



Monergism

PRESUMPTUOUS SINS

SERMONS UPON PSALM 19:13

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by Thomas Manton

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SERMON I

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.—Ps. 19:13.

IN this psalm David first admireth the brightness of the sun, and then the purity of the law. The joining of both these meditations showeth that man can as ill be without the word of God as without

the light of the sun. What would this inferior world be without the sun, but a great cave or obscure dungeon, wherein men would live like worms in a pit. Now the light of the word is as necessary for the blessedness of our souls as the sun's light is comfortable to our bodies. Again, the comparing of both these showeth that there are two books wherein we shall do well to study, and both made by God himself—the book of nature and the book of scripture; and both discover God to us, as everything that hath passed his hand discovereth the author. You cannot look well upon the book of the creatures, but in every page and line of it you will find this truth presented to your eyes, that there is an infinite eternal power that made all things; this is enough to leave the world without excuse. But in the book of the word you may see more of God, and the way how to enjoy him. This doth more powerfully convince man of his misery, and show him his remedy. The use which the psalmist maketh of these two books is notable; of the first, to admire the glory of God by the beauty of the heavens; of the second, to humble man by the purity and strictness of the law; as all religion lieth in the knowledge of God and ourselves. The text is a branch of the latter use, namely, that which ariseth from this consideration of the power and purity of the law, as converting the soul, and reaching to the very thoughts and inward workings of the heart. The holy man of God maketh a double use of it—for humiliation and caution. Humiliation and desire of pardon of what is past: 'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults.' And then grace to prevent future enormities.

1. Humiliation. The best man, when he cometh to compare himself with the law of God, will be forced to blush and acknowledge more faults than ever he took notice of before. Too short an exposition of the law begets a large opinion of our own righteousness; that the ell may be no longer than the cloth. Men have a gross notion of the law of God, as if it did only require externals; but when they look upon it as reaching to the soul, the act as well as the aim, every thought and every desire and motion of the heart, they have other manner of conceits of themselves; then they cry out, as David, 'Who can understand his errors?'

2. That this is not all the use that David maketh of the purity of the law, to beg pardon of what is past, but also grace to prevent future enormities, to get sin prevented as well as pardoned; otherwise we mock God, and mind our own interest rather than the offence done to him. There is the same method in the Lord's prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses;' and then, 'Lead us not into temptation.' One petition concerneth the guilt of sin, and the other the reign and power of it. The text falleth in with this latter branch of the use, 'Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins,' &c.

In the words observe—(1.) A prayer; (2.) Arguments to enforce it.

In the first take notice—

1. The mischief he desireth to be freed from, 'Presumptuous sins.'
2. The quality of the person that maketh the prayer, 'Thy servant.'
3. The prayer itself is twofold; for one part of the request is simple and absolute, to be kept from them; the other upon supposition, and by way of reserve; yet in case God should suffer him to fall into these kind of sins, yet at least that they might not have dominion over him.

[1.] He prayeth absolutely: Arm me by the special assistance of thy grace, that I may not fall into any of these sins.

[2.] That they may not get a full power over his will, so that, instead of a servant of the Lord, he should become a slave to sin.

[3.] The reasons are taken from the fruits or the consequent benefit and advantage of this preservation. They are two—

(1.) The testimony of his conscience concerning his integrity, 'Then shall I be upright.'

(2.) His avoiding further guilt, 'And shall be innocent from the great transgression.'

I shall now pitch upon the first part of the prayer, 'Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.'

Doct. That God's best servants need earnestly to beg grace to be kept from presumptuous sins.

The point will be best explained by a view of the circumstances of the text.

1. The mischief he would have prevented, 'Presumptuous sins.'
2. The person praying, David, God's servant.
3. The mercy asked, 'Keep back.'

1. The mischief or evil feared, 'Presumptuous sins.' I shall show—(1.) Their nature; (2.) The heinousness; (3.) The danger of them.

First, The nature, 'from prides,' so the Hebrew word signifies, which we render sins of presumption. The term must be a little explained. We are said to presume when we take more upon us than is meet. In these kind of sins men doubly presume.

1. That they shall be safe, and do well enough, though they continue in their impenitency and hardness of heart: Deut 29:19, 20, 'And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, and add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.' And so take a liberty to sin upon the presumption that he shall find mercy after all. But—

2. It is rather a presumption upon God's power than God's mercy. They carry on their sins against God as if they could make their party good against him: 1 Cor. 10:22, 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?

Are we stronger than he?' This is the presumption, that they undertake to contend with and resist God: Num. 15:30, 'But the soul that doth aught presumptuously, whether he be born in the land or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among the people.' They that live in a professed or clearly implied opposition to God: Job 15:25, 'For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty.' And it is expressed, Lev. 26:21, by walking contrary to God, and so falleth in with the Hebrew expression of prides. Sins against knowledge, with full consent of will and pride of heart. To understand this more fully, you must consider there are two sorts of sins—

[1.] Sins of mere infirmity and human frailty.

[2.] Sins of presumption. We cannot understand the one without the other.

[1.] Sins of infirmity; they are of four kinds—(1.) Sins of ignorance; (2.) Sins of sudden surreption or surprise; (3.) Sins of daily incursion; (4.) Sins of violent passion.

(1.) Of ignorance. These are opposed here to sins of presumption: 'Cleanse thou me from secret sins;' and then, 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins.' As small sins, that are for the matter indiscernible, and sometimes grievous sins, if the ignorance be invincible and not affected, these find favour for this circumstance wherewith they are accompanied: John 15:22, 'If I had not come and spoken to them they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin;' that is, no excuse for their sin: Luke 23:34, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Their ignorance is pleaded as a motive to persuade God to pardon their sin: Acts 3:14–17, 'But ye denied the holy One and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Lord of life, whom God hath raised from the dead: and now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers;' 1 Tim. 1:13, 'Who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy,

because I did it ignorantly.' Paul was as bad as bad could be. On the contrary, knowledge aggravateth sin: Luke 12:47, 'And that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes;' James 4:17, 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' To jostle a friend in the dark may be by mistake, but to run full butt at him argueth malice. So to run full butt upon God, with eyes wide open, is a sin of presumption; as to dash upon him blindfold, provided we have not hoodwinked ourselves, is a sin of weakness and infirmity. When God standeth in the way to stop the sinner by his precepts and threatenings, and the sinner shall say, Yonder he standeth that would stop me in my unlawful gain, stop me in my unlawful pleasure, stop me in my profane course of life; yet have at him; I will go through in this madness and obstinate pride; this is an aggravation of the offence. But now to press on out of mistake, as Balaam when he saw not the angel, is an infirmity; provided this ignorance be not affected, and vincible by the means afforded, that they are not willingly ignorant, refuse the light, shut their eyes and harden themselves by their own prejudices.

(2.) Sins of sudden surreption and surprise, that creep upon us unawares, or by Satan's assaulting us on a sudden; we cannot use that recollection, or have time to interpose those remedies, that might conduce to our preservation. Of these the apostle speaketh: Gal. 6:1, 'If a brother be overtaken in a fault.' A child of God is usually rather overtaken by the suddenness or overborne by the violence of the temptation; surprised before he hath time to deliberate. The suddenness of the assault giveth no leisure to represent those considerations that might stay the heart. These are the sins that suddenly steal upon us, like sly thieves, and soldiers that lie in ambush for their enemies, and show themselves in us when we think them far enough from us; as sudden flashes of evil thoughts, and evil words, and sudden actions; those swarms of noisome and unsavoury thoughts which are injected of a sudden, and do distract us, and hinder us in the best employments; carnal and wicked thoughts, that suddenly arise, but are rejected with indignation; wandering

thoughts in the time of prayer, never distinctly consented unto, but crowding in upon us; rash words spoken of a sudden, and some unpremeditated actions, when we have no due time for deliberation.

(3.) Sins of daily incursion, that are not avoidable by the usual assistance which God giveth to his people, but cleave to us while we are here in this world: Eccles. 7:20, 'There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not;' James 3:2, 'In many things we offend all.' We are daily assaulted, and there is no man so exact but sometimes his watch is intermitted, and then he will be tripping. That it should be otherwise cannot be looked for in this estate of frailty wherein now we are; especially considering the different conditions we are to pass through, the several occasions and provocations we meet with, and the many duties of piety and charity which we are to perform, many a sin cometh frequently, yea, daily upon us. In our duties to God much dulness, weariness, and formality will discover itself; our domestic crosses will put us into sudden fits of anger and discontent; our converses upon some failings of lightness and want of sincerity; our public employments, something of hypocrisy and intermixtures of vainglory; our prosperity, a touch of high-mindedness and carnal complacency; our adversity, upon distrust and uncomely disquiets of spirit: these defects and inseparable blemishes and wrinkles are found in the faces of all the saints. Our Saviour telleth us, John 13:10, 'That he that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit;' that is, though they are in a holy state, yet by walking up and down in the world, in the several businesses and employments of the present life, they contract some filth, which must be washed off every day by a renewed application of the blood of Christ, that fountain which God hath opened for uncleanness. The infirmities of the saints are not like the voluntary wallowing of swine in the puddle, 2 Peter 2:22. But only the defilements of their feet, of their affections and conversations in going through this polluted world; as men's feet are fouled by the ground they tread upon. Every minute almost we are in danger, and therefore a total exemption cannot be hoped for in this world.

(4.) Sins committed by the sway of great and headstrong passions, or by some present prevailing temptation, which may strangely transport those that do in the general make conscience of their ways. These in some cases pass for infirmities; as when a man offends through some great fear or anger, joy or sorrow, or some other consternation of spirit which hindereth the free debate of the soul, and so may run into some inconveniences; as when any natural trembling or any other passion hindereth men from discerning or weighing the sinfulness of some light small sins; but in materia gravi, in weighty cases, it is hard to say that passions excuse; as sacrificing to idols out of fear, or killing another in passion or anger, or running into oaths and execrations; because it is to be supposed that a christian doth not presently do so; for the horridness of such facts cannot but stop the career of a generally well-disposed mind; but when the fear is above the proportion and size of those ordinary notions that we have of the sin, it may pass for an infirmity that time, because through the sway of the present passion there is not a perfect deliberation, and those sudden unadvised acts are in part excused; as, for instance, Deut. 16:19, 'A gift doth blind the eyes of the wise and pervert the words of the righteous.' A judge, though for his understanding wise, for his disposition a just man, yet may under a great temptation be so enchanted for a time as to err in judgment.

[2.] Sins of presumption are sins against light and knowledge, wittingly and willingly committed, with a full consent of will, carried on obstinately and proudly against God. They are usually such open and gross sins as are manifest; as whoring, gluttony, drunkenness, which are manifest even to natural conscience; or else are manifest by the common light of Christianity, as denying the faith; so that there is no doubt of the unlawfulness of the act done.

(1.) There is knowledge in it as one ingredient, according to that, Gal. 5:19, 'The works of the flesh are manifest.'

(2.) Deliberation and studied contrivance. Men have time and space to consider with themselves; and the more advisedness in any sin,

the greater it is. It is not a thing done in passion, but in cool blood. But when men project and plot their sin, it is not an infirmity, but an iniquity: Prov. 6:14, 'Frowardness is in his heart; he deviseth mischief continually;' Micah 2:1, 'Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds.' The heart dwells long upon it, as David plotted Uriah's death. All sins that require some space of time for their execution are deliberate sins; as all acts of fornication and adultery, acts of drunkenness, unless suddenly intoxicated by ignorance of the strength of the liquor. So lying, speaking that which is false to the wrong of others. So swearing, when men devise new oaths, and study to be wittily wicked in this kind: James 1:15, 'When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.' There is no stay.

(3.) There is a constancy or resolved purpose in these sins, without fear of God or men: Jer. 18:12, 'And they said, There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart;' Jer. 44:16, 17, 'For the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth out of our own mouth.' This obstinacy is seen in men's going against express admonitions, commandments, and reproofs from the word of God: Deut. 1:43, 'So I spake unto you, and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, and went presumptuously up unto the hill.' Against warnings and threatenings in God's name from those that wish well to your souls: Prov. 29:1, 'He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed without remedy.' But men are wedded to their inclination, out-facing all challenges of duty in God's name: Ps. 12:4, 'Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?' 2 Chron. 36:14–16, 'Moreover the chief of the priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathens, and polluted the house of the Lord. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and

misused his prophets, until the wrath of God arose against his people till there was no remedy.' Especially against checks of conscience: Acts 7:51, 'Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ear, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye.' Conscience telleth them, You ought not to yield to this sin, whatsoever the profit or pleasure be; yet men will kick against the pricks, and do that which their own heart disalloweth in spite of inward motions. They will go on to follow the sin they have in chase, especially when against restraints of providence, and God hath hedged up their way with thorns. Or when they have found much inconveniency in that course: 2 Chron. 28:22, 'And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord. This is that king Ahaz.' God sets a brand upon him: Josh. 22:17, 'Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord?' Well, then, here is some rude description of presumptuous sins.

But because this is not strict enough, and does not search the core to the bottom, I shall only add two things—

First, That presumptuous sins are double—by way of omission and commission; when they live in any known sin, or allow themselves in the omission of any necessary duty.

1. For presumptuous sins of commission, there are many texts: 1 Cor. 6:9, 10, 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God;' Eph. 5:5, 'For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.' They deserve in themselves an exclusion from the favour of God and the kingdom of heaven, and do actually exclude them that commit them; the unregenerate certainly, and the regenerate from that degree of favour which they enjoyed before; and if it could be

imagined that they could persevere in them, they would eternally exclude them from the kingdom of heaven.

2. For presumptuous sins of omission; when a man omitteth voluntarily, against the light and checks of conscience, any necessary duty: James 4:17, 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' Not only to commit a sin against conscience, but to omit a duty against conscience; for the authority of God is equal, and his threatening and sanction is express, and sins of omission have the nature of sin in them; so that to live in any of these is to live in a known sin.

Secondly, That sins of infirmity may, by carelessness and neglect, become sins of presumption, and infirmities commence into iniquities. When we are wanting to ourselves, in neglecting the use of the means prescribed to avoid those sins, or for some wilful sin of ours God withdraweth that grace which is necessary for the resisting of these sins, we are partakers of this wilful sin, and are not humbled for them, do not beg pardon, but run easily, frequently, constantly upon every return of the temptation. It might be an infirmity at first, as rash swearing, or taking the name of God in vain; Christ's words are plain: Mat. 5:37, 'But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil;' when a man hath brought a custom upon himself that he cannot speak otherwise. There is no sin but, by a deliberate and licentious multiplication of acts, may become a sin of presumption; for sins of infirmity are only sins of infirmity to them that watch against them sincerely, repent of them, strive and labour against them. The neglect or contempt of them cannot be without some neglect and contempt of God, and then rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, 1 Sam. 15:23.

As a small leak neglected may sink the ship as well as the most boisterous and greatest wave. Some sins are of a lighter nature than others, yet may be very presumptuously committed; as in some colours the dye may be more than the stuff.

Secondly, The heinousness of these sins of presumption.

1. Every sin of presumption is an implicit blasphemy: Num. 15:30, 'But the soul that doth aught presumptuously reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among the people;' Ezek. 20:27, 'Thus saith the Lord God, Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed me, in that they have committed a trespass against me.' There is a blasphemy included in it, as if God were an ignorant God, and did not know his wickedness; or a careless God, that would not take notice of it; or an impotent God, that could not punish his rebellion; or an unjust God, that would not. This drunkenness is blaspheming drunkenness, this whoredom blaspheming whoredom; for thou makest God to be an idol God, that hath no respect to thy actions, or would not judge according as he hath said in his word.

2. There is the highest pride in it that a creature can be capable of. It is that pride whereby you despise God and his authority. When David fell into presumptuous sins, it is said, 2 Sam. 12:9, 10, 'Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, and done evil in his sight? Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast despised me;' Amos 2:4, 'I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandment.' When men walk as they list, they do but make a jest of the word of God. What is he that we should regard him, or his commandment that we should stand upon it? They make a sport of sin, and a mere mock of scripture; for they knowingly and willingly do the quite contrary to what God would have them.

3. It is a daring of God, or a provoking him to do his worst: 1 Cor. 10:22, 'Do ye provoke the Lord to jealousy? are ye stronger than he?' What care they? Some are said to be wicked in the sight of the Lord: Gen. 38:7, 'Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord.' They were bold, presumptuous, and impudent, daring him to do his worst.

4. It is a disposition to the unpardonable sin; as here in the text, and by that scripture, Heb. 10:26, 'For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.' It is an allusion to Num. 15:30, 'The soul that doth aught presumptuously shall be cut off.' And to that place Christ alludeth: Luke 12:10, 'Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven; but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven.' Wilful sins are against clear light, and will in time bring on despite and malice.

Thirdly, The danger from the effects, both to the unregenerate and regenerate, are common to them both—(1.) The unregenerate; such sins are not easily repented of; (2.) Not easily pardoned; (3.) When pardoned, easily return again.

[1.] Not easily repented of. They harden the heart wonderfully, and make it stout against God: Zech. 7:11, 12, 'But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets.' Every day they sin away their tenderness. Men grow wilful by frequent sinning, and their hearts become as hard as the highway by frequent treading upon it. These kind of sinners, the most grave admonitions, seasonable reproofs, powerful exhortations, and convincing reasons, will not move them. By every presumptuous sin they put a new difficulty in the way of their conversion, Jer. 13:23, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.'

[2.] Not easily pardoned. Deep stains are not easily washed out. It will cost many a sad hour, frequent sorrow and anguish of heart, ere there be a reconciliation between God and their souls, and their peace will not easily be obtained; as Manasseh's repentance was great: 2 Chron. 33:12, 'And when he was afflicted he besought the

Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.' An ordinary humiliation will not serve the turn.

[3.] They ever and anon return, and the remembrance of them is very grievous to the soul: Job 13:26, 'Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me possess the sins of my youth;' as frightful ghosts raised out of their graves. When God hath cancelled them, yet this old sore bleedeth afresh; or as deep wounds ache upon change of weather: Ps. 79:8, 'Oh, remember not against us former iniquities;' Ps. 25:7, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.'

2. After regeneration they make a sad breach between God and the soul, throwing us into the depths of fear and perplexed thoughts. They waste our comforts, wound our consciences, sequester us from the privileges of the covenant; so that we lose our present aptitude of entering into the kingdom of heaven. Whereas a pardon of course is granted for sins of infirmity, as they are retracted by a general daily repentance; but now a particular repentance and renewing of our grant is required for these sins. As when David bewailed his blood-guiltiness, and Peter wept bitterly for his denying of Christ. Sins of infirmity do not hinder the use and claim of God's grace and pardon. They are not such for which God will bid thee keep out of sight, as David did Absalom for his rebellion, but these cause us to lose the actual fruition of God.

3. The mischiefs in common to both.

[1.] A blot on the name: 1 Kings 15:5, 'Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.' See Ps. 119:110.

[2.] Many troubles and calamities, especially on God's children; but on others as often as it is meet for the vindication of his justice and

providence. Especially on God's children: Amos 3:2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.' They of all others are God's peculiar and chosen people, and if they do not walk answerably they shall smart for it. More certainly and severely will he punish them; their means and mercies are more, and their ingratitude greater. It concerneth God to vindicate his own glory and holiness. We will single out two instances, David and Eli. David, what troubles ensued his presumptuous sin in his house and family! His daughter ravished, Amnon slain in his drunkenness, Absalom driveth him from his palace-royal, his subjects desert him, his concubines ravished before his face, and he forced to go weeping up and down, and to shift for his life; all which are effects of his sins; for so it is foretold, 2 Sam. 12:10–12. The next instance is Eli, for tolerating scandalous sins in his family; his sons are slain in battle, Israel discomfited, the ark of God taken, Eli broke his neck, his daughter died in child-bearing, his house rejected, 1 Sam. 2:30. The anger of the Lord is very hot when we provoke him by these kind of sins; the revenging hand of God will lie very heavy on our persons, children, estate, and all other outward comforts. It is not safe to offend him.

[3.] It bringeth a dishonour on the name of God, and a disgrace on religion: Rom. 2:24, 'For the name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles through you;' 2 Sam. 12:14, 'Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.' You make others judge ill of the ways of God, and encourage them to sin, which certainly will strike deep in the consciences of good men, and make them bethink themselves.

SERMON II

Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins.—Ps. 19:13.

HAVING made some progress in the doctrinal part raised from these words, I shall now make some application thereon.

