects, without considering what is infinitely better and most worthy of their ardent desires and vigorous endeavours. They are so pleased with their error, so engaged in the sweet captivity of the world, that they cannot extricate themselves if they would, because they will not if they could.

(2.) It is a culpable and guilty folly. When children prefer things of lustre before things of value, their childish toys, before real treasures;

when they choose a little present enjoyment, before a future good that is incomparably better, their folly is innocent, because reason cannot display its operations in them: but when men, who are capable to distinguish between the things that "are seen and temporal, and the things that are not seen and eternal;" when they sottishly prefer sensible things before spiritual, notwithstanding the vast difference between them, both in the quality and duration, their choice is so criminal, as deserves an everlasting hell. If Esau had been a child when he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, his folly had been excused; for he was compelled by hunger; and the glorious dignity of the birthright was disproportionate to his appetite and understanding: but in his mature age, when capable to understand his interest, to part with so sacred and precious an advantage, for a little sensual satisfaction, was so "profane an act," that he was justly deprived of the divine blessing that was annexed to the birthright. That beasts are wholly led by their sensual appetites, is natural and regular, their voracity and cruelty, folly and filthiness, envy and fury, are not vicious passions, because sense is the superior faculty in them. But when men are so brutish, that the objects that please their eyes, and carnal senses, are the only attractives of their affections, it is unnatural and monstrous; because reason should have the supremacy in them. If a woman remain in a single state, she has power over her actions, and may freely govern herself; but if married, is subordinate to her husband: and disobedience to his authority and prudent counsels, is culpable. The body considered as the seat of the senses, has natural appetites, and might enjoy what is suitable to them according to their capacity; but united with an immortal spirit, that is stamped with the living image of God, its desires must be limited and directed by the mind, and the pleasing of sense in actions forbidden by the mind, is rebellion against the ruling faculty. If one be under a disease that wine inflames and increases, and the physician forbids it as deadly, yet the patient will judge only by his palate whether wine be good for him; were it not a kind of brutishness worthy of the evil that attends it? Such perverse folly are men guilty of in their sensual satisfactions, whereby the soul is unspeakably wronged, and God highly dishonoured, who has given

to man a more excellent spirit, than to the fowls of the air, that he may judge of things, not as they appear, but as they are.

(3.) It is the most ignominious folly. Shame arises from the sense of a debased excellence: the understanding is the most excellent faculty in man; and nothing brings a greater disreputation to him, than when he is deceived by the ignorance or inconsiderateness of his mind. And the delusion is most shameful in matters of great moment. Now for a man to exchange his soul, that is of angelical eminence, for transitory vanities; O folly! how enormous, how astonishing! The Lord Jesus, who as the Creator and Redeemer of souls, perfectly knew their worth, puts the question, so as to imply the strongest denial, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" The vanity of the purchase, and the value of the loss, is such, that no man, conscious of his immortality in the next state, but must acknowledge that he is an infinite loser, and prodigious fool, that gains the world by the loss of his soul. It is said of the ancient* Germans, that in their commerce with the Romans, receiving silver for their amber, that has no virtue but to draw straws to it, they were amazed at the price. And certainly the great tempter cannot but wonder at the foolish exchange that men make, in giving their immortal souls to him for perishing vanities; and having this scornful advantage, will much more upbraid them hereafter, than ever he allured them here.

The shame that attends this folly, is sometimes felt by sinners in this world; when they are shaken out of their stupifying slumber, and fully awaked to discover their evil choice. Thus the apostle speaks, "What fruit had you of those things whereof you are now ashamed, for the end of those things is death?" When the memory of sin is revived, with a true judgment of it, that which "has emptiness in the beginning, and death in the issue, must have shame in the middle." Jer. 17:11. The prophet tells us, "He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool." He was a fool all along in his deceiving of others, though

reputed worldly wise; but in the issue, when that which he gained cannot be kept; and the soul being lost, can never be recovered; by the conviction of his conscience, he is a fool, and reflects upon his past folly with confusion. But at the last day, the shame of foolish sinners shall be displayed before the eyes of the whole world. It is foretold, that "some shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt." Dan. 12:2. Obscurity is the mask of shame, but to be exposed a spectacle of scorn before a thronged theatre, is the aggravation and eminence of the shame. How confounding will the shame of sinners be in the universal confluence of angels and saints, and the presence of the glorious God, the judge of all? The sense of their guilt and folly will sting them for ever.

(4.) It is the most woful folly. Here such mischievous effects proceed from it as deserve the saddest lamentations. The understanding, the highest faculty, the beauty and excellency of man is blinded, the will is fettered by corrupt passions, and the whole man miserably enslaved to satan. What a spectacle of compassion was Samson in the slavery of the Philistines? He that had been general and judge of Israel, was deprived of his sight, and divine strength: his warlike hands, that had been of equal power with an army, and performed such glorious achievements, were employed in turning a mill, the work of a beast: and his misery was pointed and made sharper by the insultation of his enemies. The true emblem of the degenerate state of men; the soul that was created in the image of God, and had a peaceful sovereignty over the sensual appetites, a superiority over sensible things, is now enslaved and employed in the vile drudgery of sin, and become the derision of the devils. This is little thought of, or lamented, but therefore the more woful. The loss of the kingdom was not so dismal a judgment to Nebuchadnezzar, as the loss of his understanding. When his reason was taken away, and the heart of a beast was given him; it was the lowest and saddest degradation.

But hereafter the misery of foolish sinners will be extreme. The apostle tells us, that the love of the world causeth "Men to fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts,

which drown men in destruction and perdition." 1 Tim. 6:9. The expressions are full to exaggerate the horror of their ruins, and to signify that it is absolute and irrecoverable. The lusts of men are equally foolish and pernicious; they please themselves in the enjoyments of the world, and are secure, as if bathing in the fountains of felicity, when ready to be swallowed up in the whirlpool of death. By sensual vanities they are estranged from God, careless of their duty, and are finally separated from his blessed presence. And as the enjoying of God, without a possibility of losing him, is our consummate happiness; so to lose him, without hopes of ever enjoying him, is extreme misery. The foolish sinner is not affected with this now; whilst he lives in pleasure, he is content to be without God in the world; but hereafter, when he shall be deprived of these slight short-lived pleasures, and shall know the invaluable loss of his happiness, sorrows will overwhelm him for ever. As it befel that infidel in 2 Kings 8. he saw the plenty, but was not suffered to taste of it; so the damned shall see the glory of heaven shining in the saints, but shall not partake of it.

The Misery of Prosperous Sinners is Just, Certain, Aggravated

This misery will be amplified under the following heads.

III. We are to consider the justice, the certainty and the heaviness of the destruction, that shall seize on foolish sinners that abuse prosperity.

