

THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE



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by Thomas Boston

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The Necessity of Repentance

LUKE 13:5.

I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

WHEN we consider the abounding sin and hardness of heart prevailing under a preached gospel, it must needs let us see, that the doctrine of repentance is both necessary and seasonable, to pluck the brands out of the burning; or if that will not do, to leave men without excuse. Sinners stave off repentance, as if they were resolved to persist in sin come what will, or at least as halting betwixt two opinions: But here is a peremptory decision of the case in this text, "I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

In these words we have two things.

1. An abuse of a dispensation of providence corrected: "I tell you, Nay." Some had told our Lord the news of Pilate the Roman governor's falling on some Galileans, with his soldiers, and killing them, while they were sacrificing. It seems the tellers of this news, or others in the company, were apt to think, that these were sinners beyond others, because an unordinary judgment had fallen on them. Our Lord tells them, that it would not bear such a conclusion. He puts them in mind of another remarkable providence, viz. the tower of Siloam in Jerusalem its falling on and killing eighteen persons: but here he shews that this did not befall them, because they were greater sinners than all the rest in Jerusalem; nay there were as great sinners as those, which missed that stroke, and others like it too.

2. The right use of the dispensation instructed: "But except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The right use is to learn repentance from the ruin of others; if others give us an example at their own cost, that we take heed to it and improve it to our repentance and reformation. This is the import of the particle but. These words are a peremptory certification given to sinners by our Lord. And the proposition in its own nature includes a twofold certification.

1st, A certification of ruin upon impenitence. Sinners go on in their course, yet hope that all may be well. No, says our Lord, deceive not

yourselves; for if ye do not repent, there is no hope of saving you. There is here,

(1.) The matter on which the certification is given, "Except ye repent;" i. e. If ye do not repent, if ye be not duly humbled for your sins, and sincerely turn from them. If ye harden your hearts under your guilt, keep still your sinful courses, and refuse to let them go, they will ruin you.

(2.) The thing certified, which is perishing likewise; not perishing in that very manner, but ye shall perish as surely as they did. The judgments of God shall pursue you, and ye shall perish for ever.

(3.) The extent of the certification, "All—perish." This clears the perishing to be meant of everlasting death. Q. d. Though signal temporal judgments do pursue all that are impenitent, yet eternal punishment will; no impenitent sinner shall escape that, however they may escape temporal strokes of signal vengeance.

(4.) The peremptoriness of it. This appears in two things. 1. That solemn assertion, "I tell you," supposed to be repeated in the last clause. Take it out of the mouth of the Lord himself, that ye shall perish except ye repent. Q. d. This has been told you by many, but ye would not believe: but now I tell it you out of my own mouth. And to hear this out of the mouth of the Saviour, may strike a sinner with concern, and let him see, that Christ's blood will never be laid out on a person continuing impenitent, to save him from death. 2. In the relation intimate to be between the punishment of those so signally smitten by the hand of God, and the future punishment of all impenitent sinners; the former is a pledge of the latter. This is intimated by the particle likewise.

2dly, A certification of life and repentance. This is implied here as Gen. 2:17. God has made as sure connection betwixt repentance and life, as betwixt impenitence and death. Be your sins never so great, if you repent of them, and turn from them, they shall never be your ruin.

Before I come to the main point I design, I shall lay before you some observations from the words.

Observation 1: Those who meet with more strokes than others are not to be accounted greater sinners than others

Obs. 1. That those who meet with more signal strokes than others, are not therefore, nor are to be accounted greater sinners than others. The Lord spares some as great sinners, as he signally punisheth, I tell you, nay.

Reasons of this dispensation of Providence.

1. Because of God's sovereign power and absolute dominion, which he will have the world to understand: Matth, 20:15. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" Thus our Lord accounts for the dispensation of the man's being born blind, John 9:3. All men have that in them and about them, which may make them liable to the heaviest strokes that any of the children of men meet with; And therefore whatever any suffer, the Lord does them no wrong, since he punishes them less than their iniquity deserves: but amongst many whom justice may strike, sovereignty picks out some, and causes them to smart. And who may say, "what dost thou?"

2. Because we are now under the mixed dispensation of providence; not the unmixed, reserved to another world, when all men shall be put into their unalterable state. Now, hereunto this is very agreeable that God signally punish some of a society, while others as guilty do escape, that the whole may, with David, Psal. 101:1, "sing of mercy and judgment too." And thus the dispensation of divers colours is held up in the world, as a display of the manifold wisdom of God.