Use 1. For the just condemnation and reproof of them that never take care to be kept from these sins. They are of two sorts—

1. Some that live in known sins against the light of conscience.
2. Such as please themselves that their sins are but infirmities, when indeed they are presumptions; and therefore are never troubled about what they do. I must speak to both.

First, Such as live in known sins against the light of conscience. Every one of you that, under the light of the gospel, do live in the customary neglect of necessary duties, or the customary committing of any gross sin, you sin presumptuously, and allow yourselves in it. You who are so blinded in judgment as that ye know not that the gross ways ye live in are sin, and so wallow in all manner of sensualities, without any care and government of your souls and senses, and live in a present oblivion of the world to come, and the way that tendeth thither, do not you know that to live in an utter unmindfulness of God, and a neglect of your everlasting interests, without praying, meditating, reading, hearing and other means of grace, or a serious addressing yourselves to come to God by Christ, is a presumptuous violation of God's will, and is inconsistent with salvation? Do you not know that you ought not to lie, or swear, or to be drunk, deal unjustly, and fraudulently in your callings? Are not these bogs and quagmires visible, and yet you will run into them? Doth not nature and scripture condemn these things? Gal. 5:19–21, 'Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, sedition, heresy, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and the like.' This is apparent to a common understanding that these are to be called works of the flesh. Scripture telleth you so, and conscience telleth you so; yet you will not give over, because of the habituated rooted wickedness that is in your hearts. You cannot plead ignorance, temptations, passions, weaknesses; this is the element you live and breathe in. Hell will be

heated seven times hotter for such proud and arrogant sinners as you are. Oh, think of your condition before it be too late!

That you should not sin presumptuously, take these dissuasions—

1. If you have any respect of God: Jer. 44:4, 'Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate.' You are his servants; of right all should be so; and what is the condition of a servant? μή ζῆν ὡς βούλεται, not to live as he list. We are not nostri juris, have no power to dispose of ourselves; but de facto you have actually resigned up yourselves to God, to be guided by his will; and will you in apparent cases set your own will in contradiction to his, as if you would try whose will shall stand, God's or yours? God saith, 'Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not bear false witness; nor take my name in vain;' and thou in a flat contradiction sayest, I will swear, lie, and wallow in all manner of filthiness. Is this to be God's servants? Oh, how far are you different from the temper of those that are indeed so! That which is their terror is your choice; that which they desire to be freed from, you with all earnestness run into, with great proneness of heart. We may say, Deut. 32:5, 'Their spot is not the spot of God's children.'

2. If you have any respect to yourselves. Presumptuous sins will cost you dear at length, both in this world and the next. Men make a scourge for their own backs while they run wilfully into sin, and shoot arrows against heaven, that return upon their own heads. If God hath been so terrible against sins of infirmity, sudden passion, and temptations, what may you fear that provoke God, and dare him to his face, and, in contempt of him and his commandments, deliberately run into known sins? It is a wonder God giveth such any longer time upon earth, that he doth not suddenly strike them. Surely he will not always bear. Lot's wife for looking back was turned into a pillar of salt. Uzzah for touching the ark, though out of a good meaning, struck dead, 2 Sam. 6:6. Moses, for a few unadvised words, shut out of Canaan: Ps. 106:32, 33, 'It went ill with Moses for their sakes, because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvised

with his lips.' When meek Moses was drawn into the snare of a rash speech, God shutteth him out of Canaan. Therefore certainly gross sins obstinately persisted in cannot but provoke God to anger.

3. One argument more. If the offences of his children, that are dear and precious to him, are recompensed in the earth, much more the wicked and the sinner, Prov. 11:31. If Sion sip of the cup, Babylon shall drink up the dregs of it. If the hand of a father be so heavy, what shall the wrath of a judge be? If offending children smart for their folly, how will his anger break out against daring impudent sinners?

4. Consider that your presumptions will not secure you, but ruin you the more. In all these proud acts of rebellion against God there is some pretence men presume upon, or else they would not go on thus directly against the will of God; therefore they are called sins of presumption. There is some pretence or other wherewith they harden their hearts; but alas! they are but presumptions, the silly suppositions of their own deceived hearts. He that is surety to himself is but little secured by his own thoughts and words.

That I may drive the nail to the head, it will not be amiss a little to touch upon the things men presume upon, and they are five; either—(1.) That God will not call them to an account; (2.) That God will be merciful, though they go on in them; (3.) That they shall repent at last; (4.) That they will make amends for one sort of sins by abounding in their other duties; (5.) That their estate will bear them out.

First, That God will not call them to an account, or punish them for their sins. There is atheism at the bottom of sins of presumption. They think they shall do well enough though they add drunkenness to their thirst. Why? Because they either believe there is no God, or that he is a weak and careless God. They either deny the being of God, or else make an idol of him, while they fear not his power and justice. Now consider, surely there is a God, or else how can these things fall into this order and proportion wherein we see them?

Scripture and nature, creatures and conscience, will tell thee there is a God. Look within thee, without thee, upward or downward, round about thee, everything thou seest, hearest, or feelest proclaimeth a God to thee, by whose will good and evil is stated. Certainly there is a God, and there is such a thing as good and evil, vice and virtue, sin and righteousness; that the one is worthy of blame and the other of praise. If it be not so, whence cometh it that we all affect to be counted honest and good? to seem so at least, if not to be so? The most wicked are offended when they are taken for such as they are, and endeavour to cover their vices with the appearance of virtue and goodness, as fearing blame. If all things were indifferent in their own nature, it were no more crime for a man to kill his father than his neighbour's dog; to rob in the woods than to hunt a hare or deer there; to lie with his mother or sister than to use lawful marriage; and no less honest to lie and forswear than to be sincere in our dealings. Certainly there is a God, and there is good and evil, sin and righteousness, vice and virtue; and if it be so, will not God punish the evil and reward the good? If you think he will not, it is either because he hath no right to do so, or no power, or no will or care to do it. No right to punish, because mankind is exempted from his jurisdiction: can you imagine that? Certainly God hath a right to govern his creatures. As he is a creator, he is an owner; and as he is an owner, he is a ruler and a judge. He that made all is the judge of all, the king of the earth. If man be God's creature, he must be his subject, and judiciary power is part of his government, to dispense the rewards of virtue, and the penalties of vice. If God hath a right, hath he not power? 1 Cor. 10:22, 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?' How will you make your party good against him? Will you arm your lusts against his angels? What can an earthen pitcher expect by dashing against a brazen wall but to be broken all in pieces? Let the potsherds of the earth contend with the potsherds of the earth; they are no match for God. Or is it because he will not? that he neglects the looking after mankind, and doth not mind what is done here below? It was the conceit of Epicurus and his followers that it would not stand with the happiness of God to trouble himself with the affairs of the world, as if it would disturb and discompose

his bliss. *Nec pro meritis capitur, nec tangitur ira*; that he is neither pleased with our good deeds, nor angry with our offences. And because many that live in the bosom of the church are poisoned and leavened with this blasphemy, as appeareth, Zeph. 1:12, 'I will search Jerusalem as with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.' It is their latent and hidden thought, though not their declared opinion; I shall a little speak to it. It is against all reason and sense. It is against all reason, against the wisdom, power, justice, the purity and perfection of God's holy nature, that he should be indifferent to good and evil, and mindless of his creature whom he hath made; that he should not use his authority and power in executing vengeance on them that do evil, but connive at all the disorders here below, without any taking notice of things. It would destroy all worship and respect to God. The two first motives that ordinarily induce men to religion are fear and hope; fear that God will avenge their misdoings, and hope of support when men lie under straits and necessities. But now, when men have nothing to hope and fear from his providence, why should they regard God? The epicureans indeed owned that God was to be worshipped for the eminency of his doings, and for the happiness and excellency and greatness of his nature; but alas! that would breed a faint respect; for who regardeth those in whom they are not concerned? Here in the world kings and potentates are not only revered with regard to the eminence of their dignity, but as they govern and protect us; and the common peace and safety depends upon the homage and obedience which we pay to them. Who are there that have reverential thoughts for princes and potentates who are separated from us by an arm of the sea, or some small distance of place? Who hath thoughts of allegiance and awfulness towards the Mogul or kings of Persia and China, because of their magnificence and the splendour of their courts, their vast armies and retinue, and the largeness of their dominions? So would our respects to God be cold and languid if we were not interested in him and he in us. And besides hearsay, have we not continual proof of his justice and goodness? and doth he not daily make himself known by punishments and benefits? Doth not

every man value the authority of the meanest gentleman where he liveth, because he seeth it and feeleth it? In case of offence he may be punished by it; in case of doing well, supported by it. The reports of the greatest potentates affect us not unless we are interested in their rewards and punishments. So it is against sense. Internal sense, the frights and terrors of conscience, that hidden fear and bondage which sinners are subject unto all their lives: Heb. 2:15, 'And deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage;' 1 Cor. 15:56, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.' It is as a thousand witnesses in our bosoms that God will take vengeance of evil doings. Certainly the impressions are involuntary; they are not things we delight in, for fear hath torment in it. Men would fain get rid of it if they could, but they cannot wholly root it out of their breasts what time soever they take to do it. It is evident to external sense: Rom. 1:18, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;' Heb. 2:1, 2, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip; for if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' God's justice executed should strike us with dread, when we see the effects of it in pestilences or any other noisome diseases, wars, famines, tempests, inundations, lightnings, thunders, particular instances upon ourselves, upon any notorious disorders; so that we are forced to say, 'Verily there is a God that judgeth the earth.' I have been the longer on this, because atheism is at the bottom of presumptuous sins, and men seek to extinguish out of their minds all thoughts of God's justice and severity against sin. I know the grand objection, the promiscuous dispensations of God to good and bad. But that ariseth from our haste and rashness, like ignorant and impatient spectators, that will not tarry till the last act of the tragedy.

Secondly, Another thing that men presume upon is, that God will be merciful though they go on in their sins. This is a presumption

wherein they harden their hearts, that God will not be so severe as is told them, but more gentle and merciful to his creatures. But this is to turn the mercy of God to a wrong use: Jude 4, 'Turning the grace of God into lasciviousness;' to abound in sin that mercy may abound. True penitents, nolunt misericordiæ divinæ oneri esse, would not be burdensome to God's mercy. Mercy may become our enemy when it is abused. Licentious persons cannot expect it; for it is dispensed according to rule. Mercy to convert us as a free lord, but mercy to reward us as a governor; and God hath told us he will not be merciful to such: Deut. 29:19, 20, 'And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him; but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man.' Therefore do not presume thou shalt find mercy at length. Mercy is for the support of the penitent: Isa. 55:7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' Their cordial is thy poison: Ps. 68:19–21, 'Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with his benefits, even the God of our salvation. He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as goeth on still in his trespasses.'

Thirdly, Thou presumest that thou shalt repent at last. It is uncertain. God may take thee away in the act of sin, as he did Zimri and Cosbi, Korah and his accomplices, or deny thee space to call for mercy. Death doth not always give warning; and those that forget God in health may forget themselves when they come to die; by some apoplexy, lethargy, or some stupifying disease, may be deprived of all use of reason. If a man were sure to repent, yet it is folly to play the mountebank with our own souls. Who would break his head or wound his body to make all whole again to try the strength of a plaster or sovereign unguent? or surfeit his body in expectation to remove the distemper by a vomit? Better be always sure. But usually

God giveth them up to hardness of heart, so as they never repent. There is such a thing as judicial hardness of heart. When God giveth up a sinner to his own counsels, and this is inflicted on those that resist powerful means long vouchsafed: Gen. 6:3, 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man;' Prov. 1:24, 25, 'Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought my counsel, and would none of my reproof.' Therefore for any in the time of youth and health to depend upon the presumption of his repentance hereafter, and therefore defer the forsaking of wilful sins and the known vanities of his life, he doth for the present grieve and resist the Holy Spirit, while he importuneth to be heard and obeyed. God will at length be wearied out, and not so ready to give grace as before; therefore they run a desperate hazard of growing more wretched, profane, and atheistical every day.

Fourthly, That they shall make amends for a course of sin in one kind by abounding in other duties; as some that live in uncleanness will be charitable, to excuse or to expiate for the offences of a filthy life; and so make alms a sin-offering, which should be a thank-offering. So some will be just and do no wrong, but shut up their bowels from those that need; some that mind first-table duties, but are faulty in the second: Ezek. 33:13, 'If he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered, but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.' Upon that account or presumption the apostle taxeth this want of entire and uniform zeal: Rom. 2:22, 'Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?' His method would lead to say, Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou worship idols? But the Jews' form was a detestation of idols, and yet they were entangled in a crime as enormous. Most men's goodness is but to hide their secret indulgence to some lewd practice or sinful course; to hide it not only from the world, but from their own hearts, that they may sin with greater leave from conscience; as if our delinquency in some things we affect might be excused by a supererogation in other duties which are not so contrary to us; as the Jews did hope to repair their want of mercy by a multitude of sacrifices; as the stomach, when it hath no

solid food, fills itself with wind. But God will be obeyed in all things: Exod. 20:1, 'God spake all these words.' Not 'these words;' but 'all these words.' The same authority runneth through all the commandments.

Fifthly, Some that think themselves regenerate, and in a state of grace, think their estate will bear them out, so as they need not lay to heart their presumptuous sins with such bitterness and remorse. They are sure to find favour with God.

Ans. But consider, grace doth not make sin less evil. The nature of it is the same both before conversion and after. Sin is the same, as odious to God, as damnable in itself; yea, in some sense our estate doth aggravate the offence: John 6:67, 'Will ye go away also?' They that have tasted more of the sweetness of grace, and so have a greater obligation to resist sin, have felt more of the power of grace, and so are more enabled to resist it. But more especially I shall show you the inconveniency and mischief of it to the regenerate, because men presume to sin because their sins can and may stand with grace.

1. The sinner is excluded from that degree of favour which before he enjoyed. There is a twofold love of God—*amor benevolentiaë et complacentiaë*. God hath a great love to his people, first, in intending us benefits by Christ: Jer. 31:3, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;' and then delighting in what he hath bestowed: Ps. 147:11, 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him;' Cant. 2:14, 'Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely;' Heb. 13:16, 'For with such sacrifices God is well pleased,' Zeph. 3:17, 'The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.' The more grace we have, and the more we act it, the more like God, and so more delightful and lovely in his sight. Now as to his love of benevolence and his love of complacency, in both these respects God's love may be lost as to a great degree.

[1.] The love of benevolence, or that love whereby he doeth us good, which may be considered either in the eternal purpose of God, or his present readiness to execute his purpose, or indeed our readiness to receive it. Amor intentionis et executionis; his purpose to do them good remaineth firm, notwithstanding their sins. He had such a good-will to them before they were born, and before they were new-born, and in time it worketh for their good: 'He is the Lord, that changeth not,' Mal. 3:6. But it is a purpose obstructed; his present readiness to do them good is much hindered and obstructed by these presumptuous sins. Though God be always ready, yet they are not ready, they putting themselves into an incapacity of receiving these benefits: Isa. 59:2, 'But your iniquities have separated between you and your God; and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear;' Ps. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' The good-will of God is, as it were, bound up and hindered from showing itself in all those gracious effects which otherwise it would put forth for our comfort and peace. He doth not actually pardon their sins, and make them partakers of spiritual benefits in so ample and full a measure as otherwise he would, such as comfort, peace of conscience, protection against temptations; their sins put a bar against them during that state. You provoke God to withdraw, to hold his hand, and cut you short in these spiritual blessings which otherwise he would plentifully dispense unto his people; though there be some effects, for the seed of God remaineth in them, 1 John 3:9.

[2.] As to his love of complacency. God hath not such a delight in us. We grieve his Spirit, Eph. 4:30. He hath no pleasure in them that draw back: Heb. 10:38, 'He hateth the workers of iniquity.' Therefore God's children, when they do so, are no way acceptable to God, neither their persons nor their offerings. He will not take an offering at their hands. We find it by the effects. They have no internal sense of his love; no external answer of their prayers.

(1.) No internal sense of his love. They lose their assurance. God doth not hold delightful communion with them in the Spirit. The joy of the

Holy Ghost is gone. The Spirit of God doth not shed abroad his love in their hearts as formerly, Rom. 5:5. They have not that liberty and holy confidence in prayer: 1 John 3:21, 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.' Those lively-hopes of glory, that sweetness in the word, that readiness and cheerfulness in obedience; nor strength to resist sin, nor comfort in reproaches, nor courage in afflictions. Oh, in what a sad condition is a christian that is gone backward in God's love, and wants the comfortable effects of it, like Sampson when his locks were gone! Nothing maketh a well-disposed servant so ready to do his master's will as the knowledge that he is in his favour, that what he doeth will be well taken. So when there is assurance that our persons and work is accepted of God, all goeth on cheerfully: Ps. 119:32, 'I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.' Dilatation of the heart is the effect of joy. So for courage in tribulation: Rom. 5:3, 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulations;' Heb. 10:34, 'And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' When anything troubleth us, we may go to God and ease our griefs, and pour out our complaints into his bosom. Well, then, internally all delightful communion with God in the Spirit is suspended and interrupted.

(2.) Externally; this is manifest by the non-audience of our prayers, or non-acceptance of our persons: Isa. 59:2, 'Your sins have separated between you and your God;' Ps. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;' Hosea 5:6, 'They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them.' To lose our duties is a sad loss. To go to the throne of grace and find the oracle dumb; to call upon the God of mercy, who is ready to hear, and to have no answer, is a sad case. As Baal's worshippers were abashed when they had lanced and gashed themselves and could not get a drop of water from him, so it is a great cause of sadness when God shutteth up himself from the prayers of his people, and taketh no notice of their cry. When a child cannot get the father to speak to him, but rather when he turneth away in indignation; as it is said of

Miriam, Num. 12:14, 'If her father had spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?' There is a time when God spits in the faces of his children; when God poureth anger, shame, and contempt upon us by refusing to own us, or accept a prayer at our hands. Is it not sad and grievous when he that formerly had such liberty of access to God and assurance of welcome shall pray and no notice taken of it? Isa. 1:15, 'When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you, when ye make many prayers I will not hear.' Oh, therefore it is dangerous to sin presumptuously. You lose the sense of the favour of God. David's plotting Uriah's death was more laid to his charge than any other sins which he committed: 1 Kings 15:5. 'Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah.' How many of David's failings are left upon record! His distrust: 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul;' his dissimulation; his rash vow to destroy Nabal; his injustice in the matter of Ziba and Mephibosheth; his indulgence to Absalom; numbering the people, wherein he showed his carnal confidence; all these are passed over in silence as infirmities; only the matter of Uriah stuck close to him.

2. They do exceedingly weaken the work of grace that is wrought in their hearts. It is far abated; it is much weakened, though not totally abolished. *Gradus remittitur, actus intermittitur, licet habitus non amittitur.* The degree may be remitted: Mat. 24:12, 'Love may wax cold;' though not extinguished, yet abated; it is more cold than it was, though there be love still: Rev. 2:4, 'Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.' Not all love, but 'first love;' those high and raised operations wrought in the soul upon first acquaintance with Christ and christianity. Qualities are capable of intension or remission. The act is intermitted. Ephesus lost her first love, left her first works, Rev. 2:5, The apostle's advice is to keep from family breaches, that our prayers be not hindered, 1 Peter 3:7. Such men are altogether unfit for action, and perform duties in a very uncomfortable fashion, because of the guilt of the injuring party, and the grief and passion of the injured; but the habit

is not lost, for the seed of God remaineth, 1 John 3:9; and that fountain of living water that springeth up to eternal life is never dried up; and the unction abideth in you, 1 John 2:7; and they are kept on foot by the power of God, and the continual intercession of Jesus Christ.

3. That by presumptuous sins we may weaken the habit, therefore the apostle biddeth us not to quench the Spirit, 1 Thes. 5:9. Fire may be quenched by withdrawing fuel or pouring on water; presumptuous sins of omission do the first, and commission the second. When we live in the neglect of those duties that may increase grace, or commission of gross sinful acts, they are as pouring on water, they are as a wound to the body, that lets out our blood and strength. Now this should breed caution in us; for there is a double principle in us; as the one increaseth, the other languisheth; as sin increaseth, grace is ready to die: Rev. 3:2, 'Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, which are ready to die.' There is this advantage on the flesh's side, that it is a native, not a foreigner, a home-bred plant, which the soil breedeth naturally without any tillage, as nettles will sooner preserve themselves and get ground upon better plants, because the earth bringeth them forth of her own accord; as water heated, the cold is natural to it, and will prevail against the heat, unless driven out by a constant fire.