1. To illustrate the justice of God in their destruction, I shall only insist on that reason that is so admirably amplified in this chapter for their conviction; that is, their destruction is the fruit of their own choice. Prov. 1. The divine wisdom allures and invites them, by all the most tender and powerful persuasives, to forsake their ruinous course, and "the spirit of grace should be poured upon them," which

is the earnest of glory; but they would not be convinced and reformed; they "loved simplicity," the vain volatile pleasures of sin, though attended with perdition: "They hated knowledge," godliness, though recommended by the assurance of a blessed eternal reward: therefore their destruction is resolved into their own choice. Indeed no man can directly and absolutely choose misery, or reject happiness, but virtually and by real consequence the most do. A prodigal that wastes his estate, does not intentionally and deliberately choose poverty, but thus he thinks, this expence is for my honour, this for my pleasure, and proceeding to innumerable expences, he at last becomes poor, and his poverty is voluntary, because it is the issue of his voluntary exorbitant profuseness. The evil of sin, though it be destructive, and in that respect not eligible by man, yet it is pleasing to his corrupt nature: and the depraved will is so allured by the present pleasure, that it anticipates the reflections of the mind, and chooses to gratify the propensions of nature, with a brutish disregard of the terrible consequences of sin. And the present inconvenience of serious piety to the carnal heart, causes an averseness from it, notwithstanding the heavenly felicity that is promised to it. Men prefer carnal sweets before communion with God; and though not ignorant of the issue, continue in their sins. Deut. 32:6. And it is the exactness of justice, to deprive sinners of that blessedness which they obstinately refused, and to bring on them the misery they perversely choose. And when at the last day the Son of God shall charge upon sinners their neglect of his compassionate and repeated calls, that he often knocked at the door to get an entrance into their hearts, but all in vain, the world was there, and barred it against him. The guilty graceless souls will be struck with a defenceless silence, not able to make a request for pardon, but with despairing tears must submit to their righteous condemnation. The equity of God's ways, and the iniquity of men's will, at the last be clear to every eye. Then all the blessings they received will rise up in judgment against them, as proofs of their wickedness, that makes them more guilty, and deservedly miserable. Then conscience, that is now stupified by sensuality, will make furious reflections upon the folly of their choice, and be more

tormenting than the infernal fiends. When Cræsus, the rich king of Lydia, was bound to the stake, and the fire kindled for his burning, he lamentably cried out, "Solon, Solon, Solon;" and being asked the reason of it, declared, that in the height of his prosperity, that wise Grecian had advised him to prepare for a revolution from his glory and greatness into a miserable state, and his neglect of that counsel was more tormenting than the loss of his kingdom. How piercing will the remembrance be to lost souls of their despising the instructions, warnings, and gracious methods of the divine wisdom, to have prevented their ruin? that mercy was so often and so rebelliously resisted? This will be the hell of hell.

2. The certainty of their destruction is next to be considered. It is unchangeably established by the divine ordination, that the pleasures of sin shall end in the misery of obstinate sinners. This is declared in the word of God, "If ye live according to the flesh, ye shall die:" Rom. 11. and as it is founded in distributive justice, so it shall be executed from his truth. Our Saviour tells us, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or tittle of the law shall not be unfulfilled." Mat. 5. All the threatenings of it, in their fearful extent, shall be accomplished upon impenitent sinners, the proper objects of vengeance. God "cannot deny himself" in ceasing to be holy and true, and his power seconds his word, to inflict the full effects of it upon the guilty and impenitent; for a time they are spared, that they might repent: for mercy is not only over all the works of God, but paramount to all his attributes, it suspends his power from acts of vengeance, it delays and mitigates his justice: we may appeal from justice to mercy in the court of heaven: but when God's mercy has been affronted and exasperated, by the continual abuse of his benefits, when it is renounced and forfeited by sinners, their destruction is irreversible: for it is mercy alone atones his righteous anger; and this being so fearfully provoked, there is no advocate in his bosom to plead for them. Did he not expel from heaven the rebellious angels, spirits of a higher order, and more excellent endowments than men, and in their number perhaps exceeding the whole progeny of man? Now as the apostle, considering that the

Israelites, the chosen people of God, and dear to him above all others; yet when they became unfruitful, were broken off from the true "Olive tree," and the wild Gentiles were grafted into it, leaves this caution in eternal memory, "Be not high-minded, but fear. For if he spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee." Rom. 11:20, 21. We may strongly infer, if God "spared not the angels that sinned, in their first act of disobedience, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment," certainly he will not spare sinful men that hate to be reformed, and continue in the voluptuous course of sin to the last. The secure and foolish sinners, that now make a mock of sin, and have so far lost their innocence and ingenuity, that shame and request for their foul actions is counted a vicious infirmity, a degenerate humour, they shall understand in what degree sin is hateful to the holy God. They who now sleep out all the denunciations of the law, will find at last, "they have to do" with a terrible inexorable God: "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear comes: when your fear comes as desolation, and your destruction comes as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." Prov. 1:24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29. This dreadful threatening is pointed against foolish sinners who abuse prosperity: when those who shut their eyes against danger, shall be constrained to open them, and see the fearful face of death attended with judgment, and judgment with an eternal hell: when diseases in the body, and anguish in the soul, shall assail them at once, like two clouds that by collision break forth in thunder, and they mournfully cry for mercy, their prayers will be rejected with scorn, and their ruin be remediless.

The carnal conceit, that God will graciously receive sinners when the world has left them; that when by calamitous constraint they are at

last brought to confess their wickedness, and are only sorrowful for the evil consequences of it, the conceit that they shall find mercy, is atheism of as blasphemous a nature as the denial of a God: for to ascribe such a mercy to God, as is inconsistent with his wisdom, holiness, justice, and truth, is to deprive him of his purest perfections, and in effect to ungod him.

In the rebellions of their lives, they expressed open enmity against God; and their devotion at their death, is secret flattery in his account. For thus it is said by the psalmist of such sinners; "When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and lied to him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, and they were not steadfast in his covenant." Psal. 78:34, 36, 37.

It is true, God is rich in mercy, and most willing to pardon returning sinners, when their contrition is sincere; when they are truly sorrowful, that sin has made them unholy as well as unhappy, that they have abused the mercies of God, our gracious Creator and preserver, compassionate Redeemer, and blessed comforter, as well as provoked his anger: and when the resolutions of amendment are so deeply rooted, as would prove effectual if they should be tried by lengthening of their time in this world. But those who defer their repenting whilst God defers punishing, and like the unjust steward, never think of making provision for their souls, till they are cited to give an account of their unrighteous and ungrateful abuse of his blessings: those who renounce their sins when unable to commit them, and resolve to live well when they can live no longer, have great reason to suspect their own hearts, and to be fearful of their future state. If a minister be called to assist such in their dying hours, there is infinite reason he should be cautious of assuring them of pardon and salvation, lest natural sorrow be mistaken for godly sorrow, and the repentance declared by them, would be retracted upon new temptations: it is safe to imitate a* discreet physician, that is unwilling to declare what he fears will be the issue of the disease, but modestly insinuates the danger to those that are about the sick

person: the good God can do all things, he can revive the almost spent and expiring, O pray for him. It is advice given by a skilful herbalist, that particular care is necessary in planting the seed of the Carduus, for if they are not set upright, they degenerate and produce a wild herb. The gospel is compared to seed, and if the conditional promises of pardon and salvation are not received in the heart aright, if the comfort of them be not applied according to the qualifications that are requisite to give us an interest in them, they produce a vain presumption, a false hope, a delusive peace, instead of an unfeigned faith, a purifying hope, a solid peace. God declares it with the most sacred solemnity, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;" Ezek. 33:11. if the carnal heart (like the devil who abused scripture, by leaving out part of it) shall not consider what follows, "but that the wicked turn from his way and live," but shall harden and fortify itself in sin, with hopes of impunity, God will rejoice in their just destruction. He tells us that a converted sinner shall be forgiven; but that conversion must be uniform and lasting; "If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live and not die." Ezek. 18:21. He has promised to "be found of those that seek him:" but we are commanded "to seek the Lord whilst he may be found;" implying, it is not in our power when we please to find him with his pardoning mercy and assisting grace. To apply the word of God against the mind of God, is injurious to his honour, and pernicious to deluded souls.