3. Because the mercy of God to some is magnified by his severity on others. As black set by white makes the white appear the better; so God's severity against some, may be a looking-glass to others, wherein they may see how much they stand obliged to free grace and mercy, Rom. 11:22. Men are never fairer to prize health in themselves, than when they see others tossed on sick beds; nor to prize the exercise of sense and reason, and other mercies, than when they see what miserable and pitiful sights

they are that are deprived of these. And this should make folk patient and thankful under the strokes of the Lord's hand, because if he take away a mercy, health for instance, or perhaps a member or limb of their body, being taken away, it may be more serviceable for him, than when they had it, in so far as it shall serve to magnify the mercy of God to others, that see and notice the hand of the Lord. See Matth. 21:3.

4. Because in very signal strokes very signal mercies may be wrapped up. So it was in Joseph's case; there was a very singular blessing on the head of him that was separated from his brethren. Job's troubles were but a dark hour before a very glorious day. The halt Jacob got in his thigh, was more excellent, as a badge of his wrestling with the angel, than Esau's retinue of four hundred men.

5. Lastly, Because this dispensation is in some sort necessary to confirm us in the belief of the judgment of the great day. God punishes some remarkably, that the world may see that there is a God that judgeth on the earth; he does not so punish all, that men may be assured that there is a judgment to come. If none were punished here, the world would improve that for Atheism; if all were punished, it would be improved to Sadducism.

USE 1. Then learn that unordinary strokes may befall those that are not unordinary sinners; and therefore be not rash in your judgment concerning the strokes that others meet with. It is true, whatever we or others meet with, it is deserved at the Lord's hand; and when God follows an unordinary seen sin with an unordinary judgment, as in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, it is no breach of charity to judge that that stroke comes for that sin. But when people, in whose conversation ye see no signal sin, meet with signal strokes, beware of harsh judging. For in the way of the Lord's dispensation, some will meet with a signal stroke for some sin, such as the world would think little or nothing of, if they knew it.

2. Then adore the mercy of God to you, and wonder at his sparing you, when ye see others smart under the hand of God, which ye do not feel. Acknowledge, that whatever others meet with, the same might have been your lot, if the Lord had dealt with you as ye deserve; as the church did,

Lam. 3:22, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

Obs. 2. That the strokes which any meet with, are pledges of ruin to impenitent sinners.

Reasons of this are,

1. Because they show how hateful to God sin is, in whomsoever it is: Is. 42:24, "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law." God has no delight in the misery of his own creatures, Ezek. 18:23. He must therefore have a mighty hatred against sin, in that he is so heavy oftentimes on the work of his own hands for it. Not only his enemies smart for sin, but his dear friends; yea, his dear Son smarted for it, when it lay on him but by imputation. And therefore how can impenitent sinners think to escape? Luke 23:31, "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

2. Because they shew how just God is. He is the Judge of all the earth, and cannot but do right, Gen. 18:25. Now, though justice may delay the punishment of one longer than another, yet it will not allow to punish some, and for ever to spare others, in the same state. For that would be manifest partiality, which God hateth, Ezek. 18:20. And therefore the apostle tells us, 2 Thess. 1:6. that "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble" the saints.

3. Because whatever any meet with in the way of sin, is really designed for warning to others, as is clear from the text. See 1 Cor. 10:11, 12. And they that will not be taught by the example of others, may expect to be made examples to teach others, as Lot's wife was. But the wise will have their eyes in their head, while impenitent sinners pass on and perish, as those that will not take, warning. Hence it comes to pass, that the stroke afar off not prevailing, is oftentimes brought nearer home.

4. Lastly, Because all those strokes which sinners meet with in this life,

are the spittings of the shower of wrath that abides the impenitent world, after which the full shower may certainly be looked for. As the joys in believing are the pledges of eternal joy, flowing from one fountain with it; the first-fruits of Canaan's land, which will be followed with the full harvest: so all the outlettings of God's wrath on sinners here, are the pledges of eternal wrath, and first-fruits of hell, which will be followed with the harvest of misery, being the same in kind, Rev. 20:14.

USE 1. Be not unconcerned spectators of all the effects of God's anger for sin going abroad in the world; for your part and mine is deep in them. There is none of them but says to us, as in the same condemnation, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." O how unconcernedly do many look on the miseries of others, how far are they from taking a lesson to themselves therefrom! But a hard heart and seared conscience, which cannot be awakened by the dispensations of providence far off from them, do but invite the heavy stroke to fall on themselves.