4. The hurt is exceeding great to lose any degree of grace. How shall we answer it to God when we embezzle our stock? It is not only donum, a gift to be preserved, but talentum, a talent to be increased upon our hands, and of which we must give an account to God. It is a precious gift dearly bought, serving for the highest use, to fit us for communion with God. He that had five talents answered for five, and he that had two accounted for two. You are to give an account of all that you have received. So much as we lose, so much we lose of our fitness to serve God, and our glory suitable.

5. To be careless of degree makes way for the loss of the whole. Christians are like a hen when many eggs are taken out of the nest;

as long as one or two remaineth, she taketh no notice of it, forsaketh not the nest. Therefore consider whether there be not abatement of some degree of grace, though some may remain still. Content not yourselves that all is not lost, but something remains, except it be in a great proportion as formerly.

6. Those that are guilty of presumptuous sins will not be intrusted with so much again. A man may recover his peace, comfort, and strength, but in a lower degree; as a prodigal that hath once broken is not intrusted with a like stock again; his friends are more cautious. David did not recover that largeness of spirit and fulness of inward strength and comfort he had before: 2 Chron. 17:3, 'And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David.' After a great disease we do not regain that pitch of health we had afore; then the acts are intermitted. When the soul is distempered it is unfit for action; either duties are omitted, or else done in such an overly manner as doth increase our distemper and harden us the more. In what sorry fashion did David worship God till his conscience was awakened by Nathan, which was nine months. Now this was a great loss to be so long without expressing his love to God, to have his spiritual trade and commerce with heaven at a stand, or to serve him in such a careless fashion.

7. They lose their present aptitude of entering into the kingdom of heaven by falling into these gross presumptuous sins. The scripture tells us, Rev. 21:7, that 'there shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven anything that defileth, or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.' And again, the apostle, speaking of fornication, adultery, drunkenness, wantonness, saith, Gal. 5:21, 'They that do such things shall not enter into the kingdom of God.' Now the ministers of God are to declare it to them, and they that commit such things are to apply it to themselves. It is true, the regenerate that do fall into these sins do not actually perish in them, because they repent in this life, and come to themselves, and recover their estate again; but for the present, till they do repent, their pardon is not actually passed, but the guilt remaineth of them; for that is the difference between these

sins and sins of infirmity; that whereas infirmities are pardoned of course, and by virtue of our general interest in the covenant, these sins are not pardoned but upon express and particular repentance. When David humbled himself,² Sam. 12:13, the prophet told him, 'The Lord hath put away thy sin.' But till this be done, though they have a dormant right by virtue of their general state, yet they are under a sequestration; as a leprous man was compelled to want his own house till he was cleansed from that disease; he had a right to the house, but could not use it; so these lose their fitness for heaven till they recover themselves; therefore scandalous sinners are shut out by the keys of the kingdom of heaven: Mat. 18:18, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' What a misery is it for a man to be in such an estate, wherein, if he should die, you may suppose he cannot be saved! Well, then, you see it is ill depending upon your estate. Those that are in a good estate lose ground in the three great privileges of christianity—justification, sanctification, and glorification. If they should fall into drunkenness with Noah, adultery with David, incest with Lot, idolatry with Solomon, perjury with Peter, yet they smart for it.

SERMON III

Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins.—PS. 19:13.

HAVING showed you the danger of the first sort of men, that live in known sins against the light of conscience and the things they presume upon, I now come to a second sort, that live in sin, and please themselves in this, that all men are sinners, and so are they, and that their sins are but sins of infirmity.

To this I answer—That which you constantly practise, without resistance and remorse, how can you call that your infirmity? Every man almost thinketh his sins to be infirmities. Come to the drunkard, swearer, adulterer, oppressor of godliness, the vilest of

men, they will tell you that they are sinners, as all men are, and that their sins are but slips and frailties incident to mankind. But what are these slips and frailties you call so? Swearing frequently, drunkenness, wantonness, and the like sins: this they call making themselves merry; and in their mirth they are commonly ridiculing and deriding religion. Though they daily go to the taphouse, playhouse, whorehouse, though they have not one drachm of grace, or any serious care about eternal life, yet this is their excuse, that they have their infirmities as well as others.

To these five things must be offered—(1.) The distinction of persons; (2.) The distinction of sins; (3.) The nature of sins of infirmity; (4.) Some observations thence; (5.) The vanity of their excuses and pleas, by which they would prove their sins to be infirmities.

First, There is a distinction of persons to be regarded. Some have passed from death to life, 1 John 3:14; others do as yet remain in 'the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity,' Acts 8:23. Some are in the flesh, and 'they cannot please God,' Rom. 8:8; others make it their business to find acceptance with him, 2 Cor. 5:9. Some that live after the flesh, Rom. 8:13; others who are in Christ, and 'there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ,' Rom. 8:1. The one sort of men are under the first covenant, and the sins which they commit are deadly and damnable. To the other sort indeed we cannot say all their sins are venial and sins of infirmity; for they may fall in some rare and extraordinary cases into great and atrocious crimes; but this we can say, their infirmities are pardoned of course, which we cannot say of the other. The state of the person, though it doth not all, yet it beareth much weight in the case; for the first sort of men are without the verge of the covenant of grace, and wholly destitute of the spiritual life. How can their sins be said to be infirmities or venial faults? The state of the covenant will not permit it, nor the state of their hearts. Not the state of the covenant; for sin, all sin, is in its nature deadly and destructive. The end of it is death, and the wages of it death, Rom. 6:21, 23. How can wicked men, that never accepted of the covenant of grace, hope for any release? for the grace and

mercy of God goeth along with that covenant, and reacheth not to them that are not under it. Therefore their lighter faults are deadly and destructive, both ex merito, in their own nature and merit, and ab eventu, in respect of the event. They shall have judgment without mercy, when others are judged by the law of liberty, James 2:2, 13. And the state of their hearts will not permit it, for he hath no spiritual life; for infirmity is in one that hath life. He hath life, but it is weak, and so he faileth out of weakness: 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,' Mat. 26:41. But infirmities cannot properly be said to be in them who are said to be 'dead in trespasses and sins;' where sin remaineth in its full strength, and they have no power of grace at all. You do not say of a dead man that he is weak. It is true, the faults of wicked and impenitent persons are not all of a like nature; some are more wilfully committed than others, but they are all mortal, even their vain thoughts and idle words, and bring them under the curse, which is not taken off till they fly for refuge to the covenant of grace, and change states. A wicked man so living and so dying shall be judged according to that covenant which saith, Gal. 3:10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' But now, for the other sort, we cannot say that all the sins of the godly are infirmities. It is true, the sins whereinto they ordinarily fall are not presumptuous sins, but sins of weakness and infirmity, because the general bent and frame of their hearts is towards God. But they may, in some extraordinary cases, fall into gross and foul sins. As outwardly, besides the daily infirmities the body is subject to, as hunger, weariness, faintness, and pain. There are grievous distempers and diseases, in which a man cannot tell whether the patient will live or die; so a godly man that hath the life of grace may, besides incident weaknesses which cannot be avoided by the grace that is ordinarily given, fall into great enormities, which are ordinary and frequent, and so may lose his sense of the love of God, and his hopes and fitness for eternal life as before; but this advantage he hath above the wicked man, his infirmities and daily failings do not bring him under condemnation, but are pardoned by virtue of his general interest in the covenant of grace, while the main of his course is to walk after the Spirit, and not

after the flesh, Rom. 8:1. He hath the seed of God in him to awaken his heart, and some former experiences of the love of God that encourage him to sue out his pardon. In his grievous offences he is not altogether so hopeless and helpless as a wicked man that never was acquainted with God. It fareth with him as with Nebuchadnezzar when he was brutified through his melancholy or God's secret judgment, Dan. 4:15. The stump of his roots remained in the earth when his branches were cut off and his leaves shaken and the fruit scattered. There was the foundation of a reasonable creature under brutish manners. Well, then, the different state of the persons must be considered. What! should men dead in trespasses and sins, and wholly strangers from the covenant of promise, talk of infirmities?

Secondly, The distinction of sins. All sin, but not all alike. The scripture intimateth a distinction: 'Their spot is not the spot of God's children,' Deut. 32:5. They are a perverse and crooked generation; their sin which spotteth and blemisheth their souls is not such a sin which is of infirmity, which his children may, and many times do, commit, but not of malignity, and perverseness, and contempt, or such as proceedeth out of wilfulness or an impenitent heart. God gave the priest under the law direction how to put a difference between leprous persons, to pronounce some clean and some utterly unclean, Lev. 13:38, 39, with the 44th. If the leprosy spotted the skin, but did not fret the flesh, the priest was to pronounce him clean. God is merciful to the infirmities of his people; not esteeming every spot and deformity in them as a malignant sin. We read, Jude 15, of 'ungodly deeds which they have ungodlily committed;' and Ezek. 24:13, 'In thy filthiness is lewdness.' Some things are done out of mere weakness, others in a more provoking manner; as when a man is sufficiently convinced in his understanding that the thing that he would do is unlawful and displeasing to God, or at least hath means to convince him if he be not wanting to himself in the use thereof, and hath time and leisure to advise with himself, and examine the case, and apply the light of his understanding to direct him, yet resolveth to put his intention into act, and to fulfil his own will; this is an ungodly deed ungodlily committed, a presumptuous sin; and

whosoever doth so is become highly culpable before God. Thou canst not say, It is thy infirmity, no more than if a man should voluntarily beat another and say it is his infirmity. A man may strike another by chance, or in his sleep, as night-walkers; that is passed by; or as under the law there was a city of refuge for him that slew another by chance, and not of malice prepense. As casual homicide and wilful murder differ, so doth sinning out of infirmity and sinning out of presumption; and a middle between both is striking another in passion, as sins of violent passion are in some cases infirmities, in others presumptions.

Thirdly, The nature of sins of infirmity: The more of voluntariness or wilfulness, the less they are sins of infirmity; for to sin wilfully, resolvedly, without restraint, reluctancy, or tenderness of conscience, is to sin presumptuously, not out of infirmity. Now what degree of voluntariness there is in our sinning is here to be determined, and must be known by observation. The will may concur several ways, habitually or actually. Habitually; as John 3:19, 'They loved darkness rather than light;' which is more plainly expressed Ps. 52:3, 'Thou lovest evil more than good.' What is done wittingly, willingly: Isa. 65:12, 'And did choose that wherein I delighted not;' Isa. 66:3, 4, 'They did evil before mine eyes; yea, they have chosen their own ways; and their soul delighteth in their abominations.' When men willingly choose and betake themselves to such practices: Rom. 6:16, 'Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?' And an actual consent; this may be in some cases to some particular sinful action. Their actual will to sin at that time is greater than their actual will to forbear it. Now this may be deliberate or precipitated. Deliberate: Heb. 10:29, 'Who have trodden underfoot the Son of God, and have counted the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing, and have done despite to the Spirit of grace.' That is a presumptuous sin; a thorough consent of will to forsake the known truth, or else precipitated by the violence of the present passion, which is a kind of surprisal; as Peter, being surprised of a sudden, denied that he knew Christ. Again our willingness may be full or half full, plenary or

partial. Plenary is set forth in that expression, Eccles. 8:11, 'Therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil;' when there is a voluntary delivering over, ourselves to such a practice. Partial or but half full when there is a consent and a dissent, but the consent is stronger for the time; as when they do that which they allow not, Rom. 7:15. This may be an infirmity, the other an iniquity. Sometimes the will may concur not by an express consent so much as by a naked permission or connivances not a strong dissent; which, though it be culpable considering our duty, yet it argueth a weakness. Again, consent of will is found out by considering our strength, or advantages of standing out against the temptation, as when there is more time for deliberation. A deliberate act hath more of the will than sudden risings or bubbling up of sins. So also in the nature of the sin. To blaspheme and curse God is a greater sin than an idle thought, and we have more advantages against it. Idolatry is a greater sin than stealing a shilling, shedding of blood' than an officious lie. Or when we have more checks of conscience, and warnings and stops in providence, or our temptations are not great; as the murmuring: of the Israelites was not out of want, but wantonness. Or when men have greater helps, quickness of understanding, and grace to prevent it. In short, an evil intent hath more of the will in it than an evil action; the one is purposed, the other done by way of surprise.

Fourthly, The observations are these two—

1. That there is some difficulty in the case to state what sins are sins of presumption, and what of infirmity; partly because some sins which in their nature are infirmities may prove iniquities in the committer, as when he abandoneth himself to vain thoughts, idle words or actions. And partly because the same sin may be an infirmity in one man which. is not in another, because the other hath more knowledge and helps of grace. And partly because that may be an infirmity at one time which is not at another, as it cometh backed with more temptations, and so make a more forcible impression, and have no. time for deliberation. And partly because that which was an

infirmity at first may afterwards commence into an iniquity; as when he has sinned away his spiritual strength; his conscience is not awake, because lulled asleep by some foregoing sin. And partly because it is hard to determine how long sensual passions may keep the soul from sober consideration.

2. That the best way will be to stand at a distance universally from all sin, for thereby we shall be kept out of dangers. If the scripture had expressly set down how much sin is consistent with grace, we might have been tempted to have gone as far as we could, and would not so strictly stand upon our guard as now we are obliged to do; for since it is so nice a case, we should be the more cautious. And here these corollaries arise from the debate—

[1.] If you see how much it concerneth you to keep up a constant care and felicitous desire to please God in all things: Heb. 13:18, 'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly;' and a solid purpose and inclination of heart against all sin: Ps. 97:10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.'

[2.] How much it concerneth us to cherish and increase these every day, that our hatred against sin may be more keen and lively: Ps. 119:104, 'Through thy precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way;' and our inclination to God, and holiness, and heaven more strengthened and increased: 1 Thes. 4:1, 'That as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more;' Ps. 84:10, 'They go from strength to strength;' Phil. 3:14, 'I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.'

[3.] This must be not only our purpose, but our constant business, our constant care, Phil. 2:12; our prayer, Mat. 26:41; our tears and groans, Rom. 7:24; our striving, Rom. 6:13, 14; our serious endeavour, Acts 24:16. But some may say, What needeth there so much ado? I answer—'Though the spirit is willing, yet the flesh is weak.' Our understandings and wills are but imperfectly sanctified.

The understanding is an imperfect guide; the will doth not stand upon its empire; there is an obstinacy and rebellion in the lower faculties. If this care be not taken, they will prove more than infirmities.

[4.] When through frailty we sin more grievously, it concerneth us early to recover ourselves again: 1 John 2:1, 'My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' Under the law, if a man were unclean, he was to wash his clothes before evening. And after we have fallen to be more watchful and circumspect: Ps. 51:6, 'In the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom;' lest we settle into a trade of sin.

Fifthly, The vanity of their excuses and pleas. What have you to say why your sins should be counted infirmities?

1. Is it because you run not into those gross and roaring sins and abominations wherewith others are blemished? I answer—

[1.] There may be much contempt of God in a small sin, when for a trifle we will break with him, and go against his express will. This is a slighting of the divine majesty. What love and reverence hath he to God that will displease him for a trifle? Among men, to deny a small thing to a friend, or to resist authority upon a light occasion, maketh a man more culpable. It is not an excuse, but an aggravation: Amos 2:6, 'They sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.' Adam's eating the forbidden fruit, the smallness of the thing forbidden aggravated his sin. Saul's sin, for which God rejected him, was of no great outward bulk; sparing Agag, and the best of the sheep, and oxen, and fatlings for sacrifice. It was neither murder that he committed, nor adultery, nor drunkenness, but it was against the express command of God; and so rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, 1 Sam. 15:23; that is, disobedience to God in a small matter may be as heinous as the greatest sins. In some cases there are more aggravating circumstances in small sins than those that seem

greater, as the dye many times is more than the stuff. It is rather an argument that sin beareth full sway, than any sign of your goodness; as a little thing will make a stone run down-hill, because it is its natural motion. As there may be much crookedness in a small line, so there may be much contempt of God in small sins. He that was found gathering sticks on the sabbath-day, and Moses knew not what to do with him, the Lord said unto Moses, 'The man shall surely be put to death: all the congregation shall stone him without the camp,' Num. 15:35. You will say, Was that such a great matter, to gather a few sticks? Or, he being the first instance, might have been spared. No; it was against God's express law; it was a presumption, therefore capital. Among the four sorts of death inflicted by the Israelites, stoning was the chief. There was stoning, burning, slaying with the sword, and strangling. Maimonides saith, stoning was counted heavier than burning, and burning than slaying with the sword, and that than strangling. Now God said, The congregation shall stone him with stones. Go now and plead that thy sins are but small sins; with Jonathan, 'I did but touch a little honey with the top of my rod, and for this I must die,' 1 Sam. 14:43. The matter may be small, but the sin great, as it hath more or less of wilfulness in it. Do but consider God's infinite majesty, and supreme right to the creature's obedience, and see if this plea will stand, It is but a small matter, and let me be allowed in this. God will be punctually and exactly observed, so as there may be no allowed failings. The matter may be small, and yet not the nature of the sin small. The least sins are committed against an infinite majesty, and are breaches of his eternal law.

[2.] Small sins neglected may breed great danger to us. As a small leak neglected may sink the ship, as well as the greatest wave; so do small sins destroy the soul for ever if they be neglected; if a man allow himself in them, and deliberately multiply them, they will damn us as well as great and heinous sins that make more noise, and are more hateful in the world. What matter is it to the loss of the ship whether it be swallowed up by one great wave, or sunk by degrees? We read of some that have been slain by the sword, of others that

have been killed by bodkins and penknives; some that have been devoured by lions, others eaten out with vermin, destroyed with mice and lice. Pope Adrian was choked with a gnat: Mat. 5:19, 'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven;' a man of no place or room in the kingdom of grace and glory: ver. 20, 'He shall in no case enter into heaven.'

[3.] When men give themselves liberty in lesser sins, they presently fall into greater: Ps. 1:1, 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.' Mark, here is walking, standing, and sitting; ungodly, sinners, and scornful; counsel, way, and seat; hearken to their counsel, walk in their way, sit in their seat. The little sticks set the great ones on fire, and a little wisp is often used to enkindle a great block of wood. A man that keepeth his heart so carelessly that he suffereth breaches to be made upon his soul, he doth thereby fit himself for greater. Every sin bringeth not only a guilt upon the soul, but a blot, a stronger inclination to sin again; as a stick that hath been in the fire is the more apt to fire the second time. Corruption is strengthened as well as wrath increased; as a lesser degree of heat disposeth to a greater, as water heated to such a degree will soon be heated to further degrees; as many acts of sin bring on a customary necessity and inclination; it removeth the fear of God. They that make bold with him in little things will venture upon greater. We grow bolder, and so doth Satan too. When we have lost our reverence of God, he is encouraged to come on with stronger temptations. God is provoked to withdraw his grace, that awe, bond, or bridle by which we are withheld from sin. God suffereth them to fall into greater, because they made nothing of lesser; yea, small sins engage a man to do more, to excuse, conceal, or maintain what we have done already. Peter's fear drew on his denial with oaths and execrations; and so there is no stopping when we run down-hill. The wimble pierceth the wood, and maketh way for the auger; so these make the first breach in the conscience, which still groweth wider and wider for temptations to enter upon us. Small sins may harden

the heart more than greater, because there is more neglect of God; they are committed without regret; and digested without remorse. Great sins are more apparent and more hateful. Natural conscience blusheth at them; but small sins are let alone till a custom groweth upon us. A violent distemper maketh us run to the physician, but when a disease groweth upon us by degrees, we carry death in our bosoms before we are aware. All this is spoken to teach us to make conscience of lesser sins and failings, and not willingly to allow them. The lesser commandments are an hedge to the greater; as cruelty to the beasts is forbidden that it may be a rail about the life of man. Jerome saith of Paula, *Ita levia peccata deflebat, ut gravissimumorum scelerum diceret ream*—She so bewailed small sins as if she had been guilty of great ones.