3. The heaviness of destruction will be according to the aggravation of their sin, who abuse prosperity.

(1.) It is a sin most contrary to the acknowledged duty of man, and unbecoming the reasonable nature. It is an universal concession that springs from the purest light of reason, that we "should return good for good:" Mat. 5:46. the heathens agreed in it. To be defective in observance, and thankful respects to a benefactor is unnatural, but to requite evil for good, is so direct a violation of the ingenuous principles of humanity, that one is prodigiously wicked in doing it:

he ceases to be a man, and becomes a devil. Now this black guilt cleaves to those who abuse prosperity. The blessings of God are strong and sweet obligations to love him, yet their perverse hearts are thereby alienated from him: his mercies engage and enable them to serve and glorify him, but are used to gratify their lusts, and to make them more capable and presumptuous to offend him. Prosperity makes them luxurious and secure; riches make them sin at a higher rate; the patient providence of God, that waits for their repentance (such is their desperate corruption) fortifies them in their rebellion against him. This was the reason of that stinging reproach of Moses to Israel, "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?" Deut. 32.

(2.) The abuse of prosperity is most injurious and provoking to God. To sin against his law, is an high affront to his majesty; but to sin against his love and benefits is more contumelious to him. The apostle calls it, a "despising of God's goodness:" Rom. 2. what is more contumelious, than to employ his benefits for the pleasing our "dishonourable vile affections?" As the gift of a friend is slighted that is put to a base use; or as one that will not be reconciled by the presents of a friend, despises his gifts: thus when the favours of God do not melt the heart into kindly resentments, and endear him to us, they are despised.

If a favourite, that were raised by a prince to the highest honour and trust, should betray his magazines, both arms and treasures to his enemy, could there be a fouler wickedness? and of this heinous nature is their wickedness, who abuse the mercies of God in the service of sin, and implicitly betray them into the devil's hands, who maliciously wars against God. What a contumelious indignity heightened with the basest ingratitude was Jeroboam guilty of, who changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image like a corruptible beast.* God advanced him to the throne, and he depressed the Deity to the rank of stupid calves. What a hateful abuse of his bounty was it, that the Israelites turned the jewels of gold wherewith he enriched them by the Egyptians, into a detestable

idol: of such wickedness are men deeply guilty, when the precious blessings that God bestows upon them, are made the idols of their heads and hearts, and rob him of the honour and love that is incommunicably due to him.

What can more provoke the jealous God? Mercy is his dearest glory, in which he peculiarly delights; it is the attribute of which he is most tender, and the abuse of it is to stab him to the heart.

From hence we may justly infer, the punishment of such sinners will be most heavy, in exact proportion to their most odious ingratitude. Damnation is the recompence of every impenitent sinner, and is the most fearful effect of God's wrath. Temporal judgments are "but the smoke of his anger," Deut. 29. the flaming coals are in hell. But there are degrees of torment in hell, according to the number and quality of men's sins. "Those who despise the goodness of God, treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." As they continually abuse his bounty and patience, they increase his vengeance, which will be as terrible as his patience was admirable. The judgment of Babylon was a strict proportion to her luxury: "how much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her." Rev. 18:7. Justice will exact all the arrears of abused mercies. The lovers of this world shall pass from "their good things," to the flames that live by the breath of God's revenging wrath. Doleful exchange! an hour's feeling of that fire is more tormenting, than an age's enjoyment of this world in all its abundance is pleasing. But though the word of God has discovered the swift and thick-coming sorrows that shall seize upon the wicked, yet so foolish and obstinate are sinners in prosperity, they will not be persuaded to fly from the wrath to come! The light of reason, and illumination of faith, is too weak to make them sensible of their danger: they will not be convinced, till shut up in the darkness of hell.

It now follows, that by application we should make this great doctrine more useful to ourselves.

In the general, it is of excellent use to rectify our judgments about the things and men of the world. The most are miserably deluded, and live in a blindness so gross and misleading, that they are secure when near steep ruin. Asclepius being blind, mournfully complained, that he was fain to be led by a child: but carnal men are voluntarily guided by sense and fancy, the false lights that rule in children, and blindly follow, without considering who is their leader, and whither they are led. Or like one in a slumber, is strongly affected with slight things: a scene of fancy in a dream transports him as a glorious reality: a prick of a pin makes him start as fearfully as if a viper bit him: thus carnal men are as deeply affected with temporal good and evil things, as if they were eternal, wherein their blessedness or misery consists. And there is nothing of greater use and defence to the soul, than to make a true judgment of things that greatly and nearly concern us. From thence proceeds a wise choice, a well ordered conversation, and upon it our blessed end depends. For as the rudder is to a ship, the will is to man; if it be duly turned, it conducts him safely to felicity.

Inferences from the Doctrine

The particular just inferences from the doctrine are,

1. Temporal prosperity is not a certain sign of God's special favour. There are some benefits dispersed by a general providence to all, like the common benefits of a prince to all within his dominions: some are like special gifts to his favourites: of the first kind are riches and honours, and whatever is the support or comfort of the present life: of the second are spiritual and heavenly blessings, the graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit of God, the infallible seal of his love to us. The psalmist prays, "remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation:" Psal. 106:4. there is a favour common to all men as his creatures, and the fruits of it are promiscuous to the evil and the good: but the favour from whence proceed grace and glory, is the privilege of his chosen.

2. The temporal prosperity of the wicked is consistent with God's hatred. When men turn his blessings into the fuel of their lusts, and his patience into an advantage of sinning more securely, how flourishing soever they are in the world, he looks on them with an avenging eye. "He hates all the workers of iniquity." His seeming connivance is no argument that he is not highly provoked by their sins, or that they may obtain an easy pardon. Yet this is the inward principle of the gross and outward sins in the lives of men, though unobserved by them. As the vital heat is not felt in the heart, that is the cause of all the heat that is felt in the outward parts of the body. "These things hast thou done," saith God to the rebellious sinner, "and I kept silence," that is, suspended the terrible effects of justice, "thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself." Psal. 50. Astonishing blindness! not to discern the apparent antipathy of such connexions. As if God's forbearance of the guilty were forgiveness: and rebellion against his commands, and the love of sin which is enmity to him, were consistent with the fruition of his favour. But we have the most clear and convincing assurance, God cannot be pleased with men, without their being made like him in righteousness and true holiness. He sees and hates sin, and abhors the sinners though for a time they are spared. Justice and patience are his attributes: "he is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not acquit the guilty." Nahum. 1:3. "He endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, till they are fitted for destruction." Rom. 9:22. The presumptuous sinner that is encouraged and hardened, as if sin were not so hateful to God, because he enjoys the world in abundance, and expects an easy remission at last, fearfully deceives his soul: "he sows the wind, and shall reap the whirlwind."