2. Consider, O impenitent sinners, how can ye escape, when your ruin is insured by so many pledges thereof from the Lord's hand, while ye go on in sin? When a sinner goes out of God's way, he leaves his soul in pawn for his return by repentance; but the impenitent sinner never returns to loose his pawn, and so loses it. When God lets out any of his wrath in any measure on the children of men, that is God's pawn for his bringing eternal wrath on the impenitent; and we may be sure, that however careless we be of our pawns, God will not lose his. Therefore consider your ways, and repent.

Obs. 3. The strokes that others meet with, are loud calls to to us to repent

Obs. 3. The strokes that others meet with, are loud calls to to us to repent. That is the language of all the afflicting providences which we see going on in the world. To confirm this, consider,

1. God does not strike one for sin with a visible stroke, but with an eye to all. The reason which God gives in his law for punishing some

transgressors severely, is, that "all Israel might hear, and fear, and do no such thing." In the infancy of the Jewish church, he consumed Nadab and Abihu with fire, Lev. 10:2 compared with ver. 9. In the infancy of the Christian church, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for a lie. Why all this, but to be a warning to all that should come after?

2. Thereby we may see how dangerous a thing sin is to be harboured; and if we will look inward, we may ever see, that there is sin in us also against the God of Israel. If we saw one stung by a serpent which he had taken up, would not we quickly throw away one which we had taken up too, lest we should fare no better? How can we think to prosper in that way, where we see it goes so very ill with others?

USE 1. We may see that none go on impenitently in a sinful course, but over the belly of thousands of calls from Providence to repent, besides all those they have from the word. Look abroad into the world, O sinner, and consider how many have fallen into ruin, and are still falling by their iniquity. As many as there are of these, so many mouths are there calling thee to repent, and turn from thy sin. "Who did ever harden himself against God, and prosper?" And dost thou think, that thy case shall be an exception to the general rule? No; so many witnesses give their testimony to thee, that "except thou repent, thou shalt likewise perish."

2. Impenitency under the gospel cannot have the least shadow of excuse. The calls of Providence common to the whole world, are sufficient to leave the very heathens without excuse, Rom. 1:20: how much more shall the calls of the word and Providence too make us inexcusable, if we do not repent? Sinners make many shifts for themselves, to preserve the life of their lusts, and to keep themselves from this unpleasant exercise: but they will be but fig-leaf covers before the Lord.

3. How much more do strokes from the hand of the Lord on ourselves call us to repent? Hos. 2:6, 7, "Therefore behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now." What Absalom's design was in burning Joab's corn-field, is the design of

afflicting providences. And therefore impenitency and hardness of heart under the strokes of the Lord's hand, is highly aggravated, Jer. 5:3. Every cross that we meet with, is a charge from heaven to turn from our sinful course, and from the particular ills of our way.

I come now to the principal doctrine of the text.

DOCTRINE. Sinners, except they repent, shall perish.

DOCTRINE. Sinners, except they repent, shall perish. This is an except without any exception. Be who they will, if they be sinners, they must repent or perish. All are sinners, and by sin depart from God; and they must come back again to him by repentance, else they are for ever ruined. Be they sinners of a greater or lesser size, they must be penitent sinners, or it had been better for them they had never been born.

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall,

I. Explain the nature of repentance.

II. Apply.

I. I shall explain the nature of repentance. And here we may consider,

1. What it is in its general nature.
2. How it is wrought in the soul.
3. The subject of true repentance.
4. The parts of repentance.

FIRST, We may consider what repentance is in its general nature. It is a saying grace: 2 Tim. 2:25, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." It is a grace given us of God freely, enabling and disposing a soul to all the acts of turning from sin unto God; and it is

saying, as in its own nature distinguishing a man from a hypocrite, and having a sure connection with eternal salvation. To unfold this more particularly, consider,

1. It is not a transient action, as Papists and some ignorant creatures imagine, as if a sigh for sin, an act of sorrow for it, a confession of it with a "God be merciful to me a sinner," were repentance. No, no; these may be acts of repentance while they proceed from a truly penitent heart. But repentance itself is not a passing act, but an abiding grace, Zech. 12:10; a continuing frame and disposition of the soul; a principle lying deep in the heart, disposing a man to mourn for and turn from sin on all occasions.

2. It is not a passing work of the first days of one's religion, as some professors take it to be; but a grace in the heart, setting one to an answerable working all the days of his life. It is a spring of waters of sorrow in the heart for sin, which will spring up there while sin is there, though sometimes through hardness of heart it may be stopped for a while. They that look on repentance as the first stage in the way to heaven, and looking back to the sorrowful hours which they had when the Lord first began to deal with them, reckon that they have passed the first stage, are in a dangerous condition. And whoso endeavours not to carry on their repentance, I doubt if they ever at all repented yet. As when Moses had smote the rock in the wilderness, and the waters began to gush out, those waters ran (it is thought, 1 Cor. 10:4.) and followed them while in the wilderness: so the heart first smitten with repentance for sin at the soul's first conversion to God, the wound still bleeds, and is never bound up to bleed no more, till the band of glory be put about it in heaven, Rev. 21:4.