[4.] Consider the multitude of them. Small sins with their multitude and number hurt the soul as much as greater sins with their weight. David, a good man, crieth out, Ps. 40:12, 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold of me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me.' They are a burden too heavy for me. Though little sins seem light in themselves, what are they altogether? Nothing lighter than sand, yet what is more weighty than sand? Prov. 27:3. A gnat, a fly, a locust, poor inconsiderable creatures, yet when they come in multitudes they are God's 'great army,' Joel 2:25. We may count our sins by the moments of our lives, the number of our thoughts, words, and deeds. We must not look on them as single sins, but as the sins of one that hath greatly sinned before, in the whole track and course of his life; as a figure added to a sum already fixed makes it rise high. What a miserable spectacle is a poor creature that hath a complication of diseases, and is exercised with many at once, the stone, gout, strangury, pain of the teeth! Consider it; oh, what are we that have so many kinds of sin? We look on sins severally, but God conjunctly. Though he can see every sin apart, yet he seeth them altogether, in the whole course and track of it.

[5.] Small sins have met with great judgments; Uzzah for touching the ark struck dead, 2 Sam. 6:7; Moses shut out of Canaan for a few hasty unadvised words, Num. 20:24; Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt, Gen. 19:26; the disobedient prophet torn in pieces by a lion, 1 Kings 13:26; Nadab and Abihu cut off for offering strange fire unto the Lord, Num. 26:60.

[6.] It is a greater evil to be guilty of one of those sins than to suffer the greatest temporal losses. It is a step towards the loss of the favour of God, and an offence to God: Heb. 11:26, 'Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.'

2. Is it because you are tempted and drawn on by others?

Ans. Yet there may be presumption and consent on thy part for all this. Adam was tempted to the eating the forbidden fruit by Eve, and Eve tempted by Satan, yet the mischief of that action was very great. He had time of deliberation, and to give check to the temptation. All that are drawn into sin are tempted; some by themselves, and some by others. David gave leave to his eyes to fire his heart, 2 Sam. 11:2. Indeed those that tempt themselves sin more; but yet you may sin, and that presumptuously, without being tempted by others. David was tempted to number the people: 1 Chron. 21:1, 'And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel;' yet David doth not lessen and excuse the sin by the temptation: ver. 8, 'I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing.' Joseph was tempted, but he stood, because the fear of God preserved his heart. If you had stood upon your guard, you might not miscarry. It is true God considereth men according to their temptations; so should we (Gal. 6:1 'If a brother be overtaken in a fault.') in judging others, but not in judging ourselves. A self-excusing heart is none of the best. We, that are conscious to the workings of our hearts, may find wilful circumstances and voluntary inclinations in ourselves, besides instigation from without. But how are we enticed? why drawn away by our own lusts and enticed? James 1:14. Si Sathanas loqueretur, et taceret Deus, haberes unde te excusares—If Satan only speak, and

God hold his peace, it were another matter. But when we are set between God's admonitions and Satan's suggestions, why should we yield to one more than to another? God adviseth that which is good, as well as Satan enticeth to evil. Now voluntarily and deliberately to; hearken to Satan and neglect God, judge whether that be not a presumption, yea or no. They that sin, and are not tempted, reject the commandment of God; but they that are tempted reject God and prefer the commandment of a base creature or sinful man before God, and are pliable to men. when the heart is not to be entreated by God, which is a double affront and disgrace.

3. Or is it because you say you strive against it?

Ans. So did Pilate against the crucifying of Christ, but yielded to it at last against his own conscience for his interest's sake, to preserve the good-will, of the people and his credit in his government; though he would fain have washed his hands of it, yet it sticketh to him to this day. Balaam resisted for a while, but yieldeth at length for the wages of unrighteousness. The consciences of most will bear back and hold off for a time from a thing which they apprehend) to be offensive to God and destructive to the soul, but the pleasure and profit of sin prevaieth, and they are carried away. If sin hath not wholly beclouded and subverted our reason (which happeneth only to such whom God abandoneth in an extraordinary manner), men do not, cannot commit any considerable crime without some reluctancy of conscience; but at length, after some encounter and contest, reason is captivated by the violence of passion, and men are strangely transported by the instigations, and urgings of the flesh; but the actions are not the more excusable for these strivings; no, but the more culpable, since their own conscience does not acquit them. No question but every one is the most favourable judge of his own actions. Now our own hearts condemn us, and there is a sentence against what we do in our own breasts. I say, these reluctances and grudgings of conscience make the rebellion the greater, when you will venture upon what is evil against the checks of your own consciences. He that will break through when he hath rubs in his

way, his heart is the more bent upon that action. There is a double evil—to do the sinful act, and overcome that which hindereth the doing of it.

4. Do you excuse yourselves because you are troubled about it?

Ans. So was Esau troubled after he had sold his birthright. The apostle telleth us he sought it again with tears, Heb. 12:15, 16. Judas, when he had betrayed his master, had his qualms: Mat. 27:4, 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood.' He was troubled even to a deep despair. There is a necessary connection between sinful acts and stings of conscience. Heathens felt accusing thoughts after they had done any foul gross evil, Rom. 2:14, 15. Adam was ashamed and hid himself. It is not a godly sorrow when it doth not weaken the sin committed. We are troubled, yet fall into it again for all this; these are but involuntary impressions.

5. Some excuse themselves because they have no power to do otherwise; the swearer would leave his swearing if he could, and the drunkard his cups if he could.

Ans. The truth is, this one thing is considerable concerning infirmities and presumptions. That is an infirmity that doth not arise from wilfulness, but want of strength to resist: Rom. 7:19, 'The evil which I would not, that I do.' But sins of presumption are those which are more easily avoided by the ordinary assistance of grace which God vouchsafeth, either habitual or actual. They are easily known, easily observed, and occasions and opportunities easily prevented. Either prevented by habitual grace, or the actual aids of God's Spirit. But yet to say you have no power is a vain pretence in most men; for many times this want of power doth aggravate the sin. It is a lazy cannot; that is, they cannot find in their hearts to take pains, but give way to spiritual sloth, and if they will not bestir themselves and use the means that God hath appointed, they cannot be excused. A sluggard cannot do any such thing, because his hands refuse to labour. It is a wilful cannot: John 5:44, 'How can ye believe,

which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?' Or else it is the penal, judicial cannot. The want of power to resist may be more faulty than the act they commit; as when they have provoked God to withdraw his grace and leave them under a customary hardness and necessity of sinning; as, 'How can ye do good that are accustomed to do evil?' Jer. 13:27. There is an inclination in them to do evil; as a drunken man cannot do his business because he hath disabled himself. They are guilty of a double crime, for their drunkenness and disability; as a naughty man cannot go because the magistrate hath locked him in the stocks. Well, then, when they will not take pains to mortify their lusts, or to watch against sin, or have forfeited grace, and brought a necessity upon themselves, their sin is the more.

Use 2. To press us—(1.) To take heed of presumptuous sins; (2.) Not to depend upon our own strength, but seek the grace of God.

First, Take heed of presumptuous sins; of all sin as much as we can, but especially of these sins; for these reasons—

1. Because these are more unnatural: 1 John 3:9, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.' Not in such a manner as others do. He hath his failings, and now and then some great fall, but it is contrary to the new nature; as if an hen should bring forth the egg of a crow.

2. These are more mischievous. They exclude us from the favour of God, which sins of infirmity do not. Hinder the acceptance of our prayers: 2 Chron. 30:19, 20, 'The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.'

3. They bring a scourge on our families: 'The sword shall never depart from thine house,' 2 Sam. 12:16. It is a misery to a parent to

see his family scourged for his sin.

4. Pardon is not so easily obtained for these sins. There is a pardon of course for sins of infirmity, but for these not till they be particularly repented of. It is good to repent of every sin with a distinct and particular repentance, yet it is not so absolutely necessary. A special repentance is required for these sins in all the parts of it.

[1.] A greater sorrow and humiliation: 'Peter went out and wept bitterly,' Mat. 26:75; and Luke 7:38, 'Mary Magdalen washed Christ's feet in her tears.' The incestuous Corinthian, that was almost swallowed up in uncleanness, was swallowed up in sorrow, 2 Cor. 2:7. David speaketh of broken bones, Ps. 51. Great wounds must have broad plasters. Now a less degree of sorrow will serve for other sins, even the ordinary and daily exercise of repentance, such as we express to God in our daily prayers. A great disease needeth more special physic than an ordinary, or is necessarily used in health.

[2.] A particular confession and acknowledgment of this sin: Ps. 51:14, 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God;' with Ps. 19:12, 'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from my secret sins.' A general, serious, but dolorous acknowledgment of our corruptions, with a general prayer for pardon: 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' No man's knowledge is so exact, his conscience so watchful, his memory so perfect, but, so far as we observe, we must acknowledge and bewail them.

[3.] An actual reformation is more necessary. A man cannot ordinarily avoid all sins of infirmity. A virtual, habitual forsaking of them is required, as the soul is more confirmed in the love of God, and there is a general desire to be rid of them: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Rom. 7:24. And striving against them is victory, and an endeavour to resist them as far as we are able. But as to actual forbearance, that is not so strictly required, and under such penalties. A man may die when such sins are breaking from him, and yet go to heaven. But these sins

are not actually pardoned, unless actually relinquished: Prov. 28:13, 'He that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy;' John 5:14, 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.' Probably they had smarted for some gross provocation: Ezra 10:19, 'They gave their hands that they would put away their strange wives;' Acts 19:19, 'Many of them which used curious arts brought their books together, and burnt them before all men.' Real actual avoiding that sin is required of themselves and others.

Secondly, Take heed of depending upon your own strength. The more holy any one is, the more sensible of their sinfulness and readiness to fall. Their hatred against sin is more strong; they are more acquainted with God and themselves, and so are more jealous of offending him, more humble. A jealousy of a man's proneness to fall into these kind of sins is a good preservative: Rom. 11:20, 'Well, because of unbelief, they were broken off, and thou standest by faith; be not high minded, but fear;' 1 Cor. 10:12, 'Wherefore let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.' The best christians need the strongest assistance. Oh, then, take heed of this self-dependence.

The notes of it.

First, It discovereth itself by venturing on temptations without a call or warrant. When men will lay their heads in the lap of a temptation, or run into the mouth of danger, they do not only tempt God, but tempt themselves. Peter would be getting into the devil's quarters; and what was the issue? He denieth his master there. Dependence on God 'is ever accompanied with an holy sollicitude and cautiousness: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' It is a presuming on our own strength, when we will be playing about the cockatrice's hole. When you run upon occasions of sin, you provoke God to leave you. Avoid tempting objects; we soon take fire.

Secondly, When we neglect means whereby graces are fed and supplied, waiting for a dole at wisdom's gate: Prov. 8:34, 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting daily at

the posts of my doors.' We cannot regularly expect anything from God but in God's way; therefore be much in prayer, hearing, taking all opportunities of doing and receiving good. Now when once we begin to think we need not pray so much and hear so much, and are more arbitrary and negligent in the use of means, we live upon our own stock, and quit God.

Thirdly, When we go forth to any conflict without actual renewing our dependence. The Ephraimites took it ill that the Gibeonites did not call them into the field when they went out against the enemy: Judges 8:1, 'Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not when thou wentest to fight against the Midianites?' May not God much more when you take not him along with you?

Fourthly, When we boast of our courage before we are called to trial. They that crack in their quarters do not always do best in the field. Remember Peter's boast, 'Though all men be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended,' Mat. 26:33; and 'Let not him that putteth on his harness boast as he that putteth it off.'

SERMON IV

Let them not have dominion over me.—Ps. 19:13.

WE have handled the first branch of David's prayer as it is absolutely considered. I now come to speak of the second, which is conceived upon supposition and by way of reserve, that if he should fall into those sins, yet that they might not have full dominion over him. Or, if you will, in the first branch, sin is considered in the cause and rise of it, pride and rebellion against God; here in the fruit and effect of it, 'Let them not have dominion over me.' The former notion represented sin as an offence to God, a presuming of the creature upon him or against him; this clause, as a mischief to the creature, as that which exerciseth a tyranny upon us, 'Let them not have dominion over me.'

Doct. It concerneth the children of God to take care that sin get not dominion over them.

Here. I shall inquire—(1.) When sin is said to have dominion over us; (2.) Why we are to take care that this mischief doth not befall us.

The first I shall open in these propositions—

First, In every man by nature all sin doth reign; for where there is no principle of grace set up, sin remaineth in its full strength. Therefore carnal men are said in scripture to be under the power of darkness: Acts 26:18, 'To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God;' Col. 1:13, 'Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness.' As long as man continueth in his natural estate, he is kept in slavery under the power of sin and Satan. His corruptions have a great power over him, and he liveth in a peaceable, willing, uncontrolled subjection to them: Titus 3:3, 'Serving divers lusts and pleasures.' Sundry men have their sundry lusts, but all are in servitude and bondage, wholly free from the yoke of righteousness: Rom. 6:20, 'For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.' They do voluntarily and without opposition live in a trade of all sin, and under the slavish tyranny thereof. Till Christ come to trouble them, all is in peace; wind and tide go together. This should put us upon looking after a change, and to see if the power of sin be broken. There are two contrary kingdoms—of sin and Satan, Christ and righteousness. We are either in the one or the other. Doth sin yet reign in you? It did in all by nature; when and how was it broken?

Secondly, Though sin doth reign in every one by nature, yet this dominion doth appear more evidently in some than in others, who are judicially given up to be visibly under the dominion of sin, as the just fruit of their voluntary living under that yoke, that they may become warnings to the rest, and instances of this woful slavery. They are apparently and in conspectu hominum outrageous sinners, led up and down the world by the devil; so that every man that seeth

them, and is acquainted with their course of life, may without breach of charity say, There goeth one who declareth himself to be a servant of sin; either to sin in the general, or to some particular sin.

1. To sin in the general. He that, instead of trembling at God's word, scoffeth at it, and maketh more account of the course of the world than of the will of God, of the fashions of men than of the directions of the word, and thinketh the scorn of a base worm that would deride him for godliness a greater terror than the curse of God, and the love of his carnal companions more valuable than communion with God, and, instead of working out his salvation with fear and trembling, runneth into all excess of riot, and carelessly neglects his precious soul while he pampereth his frail body, and doth voluntarily and ordinarily give up himself to serve his corruptions without resistance, or crying to Christ for help, this man is in the eye of all the world a slave to sin: Rom. 6:16, 'Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?' It is an apparent case. A man that giveth up himself to go on in the way of his own heart, restraining himself in nothing which it affects, he is one of sin's slaves, so our Lord Christ telleth us, John 8:34, 'Verily, verily I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.' There is no further doubt nor debate about the matter. He that goeth on in a trade of sin, and maketh that his work and business in the world, without looking after other things, he is one in whom sin reigneth.

2. To some particular sin. As we have instances of carnal wretches in the general, so of some poor captive souls that remain under the full power and tyranny of this or that lust, and are so remarkable for their slavery and bondage under it, that the world will point at them, and say, There goeth a glutton, a drunkard, an adulterer, a worldling, a proud or an envious person. Some are remarkable for covetousness, others for gluttony, another for ambitious affection of greatness; one whose god is his belly, a slave to appetite; another famous for his worldliness and arts of gaining: 2 Peter 2:19, 'Of

whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.' They grow proverbial for giving up themselves wholly to such a conquering and prevailing lust. As in the natural man, some are famous for a strong sight, a quick ear, a nimble tongue, so are these for notable excesses in some corruption; or as the saints are eminent for some graces, Abraham for faith, Moses for meekness, Job for patience, Joseph for chastity, Timothy for temperance, so these are notorious for contrary blemishes.

Thirdly, As to the godly, sin remaineth in them, but reigneth not there. It is cast down in regard of regency, though not cast out in regard of inherency, like the beasts in Daniel, chap. 7:12, 'Their dominion was taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.' There is some degree of life, but their reign is broken. The Israelites could not wholly expel the Canaanites, yet they kept them under. There will be pride, earthiness, unbelief, and sensuality, dwelling, moving, and working in them; but it hath not its wonted power over them. It is not only incongruous that it should be so, considering their advantages by grace, but also in some sense impossible. De jure, it ought not; but de facto it shall not. We have the apostle's exhortation, Rom. 6:12, 'Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof.' While ye have these mortal bodies, sin will dwell in you; but let it not reign over you. God suffereth it to dwell in you for your exercise, not your ruin. We have a promise, Rom. 6:14, 'For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace;' as, let it not, so it shall not. Christ will not reckon men slaves to sin by their having sin in them, nor yet by their daily failings and infirmities, or by their falling now and then into foul faults by the violence of a temptation, unless they make a constant trade of sin, and be under the dominion of it without control.

Fourthly, The not reigning of sin in the children of God will be understood by these distinctions—

1. There is a predominancy of one sin above another sin, and the predominancy of sin over grace. In the first sense, renewed men may be said to have some reigning corruption or predominant sin; namely, in comparison of other sins, as appeareth by the great sway or power they bear in commanding other evils to be committed or forborne, according as they may contribute to advance them. By violent and frequent relapses of the saints into them, or their unwillingness to admit of admonition and reproof for them, or their falling into them out of an inward propensity, when outward temptations are none, or weak, or very few; some sins that are less mortified than others, or into which they are hurried by natural inclination, constitution, or education. Thus David had his iniquity, Ps. 18:23, be it hastiness, distrust of the promise, or an inclination to revenge himself. Some sins that men favour most, and are most urgent and importunate upon them, and steal away their hearts most from God; the ocean into which the other streams of iniquity do empty themselves; that sin which outgroweth all the rest, as the tall trees take away the nourishment from the under shrubs; that which is loved and delighted in above other sins. Thus, in regard of other sins, one may reign in the throne of the heart, and be beloved more than another; but not in regard of predominancy over grace, for that is contrary to the new nature, that sin should have the upperhand constantly and universally in the soul; for any one thing habitually loved more than God will not stand with sincerity: Luke 14:26, 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' If we must not love our natural comforts above Christ, certainly not our carnal lusts: Mat. 6:24, 'No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' It is a dispossessing Christ to put anything in his stead; to love anything with him or above him.

2. The next distinction is in reference to sins prevailing over grace. There is a twofold prevalency—actual or habitual. Actual is only for a time; habitual for constancy. Though a regenerate man be not one

that letteth sin reign over him habitually, yet he too often letteth sin reign over him actually, as to that particular act of sin; when we do that which is evil against our consciences, or yield pro hic et nunc, at the present time, to obey sin in the lust thereof, or upon its command run into any particular wickedness. By presumptuous acts a man doth for that time put the sceptre into the hands of sin; for consent to sin maketh it reign. This a child of God may do for a fit, but as to the general state and frame of their hearts, they are at liberty.

3. The next distinction is of sins reigning with a full and plenary consent, or with reluctancy and contradiction; as Herod reigned over the Jews for many years by mere force, they opposing and contradicting him, but afterward they willingly consented to his government. So sin reigneth in some who readily and willingly obey the lusts thereof, and take its bonds and chains upon them. But now sin doth sometimes prevail on the godly, yet not quietly and without blows: Rom. 7:15, 'What I hate, that do I.' They are in combat and conflict with it. The virgin that cried out was innocent; it was a ravishment, not a consent. *Peccatum patitur, non facit*—He suffers sin, but does not do it, saith Bernard. The seed of God is disliking and opposing: 1 John 3:9, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.' They are sometimes foiled, but they keep up their resistance. Sin gets the mastery, but as a tyrant, not a lawful possessor. You groan under that oppression, and strive for liberty and freedom. Chrysostom hath an expression on that of the apostle, Rom. 6:12, 'Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lust thereof;' οὐκ εἶπε, μὴ τυραννέτω, ἀλλὰ μὴ βασιλευετω. He does not say, Let it not tyrannise; but, Let it not rule. Sin will play the tyrant in the best heart, but you must not let it have a quiet reign and government. Sin, taking advantage of some present distempers and difficulties, may encroach upon us, but it hath not our hearts. Whereas otherwise, if a man be not in arms against it, but liveth in peace and good contentment under the vigour and life of his lusts, there is no opposition, unless it be some checks of a natural conscience, or a few thoughts of fear and shame; there is no

opposition of a renewed heart; sin reigneth in them, though there be some risings against it, as a mischief and inconveniency, not a hatred or resistance of it as it is an offence to God.

Secondly, The reasons why we are to take care that sin reign not over us.

First, Because in giving way to the dominion of sin, we renounce the government of Christ, and transfer the kingdom from him to Satan. Let me—

1. Prove that we do so, and that to do so is—(1.) A great wrong and injury to Christ; (2.) A great folly and disadvantage to ourselves.