3. The prosperity of the wicked is so far from being a sign of God's love, that it often proceeds from his deepest displeasure. It is a curse candied over with a little vanishing sweetness, but deadly in the operation. It makes them careless of God and their souls, of heaven and eternity, and they become incorrigible in their perverse wills and wicked ways, and irrecoverable in their lost state. Prosperity induces security, that presages and accelerates their ruin. It is expressed as

the most fearful and sorest judgment by the prophet, "the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep," Isa. 29:10. an insensibleness of the worst evils, their sins, and the infinite danger that attends them. This judgment is usually inflicted from the righteous God by the prosperity of the wicked, and extremely provokes him, it being a sin of the greatest guilt, as well as a punishment of former high provocations. It is a distinguishing judgment inflicted upon his enemies, from which his children are exempted. Other judgments that cause grief and trouble to sinners, often incline his compassions to them; but this judgment inflames his wrath. In short, the prosperity of the wicked here, is a fatal sign they are reserved for the severity of justice, for their abuse of the riches of his mercy: and of all judgments that is the most terrible, that insensibly destroys, and certainly brings damnation.

4. From hence we are instructed to look upon prosperous sinners with pity, not with envy and indignation. They please themselves, and triumph in their conceited happiness, as the psalmist expresseth it, "whilst he lived, he blessed his soul." But how contrary is the opinion of vain men to the judgment of Christ; he pronounces (and upon his sentence depends eternity) "woe unto you that are rich," for ye have received your consolation! "woe unto you that are full," for ye shall hunger: "woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep." And we are told by the inspired prophet, "man that is in honour, and understands not," (that does not consider the vanity and frail tenure of his present flourishing state; nor his duty and interest to employ his riches, power, and greatness, for securing his everlasting felicity) is like "the beasts that perish," Psal. 49. stupid and insensible of approaching ruin; as the beast that was to be sacrificed, did not perceive that the gilding its horns, and adorning it with garlands, was a sign it was destined to death. They now live in ease and pleasures; but they must shortly remove from their rich possessions, and splendid palaces, to the dark regions of woe, and death will be an entrance into endless sorrows. "The laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under the pot," Eccles. 7. a short blaze soon damped and extinguished.

It is a dreadful imprecation of the holy psalmist; "let their way be dark and slippery; and let the angel of the Lord persecute them." Psal 35:6.* To fly in the dark, and in slippery places, and so to fall into the mire and pits, is a fit emblem of their condition, who are prosperous and wicked. They are hoodwinked by prosperity, in a voluntary darkness, and see not the precipices that surround them: and how slippery is their way by so numerous and insinuating temptations; how easily, how frequently and dangerously do they fall, and both defile and wound themselves? Briefly, they are truly miserable here, even whilst they most pleasantly and contentedly enjoy the world, they are accumulating the treasures of wrath, and preparing new torments for their souls: they stand upon brittle ice, and hell is beneath ready to swallow them up in its deepest gulf. As it is said by the apostle, concerning the saints darkened by sorrows here, that their "glorious life is hid in God," Col. 3. and shall illustriously appear with Christ at his second coming: so the terrible death of the wicked, whilst they flourish here, is hid from the eyes of sense, but shall be revealed in the day of wrath. And to a wise observer, to a serious believer, the prosperous sinner is the most unhappy and compassionate object in the world; for he perishes by such a flattering kind of death, that he is neither apprehensive, nor affected with his danger.

And when an illuminate christian sees the marks of damnation in sinners, whom prosperity deceives and hardens, he cannot but be tenderly moved, and is obliged most earnestly to pray to the merciful "Father of spirits," whose grace is omnipotent, that he would recover their lapsed souls, bleeding to eternal death. If there be any heavenly charity in our breasts, it will melt our hearts, and dissolve us in tears to prevent, or at least to solemnize and lament their heavy destiny.

5. From hence we are instructed to judge truly and wisely of afflictions: they are the necessary and merciful dispensations of heaven, to recover sinners corrupted by prosperity, and to return them to God. Sense, though its principal end is to preserve the body, is not always a fit judge of things beneficial to it; the appetites and

aversions are sometimes pernicious: one in a dropsy drinks to quench his thirst, and increases his distemper. A bitter potion is rejected by a sick child, not considering that a medicine, not sweetmeats, can cure his disease. The pleasure of the taste, is no certain indication of what is wholesome for health; much more incapable is sense to judge of what is useful for the soul. Reason is entirely renounced, and fallacious sense is in the throne, when prosperity with its gaudy allurements is esteemed as our happiness, and adversity is abhorred as the worst misery. The wise man instructed by dear experience, tells us, "it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." Eccles. 7:2, 3, 4. Prosperity irritates and fortifies the sensual vile affections, the pleasing of which is fatal to the* soul. As it is observed by the natural historian, that the sparkling colour and delicious relish of wine, tempts men to drinking without thirst, and from intemperance, innumerable diseases flow.

Prosperity diverts the mind from considering the things that belong to our eternal peace, and the will from consenting to them. The thoughts are so scattered abroad, that few are left at home, duly to ponder the miserable effects of sin. Now in this the rules of natural and spiritual medicine agree, that one extreme is to be cured by another. The devil cruelly destroys the souls of men by the pleasures of sin;† and God, the wise and compassionate physician, recovers them by bitter sorrows, the most congruous and powerful means for that blessed effect.

Affliction makes us retire within our hearts, and shuts out the noisy throng of worldly distracting objects; and then truth and conscience, that were under unrighteous restraints, will break the fetters, and speak loudly and terribly to the sinner. Affliction fixes the mind upon those objects, that duly considered, are able to terrify the most determined and resolved sinner. There is no man so prodigiously

bad, so perfectly a brute, but has at times some twinges of conscience, some workings in his spirit, some desires of salvation. Even Balaam, who in the judgment of the angel was more stupid than the ass he rode on, yet had some springings in his heart towards heaven; "O that I might die the death of the righteous, and my last end may be like his:" but these are fleeting and variable, and so weak in comparison of the opposite desires of the flesh, while prosperity continues, that they prove abortive. Now affliction deadens the flaming edge of the affection to vanity. When the sinner feels the truth of the divine threatening, then he is effectually convinced of the evil of sin, and understands, by the beginning of sorrows here, what the issues will be hereafter, and retracts his foolish choice. In the time of affliction, "our sins find us out;" and it is most likely we shall then find our sins out, and with repenting tears acknowledge them, and with hatred renounce them.

Now the consideration of the designed benefit by afflictions, should reconcile them to our wills, and persuade us, with patience and thankfulness, to accept of them as the testimonies of God's peculiar favour. Our Saviour declares, "as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous and repent." Rev. 3. God is often most angry, when he makes no sensible discovery that he is so: thus he threatens the rebellious Jews, "I will make my fury towards thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry:" Ezek. 16:42. implying a final divorce, a leaving them to their impure idolatries, without more correction. If there be such a hardness of heart as the fire cannot melt, such a rust that the fire cannot purify, God will not waste his judgments on such desperate sinners. He withdraws his chastising hand, as hopeless of their amendment, and that desertion is a fatal signature of reprobation. And on the contrary, many times God's love is most tender and compassionate to us, when to sense there is the least evidence of it. Even the heathens,* in the twilight, between the darkness of idolatry, and the light of nature, discovered that afflictions were the privilege of those that are singularly beloved of God. And christians have a more sure word for their instruction, "whom the Lord loves he

chastens, and scourgeth every son whom he receives." Heb. 12. There is not a stronger evidence of his fatherly wise love, than the discipline of the rod; and the afflicted returning sinner may, with an adoptive assurance come to the throne of grace. By afflictions the world is less enticing and hurtful to us, and heaven is more amiable and desirable: the things that are seen, are vilified and distasted; and invisible things are sought with our highest esteem and respect, and zealous endeavours. Those lusts that spring, and grow, and flourish in prosperity, are blasted and wither, and die in adversity.* Those who forget God when prosperous in the world, are taught by the voice of the rod to adore his majesty, obey his laws, imitate his holiness, and humbly to accept of his mercy. By afflictions the sensual appetites are subdued, and brought into order; a low state, is a protection from many strong and destructive temptations.† Sickness that brings near the grave, and makes us feel how frail we are, renders the world despicable, that by their lusts so powerfully infatuates men to their ruin. Sanctified affliction, is a happy preparative for the fulness of joy in the blessed presence of God. The first to whom our Saviour promised the rest and joy of paradise, was the companion of his cross.