Hence initial and progressive repentance, though the former be the repentance of a sinner, the latter of a saint, are no more different kinds of repentance, than the soul's virgin love to Christ, and their love to him through the course of their spiritual marriage with him; or than faith in its first, and after actings. But as the mid-day and evening sun are the same with the morning sun, so are these; though the rising morning sun may be most noticed by the traveller, who having travelled in the night, was thereby brought from darkness to light.

3. It is not a common grace, but a special saving one. Men may have a repentance for their sin, gnawing their consciences, and tormenting their hearts, which they will carry on in hell through eternity: being only the first movings of the worm in the soul that never dieth: as Judas's repentance seems to have been Simon Magus's and Pharaoh's. They may bitterly rue their sin, as Esau, Gen. 27:34 who never truly repent of it, Heb. 12:17; and the stony heart may be broken in a thousand pieces, while yet every piece remains a stone. They may have a superficial sorrow for sin, and a light joy succeeding it, whose hearts were never pierced to the quick; and therefore the joy goes, as the effects of a scud of rain on the parched ground, Matth. 13:20, 21. But true repentance is a repentance never repented of, kindly working in the soul.

SECONDLY, We may consider how repentance is wrought in the soul. And here two questions must be answered, and two points cleared, namely,

1. Who works repentance, or is the author of it? And that is the sanctifying Spirit of Jesus Christ: Zech. 12:13. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." Sometimes notorious prodigals become true penitents; as a persecuting Saul turned to be a preaching Paul: so that the world is amazed with the change, and are ready to say as in Saul's case, 1 Sam. 10:11. "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets? But that query, ver. 12. "But who is their father?" gives a rational account of the matter. All sort of timber to divine grace is alike easy to hew. And forasmuch as the house of God is ordinarily built of the knottiest wood, publicans and harlots entering into the kingdom of God before Scribes and Pharisees, it may plainly appear, that repentance is not the work of nature, but of grace; not of men's own spirit, but Christ's Spirit.

This is evident from the word, Jer. 13:21, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." It is the Lord's own work to "take away the stony

heart, and give an heart of flesh," Ezek. 36:26. It is the office of the exalted Mediator to give repentance, in whose hand it is to send the Spirit, Acts 5:31. Ministers may preach repentance, but cannot work in it themselves, and far less in others. They may sow the seed, but cannot make it grow, 1 Cor. 3:6, 7. It is but a peradventure if God give repentance, when they have done their utmost, 2 Tim. 2:25. But if at all their weapons be mighty, it is through God, 2 Cor. 10:4.

2. By what means does the Spirit work repentance? That is by the word, whether read or preached. The word is the channel wherein the influences of the Spirit flow; and from these it has its piercing, melting, and heart-softening virtue, as the pool of Bethesda had its healing virtue from the angel's troubling the water: Acts 11:20, 21. "And some of them were men of Cyprus, and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." Junius, who was deeply plunged in Athiesm, was brought to repentance by reading John 1. in a New Testament which his father had purposely laid down in his chamber, if perhaps he might take it up and read it. Augustine was converted by reading Rom. 13:13, 14. "Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Three thousand we find were wrought on by one sermon, Acts 2.

Many and various are the occasions of repentance, which the Lord blesseth for bringing home the word to the soul, and the soul by it unto God. Personal afflictions have been so in the case of many, Hos. 2:7. The sight of strokes on others has been blessed to some. The first occasion of Luther's turning serious was a fright by the violent death of a dear companion of his. Nay, God has made falls into gross sins occasions of repentance unto many, whereof there are several instances, as Achan, the thief on the cross, &c. Flavel gives an account of one, in the case of an attempt of self-murder. Augustine heard a voice, saying, "Take up, and read." Nay, God can make a dream in the night such an occasion, Job 33:15, 16. But these are not properly the means, but the occasions which bring men to consider of the word, which is the true and proper means.

And here the Spirit of the Lord makes use of both parts of the word.

1st, The law, to break the hard heart: Jer. 23:29, "Is not my word—like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? saith the Lord" It goes before like John Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord into the heart. And the Spirit of the Lord making use of it in a soul, is called "the Spirit of bondage," Rom. 8:15. And here each part of the law has its proper use.