[1.] He that giveth way to the reign of sin taketh the sceptre out of Christ's hands, and puts it into the hands of Satan. What though he doth not formally intend this, yet virtually he doth it, and so God will account it. It is *finis operis*, the end of the work, though not *operantis*, of the workman. Look, as the setting up of an usurper is the rejection of the lawful king, so the setting up of sin is the setting up of Satan: John 8:44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.' And the setting up of Satan is the laying aside of Christ. As no man can serve two masters, God and mammon, so every man serveth one of these two, God or mammon. In being a servant to sin you become a servant of Satan, and every degree of service done to Satan doth include in it a like degree or portion of treason and infidelity towards Christ. All will grant that the heathen, that lived in abominable idolatries, were slaves and bondmen of Satan; and may not christians be such as work iniquity with greediness? Though they profess Christ to be their Christ, to be their Lord, yet they may be as true slaves and bondmen to Satan as the heathen were, which offered sacrifice to him. A drunken and a wanton christian gives the devil as much interest in him as he had in those that sacrificed to Bacchus and Venus. Satan desired that worship from them but as a means to gain an interest in their souls. Now, if you give him a power to dispose and command your

affections, you are his by possession or occupation. The bond of your servitude to Satan is altogether as firm and strong as theirs was. Barely crying, Lord, Lord, will not excuse: Mat. 7:21, 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.' And we were all formerly made over to Satan as well as they: Titus 3:3, 'We ourselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient;' and the god of this world ruleth in the hearts of the disobedient.

[2.] This is a very great wrong to Christ, to put ourselves in subjection to Satan, for we have no power to dispose of ourselves, being Christ's by purchase and covenant. By purchase: 1 Cor. 6:19, 20, 'What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.' The buyer hath power over what he hath bought. We were lost, but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. We were sold, we sold ourselves against all right and justice, and Christ was pleased to redeem us, and that with no slight thing, but with his own blood: 1 Peter 1:18, 19, 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from our vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.' How can you look your Redeemer in the face at the last day? If you have any sense and belief of christian mysteries, you should be afraid to rob Christ of his purchase: 1 Cor. 6:15, 'Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.' He hath bought us to this very end, that we may be no longer under the slavery of sin, but under his blessed government and the sceptre of his Spirit: Titus 2:14, 'Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.' This was his end, to set us at liberty and free us from our sins. Therefore for us to despise the benefit, and to count our bondage a delight, this is to build up what he came to destroy. This is as great an affront to Christ as can be. But we are not only his by

purchase, but by covenant: Ezek. 16:8, 'I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine.' This was ratified in baptism, when we dedicated ourselves to the Lord's use and service; and shall we rescind our baptismal vows, and give the sovereignty to another, after we have resigned ourselves to Christ, and the hands of consecration have passed upon us? When Ananias had dedicated that which was in his power, and kept back part for private use, God striketh him dead in the place, Acts 5:5. And if we alienate ourselves, who were Christ's before the consecration, of how much sorer vengeance shall we be guilty? God's complaint was just: Ezek. 16:20, 'Moreover, thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast born unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them.' Children born to me; that is, born during the marriage covenant. And if Satan hath a full interest in you by doing his lusts, as he had in them by that rite of worship, is not the wrong done to God the same?

[3.] It is a great folly and disadvantage to ourselves. What a poor and sorry exchange is this, of grace for sin, and Christ for Satan, a good master for a bad, which is not only a mischief to us, but an affront to God? When we will turn back upon him with so much loss to ourselves? The work and wages are very different. The apostle compareth them when he dissuadeth them from the reign of sin: Rom. 6:20–22, 'But when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.' You had full experience of the fruits of Satan's work; what fruit then before you had tasted better things, before you had a contrary principle set up in your hearts? You are ashamed now to think of that course. Now you know better; but what fruit then? Satan's work is drudgery, and his reward death. Satan hath one bad property, which no other master, how cruel so ever, hath, to plague and torment them most which have done him the most continual and faithful service. None are punished like those that have most sinned; for every degree of service hath a proportionable punishment. He is an unreasonable

tyrant in exacting service, without rest and intermission. The most cruel oppressors, Turks and infidels, give some rest to their captives, but sin is insatiable. Men spend all their means, and all their time, and all their strength in the pursuit of it; yet all is little enough; and what is the reward of all but death and destruction? Now judge you to whom should we yield obedience, and who hath most right to be served? He certainly who made and redeemed us, and preserveth us every day. None but he can claim a better title to us. He to whom we are debtors by so many vows, so many obligations; not Satan, our worst enemy, who is posting us on to our own destruction.

Secondly, The second reason is, because they have so many helps and encouragements to resist sin.

1. The helps. Grace planted in the heart. Seeing Christ hath put in them grace to mortify sin, it is their part not to suffer it to be idle and unfruitful: Rom. 6:11, 12, 'Likewise reckon ye also yourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof.' You want no ability to encourage you. You have the Spirit of God to help you in this work: Rom. 8:13, 'If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' He will be your second. Neither we without the Spirit, nor the Spirit without us. The law was a dead letter; it gave bare instruction, without helps or power; but there is a life and power goeth along with every gospel truth. Laziness pretendeth want of power; but what is too hard for the Spirit?

2. For encouragements. In every war there are two notable encouragements—the goodness of the quarrel, and the hope of victory. As David said, 1 Sam. 17:36, 'Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.' We have these in our conflict and combat with sin.

[1.] Our quarrel and our cause is good. It is the quarrel of the Lord of hosts in which thou fightest. Let the goodness of the cause put courage into thee. The honour of Christianity dependeth upon the issue of the conflict. Let the world know that the school of Christ breedeth the excellent men of the earth; that the divine life is the most powerful principle in the world. We stand with Christ our Redeemer in this combat, who came to destroy the works of the devil, 1 John 3:8. He hath begun the battle; we do but labour to keep under that which Christ hath begun to slay and destroy. Sin is not only an enemy to us, but to him; it is against his law, and hindereth his glory in the world, and the subjection of his creatures and servants. Were it not for sin, what a glorious potentate would Christ be, even in the judgment of the world!

[2.] The hope of victory. Our strife will end, and it will end well. If we strive against sin, we are sure to conquer: Rom. 6:14, 'For sin shall not have dominion over you.' Let it not, and it shall not. If there be but a likelihood of victory, we are encouraged to fight. Here a christian may triumph before the victory. In other conflicts it is good advice, 1 Kings 20:11, 'Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.' There will come a good and happy issue in the end. For the present, they overcome it in part it shall not totally and finally overcome us in this world; and shortly all strife will be over: Rom. 16:20, 'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.' It is but a little while, and we shall receive the crown, and triumph over all our enemies.

Thirdly, The third reason is, because of the danger if we do not take care against the reign of sin. There is sin in us all; it is a bosom enemy, born and bred with us; and therefore it will soon get the advantage of grace if it be not watched against and resisted; as nettles, and thistles, and rushes, and suchlike weeds as are kindly to the soil, will choke flowers and better herbs that are planted by care, and grow not of their own accord, when they are neglected, and not continually rooted out. Yea, they are not only within us, but always working and striving for the mastery: Rom. 7:8, 'Sin wrought in me

all manner of concupiscence.' If sin did work in us as a sleepy habit, and a dull, inactive principle, the danger were not so great; but it is always exerting and putting forth itself, and seeking to gain an interest in our affections, and a command over all our actions; and therefore, unless we do our part to keep it under, we shall soon revert to our old slavery. Sin must be kept under as a slave, or else it will be above as a tyrant, and domineer. The more it acts, the more strength it gets; as all habits are increased by action. For when we have once yielded, we are ready to yield again in some further degree. Therefore any one sin let alone, yea, that which we least suspected, may bring us into subjection and captivity to the law of sin: Rom. 7:23, 'I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.' Yea, this bondage is daily increasing, and more hard to be broken; for then a custom groweth upon us, which is another nature; and that which might have been remedied at first groweth more difficult. As diseases looked to at first are more easily cured, whereas otherwise they grow desperate, so sins before they harden the heart, or bring us under the power of any creature or comfort which we affect (1 Cor. 6:12, 'I will not be brought under the power of any') are more easily subdued. When it cometh to a complete dominion and slavery, then if a man would he cannot help it. Well, then, if sin be in us, and thus working to a conquest and dominion over us, and it ought and may be kept from reigning, then it behoveth every child of God to do his part, that sin may not reign; for where this care is not taken it certainly will reign; on the contrary, every limb of the body of sin that is mortified causeth the rest to languish by consent.

Use 1. To exhort us to take heed of this great mischief, That sin may not have dominion over us. How shall I enforce this exhortation, or say anything beyond what I have already spoken?

First, Shall I urge you in point of duty and obligation to Christ, as you would not frustrate the end of his death? Let not sin reign over you. If you would have any benefit by Christ, express any mystical conformity to him, and to show yourselves to be christians indeed,

weaken the power of sin yet more and more in your hearts: Gal. 5:4, 'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.' If you be Christ's, wherein do you show forth the virtue of his death? Are you always suppressing and smothering the effects and endeavours of indwelling corruption? 'Christ' (the apostle telleth you) 'being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him,' Rom. 6:9, 10. Is there any suitableness to this in you? There will be in all that are Christ's.

Secondly, Shall I move you in point of your own interest? No bondage like the servitude of sin. Sin is thy enemy as well as God's. It is not only against his honour, but the everlasting well-being of thy soul: 1 Peter 2:11, 'I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.' Pharaoh's oppressions of the Israelites made them weary of their lives. Certainly, if you have any true sense in you, any respect to your precious and immortal souls, you will groan under the burden of sin: Rom. 7:24, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' The least relics of sin will be grievous to you, and make you weary and heavy laden. But alas! the want of sense and feeling is a great sign that sin reigneth. If once it began to be a burden and a wearisome bondage, there were some hope of people. Shall I tell you of the loss of all that liberty and happiness which is in the service of God: John 8:36, 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, then are ye free indeed.' You think that liberty lieth only in a power to do what we list. Oh, no! It is a power to live, that we may be happy, so as we may enjoy God, and receive the consolations of his Spirit. What comfort, peace, joy, would there be in the soul if your hearts were once enlarged to run the way of God's commandments! Shall I tell you of the sad reward sin will give for all your service? What will it prove but bitterness in the issue? and thou shalt mourn at last, when all the comforts and joys wherewith thy soul is now enchanted shall be spent and quite gone. Oh, then, consider, it is liberty and blessedness that we invite you to; and, if you be not wanting to yourselves, you may have it.

The means are these, to help you against the dominion of sin.

First, Watchfulness. Sin cometh to reign by degrees. A man getteth his neck under the yoke by little and little. First we cherish, the lusts of the flesh and its secret enticings; the heart regardeth them, and delighteth in them: Ps. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart.' The heart museth, setteth a-brood on them: Micah 2:1, 'Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds, and when the morning is light practise it.' Then it hatcheth these cockatrice's eggs, and then resolveth, and then, when the fire is kindled, the sparks begin to fly abroad. Men execute what the heart contriveth, and then finish it; go on without stopping: James 1:14, 15, 'But every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.' There is suggestion, conception, and consummation, and so they go on to the very last, till they drop into hell. Now watch, that you may break off betimes, before the mischief increaseth. Give no indulgence to the least sin, for afterwards it may prove thy master, and ruin thy soul. Watch against thoughts, which are sin's spokesmen, and make the match between the soul and the object. Watch against outward occasions; it is ill sporting with occasions of sin, playing about the cockatrice's hole, and standing in harm's way. We are often warned of this: Prov. 4:14, 15, 'Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not into the way of evil men: avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away;' Prov. 4:8, 'Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house.' The wisdom of God thought fit to give us these directions. They that think they have so good a command of themselves that they think they shall keep within compass well enough, though they venture upon occasions of sin, converse with vain persons, and the haunts of the wicked, go to plays, and entertain themselves with dalliances, and all the blandishments of sense, surely they are not acquainted with the slipperiness and infirmity of human nature; they know not what the new nature meaneth, nor what a tender thing it is to preserve it in strength and vigour. Is sin grown less dangerous? or have men gotten a greater command of themselves than they were

wont to have when the scriptures were first written? Surely man is as weak as ever, and sin as dangerous; why then should we venture upon evil company, and the places where they resort, and go so near the pit's brink, and freely please ourselves with the allectives of sin and apostasy from God, and use such songs and wanton plays as if there were no infection in them? They secretly taint our hearts. Some say they get as much good by these plays as sermons. In a sense it is true, while you are so unmortified and savour nothing that is truly good and spiritual: 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of God.' Watch against evil customs, that you lose not your tenderness of conscience. Conscience, as the eye, is offended with the least dust; but afterwards it is like the stomach of an ostrich, which digesteth iron. Men inure their souls to sin till their consciences are seared as with a hot iron, 1 Tim. 4:2. Conscience is like water when it beginneth to freeze; at first it will not bear a pin, but when hard frozen, it will bear a laden cart.

Secondly, Take heed of presumptuous sins, of doing anything that is evil against cheeks of conscience. Nay, small sins may get the upper hand of the sinner, and bring him tinder in time, after it is habituated by long custom, so as he cannot easily shake off the yoke, or redeem himself from the tyranny thereof. These steal into the heart insensibly, and overcome us as they get strength by multiplied acts; but presumptuous sins, by one single act, bring a mighty advantage to the flesh, and weaken the Spirit, and advance themselves suddenly.

Thirdly, Take heed of your daily sins: Ps. 18:23, 'I was also upright before him, and kept myself from mine iniquity;' your master-lust, that is most apt to prevail, and to settle into the tyranny of an evil custom, because of its frequency and importunity; unless we humble ourselves more for these, strive and pray against these, cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, Mat. 5:29, 30, it will be your ruin, and the stumbling-block of your iniquity, like Judas' covetousness, Herod's uncleanness, and the young man's

worldliness. It will be the ground of our apostasy in the time of temptation.

Fourthly, Set the contrary principle of grace a-work: Gal. 5:16, 'Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.' Cherish and obey the motions and directions of the renewed part; this will keep the carnal part under, so as the motions of it, if they be not totally suppressed, yet will not be completely fulfilled. If the flesh be brought into subjection to the Spirit, it will be found by examining every day what advantage the flesh hath gotten against the Spirit, or the Spirit against the flesh; how providence and ordinances are blessed to that end, to the weakening of sin, when the Spirit of Christ hath gotten the sovereignty over the flesh, and won the better part of the natural affections to its service. The flesh is getting ground, or the Spirit, every day. We are never free from the reign of sin till the Spirit get above the flesh, and the prevailing bent of the heart be set and fixed towards God. Dough once soured with leaven will never totally lose the taste and smatch.

Fifthly, Remember thy baptismal vows and engagements: Rom. 6:2, 3, 'How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?' Every one hath engaged himself by his covenant, sealed in baptism, so to do.

Sixthly, In the sense of thy weakness have recourse to God for help: Ps.119:133, 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' God will hear the groanings of thy poor afflicted soul.

Use 2. Hath sin dominion over us, yea or no? Doth it reign in us or not? Some things may increase our fear and caution. It may be known—

First, When the soul readily closeth with temptations, or when it is a force you cannot withstand: Prov. 7:21, 'With her fair speech she caused him to yield; with the flattering of her lips she forced him.' Easiness of insinuation, efficacy of operation:. James 1:14, 'Every

man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed.' You are at sin's beck. If it say, Go, you go; if it say, Come, you come. As the angels, Ps. 103:20, 'that do the Lord's commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word,' so they hearken to the voice of their lusts, whatever cometh of it. If envy and malice bid Cain kill his brother, he will break all bonds of nature to do it. If ambition bid Absalom rebel against his father, it shall be done, and he is up in arms presently. If covetousness bid Achan take a wedge of gold, he will do it. If adultery bid Joseph's mistress tempt her servant, she doeth it. That is done readily which sin willeth and commandeth to be done; we are as ready to yield to temptations as our corrupt heart to suggest them. We are at the beck of sin; we cannot withstand it, whatever checks and reasons we have to the contrary.

Secondly, When this is our ordinary practice as often as the temptation returneth. Meadow ground may be overflown with a great flood, but marshy ground is drowned with every return of the tide. Some cannot cease from sin, 2 Peter 2:14. Sin is become our element, out of which we cannot rest; it is our paradise, a very Eden to our souls. Whatever sin biddeth us love, we love it; and whatever it bids us do, we do it; and by little and little it eateth out all reverence of God and delight in him.

Thirdly, When men grow impatient of reproof. They have a privy sore, that cannot endure to be touched. Till John preached against Herodias there was no trouble to him, Mark 6:20, but when he urges non licet, he dieth for it; as the sensitive plant shrinketh and contracts itself when touched; as Ahab hated Micaiah, and the young man went away sorrowful, Mark 10:22.

Fourthly, When we set up a toleration in our hearts; as he, 2 Kings 5:18, 'In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.' Is there no sin for which you would crave

pardon and indulgence? When men will be excused in this or that, it is an ill sign.

Fifthly, When all your care is to hide or feed a lust. Judas masketh his covetousness with religion: John 12:5, 6, 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor.' When sin rnaketh us religious, some interest and advantage of our own sets us a-work for God.

Sixthly, Wilful obstinacy, to go against the express will of God: Prov. 13:13, 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed;' as Balaam, 2 Peter 2:16, was 'rebuked for his iniquity; the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, rebuked the madness of the prophet.' When Ulysses feigned himself mad, because he would not go to the Trojan war, and in his madness drove his plough fantastically, those that were sent to discover him laid his young son Telemachns in the furrow, to see if he would drive over him; at the sight of whom all his mask of madness fell off. Though sinners ran mad in sin, though they drive on furiously, as Jehu did, yet if we lay before them their wives and children, dulcia pignora, those sweet pledges, if any sense remain, they will forget their madness, and not drive over them. Men are wedded to their inclination, stout-hearted, and will go in their own way, over the belly of more than ordinary opposition, till they perish. But the surest and closest note is, if there be not the reign of grace, there is the reign of sin.

SERMON V

Then shall I be upright.—Ps. 19:13.

WE have done with David's prayer. We now come to his arguments, taken from the effects, 'Then shall I he upright.' 'Then,' that is, when kept from presumptuous sins and the dominion of sin. 'Then shall I

be upright;' that is—(1.) Upright in the account of God; (2.) In the judgment of his own conscience.

First, In the account of God. Though God's children are guilty of many failings through ignorance and infirmity, yet their claim, by the covenant of grace, ceaseth not, when they do not allow themselves in the customary practice of any sin against the light of their consciences. A man is a transgressor before God either according to the covenant of works or according to the covenant of grace. According to the covenant of works; so the least failing layeth us open to the curse: James 2:10, 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' According to the covenant of grace; so wilful and allowed customary transgressions lay us open to the curse too. Understand that sentence in the rigour of the first covenant which was made with Adam, and the burden of which lieth upon all Adam's seed till they be in Christ, and it concludeth all men under the curse; so none can be upright, but all are transgressors in the account of God. But according to the covenant of grace, if a man should keep the whole law, conform in many things, and yet willingly indulge and allow himself under the tyranny and customary practice of any one sin, he is guilty of all; as one article not observed maketh void the whole agreement. Out of frailty and weakness, the most holy man may and doth break every commandment of God, and yet guilty of none, so as it shall be imputed to him; but he that habitually, wilfully, and of set purpose shall dispense with himself in the transgression of one commandment, or any breach thereof, he is a transgressor, and shall be accounted guilty before God; for he has forfeited the grace of the second covenant.

Secondly, In the judgment of his own conscience. The reign of sin is inconsistent with grace, and though a presumptuous sin may be committed by a renewed man, yet that destroys peace of conscience, and a man hath not the comfort of his sincerity; as David, Ps. 51:8, 'Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.' But on the other side, though there be many

failings, yet, Heb. 13:18, 'We trust we have a good conscience, willing in all things to live honestly.' Well, then, the sum of all is this, that those may look upon themselves to be upright, and in a capacity to claim by the second covenant, that are kept from an allowed course of sin, though they be guilty of many failings; for David, that saw need to say, 'Cleanse thou me from secret sins,' yet saith also, 'Then shall I be upright, and innocent from the great transgression.'

Doct. Uprightness and integrity of obedience may stand with sins of ignorance and infirmity, but not with sins of presumption, customarily committed against the light of conscience.

First, Let me open the nature of sincerity, and show you what uprightness and sincerity is.

Secondly, The inconsistency of uprightness with presumptuous sins.

Thirdly, The privilege of being upright.

First, What is uprightness or sincerity? It is a blessed frame of heart wrought in us by the Spirit of God, whereby we are inclined and fixedly bent to please God in all things, and to offend him in nothing.