Let us therefore, with free judgments, and sincere affections, make an estimate of all sensible things, not judge ourselves to be in the favour of God, by the good things received here, nor under his wrath by evil: let us not be surprised at the prosperity of the wicked, nor shaken at the afflictions of the godly, but regulate our thoughts by the unerring wisdom of God, so clearly revealed in his word.‡ He is propitious, when he denies or takes from us those temporal enjoyments that we are apt to abuse; and severe when he bestows them, and seems to indulge men's carnal affections. It is but a little while, and the pleasures of sinners; and the afflictions of the saints, will end in a state directly contrary to what is enjoyed or suffered here. "With God a thousand years are but as one day:" the world is not of a week's standing in the divine account: he measures all things by eternity: the vessels of mercy are by sanctified afflictions made fit

for eternal glory. "The vessels of wrath are by the abuse of his bounty and patience, fitted for eternal destruction."

In the last place, From hence we should be warned to be always circumspect to avoid the evils that usually attend prosperity, to improve it to our eternal advantage. Prosperity is not like an infected garment, that transfuses a contagious malignity into every one that wears it. A person that is rich and honourable, and in power, may not only be a saint, but the more a saint by his dedicating and employing the gifts of God to his glory, and the public good. It is a point of high and holy wisdom, and only taught in the school of heaven, how to manage the opposite states of the present life, so as not to be vainly swelling in prosperity, nor broken and flagging in adversity, but to preserve an equanimity, a constant and composed mind, the blessed imitation of the divine unchangeableness. St. Paul saith, without vain arrogance, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." Phil. 4:12. It was a secret of spirit, not learned from men, but from the holy Spirit of God. In some respects it is a more difficult exercise to manage prosperity than adversity. Many are like Hannibal, victorious in arms, whilst conflicting with adversity, and vanquished by enticing pleasures. It is observed of the lamps in some of the Roman tombs, that have burnt for many ages, and are bright whilst kept close, that as soon as they are opened to the air, a breath of wind extinguishes them: thus the virtues of some shine in a low retired condition, when there are no temptations, no occasion of quenching them: but when brought forth into the open world, and should appear in conspicuous operations, their virtues are of so weak and consumptive a spirit, that the light expires and dies. Even the piety of David was chilled by prosperity. It is said, with an emphasis, concerning Jehoshaphat, that he "walked in the first ways of his father David:" 2 Chron. 17:3. intimating that his religion was not so exact when he was in the throne, as in his banishment.

It is equally excellent as difficult. To be holy and heavenly in the midst of sensual tempting objects, is the clearest discovery of the truth and power of divine grace, of the piety, ingenuity, and generosity of the christian spirit. Humility and modesty in a low condition, are not so praise-worthy, as the absence of them is odious: but humility in a state of honour, is more illustrious than the splendour of external dignity. Temperance in a cottage, where are only supplies of hunger and thirst, seems rather the effect of necessity, than of wise choice: but to be temperate when abundance and variety tempt the sensual appetites, when the sparkling colour and delicious relish of the purest wines tempt the fancy and the palate, is virtue in height and excellency. To be pious, and weaned from the world in afflictions, is no wonder; but in prosperity and power to be serious in religion, and despise the splendid vanities of the world, is virtue of a superior order.* What is observed of the perfuming gums of Arabia the happy, is applicable in this matter: those that distil freely from the tree, excel in purity, in fragrancy, and value, what comes from it when the bark of it is cut. Thus obedience that comes from the heart in love with God for his benefits, is more valuable and precious than what is the effect of compulsion, that comes from the heart wounded with terrors in adversity.

I shall add farther, the using prosperity aright is most comfortable. The love of God can sweeten afflictions, and make a dinner of green herbs as savoury as if they grew in paradise: and it gives a quick and high taste to all our temporal blessings. When his love is conveyed and sealed to us by the gifts of his providence, we have the purest enjoyment of them. Now when prosperity is made subservient to his glory, when it endears obedience to us, we have an infallible testimony it is from his special favour to us.

Rules How to Manage Prosperity for our Everlasting Good

The rules how to manage prosperity for our everlasting good, are,

1. Let us preserve an humble sense of our original meanness, continual frailty, and sinful unworthiness in the midst of prosperity. Men are apt to be high-minded, and to cherish undue conceptions of their worth when raised in the world: as if they were not as inferior to the majesty of God, and as liable to his impartial justice as others: they lose the knowledge of themselves in a mist of vanity. This provokes "the high and holy One that inhabits eternity," to blast them in their most flourishing and secure state, and convince them how deceitful and insufficient the grounds of their pride are. "He puts them in fear, that they may know themselves to be but men." Psal. 9. There are such great and just allays of the vain mind, such correctives of pride, that it is strange that any temporal prosperity should occasion swelling arrogance. The psalmist considering the glory of God shining in the heavens, is in an ecstasy at his condescending goodness. "What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou regardest him?" His original is from the earth, the lowest element: all that he possesses, to supply his wants and satisfy his desires, is from pure mercy: and the more eminent the advantage of some is above others in this world, the greater are their receipts and obligations: and who would be proud that he is in a mighty debt? Rich and poor, honourable and mean, are distinctions among men; but in respect to God all are equally mean and low. Neither do these things give any inherent worth, and make persons more acceptable to God. Poor Lazarus who was a miserable spectacle, his body corroded with ulcers, yet had a precious soul under it: the glorious angels descended from heaven to receive it at the point of death, and convey it to the reviving presence of God; but the rich man was cast into hell. Besides, how uncertain are all the admired things of this world!

Is he truly rich whose whole estate lies in a ship abroad, that is to pass through seas exposed to tempests, and infested with pirates, and runs a double hazard of being robbed or cast away? And the consideration thereof, is a proper argument to cause us to keep a low mind in a high condition. It is the apostle's counsel, "let the rich," and the great in the world, "rejoice in that he is made low: because as

the flower of the grass he shall pass away:" Jam. 1:10. when the florid beauty is displayed, it presently withers. How many survive their estates and dignities, and by unforeseen revolutions become poor and low. Many that were overflowing in riches and pleasures, are as dry and desolate as the desert. And is it not a disparagement to our reason to admire shadows, and be proud of transient vanities? But suppose they continue with men here, can they preserve the body from diseases and death, or the soul from oppressing sorrows? And is it not miserable folly to pride themselves in secular greatness, that is so insufficient to prevent the worst evils? But especially the consideration how man is vilified by sin, should make him be abased and low in his own eyes. As that blessed martyr, bishop Hooper, says, 'Lord, I am hell, thou art heaven; I am a sink of sin, thou art the fountain of holiness'. And the more gracious and bountiful God is to men, the more sinful should they appear to themselves. Humility discovers our native poverty, in the midst of rich abundance; our true vileness in the midst of glittering honours, that nothing is ours but sin and misery; and makes us say, with the spirit of that humble saint, "we are less than the least of all God's mercies." Now the more of humility, the more of heaven is in the soul: it is that disposition that prepares it to receive the graces and comforts of the Spirit in an excellent degree. "God resists the proud;" the self-conceited and aspiring he is at defiance with, "and abhors them;" he justly deprives them of spiritual treasures, who value themselves and bear it high for the abundance of this world: "but he gives grace to the humble." The due sense of our wants and unworthiness makes us fit to partake of divine blessings.