(1.) The commands of it, to convince the soul of sin: Rom. 7:7, I had not known sin," says the apostle, "but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." The commands of the law, held forth to the soul in their spirituality and vast extent, are the looking-glass wherein the sinner is made to see his black face, the sins and sinfulness of his nature, heart, and life, which he must repent of.

(2.) The threatenings of it, to convince the soul of judgment: Gal. 3:10, "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." These carried home on the soul, disturb its rest in sin, and let the man see that he has been sleeping within the sea-mark of divine vengeance, and so give him a frightful wakening. These discover the danger of sin for time and eternity, and tell him that he must turn over a new leaf, else he is ruined.

2dly, The gospel, to melt the hard heart like a fire, Jer. 23:29, "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and so to bow and bend it from sin towards God," Zech. 12:10, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." Thus the soul that was driven by the law, is kindly led and drawn by the gospel to repentance. The law serves to make a terrible reel in the conscience and affections: but the gospel is Christ's key to open the heart, and to turn about the will that he may come in, Gal. 3:2. The stormy wind, and earthquake, may go before in the law; but the still small voice of the gospel is that which the Lord is in. This is evident, if ye consider,

(1.) That repentance is the doctrine of the gospel. I do indeed think, that it cannot be denied but that the law requires repentance as a duty, in so far as it binds the apostate sinner to return to God: but in the meantime it gives no hope of mercy to the penitent, seeing its constant voice is, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." But the gospel gives the glad tidings of place for repentance, and shews how the apostate creature returning will be accepted. And there can be no true returning to God, where there is no hope of acceptance.

(2.) Repentance is a promise of the covenant of grace: Ezek. 36:31, "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations." It is not only the duty of God's elect, but their privilege, made over to them in Jesus Christ, purchased by his death, and bestowed on them by virtue of his exaltation, Acts 5:31. And hence, as one of the benefits of that covenant, it is sealed in baptism, Mark 1:4.

The sum of what is said on this second head, is, that repentance is an evangelical softness of heart, and bent of spirit to turn away from sin, and to turn to God, wrought in a soul by the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of holiness being given to Christ without measure, he puts the same Spirit in his elect in the day of his power; who by his grace melts the heart for sin, and bends it away from sin to holiness.

USE 1. Repentance is not a man's taking up himself, in the point of his outward conversation. It is one thing to reform the life, another to reform the heart, by changing the will. The former is within the reach of mere nature, the other is not to be effected but by a supernatural hand, Jer. 31:18. The former may make one a painted sepulchre, the latter makes him a new creature.

2. Legal repentance is no true repentance: and therefore though one have it, he may perish; as Pharaoh, Judas, &c. It makes a fretful restless conscience under the terror of God's wrath but mean while it leaves a hard heart, glued to sin. The law and its terrors coming into a sinful soul, may raise the dust ready to choke the sinner, as in a house when a

sweeping; but it will never be made clean, unless the gospel have its efficacy on the heart, as the water which lays that dust. Hence it comes to pass, that sinners sometimes have sharp convictions, but mean while their lusts grow as rampant as ever after.

3. See the folly of delaying repentance, and not striking in with the motions of the Spirit, when one has them. How do people put off repentance from time to time, as if it were wholly in their power to do it at any time! But they that cannot command wind and tide, have need to fall in with them while they serve, least if they go, they be left hopeless. O delay not, lest the Spirit of the Lord be provoked to depart.

4. Lastly, Learn whom ye are to look to for repentance. It is the work of the Lord's Spirit; and unto him ye are to look for his grace to loose the bands of wickedness, to soften the hard heart, and to turn you to himself, Jer. 31:18.

Thirdly, We may consider the subject of true repentance, what it is. It is a convinced believing soul. An unconvinced sinner cannot be a true penitent; for what the eye sees not, the heart rues not. Neither can an unbelieving sinner be so; for without faith the heart may be rent for sin, but not from it.

First, The soul wherein true repentance is wrought, is a convinced soul: Job 36:9, 10, "He showeth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity." Acts 2:37. 38, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The first particular work in the creation was making light; and the letting in a new light by conviction, is the first work in the new creation. God begins his work, where Satan ends his; who having got the soul asleep in the arms of its lusts, shuts the windows, and draws the curtains, that it may sleep sound, till it awaken in bell. But the Spirit of the Lord by conviction opens them, and awakens the sinner ordinarily, if not always, in a fright. Here consider,

1. How this conviction is wrought. It is done by the erecting of a criminal court within the sinner's own breast, which the man cannot absent himself from, more than he can go out of himself. He must stay and answer, unless he prevail with the judge to let fall the process; as, alas! many do by silencing their consciences one way or other to their own ruin. And in this court,

1st, The Spirit of the Lord, awakening the sleepy conscience, sets it upon the bench, so that the man becomes his own judge: John 16:8, "And when he [the Comforter] is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." The man searches and tries his own heart and life, which was before neglected as the sluggard's garden. But now every corner thereof is ransacked, and secret things set in the light.