1. It is a blessed frame of heart. Not one grace, but that which runneth through all our graces, like a thread of silk through a chain of pearls. Faith unfeigned, 2 Tim. 1:5, and an unfeigned love of the brethren, 1 Peter 1:22. It is a qualification of all graces. Truth and sincerity is the essential commendation of all christians. Some christians may be famous for several graces, but all for sincerity; Moses for meekness, Phineas for zeal, Abraham for faith, David for devotion, but every one that is a new creature for truth and sincerity. This is the common praise of all the saints. The least grace with uprightness maketh a new creature. It was Christ's commendation of Nathanael, John 1:47, 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!' The mark of a true Israelite in the spirit is not sinlessness or absolute perfection, but sincerity. Why doth he call him an 'Israelite indeed,' rather than any other term? Why not a saint indeed, or a

believer indeed, or a child of God indeed, or a holy man indeed? It was because he was like good old Israel or Jacob, who was called Israel, of whom it was said, Gen. 25:27, 'That he was a plain man, and dwelt in tents.' so we may say of a plain-hearted christian, how weak soever he be otherwise, behold a christian indeed, because like Christ, of whom it was said, Isa. 53:9, 'He did no iniquity, neither was there any deceit in his mouth.'

2. Wrought in us by the Spirit. Naturally we are full of guile and falsehood, off and on with God; the deceitful old man prevaleth over them, and hath them under his power: Eph. 4:22, 'That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts.' A man in that estate dealeth crookedly and perversely with God till the heart be renewed by grace, and God cast it into the mould of regeneration. It is bowed and bended to carnal things, and therefore as useless; as things that are battered and bowed are cast into the furnace that they may receive a new shape, so doth God new mould us and fashion us: Ps. 51:10, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.' It is the Spirit of God puts us in this right frame, that we may not deal deceitfully with God: Eph. 4:24, 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;' opposite to those deceitful lusts spoken of in the 22d verse, which do by subtlety carry sinners captive to their slavery. Holiness and truth is a sign of God's image wrought upon the soul. Good inclinations and actions are false and deceitful without this.

3. Whereby we are inclined and fixedly bent. There is a difference between velleities and good wishes and a hearty volition, between sudden motions and imperfect and wavering resolutions, which may be without fruit, and that fixed deep bent of heart which beareth up a christian in all his actions towards God: 1 Chron. 22:19, 'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God;' Acts 11:23, 'And exhorted them all, that with full purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord,' τῆπροθεσει τῆς καρδίας, by a full decree and bent of soul. Others have wavering purposes, faint inclinations, superficial or

slight motions, that come to nothing: Deut. 5:29, 'Oh, that there were such an heart in them,' There is a moral integrity when they do not dissemble, and a supernatural sincerity when there is a foundation of grace to carry us out constantly and uniformly to God in a course of obedience; such a purpose as produceth considerable endeavours henceforth to serve God from right principles and to right ends.

4. To please God in all things and offend him in nothing: Col. 1:10, 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.' He that is upright with God maketh it his business to please God, not to please himself or his own flesh: Rom. 8:12, 'We are not debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh.' Not to please men: Gal. 1:10, 'For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ;' but to please God by doing the things which he hath commanded: Ps. 40:8, 'I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is within my heart;' and avoiding the things which he hath forbidden: Ps. 141:4, 'Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works;' and as far as he knoweth the mind of God, and frailty incident to human nature will permit him.

So that in uprightness three things are considerable, by which it is discovered—

[1.] Purity of intention. It is a bent of heart towards God, or a desire to please him whosoever be displeased, whether our own flesh or the world. Therefore it is called 'godly sincerity,' 2 Cor. 1:12, because it chiefly respects God, his eye and approbation, and his glory and honour: 1 Thes. 2:4, 'For we speak not as pleasing men, but God.' We urge our hearts. So Col. 3:22, 'Not with eye-service, as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.' There is a deep impression of the awe, and fear, and love of God upon our hearts: 1 Cor. 10:31, 'Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' God is at the end of all their actions.

[2.] There is constancy and uniformity of endeavours. There is a desire to please God at all times and in all places; at one time as well

as another, not by starts. It is but a humour if we do it in good moods only. Job saith of the hypocrite, Job 27:10, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?' The worst men have their good moods. They use duties as we do strong waters, in a pang, not for a constant diet; soon grow weary of their observance; but a godly man is uniform: Ps. 119:112, 'I have inclined my heart to keep thy statutes always unto the end.' In all conditions, prosperity and adversity, in good report and ill report. It is a double and a crooked heart that only mindeth God in its need. So in all places, in private and closet duties, between God and our own souls, as well as public duties liable to the notice of others. A sincere christian is alike in all places and in all companies, because God is alike everywhere; he prayeth with as much strength and earnestness when alone with God as in the company of others. His Father seeth in secret, Mat. 6:6; and there he hath the advantage of a religious privacy and retirement, and can more freely enlarge himself in the presenting his own wants and requests to God. He is not one that is devout abroad, but slight and careless at home: Phil. 2:12, 'Ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.' It was all one when Paul was by or when he was away; as birds in the wood sing as sweetly as when in houses and dwelling-places of men.

[3.] A universality of respect to all and every part of God's will. He that is sincere performeth all known duties and avoideth all known sins.

(1.) He performeth all known duties: Acts 10:33, 'Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.' Singling out one precept and leaving another is usurping God's sovereignty. We make ourselves our own masters when we do what we list. Everything that God commands, even those things which are less esteemed and countenanced in the world, and more cross to our humour, yea, that are persecuted and hated: Gen. 6:9, 'Noah was a just man, and upright in his generation, and Noah walked with God.' When so many opposed and scorned those that were good, and corrupted their ways, then Noah was

upright. To be good in bad times, and to swim against the stream, is a note of uprightness. So in all parts and points of life: Luke 1:6, 'Zacharias and Elizabeth walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' In their worship blameless, and in all their business and ordinary conversation blameless: Acts 24:16, 'And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.' Not only in commerce with God, but dealings with men. In their callings, they do it as God's work, to God's glory; in their refreshings and recreations, they act as one that would approve his heart to God.

(2.) He avoideth all known sins. He is in league with no sin, but hateth all sin because God hateth it: Prov. 8:13, 'Pride and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth do I hate.' All is contrary to the image of God and the new nature in him: 1 John 3:9, 'Whoever is born of God doth not commit sin;' contrary to grace infused. Original sin is the seed-plot of all evil. It is contrary to the revealed will of God, and the law forbiddeth all, and therefore he alloweth none: Ps. 119:133, 'Order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.' It is contrary to communion with God: Ps. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.' The prayers of a false heart that is in league with any sin are never accepted. He doth not say, If I sin, but, If I regard it in my heart. When all doors are shut, and though a room be never so close, yet some air will get in; but he doth not leave a door open. Sin remaining and sin allowed and reserved are different things; and all sin is contrary to his comfort and peace of conscience. Forbidden fruit, though it be sweet in the mouth, yet it is terrible in the bowels: Rom. 6:21, 'What fruit had you then of those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.' Sin will breed shame, and anguish, and horror, and many a stinging and troubled thought. Well, then, out of all we may conclude with Solomon, Prov. 16:17, 'The highway of the upright is to depart from evil. He that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.' If he would keep his God, and keep his soul, he must keep God's way without turning aside either to the right hand or the left.

Secondly, The inconsistency of uprightness with presumptuous and reigning sins.

1. These two are contrary. Now it is impossible two contraries can be together, in gradu intenso, in a high and prevailing degree; in gradu remisso, in a lower degree they may be, as heat and cold in a lower degree, for the opposition of the one weakeneth the other. Therefore grace in truth and sin in its reign cannot stand together: Gal. 5:17, 'For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that ye would.' Carnal nature must needs be broken, and the force of it abated, when there is a war in all the faculties and resistance of the Spirit against the flesh. Indeed, in carnal men, that have only some illumination in their minds, but no renovation in their hearts, lusts may bear sway, they may have great convictions, and yet strong corruptions; but true sanctification being seated in all the faculties and parts of the soul, will cause a war and a resistance, so that sin will not carry it so freely, but it is opposed in the mind, will, and affections, and in the execution of it.

2. Wherever there is sincerity, the fixed bent of the heart is towards God; therefore sin shall not reign; for then the fixed bent of the heart is towards the creature, and the vanities of the world, and the contentments of the flesh; and we cannot point at two things at once: Mat. 6:21, 'Where the heart is there is our treasure also.' We can have but one treasure and one chief good; therefore he that doth heartily resign himself to God, to be guided and directed by him in all things, cannot let sin reign habitually in his heart.

Thirdly, The privileges of being upright; for it is here propounded as a motive.

1. Your defects will not hinder your acceptance with God. In the covenant of grace, God doth not look after measure so much as truth. Though what we do will not endure the balance, yet it is accepted if it will endure the touchstone. Every piece of gold that is of the right

stamp and metal may not be full weight: Heb. 10:22, 'Let us draw near, with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.' We may come to God with confidence, if we come with a true heart, a sincere heart; though not with a sinless heart, yet without guile. If we study to approve our hearts to God, God will accept our little, our two mites. A small pearl is worth a great deal of rubbish. All the pompous service of wicked men, when they come with their flocks and herds, they are not accepted of God: Hosea 5:6, 'They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him.' All their pompous and glorious services are not accepted. It is a wonder to consider how many infirmities God will oversee when the heart is right. God valueth us not by perfection, not by glorious shows, but what we have in truth. He that desireth in all things to look to God, though he be often put besides his purpose, God will pardon him: 2 Chron. 30:19, 20, 'The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.' Asa had many weaknesses and failings, yet it is said, 'His heart was perfect with the Lord all his days,' 1 Kings 15:14. God passed by other things. We read of Jehoshaphat, that he had many and great failings, he made a league of amity with Ahab, and went with him to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, though he had heard what Micaiah the prophet spake against it, 2 Chron. 18; and though reproved by the prophet, 2 Chron. 19, yet doth he make a special league with Ahaziah, Ahab's son, a most wicked man, 2 Chron. 20:9; and he bestowed Jehoram, his son, in marriage with Ahab's daughter, 2 Chron. 21:6; yet for all this God accepted him as a good man: 2 Kings 22:13, 'He turned not aside from doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord.' And why did God so esteem of him? Because his heart was upright with God: 2 Chron. 19:3, 'Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek the Lord;' Jer. 5:3, 'O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?' God doth not regard gifts, and parts, and outward serviceableness in the church, but truth of heart. It is not a pompous prayer or setting forth

our parts, but a sincere prayer that God regards: Prov. 15:8, 'The prayer of the upright is his delight;' or in any other duty the upright are his delight. A cup of cold water given in singleness of heart shall not be forgotten.

2. The more upright we are then, the more we do, and the more we shall have grace to do what God requireth: 'The way of the Lord is strength to the upright,' Prov. 10:29. Wherever truth and sincerity are, there is a growing to perfection: 'To him that hath shall be given.' The more we labour to please God in all things, the more shall we have grace to do so. A true christian is always on the mending-hand, and bettering and improving himself by God's blessing. Where God giveth a little in truth, though it be but a grain of mustard-seed, he shall cherish it till it come to be a tree. God addeth grace to grace; but an hypocrite groweth worse and worse, till he be altogether uncased, and then turned into hell. Frothy gifts are blasted and withered. A man loseth every day when his flower and vigour are gone; but the upright shall wax stronger and stronger, as a living tree gets more root, and sendeth forth more branches, the longer it standeth. All things that have life increase by age: one drachm of grace, how will it increase!

3. This will be a comfort and support to you while you live in all the changes and circumrotations of the world, that you are upright with God: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.' A man can never have any sound peace of conscience till the bent of his heart be sincerely set towards God. Others may have the toil of religion, but they have not the comfort of religion. Their hearts may reproach them for their partial dealing, and so all is lost they do. Men may applaud us for many things for which conscience will not acquit us, for they are not acquainted with our temper and the ordinary strain of our hearts; but when we have rejoicing in ourselves that it hath been our course to live in all good conscience to God and men, then we are glad indeed. Others are but like those that are honoured abroad, but mated with a shrew and

cursed wife at home. No note so sweet like that of the bird in the bosom. A good conscience cheering us with the sense of what we have sincerely done, and have no great sin to make a breach upon our comfort.

4. You will die comfortably when you have sincerely made conscience to serve and glorify God here in the world. When Hezekiah was arrested with the sentence of death, what was his plea? 2 Kings 20:3, 'O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' God's servants can plead their sincerity upon their sick-beds, and look death in the face with confidence, even then when hypocrites usually vomit up their own shame. O christians! we should prepare comforts against that time when all other comforts vanish. If you think how rich you have been, what pleasures and delights you have had, this is so far from comforting, that it will torment you the more. Conscience, if ever, is then awakened, and the devil will be busy to trouble thee. We stop the mouth of conscience now, and charm it with carnal pleasures, but then it will speak and we cannot keep it quiet. If any sin did formerly sting thee, thou wilt feel it then. When we are immediately to appear before God, to be judged to heaven or hell, will it not be sweet then to say, Lord, though I were once overtaken with many infirmities, yet my heart was set to serve and glorify thee. Oh, how will this strengthen thee against all the terrors of death! Our time is running on, and we are hastening to the pit; it is good to be able to say so in truth, and without any check from our own hearts.

5. Uprightness will give you boldness and comfort at the day of judgment: Ps. 119:6, 'Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments.' Shame is φόβος δικαίου ψόγου, a fear of a just reproof. No shame so intimate, and troublesome, and confounding as a rebuke from the judge of the world when he sits upon the throne. Now those that set themselves to do the whole will of God shall be able to hold up their heads at that day. When the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, their failings will be produced,

but blotted out as a cancelled bond, which the debtors need not fear though it be shown.

Use 1. Oh, study this grand case of conscience more, whether we be sincere and upright with God.

I shall state this—(1.) Negatively; (2.) Positively.

First, Negatively. Perfect none of us can be; but can we stand before God upon a gospel account, and endure the touchstone though not the balance? If we do not attain to perfection, do we attain to integrity? It is a sad thing that so few study their qualification, but leave the state of their souls to such an adventure. Till thou art able with a clear conscience to plead thy uprightness, thou wilt live doubtfully and die doubtfully, and go into the other world as a man that leapeth blindfold over a deep and terrible gulf and ditch, and knoweth not where his feet shall light. Will you come to a trial? Here is one in the text.

No man can think himself upright till he hath cast off the dominion of every sin, especially presumptuous sins. Therefore they that live in the constant allowed practice of any known sin, whether it be public or secret, whoredom or wantonness, drunkenness or sensuality, open ambition or secret pride, rapine or covetousness, or any allowed passion, they cannot make their claim to the new covenant. Not only such as by their lewd conversation give an open account of their irreligion, but such as live in any secret allowed sin. Whatever their repute be for godliness, if they hold any sin as a sweet morsel under their tongue, set up a toleration in their hearts, and say, God be merciful to me if I bow in the house of Rimmon; if thou continuest in the pleasing or profitable practice to which thou hast special enticements, some particular warrant or profession, and thou carriest this sin closely and in a clever way, so as not to lie open to the malice and reproach of others: Luke 16:15, 'Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed amongst men is abomination in the sight of

God;' God knoweth, conscience knows it, and so thou canst not have the comfort of integrity; yea, whatever parts and abilities or expressions thou hast, thou mayest be carnal for all that; all thy parts are but like a jewel in a toad's head. Refined notions with an unrenewed heart are but a form of knowledge. Yea, whatever exercises and duties of religion thou performest, reading, hearing, praying, there is a worm at the root that blasteth all, even that unmortified lust which hath dominion over thee: Ps. 50:16, 17, 'But unto the wicked, God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?' What good will ordinances do when sin is allowed in thy soul? The seed of the word falls among briars and thorns; the word is choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of life, Luke 8:14. Any lust let alone will in time outgrow the word. Nay, though with these exercises men had some experiences, humblings, tastes. Convictions die away, and tastes vanish, and men in time lose all their savour, and lose all the cheerfulness of their profession; for 'that which is lame is soon turned out of the way,' Heb. 6:13. Carnal affections having the first possession of a man's heart, and being preferred by long use and custom, get a stronger root than godliness can have, and will draw the greatest strength of thy heart and desires after them. Therefore godliness, though somewhat prized and esteemed, yet wanting earth, must needs grow weak and languish.

Secondly, Positively. He that is upright may be known and tried by these four things—(1.) His principles; (2.) His conversation; (3.) His ends; (4.) The fruits and effects of his constant endeavours.

1. His principles, which are—

[1.] The new nature fitting and suiting his heart to the things of God, so that he loveth them not only out of interest, but inclination: Ps. 119:140, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.' Surely he is upright that is thus naturally carried to the things of God. In some measure the man is restored to that frame of heart

which mankind had in innocency; his heart inclined him to God. God made man upright; grace giveth somewhat of this: Heb. 8:10, 'I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.'

[2.] By his love to Christ: 2 Cor. 5:14, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' That cureth his self-love, which maketh us act crookedly and perversely. Self is his principle, self his business, self his end; his own contentment and satisfaction is all that he looketh at. But the love of Christ maketh him readily go about those things which are pleasing to Christ, and hath a mighty force and efficacy upon the soul to overrule our self-love, that we may not live to ourselves, but unto God, and obey his will.

2. By his conversation, wherein he betrayeth a constant care—

[1.] To avoid all known sin; to weaken the lusts, to suppress the acts: 1 Peter 2:11, 'Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.' But especially he is most careful to avoid his own personal sin: Ps. 18:23, 'I was upright before thee, and kept myself from mine iniquity;' which the affections of his own heart might most transport him into. He can sacrifice his Isaac, cut off his right hand, pluck out his right eye, laboureth to subdue his particular corrupt inclinations, useth no guile to cloak and extenuate them before God: Ps. 32:2. 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.' This is the man who may comfort himself with God's acceptance, and the comforts and privileges of the-new covenant.

[2.] As to the other part of his conversation, his way and the constant tenor of his walk is to please God, and he maketh conscience of obeying the will of God in all his actions: Phil. 1:10, 11, 'That ye may approve things that are excellent, and ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God.' His aim is at the constant practice of every thing that is good:

'And having learned how to walk and to please God, so you would abound therein more and more,' 1 Thes. 4:1.

3. By his ends, which are the pleasing and glorifying of God. This is his main fixed scope: 2 Cor. 5:9, 'Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him;' 1 Cor. 10:31, 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God;' Col. 1:10, 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.' There is no corrupt design of vainglory, credit, or by-respect, but what he doth for God it is to God.

4. The effects and fruits, which is not an exemption from sin altogether, but a growth of the contrary principle, and the flesh is brought every day more and more into a subjection to the Spirit, and Christ's interest prevaieth in the soul. The Spirit gets above the flesh, and the prevailing bent of the heart is set and fixed towards God. Either sin reigneth or grace must reign; something must be in solio, in the throne. That which is in the throne showeth the state of the heart, be it sin or grace, and that which generally and mostly commandeth and influenceth our conversations, that is in the throne. As the sun in the midst of heaven sendeth abroad his influences on every side, so doth that which is seated in the heart, as a sovereign governs all the parts of our lives. Well, then, here the mark must be fixed. There is no man so good and spiritual that hath not something in him bad and carnal, nor so fully addicted to God but the creature or some inferior good hath an interest in his heart. On the other side, there is no man so addicted to worldly and sensual lusts, that God hath no manner of interest in him at all. Carnal men, if they have not renounced all conscience, and outgrown the heart of a man, have some good thing in them, and a renewed man hath much of the old tang yet left. When, then, is a man sincere? Why, when grace gets the upper hand; not for a fit, but habitually. When the soul is more for God than against him; more against sin than for it; more for obeying, loving, serving, and pleasing God, than for gratifying and pleasing the flesh, and your inclination and love to the

ways of God is greater than your dislike. But on the other side, they that love any inferior thing above God are not sincere and upright with him; as those that love pleasure more than God: 2 Tim. 3:4; John 12:43, 'They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God;' and the profits of the world more than grace: Luke 12:21, 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.' These are the great sins which do more directly fight against the sovereignty of God. Therefore these we must look after to see whether they get ground or strength, yea or no, and encroach upon Christ's interest in our hearts, or the interest of Christ gets ground upon them.

Use 2. To persuade you to be upright. There are many arguments which the scripture useth to press us to it.