2. A meek temper and deportment, is an excellent preservative from the evil of prosperity. Humility and meekness are always in conjunction, and most amiable in the eyes of God and men. "A meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." 1 Pet. 3:4. They are the brightest jewels that adorn humanity, and shined so gloriously in our blessed Saviour, the supreme pattern of perfection, and are propounded as signally imitable by us. "Learn of me for I am meek and lowly." When he came in his regal office, he is thus

described, "rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion: behold thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation, lowly." Zach. 9:9. The church is excited to rejoice in his mild monarchy. And christians, who in profession are his disciples, are commanded to be "gentle, and to show all meekness to all men." Tit. 3:3. This especially concerns those who are in a superior order: for prosperity is apt to make men insolent and intolerable, and to treat with a haughty roughness those that are below them. But there is nothing more becoming men in prosperity and power, than a sweetness of spirit, not easily provoked by injuries, and easily pardoning them; a gracious condescension expressed in words and actions, even to all inferiors. And especially meekness is necessary in a submissive receiving reproofs for sin, whether by the ministry of the word, or by a faithful friend. Prosperity is never more dangerous, than when sin takes sanctuary in it, when men think riches and power to be a privilege to free them from sound and searching reproof, and damn themselves with less contradiction. And an humble submission, with respect to the authority of God and an ingenuous tractableness, with respect to the sincere affection of those who are faithful in their counsels for our souls, is an eminent instance of meekness, and preserves from the danger of prosperity.

3. Solemn and affectionate thanksgiving to God for his mercies, sanctifies prosperity. This is the certain consequent of an humble disposition of soul. Pride smothers the receipts of God's favours: thankfulness is the homage of humility. This is infinitely due to God, who renews our lives as often as we breathe, and renews his mercies every moment; yet so unjust and ungrateful are men, especially in prosperity, that they strangely neglect it. From hence are those divine warnings so solemnly repeated to the Israelites, "when thou shalt have eaten, and art full, then beware lest thou forget the Lord." Deut. 6:11, 12. And, "lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God." Deut. 8:12. This was the wicked effect of their prosperity: "according to their pasture so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted, therefore have

they forgotten me." Hos. 13:6. There is a great backwardness in a carnal heart to thanksgiving for mercies. Prayer in our distress, is a work of necessity, but thankful praise is an act of duty; carnal love is the cause of the one, divine love of the other. Even David how ardently does he excite his soul to the performing this duty; "bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Psal. 103:1, 2. The earnest and repeated address to make a lively and fervent impression upon his soul, is a tacit intimation of the drowsy negligence he found in himself. This duty is spiritual, and to be performed by the soul that is our noble part, and capable to understand our obligations to the divine goodness. Indeed, it is often expressed in the vocal praises of God, Psal. 34:2. for there is a natural correspondence between the tongue and the heart, as between the hand of a clock, and the motion of the wheels within: but the chief part is performed in the soul, and is only of value and acceptance with God, who is the maker, the searcher, and the judge of our hearts. Therefore the holy psalmist calls "upon his soul, and all that is within him, every faculty to unite in the praises of God:" the understanding to consider the several arguments of praise and thankfulness, to esteem and to admire the divine goodness, to ascribe the glory that is due to God for his mercies: the memory to register his benefits; the will and affections to love him for his mercies, and above them.

Thankfulness implies a solemn recognition of the mercies of God, with all the circumstances that add a lustre to them, to affect us in as vigorous a manner in our praises for the blessings we enjoy, as we are in our prayers for what we need. Not only signal mercies, but common and ordinary should be continually acknowledged by us. And since our memories are so slippery as to the retaining of favours, injuries are inscribed in marble, benefits written in the dust: we should every day review the mercies we enjoy, to quicken our praises for them, and to make impressions not soon defaced. Thankfulness implies a due valuation of God's benefits: this will be raised, by considering the author, the great God: the meanest mercy from his

hand, is a high favour. As the guilt of sin arises from the greatness of the object; though some sins are comparatively small, yet none is in its intrinsic nature a small evil: so though of mercies, some are in comparison eminent, and some are ordinary, yet every mercy is great with respect to the author from whence it comes: and the thankful esteem of mercies, will rise in proportion to the sense of our unworthiness. A constant poverty of spirit in reflecting upon our own vileness, that there is not merely a want of desert in us, with respect to God's blessings, but a desert of his heavy judgments, will heighten our esteem of them. For this end it is very useful, that the prosperous would consider those below them, how many better than themselves are under oppressing wants, tormenting pains, heart-breaking sorrows, whom you may trace by their tears every day; and what free and rich mercy is it, that they enjoy the affluence of all things: this distinguishing goodness, should be acknowledged with a warm rapture of affection to the divine Benefactor. To compare ourselves with those that excel us in grace, will make us humble, and with those who are below us in outward blessings, will make us thankful.

The prosperous have special obligations to be most conversant in this celestial duty: there are various graces and duties that are only useful in this imperfect state, and shall expire with us: as repentance, faith, hope, patience, &c. the reward of them will be eternal, but the exercise is limited to present life; but love and praise remain in heaven. The saints eternally admire, love, and bless God for his mercies. And the sincere and constant performance of this duty, is most pleasing to God, and profitable to us: for thankfulness to our blessed benefactor, engages his heart, and opens the treasures of his bounty more liberally to us. The way to obtain new benefits, is not to suffer former favours to be lost in ungrateful oblivion. In short, it is the best and surest evidence of our thankfulness to God, when his mercies are effectual motives to please him. We cannot always make an actual commemoration of his benefits, but an habitual remembrance should ever be in our hearts, and influential in our lives. "Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes," (saith holy David)

"and I have walked in thy truth;" unfeignedly respected all thy commandments.

4. The fear of God, and a vigilant care to avoid the sins that so easily encompass us, are necessary in prosperity. The secure assist satan in his war against the soul; but watchfulness disarms the tempter. Circumspection is never more a duty, than when pleasures without, and passions within, conspire to betray us. It is useful to reflect upon the great numbers who have been corrupted and ruined by prosperity: that the vices of the dead may secure the virtues of the living. The "fear of God is clean," effectively, as it preserves from sin. It is Solomon's advice to young men, that enjoy the world in its flower, and in the season of their sinning, that they would remember that God for all their vanities will bring them to judgment. This consideration will be powerful to prevent the risings of the corrupt affections, or to suppress their growth, and hinder their accomplishment. But with the excellently tempered soul, an ingenuous fear from the consideration of God's mercies, is an effectual restraint from sin. It is said, "they shall fear the Lord, and his goodness:" fear to offend, and grieve, and lose his goodness. This fear does not infringe the comfort of the soul, but preserve and improve it: servile fear, when the soul is afraid to burn, not to sin, is a judicial forced impression, the character of a slave; but an ingenuous grateful fear, that springs from the sense of the divine goodness, is a voluntary affection becoming a child of God, and cherished by him. "The fear of the Lord is his treasure." This watchfulness must be universal against all temptations to which we are incident by prosperity: otherwise we shall be guilty of a like folly with those that shut and fortify one gate, and leave the other open to the enemy. And it must be as continual as our temptations. "Blessed is the man that feareth always."