2dly, The man is convicted as a sinner by the law. His nature, heart, and life brought to the holy law and compared with it, he is found evidently to be guilty and a transgressor. Hence says the apostle, Rom. 7:9, "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." The law as a looking-glass is held before his eyes, and he sees his spots. His own conscience is as a thousand witnesses against him, and he cannot deny the charge. So his mouth is stopped, and his sin at length has found him out, Rom. 3:19.

3dly, The man is sentenced and condemned by his own conscience according to the law, adjudging him liable to death, eternal death, for his sins: 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." He is therefore a condemned malefactor in his own eyes, by the sentence of the law pronounced against him. Consider,

2. The effects of this conviction; which are these.

1st, A painful sense of sin, an affecting sight of it, Rom. 7:9. forecited. For now the sore is lanced; and they see those sins, and that in sin, which they saw not before; and their eyes affect their hearts. As when the sun shines into a house, the motes are discovered, which did not before appear: so is it here. And the sin which sat light on them before, becomes a burden too heavy to them to bear; for now they are roused out of their

lethargy, and feel their sores. It is a burden on their spirits, which sinks them; on their backs, that bows them down; on their heads, which they are not able to discharge themselves of. Therefore the soul coming to Christ is represented as a man with a burden on him: Psal. 55:22, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." Hos. 14:2, "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord, say unto him, Take away all iniquity;" (Heb.) Lift off iniquity as a burden.

2dly, Terror on their hearts: Psal. 9:20, "Put them in fear, O Lord; that the nations may know themselves to be but men." The convinced jailor, a man who wore a sword, falls a-trembling, Acts 16:29: for the terror of God is too high for the stoutest heart, that knows not what it is to fear the face of man. The soul that was fearless before, because blind to its own hazard, now that his eyes are opened, is magor missabib. For what heart can be strong before an angry God, brandishing the sword of a fiery law over the conscience, which awakened, is the tenderest part of the man?

3dly, Legal sorrow for sin: Acts 2:37, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart." There are stounds of grief that go through their hearts like arrows, Psal. 45:5; and these are very piercing, Prov. 18:14, "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear? The man sees now that he has been murdering his own soul, and he groans out an elegy over his dead self; which is raised the higher, that he thought his soul was alive, when really it was dead. He calls himself fool and beast for doing as he did. But what is very sad, though his heart be rent in pieces for his sin, yet it is not rent from it. What grieves him thus, is purely selfish; his separation from God, without whom he sees he cannot be happy; and his liableness to his wrath and curse, which he sees will ruin him for ever to lie under.

4thly, A racking anxiety how to be delivered out of this state: Acts 2:37, "Now when they heard this, they said,—What shall we do?" And here many times fear and hope take their several turns in his anxious soul; sometimes hoping, sometimes desponding, like Jonah in the whale's belly, Jon. 2:4, "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." Conviction of sin will make way for care into the most careless head, and will make folk bestow many thoughts on the neglected salvation, that used not to bestow one serious thought upon

the business. And this care will swallow up all others, as that of a drowning man to save his life.

USE 1. The unconvinced sinner is an impenitent sinner. Hearken ye young ones, and old, that have lived at ease, and with a hale heart, in respect of your souls' state, all your days. They may sleep sound indeed, whom the devil is rocking in the cradle of a natural impenitent state. But ye will get a wakening yet, either in time to bring you to repentance, or when time is gone, and there is no more place for repentance, Jer. 48:11, 12, "For except ye repent, ye shall perish." Ah poor sinner, thou wast never yet in the next step to repentance. Thy sore has not been lanced yet, therefore surely the filthy matter is never yet cast out by repentance.

2. Convictions and legal qualms of conscience are not repentance: for they do but qualify the subject for it, and that in part only. These are very necessary things I have spoke of under this head; but they are but like the unripe fruit, which must be ripened by the work of the gospel on the heart, and brought to a perfection by the warm sun of gospel-influences, ere he that has them can be accounted a penitent indeed. Or rather, they are like the blossoms which go before, and differ in kind from the fruit, which often fall off, and no fruit follows at all. Folk may have had these many days and years since, that never repented to this day, Hos. 6:4. The first-fruits of the second death may be mistaken by many for the pangs of the new birth. And therefore ye that have had them consider well what issue they have had; for it is not enough to have been in them, but to have got right out of them. Wrong curing of some diseases, breeds others, that prove mortal to many.