1. This will be your safety in all times of danger. They that are upright betake themselves to God, look to God as their paymaster, and God thinketh himself concerned more for them than others. They are under his special protection: Ps. 25:21, 'Let integrity and uprightness preserve me;' and Ps. 18:25, 'With the upright thou wilt show thyself upright.' God will defend the sincere; he will either deliver or support them in all their troubles.

2. This will be your safety, not only from temporal danger, but spiritual. The upright do avoid presumptuous Sins, and the dominion and reign of sin hath no place in them. An hypocrite is one that doth partially obey God; he is divided between God and the world, therefore uncertain and unstable in all his ways, James 1:8. He that is false-hearted at first setting out can never hold on with God, nor carry on the business of his salvation to any good purpose; for when his lusts or interests entice or invite him, he voluntarily dispenseth with his duty, and either falleth wholly off, or at least very foully. The young man came forwardly on with Christ, but he had a carnal bias in his heart, and therefore when his privy sore was touched he went away grieved, Mark 10:22.

3. It will be a sweet cordial to you in all exigencies.

[1.] In reproaches from men, when they question and tax your sincerity: Job 12:4, 'I am as one mocked of his neighbour, who calleth upon God, and he answereth him; the just, upright man is laughed to scorn.' It is a grievous sore trial. The church complains of it: Ps. 123:4, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.' Now in such a case it is a mighty help and support to consider that God will accept us though men scorn us. Though God's children want not their failings, yet God looketh more to their good than ill, though he know more of their failings than any; therefore none that are truly sincere will be rejected by him, though they be scorned by men. If we find acceptance with God, why should we be troubled? Job often fled to this: chap. 16:19, 20, 'But, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears to God.' Upright men are comforted in his testimony, which is the witness and observer of all men's ways.

[2.] In the midst of many infirmities and imperfections, when our hearts condemn us, not for any wilful or allowed sin, 1 John 3:21. It is a mighty comfort to be sincere, and yieldeth advantages that cannot be easily told. Believers find it when condemned by others, when God's dispensations and their own inward temptations make them ready to question their condition.

4. Eternal happiness will be the portion of the upright: Ps. 140:13, 'The upright shall dwell in thy presence.' Besides all the testimonies of God's love in this world granted to the believer, he shall have everlasting fellowship with God in the world to come. David propoundeth the question, Ps. 15:1, 2, 'Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?' That is, If I should take the boldness to interrogate thee, who art the Lord of heaven and earth, Who shall be rewarded with eternal bliss hereafter? the answer will be certainly thus, 'He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.' He, and none but

he, that goeth on in a course of uniform and steady obedience, and doeth all things sincerely, and as in his sight. A sincere endeavour of universal obedience is the only sure mark. He asketh the question of God, because God can best interpret our sincerity.

Means.

1. Beg it of God to renew a right spirit within you, Ps. 51:10. The new man, which inferreth true holiness, is created, Eph. 4:24. Renovation cometh from the same power from which creation came; for this is a second creation, a thing to be done by an omnipotent hand, the work of his grace upon our hearts.

2. Something is to be done by ourselves.

[1.] In the performance of our duty we must take God for party, not only as our witness and approver, but also our defender and rewarder: Ps.16:8, 'I have set the Lord always before me.' Before me in point of reverence and in point of dependence; both are necessary to sincerity; to do all things as in his sight, who is our witness, and approver, and judge, and who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. Remember you have to do with God. You may carry the matter fairly before men, but God is not deceived with a false appearance: Prov. 5:21, 'For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.' What a shame is it to be convicted of evil before men? As a thief is ashamed when he is found; and is it not a greater shame to be convicted of evil before God? This hath a great influence upon uprightness: 'I was upright before him.' A serious apprehension of his omnipresence and all-seeing eye, doing all things as in his sight.

[2.] A belief of his all-sufficieny: Gen 17:1, 'I am the almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' A man that doth not trust God with his all can never be true to him. All defection and apostasy lieth hid in distrust: Heb. 3:12, 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.'

2. Earthly affections must be mortified, and we must get a deadness to all things of a temporal interest. We fall into presumptuous sins out of an indulgence to some fleshly and worldly lusts; for though there be an express knowledge of our duty, and time enough for mature deliberation, yet, if a man be given to please the flesh or the world, he will make a breach upon his duty, and temptations will seem to have an irresistible force: James 1:14, 'But every man is drawn away by his own lust and enticed.' Drawn away by the sensitive lure; as the harlot, Prov. 7:21, 22, 'With much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks.' Some pleasure or profit which cometh in competition with our known duty carrieth us away. Thy conscience telleth thee thou oughtest not to yield, yet some sensual or worldly lust prevaieth. Therefore, if you would be upright and not yield, you must be mortified to the world, which is the bait which enticeth the rebelling flesh. When men dote on pleasures, honours, profits, they can never have a sincere spirit, but are crooked, perverse, and distorted. But when once we come to count honours small, as Paul, 1 Cor. 4:3, 'With me it is a small thing to be judged of you;' and riches small matters, as 1 Cor. 6:2, 'Are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?' that is a sign of uprightness.

3. A tender, waking conscience. Without this vigilancy we can never keep right with God. David's heart smote him. The most upright are obnoxious to these heart-smitings when they go wrong, whereas others are not moved unless they commit some gross sins. Light and love keep it tender, and then lesser sins and daily imperfections will be bewailed; much more will they watch against raging passions and boisterous affections.

4. A clean heart, which is as irreconcilable with sin as filthiness, and is always working it out. Purity of heart is now seen in our hatred of sin, when that is kept lively: Ps. 119:104, 'Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way;' and love: Ps. 97:10, 'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.' Now this hath a great influence

upon uprightness. Pure and upright are often joined together in scripture: Job 8:6, 'If thou wert pure and upright.' So Ps. 51:10, we read of 'a clean heart' and 'a right spirit.' The one respects the frame and disposition of the heart, and the other the conversation.

5. Use often recollection and search: Ps. 4:4, 'Commune with your hearts.' If men would discourse with themselves, they would better know themselves. If we suspect a servant, we call him to an account. Bankrupts cannot endure a reckoning. Offer yourselves also to God's trial: Ps. 139:23, 24, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me.' Appeal to his all-seeing eye. Frauds, colours, disguises will not long hold out.

6. Look not only what you do, but upon what principles and aims: Prov. 16:2, 'All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes; but God weigheth the spirits.' See if there be no carnal bias, and be not good by chance or by force or by craft; as many follow a good way because of company, or because it is their present interest, or because of crosses lying upon them. Some are good by chance, as the man that taketh up religion barely on tradition, not from any sound conviction of the truth: John 4:20, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain;' 1 Peter 1:8, 'Christ redeemed you from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers.' Some by force or fear of men, because else they cannot be had in credit and security. Or else entertain a slavish religion. The evil they love they avoid, and the good they hate they do. Some out of craft and design; there is a carnal bias; they are not sincere in closing with Christ or rejecting what is wrong.

Lastly, Often renew your covenant with God, because of many breaches. Bind your resolutions afresh. It is one of the Lord's appointed means to keep us firm in the covenant. Things done long ago are soon forgotten, therefore we should revive them upon our memories.

SERMON VI

And innocent from the great transgression.—Ps. 19:13.

WE now come to the second motive or encouragement, which is in the text. There is a double reading of these words—that in the margin, and that in the text. In the marginal reading it is, 'Much transgression,' as relating to other heinous sins. In the text, 'The unpardonable sin,' or, as we express it, 'The great transgression.' From the marginal reading observe this point—

Doct. He that alloweth himself in one sin cannot promise himself freedom from the greatest sins.

The point will be made good by these two considerations—(1.) That some sins are greater than others; (2.) That the lesser sins make way for greater.

I. That some sins are greater than others. Certainly there is a difference between sins; some are lesser, some greater. That appeareth because the scripture telleth us of gnats and camels, Mat. 23:24, motes and beams, Mat 7:3. All sins are not alike, nor all sinners. Some sins are more heinous than others: 2 Kings 3:1, 2, 'Jehoram, the son of Ahab, wrought evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and like his mother; for he put away the image of Baal which his father had made.' His sins were great, but not so great as theirs: John 19:11, 'Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.' All that had a hand in the persecutions of Christ were guilty, yet some more heinously than others; they that betrayed him out of mere malice than those that judged him *secundum allegata et probata*, upon pretence of proof. They that are trained up in the church have more knowledge than a pagan. It appeareth also by the judgment, which is always proportioned according to the offence, Mat 11:22. Some have περισσότερον κρῖμα, a more intolerable judgment; Mat 23:14, 'I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.' And some have

many and some few stripes; Luke 12:47, 48, 'And that servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.' Though for duration all are punished alike, and as to *pœna damni*, the punishment of loss, all are alike, yet as to *pœna sensus*, the punishment of sense, there are degrees of torment; some more and some less. Then certain it is all sins are not equal. But whence doth the inequality arise? Not merely from the opinion of the multitude and shame among men. There is *peccatum majoris infamiæ*, a sin of greater shame, and *majoris reatus*, of greater guilt. Spiritual sins, as unbelief and impenitency, may be of greater guilt than those acts of sensuality which are more odious in the eye of the world, and betray us to greater shame.

The difference and aggravations of sins do arise—(1.) From the lawgiver; (2.) From the law, by which good and evil are determined; (3.) From the offender; (4.) From the nature of temptations; (5.) From the consequents and effects.

First, From the lawgiver. The more contempt is done to God, the greater the offence: 1 Sam. 15:23, 'Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft; and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.' When men wilfully transgress God's known will, and commit a sin the rather because they know God hath forbidden it, that is rebellion; so that the quantity is not forbidden so much as the quality, not the materiality so much as the formality of it. Rebellion, it is no small matter; it is like going to witches and devils, or worshipping idols. The authority of the lawgiver expressly known is as much contemned in the one as the other, as in Saul's sparing Agag against God's express command: Ps. 95:10, 'Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their hearts.' There is a sin out of ignorance, and that is an erring with the mind and there is a sin out of incogitancy and inattentiveness, which is an ignorance for the time, or a not

considering our duty; and there is an erring with the heart, when we love to wander, and care not to regard the mind of God. A man erreth in his mind that knoweth not the ways of God, but he erreth in his heart when he desireth not to know his ways. The fault is not in his mind, but his heart. These sins grieve God and provoke him exceedingly, because his authority is slighted.

Secondly, From the law. Sins of the highest degree against the first table are greater than the sins of the highest degree against the second, because Christ telleth us, Mat. 22:38, 'This is the first and great commandment.' He committeth a greater offence that beateth his father than he that striketh another man, that immediately resisteth his prince than he that resisteth his officer. The more directly any sin is against God, the greater the offence, for God is greater than man, Job 33:12. He that sinneth against his neighbour sinneth also against God, but not so directly: 1 Cor. 8:12, 'But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.' Duties of the first table must needs be greatest, because they enforce the second. We perform our duty to them as in and to the Lord; but yet this must be understood so as the comparison be rightly made; the chief of the first table with the chief of the second, of the middle with the middle, the least with the least; otherwise not: Isa. 1:15, 'And when ye spread forth your hearts, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood;' Hosea 6:6, 'For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings.' First, love to God, then love to men; acts of outward worship to God, and acts of outward kindness to men; the circumstantial and ceremonial duties of the first table must give place to the necessary and moral duties of the second. But when the comparison is duly made in the same rank, those laws which do simply and directly respect God are to be preferred; the love of our neighbour must give place to the love of God; the love of wife, children, friends, brethren: Luke 14:26, 'If any man will come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and

brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.' God is chief and most worthy of respect.

Thirdly, From the offender, and his temper and quality and advantages; as—

1. Sins against light and knowledge; there is more of the nature of sin in such acts. Sin is a breach or violation of the law; the more we know of the law, the greater is the offence. Therefore sins are greater or lesser as we have more or less knowledge: James 4:17, 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin;' 1 Tim. 1:13, 'Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly.' I that offered injury to God and men and saints, yet, ἤλεήθην, 'I obtained mercy.' Why? I did it in ignorance and unbelief. Sins against knowledge are greater than those committed out of simple ignorance. Ignorance doth not excuse; it doth not cease to be sin though committed ignorantly, because of the obligation that is upon the creature to know his Creator's will; yet it is not a sin so grievous and heinous; there is more malice and violence offered to the principles of conscience in sins against knowledge.

2. The voluntariness and wilfulness of it, when men freely and obstinately give up themselves to do evil, and not only do the sins, but have pleasure in them that do them, Rom. 1:32. Their souls delight to see others as bad as themselves; this is malice and doing despite to the Spirit of grace: Heb. 10:29, 'Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?'

3. When men have received many mercies. Men cannot endure to have their kindness despised. Joseph thought it ingratitude to wrong his master, who had committed all things to him, Gen. 39:9; and shall we wrong God? Every sin is not a sin against knowledge, but

every sin is a sin against mercies. There is a common love which all receive, food and raiment. It is their charge, Rom. 2:4, that they despise not his kindness and the riches of his goodness. But his people have tasted his love in Christ. Every sin of yours is a stab at the heart: John 6:67, 'Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?' Is this the fruit of all his tender love sealed to you by the Spirit? Ps. 55:12, 13, 'It was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it. But it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.' David took it ill from Achitophel, and Christ from Judas. From a professed enemy we could expect no better; but from a friend, it is grievous; you have tasted of his bread, and been fed with hidden manna.

4. You have more opportunities to be acquainted with the will of God: Rom. 2:9, 'Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, to the Jew first, and also to the gentile.' To the Jew first, because more advantages and opportunities: Mat. 11:23, 'And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day.' Yea, they have not only external means, but experiences to the contrary: Num. 14:11, 'And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me for all the signs which I have showed among them?' When God trained them up in a constant course of experiences, but especially inward experiences, to break with God after all, how heinous is this! After they have tasted his love, Heb. 4:6; after experience of his multiplied favours: Jer. 2:5, 'Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me that they are gone far from me, and are walked after vanity, and are become vain;' Micah 6:3, 'O my people! what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.' You have had some experience of the sweetness of God's ways. What! return to Egypt after a sight of Canaan? Men loose their lust, and fall off from God. You have had experience of the evil of sin. You have smarted once or twice, yet will you venture again? Send the other fifty, 2 Kings 1:11; James 4:2, 'Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and

desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.' You have many times repeated this. This is a plain contest with God, a kicking against the pricks. It hath cost you dear, and still you will be meddling with forbidden fruit: Jer. 2:19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and a bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.' Like foolish children, who remember the beating no longer than it smarteth. We are not yet whole of the old wounds; we should remember the former anguish and stings of conscience: Ps. 51:8, 'Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.' We have found how tedious and bitter this course of sinning hath been.

Fourthly, The difference of sins does arise from the nature of temptations.

1. When a small temptation, a little matter, carrieth us off from God; an handful of barley and a piece of bread, a vain pleasure, a small profit; and we can hazard our peace, neglect our duty, and pervert our ways for a trifle. Adam for an apple: 'They sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes,' Amos 2:7.

2. When a great temptation draws us to apostasy from Christ; idolatry, blasphemy, adultery, murder, or gross enormities; to hearken to these is contrary to all that natural sense of honesty and piety, or those notions which we have of either of these. There are peccata clamantia, crying sins, that solicit God for vengeance, and will not let him be quiet. To fall into these is a great evil: Ps. 51:2, 'Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.'

Fifthly, From the consequence and effects. So a sin may be greater or lesser as it turneth to the prejudice and loss of him that committeth it, or to the dishonour of God.

1. When it turneth to his loss; when it terrifieth or stupifieth him. Terrifieth: James 4:17, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin;' Gen. 4:13, 'And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.' When a man goeth up and down under the burden of his despairing thoughts, and is a terror to himself, to him it is sin indeed; he findeth and feeleth it to be so. Or when it stupifieth and settleth into an evil custom and bondage upon the soul, which we know not how to break, so that men go on impenitently, and resolve to make the best of their lives, and to live as sweetly in their sin as they can: Jer. 18:12, 'And they said, There is no hope; we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.' When it hath strangely prevailed over us, that is a great transgression indeed; when it cometh to that, to yield up ourselves to the tyranny of any lust, to carry us where it will. Yet this is the fruit of relapses, or frequent committing of the same sin, as a bone often broken in the same place is hardly set; so when men will frequently run into the same sin, they bring a necessity upon themselves, and then yield their necks to the yoke.

2. As to God, when his name is dishonoured: Rom. 2:24, 'For the name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles through you.' When you encourage others to sin in like manner, or by your inordinate walking give them occasion to speak evil of the ways of God: Mat. 18:7, 'Woe be to him by whom offences come! for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!' Such sins will bring a reproach upon godliness, and ruin others' souls. These are great sinners indeed. There is scandalum activum et passivum, either given or taken by weak christians. A man should not offend them; Mat. 18:6, 'Whoso shall offend one of those little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea;' Exod. 21:22, 'If a man strive and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow, he shall be surely punished.' Or malicious ones, as the pharisees were scandalised at Christ. When there is no occasion given on our part, it is well; but when you open the mouth of iniquity, and furnish the

triumphs of the uncircumcised, the dishonour of God's name is put on your score.

II. That the lesser sins make way for the greater, and the greater for the unpardonable sin. This it doth meritoriè and effectivè.

1. Meritoriè. Meritoriously, it provoketh God to give us up to our own heart's counsel; for God is wont in his just judgment to punish sin with sin; our carelessness, looseness, and security in small sins, by leaving us to wallow in greater: 2 Thes. 2:10, 11, 'And with all deceiveableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. For this cause God sent them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie.' David giveth himself liberty in idleness to wanton eyes: 2 Sam. 11:2, 'And it came to pass in an evening-tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house; and he saw a woman washing herself, and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.' God left him to the foul sins of blood and uncleanness. Therefore Job made a covenant with his eyes: 'Why then should I think upon a maid,' Job 31:1. He would not allow himself in a wanton glance for fear of further mischief. He kept his eyes under a law, and a firm resolution and endeavour, that they might not dwell on any object of lust, lest it should prove a means to infect and poison his heart.

2. Effectivè. Though it be but a small sin, yet it weakeneth the interest of God, and so taketh off that awe-bond that is upon the soul to keep it from other sins. A man is apt to grow careless and to lose conscience of sin when he giveth himself liberty in the least sin; for he breaketh the bond and cord which should restrain him from any sin, namely, the commandment of God against it: Ps. 2:3, 'Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us.' If once this bond be of no force with us, then what can be of force to hold us to the Lord: Rom. 6:19, 'For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.' One

maketh way for another; and in running down-hill, there is no stay. Oh, therefore, how should we tremble at the thought of tolerating ourselves in one sin, lest it lead you to hell! for there is no stop when once ye yield up yourselves.

Use 1. First, To show the vanity of that plea whereby the heart is deceived: It is but a little one; and I will yield but once. Oh, deny at first; better never yield at all.

1. In little things we must be faithful. In *minimo fidelem esse magnum est*. It is a great matter to be faithful in a little. Yea, our Lord telleth us, Mat. 5:19, 'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and teach men so, he shall be least in the kingdom of heaven.' It is a good note not to yield to the least violation of God's law. It is a sign you have the awe of it upon your hearts.

2. Sin is of an encroaching nature, like a river, that is small at the first rising, but it spreadeth and enlargeth itself in its progress. Grant it but a little, and it will come to a great deal. When once the sluices be open, there is no stopping of the waters. Sin is better kept out than gotten out. You cannot say how far you shall go. I will yield but once, saith the deceived heart, but a little after yields again. The devil will carry thee further and further, till he hath left no tenderness in thy conscience. Some will say they will venture but a shilling, till, by the secret witchery of gaming, they come to play away their lands, heritages, yea, the clothes off their backs; so all principles of conscience will be lost at length to those that give way to sin.

3. If we should stop at small sins, yet these may harden the heart so as to neglect the greater: Mat. 21:31, 'Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you;' that is, before the pharisees.

4. If we do not abstain from small sins, we do not abstain from the grossest out of conscience, but by-respects, not because God forbiddeth it, and is offended with it. There is the same reason for

one as for all: James 2:10, 11, 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art a transgressor of the law.' He that said, Swear not great oaths, hath also said, Swear not at all. He that said, Thou shalt not hate thy brother, hath said also, Put away anger. It is not sincerity of heart if we keep from one and not from another.