5. A moderate use of worldly things, is an excellent preservative from the evil adhering to them. It is a divine blessing, to partake of the gifts of God with contentment and tranquillity, especially it is sweet to taste his love in them. "God gives to a man that is good in his sight,

wisdom, and knowledge, and joy:" that is, to use temperately and comfortably, outward blessings. But the flesh is the devil's solicitor, and persuades men with a freer fancy, and looser affections, to enjoy the world, than is consistent with the prosperity of their souls. When Diogenes observed with the many sick and languishing persons, the hydropic, consumptive, and other diseases, that came to the temple of Æsculapius for recovery, and that after their sacrifices they made a luxurious feast, he cried out, is this the way to recover health? If you were sound, it is the speedy and effectual way to bring diseases, and being diseased, to bring death to you. It is applicable in a higher sense; the intemperate use of sensual delights, weakens the life and vigour of the soul in a saint, and certainly brings death to diseased souls, that habitually indulge their corrupt affections. The apostle saith of the licentious woman, "She that lives in pleasure, is dead while she lives:" an allusion to a torch that is consumed by its own flames. Sensual lusts are cherished and pampered by prosperity, and the carnal heart overrules the whole man. Our Saviour charges his disciples to beware of "surfeiting and drunkenness." The indulging the lower appetites, is natural to men, but chiefly incident to those in prosperity.* The great care of such should be, to use worldly things with that modesty and measure, that the divine part, the soul, may be untainted by them: that it may neither over-value nor over-delight in them. The first degeneracy of man is by sensual satisfaction. This expelled him from paradise, and keeps him out ever since. The excess of pleasures darken the mind, stupify the conscience, extinguish the radiancy and vigour of the spirit. "Wine and women take away the heart." Hos. 4:11. The apostle speaks of those who are abandoned to pleasures, they "are past feeling;" Ephes. 4:19. without a quick and tender sense of their sin and danger. That we may not in an unlawful degree use lawful things, we should always be ordered by the principles of fear and restraint, not indulging ourselves to the utmost of what may seem allowed: for to be upon the confines of sin, exposes us to be easily overthrown the next gust of a temptation. It is a divine command, that christians should "rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and buy as though they possessed not; and use the world as not abusing it." 1 Cor. 7:30, 31. A christian should converse

with the world, as a carnal person converses with heaven; he prays for spiritual blessings with that coldness, as if he had no desire to obtain them; he hears the word with that carelessness, as if he had no desire to profit by it; he performs other religious duties without a heart, as if he had no desire to be saved: such an indifferency of spirit in outward enjoyments, is our duty and safety. It is a prodigious disorder, and the great* cause of the sins and miseries of men, that their affections are lavishly wasted upon trifles, their love, desires, and delights are let forth in their full vigour to the honours, riches, and pleasures of this world, but are wretchedly remiss to spiritual and eternal things. They would enjoy the world as their heaven and felicity, and use God for their necessity. And thus by embracing vanishing shadows, they lose the most substantial and durable good. It is a point of great wisdom to consider the several respects of temporal things, as they respect our sensitive part, and the present life, and as they respect our souls and the future state: and to use them, that the outward man may be a more active and ready instrument of the soul in working out our own salvation.

6. Let the favour of God, and communion with him be most precious and joyful to us in the midst of prosperity. The highest esteem and most ravishing apprehensions of God, the dearest delight in him as the most excellent suitable good, and in whom the soul has the most intimate propriety, is the honour due to his incomparable perfection. The holy psalmist often declares his transcendent valuation, and inflamed affection towards God; "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" Psal. 139:17, 19. (no artifice of words could fully express it) "how great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake I am still with thee." As if he breathed not oftener than he thought of God with reverence and complacency. Thus also he despises all that carnal men pursue with violent desires, in comparison of God's favour, "There be many that say, who will show us any good?" that is, a sensual good, for nothing is pleasant to them, but what appears in a fleshly fashion. "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that

their corn and their wine increased." Psal. 4:6, 7. The carnal man, who is a stranger to spiritual joys, has a sweeter relish of carnal things, than a saint that has a new nature, that deadens the appetite to dreggy delights: and in the vintage and harvest there is a spring-tide of carnal joy: yet David feels a more inward joy and cordial contentment in the fruition of God's favour, than a natural man has in the flower of his worldly felicity. Nay, he prizes the favour of God before life itself, which is our most precious possession in this world. "Thy lovingkindness is better than life, therefore my lips shall praise thee." Psal. 63. Communion with God, is the beginning of heaven, and differs from the fulness of joy that is in the divine presence above, only in the degrees and manner of fruition. As the blushes of the morning are the same light with the glorious brightness of the sun at noon-day. The natural man is averse from this heavenly duty, and most in prosperity. It is the observation of holy Job; "They spend their days in wealth; therefore they say to the Almighty, depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." It is the malignant property of worldly things, to deface the notions, and cause a disrelish of sublime and spiritual things. The objects that pleasantly affect the carnal faculties, draw the soul from God. This is the principal and universal temptation of the present world, by the corruption of our hearts, and never so dangerous as in our prosperity. It is a rule in building, that chief care must be taken for the contriving of windows, for the transmission of a liberal light to refresh the inhabitants. Now to build in a plain where the heavens are open on all sides, and the pure light shines, it is easy to make the house convenient: but to raise a luminous fabric in a city thick set with houses, and straitened for room, requires art, and the building must be higher: thus a person that is surrounded with the honours, riches, and pleasures of the world, that are so apt to darken the soul, and to exclude the influences of heaven, has need of holy skill to preserve a free communication with God, and to be always receptive of his grace. Then holy duties should be frequent and fervent, wherein the soul ascends to God by raised desires, and God descends into the soul, by the operations of his sanctifying and comforting spirit. And as we see in nature, the flowers of every kind open their

leaves to the rising sun, to be revived with his vital heat; so we should every day open our hearts to God in prayer and praises. And since all his mercies invite and conduct us to the blessed author, and temporal benefits are sensible arguments of his love; those who most richly enjoy them, are obliged infinitely more to value and delight in the giver, than in the gifts themselves. If the "heart be set upon riches," which it is very apt "to be when they increase," or upon pleasures, God is neglected and vilified: and though many are not openly vicious and profane, yet so pleasantly the things of the world insinuate into their affections, that they cannot "taste how good the Lord is;" a sad indication of their unregenerate state: for the divine nature in a saint, inclines him to God as his supreme good, his only treasure and exceeding joy; and as soon as he begins to breathe the life of holiness, he dies to the vanities of the world. And when prosperity alienates the heart from God, it is as surely destructive, as when it draws forth the sensual appetites into exorbitant and foul actions. A consumption kills as surely as a calenture. Those who abuse the favours of God to impiety and luxury, throw themselves headlong into the bottomless pit; and those who in their abundance are remiss and cold towards God, gradually descend thither: for God will not be our joy for ever in heaven, if he be not our exceeding joy upon the earth.