The right issue out of them lies in three things.

1. It lies in self-denial, or unselfing of the soul, when the soul is shaken out of itself for justification and sanctification too: Jer. 31:18, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God." Compared with ver. 19, "Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed. I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." They see the heinousness of

sin, and the corruption of their nature too, so as they conclude themselves utterly unable to help themselves in either of these points, and so come off from themselves.

2. It lies in faith, or believing; in coming to Jesus Christ for all, in point of justification and sanctification too: Is. 45:24. "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." The soul being turned off its own bottom, comes and builds on him for what it wants, and looks to him for his blood and Spirit. Thus "the law is a school-master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith," Gal. 3:24. See Jer. 3:22, 23.

3. It lies in repentance, or a kindly melting of the heart for sin, Jer. 31:18. Zech. 12:10 as done against a gracious God, whom the heart is knit to in love. The soul comes from before the throne of justice, where it stood weeping for itself and its own misery, unto the throne of grace, where it stands weeping for having offended such a gracious Father.

They land at this threefold shore, who come rightly out of these depths. But many plunge up and down in them a while, and land again just in the same side they went in at. Some land at the shore.

1. Of formality, or a legal walk, 2 Tim. 3:5. "Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof." They change their former ways but retain their old heart. They go indeed to religious duties, but they never go out of them to Christ. They act not as they did; but still they have the old principle of action, acting from self, and to self; so that though they change their work, they still work to the old master. And thus many continue in a profession of religion, living on their duties, never coming to Christ. Others land at the shore.

2. Of their former security. They are neither better inwardly nor outwardly; but they come out of their qualms of conscience, as one out of a fever, returning just to their old way of living; as was the case with Felix, Acts 24:25. who said to "Paul, go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Others land at the shore,

3. Of profanity; turning worse than before: Mat. 12:43, 44, 45, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places,

seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first." Their lusts dammed up for a while, run with more vigour than ever thereafter.

Secondly, The soul wherein repentance is wrought, is a believing soul. Faith is the spring and source of repentance so that though the grace of faith and repentance are given together and at once in respect of time, yet, in the order of nature, faith goes before repentance, and the acting of faith goes before the exercise of repentance. And he that would repent, must first believe in Christ that he may repent. I know that some teach otherwise. But this is the doctrine of the Scriptures and our Catechism. To confirm it, consider,

1. That faith is absolutely the leading grace, and the first breathing of a quickened soul: Heb. 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God;" therefore it is impossible to repent, for that is very pleasing to him, Jer. 31:20. So John 15:5, "Without me," i. e. separate from me, and there is no union with him but by the Spirit of faith, "ye can do nothing" acceptable to God, therefore ye cannot repent.

2. It is particularly the leading grace to repentance: Zech. 12:10, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son." Thus it is represented in fact, Acts 11:21, "And a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." If repentance be the emptying of the soul by the dropping of the tears of godly sorrow, it is faith that generates them in the heart. It is faith that melts the hard heart, which droppeth in repentance. The eye of faith fixes on God in Christ, and then the soul turns to him by repentance, Jer. 3:22.

3. The scripture usually proposeth the objects of faith, and promises of grace, for motives to repentance; thereby discovering, that it is by a believing application of these, that a soul is brought to repentance: Jer. 3:14, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." Ver. 22, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings: behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God."

Joel 2:12, 13, "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Hos. 6:1, "Come and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. Chap. 14:1, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Nay the very law proclaimed on mount Sinai with so much terror, is graciously prefaced with gospel-grace for faith to work on in the first place; "I am the Lord thy God," &c. And thus the doctrine of the New Testament concerning repentance is proposed to sinners, Matth. 3:2, and 4:17, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

4. Lastly, The nature of repentance plainly teacheth this. It is a cordial turning from sin to God: but is it possible to turn to God, but through Christ? John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And is there any way of coming to Christ, but by faith? The soul then that would turn and go to God again by repentance, must needs take Christ by faith, by the way. The people indeed wept; but did they put away the strange wives, or set to it, till Shechaniah cried, Ezra 10:2, "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives, of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing?" They must not be only prisoners of fear, but of hope that will turn, Zech. 9:12, "Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope." Repentance is a kindly humiliation and mourning for sin; but the faithless heart may roar under law-horror, will never kindly mourn but under gospel-influences.