Secondly, It showeth the vanity of that plea of committing small sins upon other considerations; as for preventing of greater danger. No danger like the great transgression; and we must choose the greatest affliction rather than the least sin: Heb. 11:26, 'Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.' We must not commit the least sin to procure the greatest good: Rom. 3:8, 'Let us do evil that good may come.' This is to make the devil serve God, and God to serve the devil. It is a doubt of God's all-sufficiency: he needeth not my lie. We may not commit the least sin for avoiding a greater, fouller sin. None is reduced to that necessity. Lot cannot be excused, who, to keep the Sodomites from committing the sin against nature, offered his two daughters to their filthy lusts, Gen. 19:8. There is no such necessity laid on God's children, that they must do a smaller sin to prevent a greater. Refer the issue to God.

Thirdly, It informeth us that sin is of a spreading nature. One sin is the cause of another; as being left by God, and given up to Satan; or by the affinity of sin, by one they are inclined to another; by prodigality to theft or fraudulency. Lusts must be fed; one sin cannot be committed without others; as covetousness: 1 Tim. 6:10, 'The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.' When one is committed to palliate and hide another; as David's murder, to hide his lust. The same sin spreads further: James 1:15, 'When lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin.'

Fourthly, It shows what need we have of constant hatred and mortifying of sin, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way,

Heb. 6:12, 13. Therefore labour to be humbled for and to strive against the least sin; as Hezekiah was for his pride: 2 Chron. 32:26, 'Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart.'

Fifthly, Take heed of the least sin, either as to judgment or practice.

1. You must not give yourselves liberty to swerve from the least truth which God has revealed to you, and of which conscience has been convinced. Though you do not fail in the main and in fundamental matters, yet you must make conscience of holding fast the truth in the smallest things: Gal. 2:5, 'To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.'

2. For practice. We may not do anything which we have cause to doubt of whether it be such as is forbidden: Rom. 14:23, 'He that doubteth is damned if he eats.' David was afraid of his secret faults.

Let us now take the expression as it lieth in the textual translation or reading. There are many great transgressions, but there is one above the rest, which deserves to be called the great transgression, and is usually spoken of in scripture as such; and fitly, because it is only excepted out of the covenant of grace, as not to be pardoned by it. And also because it importeth the highest malice and contempt of God that a creature on this side hell can be guilty of, and cometh near to the sin of the devils or evil angels. And it deserveth to be spoken of in this place, because presumptuous sin is a disposition to the unpardonable sin. That place, 'If we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin,' Heb. 10:26, alludeth to Num. 15:28–31, where no sacrifice was allowed for presumptuous sin, or sinning with an high hand. And it is said, ver. 30, 'That he that sinneth presumptuously reproacheth the Lord;' is guilty of blasphemy against God; and this great sin symboliseth with it, for it is called a 'blasphemy against the Holy Ghost;' Luke 12:10, 'Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but unto him that blasphemeth

against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven.' Wilful sins imply or express a blasphemy. Therefore, for the consolation of the weak and wounded in spirit, who are apt to charge themselves with the committing of this sin, and for our own caution, that we may not run into it nor come near it, there are certain degrees and steps that lead down unto this sin unto death, and we shall do well to keep out of harm's way. Those that sin wilfully against light and checks of conscience are in the highway to final apostasy and falling off from God. All presumptuous sins give a fearful wound to the conscience, and Satan gets advantage by them; therefore let us a little state what is this great sin. I shall not make a set and solemn discourse of it, yet something I shall open of it to you.

First, Let us consider the names by which it is called: 'Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost;' Mat. 12:31, 'Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.' Here I must give an account why it is called 'blasphemy,' and why 'against the Holy Ghost.' Why blasphemy. Blasphemy is either explicit or implicit. There is implied blasphemy in every presumptuous sin; it is a reproach to God. Thus Pharaoh openly and by consequence and interpretation, blasphemed God when he said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?' a questioning of his authority, or a questioning of his power and truth. Implied blasphemy is a saying in the heart, as security and presumption in sin denieth God's providence or just government: Zeph. 1:12, 'That say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.' But this sin is not only implied, but often explicit (if not always) and express blasphemy, as appeareth by all the descriptions of it; as Mat. 12:24, 'This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils;' which occasioned Christ's speaking of this sin. So Heb. 6:6, 'They crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame;' that is, they judged him such an one as the Jews that crucified him, who judged not Christ to be the Messiah and the Son of God, but a seducer, impostor, and malefactor; they desired judgment against him as such, that he might be crucified and put to

shame; and they ratify this ex post facto, by their after consent. So again, this sin is aggravated by the blasphemy which is contained in it; when it is said of the total and final apostate, Heb. 10:29, 'That he hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace;' he doth blasphemously vilify, undervalue, and debase Christ as low as the dust and dirt under his feet, and judgeth him an impostor, a false prophet, and malefactor, and justly and worthily crucified. His blood, which was the ground of the new covenant, he counteth it common blood, such as had no expiating and purging power, and reckoneth it as impure and unholy, despising and disdainning the Spirit of grace, accounting the gifts, illuminations, motions, comforts of the Spirit as delusions and impulses of the devil, both in himself, if formerly he felt them, and in others; and all this out of malice and detestation of the christian religion, after he hath felt some of the divine effects of this Spirit in his own soul, both in terrors and comforts.

Secondly, Let us consider the nature of the sin. It is a malicious contempt and wilful rejection of the truth of the gospel, when it is propounded to us by the Holy Ghost with sufficient evidence; or else it is a total and final defection and apostasy from it, after we have received it, and have been convinced of the truth of it by the Spirit. Where—

1. Observe, the object of this sin is the gospel; it is not a sin against the law, but against the gospel; not against some one point of truth, but against the whole gospel covenant, contrary to the main substance of christianity, and contrary to Christ as the Redeemer, that upon repentance in his name, we may obtain remission of sins, and by his Spirit be sanctified and fitted for eternal life. These three blasphemies show the nature of it. The first of these blasphemies relateth to the person and office of Christ as the Redeemer of the world; the other two to his benefits, justification and sanctification. The one is founded upon the merit of his blood, the other depends upon the efficacy of his Spirit. The whole showeth that it is a total defection and apostasy from the christian faith.

Now, why is it called 'blasphemy against the Holy Ghost?' It is called 'blasphemy against the Holy Ghost,' or 'the sin against the Holy Ghost,' because it is committed against the peculiar operation of the Holy Ghost, rather than against the Father and the Son. I say, it is against his personal operation, or that relation which he sustaineth in the mystery of redemption. The sins committed against the law may be said to be committed against the Father as the governor and judge of the world. Now there may be pardon for such sins, because God hath provided a remedy in Christ. The sins that are committed against the gospel, such as impenitency and unbelief, they may be said to be committed against the Son, for these are sins contra remedium, against the remedy, as the other contra officium, against the office of Christ. And the gospel is the new remedying law of the Lord-Redeemer; these are sins against the Son. The Father gave the Redeemer to men, but he is not the Redeemer to them till the Spirit doth open the eyes of our minds, that we may acknowledge and embrace our Redeemer. But the Holy Ghost was not made sin for us, nor did he endure the wrath of God for our sakes; therefore he is not called our redeemer. That honour is put upon Christ, who is exalted to be prince and saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins, that we may own him and receive him, which if we do not, we sin grievously, and incur a just condemnation. But all are not condemned who for a while reject Christ. Paul did it with some persecution, yet afterward was converted. There is a third sort of sins that we must seek to find out, and that is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and that is when we do despite to the Spirit of grace, who is to convince and convert, and bring men to Christ, which when we refuse and blaspheme, and slight his evidence, be it never so full and clear, and sufficient to force belief, and will not see it, nor hearken to it, but obstinately speak evil of it, this is to sin against the Holy Ghost. The Spirit is the great witness of the gospel, and he witnesseth thereunto two ways, objectively and efficiently, as by and by more fully shall be shown. Now if we wilfully shut our eyes against this, and continue blaspheming, this is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and then there is no hope for us; for after the three persons have done their part, every one their proper work, there is no remedy.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have divided the work of salvation among themselves; God the Father as the lawgiver, the Son as redeemer, and the Spirit as the applier. He that sinneth against the law sinneth against the Father; he that sinneth against the gospel sinneth against the Son, but he that wilfully, maliciously, and blasphemously withstandeth conviction, and the power of the Holy Ghost in bringing souls to Christ, his convincing, persuading, and converting work, he sinneth against the Spirit. According to these three dispensations and respects hath God revealed himself to us. Before the coming of Christ in the flesh, God was more known as a lawgiver; God the Son was manifested obscurely, and the Spirit given sparingly. When God was manifested in our flesh and dwelt among us, the person, dignity, and office of the Son was set forth; but upon his reception into heaven, the Spirit came as God's vicegerent or vicar-general. Now he hath a special inspection over all affairs of the church: Acts 5:3, 4, 'And Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost, and hast kept back part of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God;' Acts 20:28, 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.' He liveth, and walketh, and dwelleth in you: 'His temples we are.' All operations that belong to faith and repentance come from him. To resist them is to resist the Holy Ghost, Acts 7:51. Therefore this sin, which questioneth the main evidence upon which faith is built, is called, 'The sin against the Holy Ghost.' Once more; it is called 'a sin unto death;' 1 John 5:16, 17, 'There is a sin unto death, and there is a sin not unto death.' In some respect, all sins are sins unto death, as they deserve it; but this is especially so. A sin may be called a sin unto death *quo ad meritum*, in respect of its desert: Rom. 6:23, 'The wages of sin is death.' Vel *quoad eventum*, or in respect of the event; so is unbelief and impenitency, or all that sin which men continue in till death: Prov. 3:18, 'Her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead,' if continued in; but if broken off, it is pardonable, or

rather pardoned. But this sin is quoad naturam, in its own nature, a sin which cannot be pardoned neither in this world nor the next: Mat. 12:31, 32, 'Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.' Why is this sin irremissible or unpardonable? Surely it is not in respect of God the Father, as if he wanted mercy enough to pardon it; that cannot be, for his goodness and mercy is infinite. Not in respect of the Lord our propitiation, for his blood being of an infinite and matchless value and worth, is above the transgression of the creature. Nor merely subjectively in regard of the sinner, who by reason of former impieties and frequent convictions is given over to an hardened heart, an heart which cannot repent, and through custom of sin is seared and made as hard as the nether millstone; but chiefly from the special nature of this sin, which lieth in some contradiction to the pardoning terms, or the way which God taketh to bring home sinners to himself. It is an aggravated sort of an impenitency in its own nature, which God will not pardon, it being an obstinate refusal of the means of conviction and conversion.

2. Observe the qualification of the object, the truth of the gospel represented by some powerful evidence of the Spirit; for it is a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, or an obstinate refusal of the means of conviction and conversion. A sin of ignorance it cannot be, for the greatest blasphemy committed ignorantly may be forgiven: 1 Tim. 1:13, 'Who was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.' A sin of incogitancy it cannot be, for of all sins, that hath the most of infirmity when a man is suddenly surprised. It is not a rash opposition, but wittingly and willingly committed against some special operation of the Spirit; and that operation of the Spirit in applying the gospel must be such as is a sufficient evidence to work faith concerning the truth of it. Now two ways doth the Holy Ghost

evidence and witness the truth of the gospel to the souls of men—either objective or efficient; either as an objective testimony or argument: Acts 5:31, 32, 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.' Or efficiently: Eph. 1:17, 18, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints.' By miracles without, or some divine effects within, such as is illumination and taste. The outward work is enough, for it is full evidence. And the pharisees had no internal conviction from the Spirit, or illumination that we read of, but only maliciously slandered Christ's miracles, to whom Christ applyth the sin, Mat. 12:31. They fathered these works of the Spirit on Satan. And it is possible some may have more illumination, as those that reject this evidence by malicious and total apostasy. They may be enlightened: Heb. 6:4, 'For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost.' They may have a taste, some internal preparative work.

3. It is a wilful, malicious, and blasphemous rejection of this truth, as sealed by the Spirit. To this blasphemy I spake before.

[1.] It is a wilful sin: Heb. 10:26, 'For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin;' that which is committed with a full will, and a deliberate and obstinate malice. Sin may be committed either by a full will or a mixed will. Things may be done with a mixed will when swayed from the right rule by violent passions; and with a full will when done with consent and obstinate will. It is not ignorance, fear, or violent passion. That which we do out of fear, we seem to do it unwillingly; for the will refuseth a while, though afterwards, overcome with fear, it yieldeth; as a man throwing goods into the sea,

it is done ἐκὼν ἀέκοντι γε θύμῳ, willingly, yet with an unwilling mind. But what a man doeth wilfully and stubbornly against God is another case. There is a difference between sins wittingly and wilfully committed.

[2.] It is a malicious rejection, for it is accompanied with an hatred: John 15:24, 'If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.' Generally this sin is made to be an hatred of the truth as truth; but that cannot be. It is true that the person which hath sinned this sin hateth the truth from whence he is fallen, hateth God, and hateth Christ. Conviction disappointed maketh a man turn devil. But to hate truth as truth is not agreeable to reason. Hatred hath evil for its object, not truth. A man cannot hate truth but as contrary to our carnal inclinations and interests, and that raiseth the malice that God would convince us of, that which we have no mind to.

4. This may be done either by infidels or apostates.

[1.] By infidels, and those who never received christianity, but were or might have been, by the sufficient evidence of the Spirit's work, convinced of the truth thereof, but they did obstinately shut their eyes against the light thereof, and choose to scorn and blaspheme rather than to believe, and so become incapable objects of mercy. This was the case of the pharisees, Mat. 12.

[2.] Apostates. In the sixth of the Hebrews we find they were once christians, made profession; they had some light and taste, some illumination, some consolation; some sense they had, but it was superficial; some joy, like fire in straw. The stony ground received the word with joy, Luke 8:13; there was not a firm adherency, and deep radication of grace in the soul; they did but taste. To taste is a real participation, yet but in a little or low degree, so that it gets not a universal dominion over sin and corruption; and therefore they might fall away, and afterwards hate, and persecute, and blaspheme

the truth. This is a most heinous sin, and the highest degree of this sin, because they had received the knowledge of the truth of the gospel; they were fully convinced that God had done much towards their salvation, not only by power and miracles without, but come effects within.

Because this is the way of sinning against the Holy Ghost. Now I must tell you that every apostasy is not this sin, but it is more or less heinous according to the wilfulness and malice of it. They that cast off the profession of godliness for some great earthly hope, involve themselves in a more heinous sin than they that shrink from it out of some great fear; for those things that we fear, as death, torment, and all matters of that kind, are destructive of our nature, and therefore it cannot be said how much nature abhorreth them; but those things we hope and desire for the most part are such that nature may easily and without great inconveniency want them; as great riches, splendour of life, noble affinities and marriages; for these things are not absolutely necessary, but only conduce to our more abundant felicity; not only our being, but our well-being is concerned in them. Our being may be kept and supported in a far meaner condition. Thence it is that great dangers, when they are at hand, are difficultly sustained, and the fear of them doth often sway us from the right rule. If we lose our great hopes, and be cut short in our ambitions or worldly expectations, it is no great matter; wise and gracious men have easily borne it with a quiet and composed mind. The apostasy of those that are moved with such hopes is greater, more voluntary, and cometh nearer the great transgression; and the repentance of them that lapse is more rare and seldom, as daily observation may inform you; for they are only enticed away by their pleasure and lusts, which christians are obliged to deaden and mortify.

But though to fall out of fear be not so heinous a sin, yet a great and heinous sin it is; for grace should govern fear as well as hope; and though the coercion. and bridling of it be more difficult, yet it doth not excuse à toto, from all sin, but à tanto, only from part of the sin; and it is very hard to set a christian in joint again. Witness those

terrors that haunt men when they are once gotten into the snare; as Peter went out and wept bitterly; it cost him much sorrow of heart. Christ is fain to direct a comfortable message to him by name: Mark 16:7, 'But go your way, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall you see him, as he said unto you.' So that it doth not exclude all hopes of repentance and pardon. Some checks of conscience may revive his love to religion again. But when it is joined with obstinate malice, persecutions, contempt, and hatred of the known truth, because it is troublesome to his thoughts to consider how much he hath forsaken for so little, this is a great aggravation of the sin.

Use 2. Is caution to take heed of the great transgression, and the steps that lead thereunto.

1. Take heed of a contempt of the word of God, and the offers of his grace against the evidence and light that shineth in our consciences. This sin lieth in a malicious and scornful contempt; it is so represented in Esau, the type of the reprobates: Heb. 12:15–17, 'Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.' The root of it lieth in neglecting and slighting Christ for light causes, and preferring base lusts and pleasures before him. Esau despised his birthright when he sold it, Gen. 25:34; he apprehended the birthright would be of no use to him till after the death of his father, which might be for a long time, therefore, to satisfy his present pleasure, sold it. So many are apt to think our happiness is to come, and Christ is unseen; therefore our neglect of him is described by a contempt: Heb. 10:28, 29, 'He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the

covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace?' What is treading under feet but contempt? Oh, let the despisers of Christ and his grace lay this to heart, who make light of heavenly things, as negroes trample upon pearls: Mat. 7:6, 'Neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet.'

2. Take heed of apostasy and falling from the truth after conviction. Some receive and profess christianity by tradition and implicit faith, yet never have any distinct knowledge of the truth so believed; and some believe and understand more explicitly the doctrine of christianity, are convinced of the truth of it, yet never affected with the matter so as to forsake their sins. Some know and believe, and in some sort are affected with the matter, so as they begin by the power of the Spirit to forsake the pleasures of the world, find some spiritual joy and comfort; this estate is hopeful, yet must not be rested in. Some lust may be left unmortified, which in time of trial doth break out and discover the hidden malignity of the heart, not yet fully regenerated: 2 Peter 2:20, 'For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end with them is worse than the beginning.' Now for these to fall away, to deny the truth in profession and practice, is very dangerous. Take heed of the great transgression.

3. Take heed of the hatred of God, and Christ, and his ways. There are haters of God of a lower rank; every unregenerate man is so by prepossession: James 4:4, 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, 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.' Carnal liberty: Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity to God; for it is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be.' Legal bondage: Gen. 3:7, 'And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons.' Men hate what they fear. It crosses us in our way, and cuts off our desired pleasures, and punishes us for our sins.

Somewhat of this remaineth in the godly. An higher sort there is that hate instruction: Ps. 50:17, 'Thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.' That hate the light: John 3:20, 'Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.' Cannot endure to be minded of duty or warned of danger: 1 Kings 22:8, 'And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man (Micaiah, the son of Imlah) by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.' Cain hated his brother, 1 John 3:12. A higher degree is persecution. But this is not the sin against the Holy Ghost, because it is some particular truth they hate, not the main of the christian faith; in spleen to the person that holdeth it, or is divided from them by contrary interests; not the truth itself is hated: yet this is dangerous. So hatred of the power of godliness; when men hate others that are godly, as godly, it is a great degree of sin. They cannot endure the lustre of grace shining in them, and therefore load them with all manner of injuries and contempt.

4. Take heed of scoffing and mocking at the word of God, and the serious counsel that is given you to reconcile yourselves to Jesus Christ. The chair of scorers is an eminent preferment in Satan's school: Ps. 1:1, 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.' I cannot say these are guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost, for scorers are invited to return: Prov. 1:22, 23, 'How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorner delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you.' We know not their measures of conviction, or that thorough evidence they have; yet for any in the bosom of the church to do it, where Christ is professed and owned, is very dangerous. Oh, take heed, as you love your salvation, that you do not make a jest of religion, nor scoff at that doctrine which seeks to draw you to Christ, nor reproach the sanctifying work of the Spirit in any, because they desire to fear God and walk with him. Take heed of mocking at serious diligence as preciseness. Shall the image of

God be made a scorn? To scorn at godliness is to scorn at the Holy Ghost, whose office and work it is to sanctify. But this is not the unpardonable sin; yet it comes very near that which is unpardonable, so that the thought thereof should humble all that are guilty, and make them fear so horrible a sin.

5. Take heed of presumptuous sins. It is a fearful advantage the devil gets by the wounds which wilful sins give the conscience. Every gross sin is not it, but when committed against knowledge and conscience, especially if we have time for deliberation and consideration of God's prohibition and displeasure.

Secondly, It serves by way of consolation, for such as fear they have committed this sin. Complaining christians have no reason to fear it. The nature of this sin is to harden the heart. They that are guilty of it despise our Lord Jesus Christ, but are not at all grieved to think that they have lost him. And therefore, if thou hast a value and esteem for him, and a desire of him, it is certain that thou hast not committed this great sin.

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