But when in the midst of prosperity the soul is filled with a noble admiration of the divine excellencies, when it tastes incomparably more sweetness in the love of God, from whence outward blessings are derived, than in the things themselves, when the chief joy arises from the contemplation of his favour in Christ, whereby we are pardoned, and preferred to be his brethren, coheirs with him of the immortal and undefiled inheritance, then we know how to abound. Our Saviour commands his disciples not to "rejoice that spirits were subject to them," Luke 10:20. though an admirable testimony of his favour, but that "their names were written in heaven." Much less should this perishing world be the matter of our joy, in comparison of our title, and the blessed hope of heaven. Spiritual joy purifies and fortifies the soul against the ensnaring and corrupting allurements of

the world. "The joy of the Lord is their strength;" that of which he is the author and object, is both productive and preservative of the vigour of the soul, to resist the charms of the world. It is said of Orpheus, when he panted by the Syrens, who by their charming voices subdued men to sleep, and then destroyed them, that he played on his harp, and the sweet sound made him despise their singing, and prevented the danger. The fable is fitly moralized: joy in the Lord, as our portion, and that infinite sweetness that is in communion with him, makes such an impression upon the soul, that the ensnaring and destructive pleasures of the world are abhorred in comparison with them. That firm peace and pure joy, "passes the understanding," our most comprehensive faculty; whereas all the pleasures of the world do not satisfy our senses.

7. When riches and power are employed for the glory of God and the good of others, they are a happy advantage to those that possess them. All benefits are virtual obligations; and the greater our receipts are, the greater our accounts will be. God has a sovereign right in all things we have, and they are not to be employed merely for our pleasure and profit, but according to his will, and for his honour. It is true, he enjoys his own eternity, his own glory and blessedness, to which there is no possibility of accession: his essential glory cannot be increased, but his declarative glory may be more manifested in the eyes of men; and he strictly requires that we should use his gifts, so as to show forth his glory, to declare how highly we value his glory, and how ardently we desire and endeavour that others should bless and praise him. Thus men in high dignity should govern their greatness so, as to make it subservient to this blessed end, that the wisdom, power, holiness, justice, and mercy of God, may be manifested in their administration. And those who enjoy a present abundance, should, according to their capacity, relieve the wants of others. The wise God has ordered several degrees in the society of men, the rich and poor; that the inequality may be an occasion of the exercise of charity. And it is a special favour, that he is pleased to make some his treasurers to dispense his benefits to his family. Whilst others can only be charitable in their compassionate desires,

he gives to some an ability of diffusive goodness; and it is injustice mixed with foul ingratitude, not to pay that tribute of which he has appointed the poor to be his receivers, not to abound in good works, when from his most free and special favour, he enables men to imitate and honour him who is rich in mercy. It is more "blessed to give than to receive." The present reward is excellent: it is our Saviour's encouragement, "Give alms of such things as you have," according to your capacity, "and behold all things are clean unto you." As under the law, by offering the first fruits in the temple, the whole harvest was consecrated and blessed; so by a charitable distribution, the rich have a pure and comfortable enjoyment of their estates. And the reward hereafter will be glorious by infinite degrees, exceeding the most costly and liberal charity. It is the encouragement used by the apostle, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." 1 Tim. 6. Some by corrupt prodigality waste their estates, are profuse as the sea; some heap up riches as the sand, and both must be responsible to the righteous Lord, who will severely call them to an account for the abuse of his blessings. But those who according to their utmost ability honour him with their substance, and by their charity and beneficence open the hearts and lips of many in thanksgivings to God, shall be accepted and rewarded from the divine mercy.

Especially doing good to those whom God loves, who bear his image, who are peculiarly related to him, shall have an excellent reward. The apostle tells us, Mat 11. that some by entertaining strangers, received angels: the honour is incomparably greater, that in relieving the godly, Jesus Christ, the Lord of angels, is fed and clothed in his members. And at the last day he will publicly own those acts of mercy as done to himself: then he will give to the contented poor the crown of patience, and to the charitable rich, the crown of liberality. In short, riches and honour, power and prosperity, are temptations to the carnal, that draw forth their lusts, and increase their guilt and

misery; but to wise and faithful christians, they are talents improved for their master's honour, and their own everlasting good.

8. A firm resolution to part with all possessions and dignities, when God's honour, and the testimony of his truth requires it, is an excellent antidote against the evil of prosperity. God doth sometimes call forth his servants to hard trials, to declare with more strength and evidence their love to his name, their zeal for advancing his glory: satan is an irreconcilable enemy to God and his saints; and inspires the perverted world with his own malice against them. Rage has no reason: the Jews would excommunicate the blind man, because he saw, and ascribed the glory of the miracle to our Saviour: and Lazarus must die, because he was raised from the grave. Now when a christian is prepared for this noble act of self-denial, to forsake all things when his duty to Christ requires it; this preserves him from the ensnaring temptations of prosperity.

It is observable, the same divine disposition of soul, makes us temperate in the use of present abundance, and patient in the loss of it. The low esteem of earthly things, joined with the lively hope of heaven, renders the enjoyment of the world less delightful, and the loss of it more tolerable.* The philosopher and courtier says of himself, that he always in his prosperity kept a great distance between his affections and riches with honours; and in the change of his state, they were rather taken easily away, than rent from him. According to the temper of the mind, the difference is as sensible in the parting with outward things, as between clipping the hair, and tearing it off with violence. Nay, the glory of heaven does so eclipse the faint and fading lustre of this world, that a believer not only patiently but cheerfully makes the exchange of the one for the other. "Moses preferred affliction with the people of God before the crown of Egypt, because of the reward above that was in his view." Heb. 11. And the christian Hebrews took "joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance. The blessed hope will preserve us from being foiled by prosperity when it surrounds us, and from sinking in adversity. Like Mertyllus'

shield, that secured him in the field, and saved him being shipwrecked at sea, by wafting him to the shore.

Lastly, Earnest and constant prayer to God for divine grace, is a sovereign means to preserve those who are in prosperity from the danger that attends it. "I know how to abound," Phil. 4. says the apostle; and immediately adds, "I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me." Supernatural strength in an eminent degree is requisite to keep us entire and upright in the dangerous conflict with the pleasant temptations of this world: and that strength is derived from Christ, and obtained by humble prayer. It is St. Austin's observation,* that Elisha wanted a double portion of Elijah's spirit, because he was in public honour; and exposed to a more dangerous trial, and extraordinary grace was necessary for him; but Elias was under continual persecution. The trees that are exposed to storms, are strong and firm; but those in the sunny vallies are brittle and easily blown down. We are directed to ask wisdom of God for the governing of ourselves in afflictions, "that in patience we may possess our souls," and the turbulent passions may not cause rebellious disorders, but the sanctified mind may use afflictions for our spiritual and eternal good. And it is as necessary to beg heavenly wisdom for governing ourselves in prosperity, that when temptations are frequent, and favoured by our joyful affections, which are equally vehement and exorbitant as the sad affections, reason may keep the throne, and manage prosperity, so as we may obtain our blessed end. Such is the malice of satan, that he incessantly desires leave to tempt us, and love to our souls should make us pray continually for confirming grace against his temptations. Briefly, if the good things of this world make us more humble and holy, more fearful to offend God, and careful to please him; if they are motives to renew our homage and thankfulness to him, if they are used in subordination to his glory, they are the testimonies of Ins present favour, and the pledges of our future felicity. Our blessed Saviour keeps the best wine for his obedient friends till the last.

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