OBJECTION. Repentance is placed before faith

OBJECTION. Repentance is placed before faith, Mark 1:15; and sometimes repentance only is mentioned to natural men as the way to salvation, as in our text, and Acts 2:38, and 3:19. ANSWER, (1.) Repentance no doubt is absolutely necessary to salvation; and no man

needs pretend to faith, that does not repent, for they are inseparable. But that will no more infer the precedency of repentance to faith, than that, Heb. 12:14, will infer the precedency of holiness to it. Now, this is all our text aims at. (2.) Repentance being the end, and faith the means to that end, no wonder they be so placed: for the end is first in one's intention, yet the means are first in practice. So Mark 1:15. Christ commands sinners to repent; but then in order to repenting, he commands them to believe. So Acts 2:38, believing is implied in the command to be baptized. And therefore, speaking of the result of this work, ver. 44, it is said, "And all that believed," &c. So Acts 3:19, it is implied in being converted; compared with Heb. 3:12, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," And that this is the true reason of this way of speaking, namely, that repentance is the end, and faith the means, is clear from Acts 20:21, "Testifying—repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ:" for that Scripture can bear no other meaning, without destroying that fundamental truth, that Christ is the way to the Father. John preached repentance, Mark 1:4, but how did he direct them to it? Acts 19:4, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

USE 1. Then it is not gospel-doctrine, that Christ will receive none but true penitents, or that none but such have a warrant to embrace Christ by faith: Rev. 21:17, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The evil of this doctrine is, that it sets sinners to spin repentance out of their own bowels, and to fetch it with them to Christ, instead of coming to him by faith to get it. And it hinders sensible sinners from coming to Christ, as keeping them back till they be persuaded that they have true repentance. I say, persuaded; for how can a sinner come to Christ till he be persuaded he has a warrant so to do? If Christ will receive none but such as have true repentance, then none other are invited to come; for surely those that are invited, will be welcome upon their coming: if none other be invited, then impenitent sinners are not bound to come to Christ; for none are bound to come, but those that are invited; "for where there is no law, there is no

transgression." However, none are here in Christ by faith, but thereupon they become true penitents; and none but true penitents will see heaven.

2. Then for sensible sinners to think that they dare not and ought not to believe, and embrace Christ, till they be more deeply humbled, and do more thoroughly repent of their sins, and in a word, be more fit to receive him, is but a gilded deceit, and a trick of the false heart, to make the soul stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children, and die there at length. The Scripture holdeth forth quite other doctrine: Rev. 3:20.

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Is. 55:1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." It is one thing what a sinner will do; another, what he may and ought to do. It is very true, there are many who will never come to Christ, if they be not made more sensible of their need of him than they are. But all that hear the gospel may and ought to come, be their case what it will; and those that come not, will be condemned for their not coming, John 3:19. Therefore let every sensible sinner under that temptation think, that he is in the case of a drowning man, who if he stand disputing whether he may catch hold of the rope reached to him to hale him to land, a wave may come and sweep him away; and therefore without disputing he must take hold of it.

3. This shews the true way to deal with a hard heart, to soften it, and bring it to hearty repentance. It is to believe. Ye must do like those fowls, that first fly up, and then come down on their prey; first soar aloft in the way of believing, and then come down in true humiliation: Zech. 12:10. —"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him." One may otherwise toil long in vain with a hard heart. Unbelief will lock up the heart, as the waters with a hard frost; for hard thoughts of God set the soul at a distance more and more from him, when the believing of the proclaimed pardon touches the rebels' hearts, and makes them come in.

4. Lastly, The more faith the more repentance; as the fuller the spring is, the streams run with the more vigorous current. According to your faith be it unto you, is the rule of the dispensation of grace. For faith is the

provisor for all other graces, as being the conduit pipe by which grace comes from the fountain of grace to the soul; so that it failing, all fails; and it moving vigorously, the rest do so too.

QUESTION. How are we to act faith in order to repentance?

ANSWER 1. Firmly believe, that whatever your guilt be, God is reconciled to you in Christ Jesus; that there is hope of your case, if ye can attain to the way laid out for bettering it. You have God's word for this: Is. 1:18. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Ezek. 18:23. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways and live?" This will quicken your endeavours after the happiness of your souls. Satan strikes at this foundation, to keep the soul from repentance, many ways. He will tell you, it cannot be thought that God can ever love the like of you. But the Lord saith the contrary: Hos. 14:4. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." Again, Satan will tell you, that you were not elected, but made for destruction; though God never set him nor you in the secrets of his decrees: Deut. 29:29. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us." But why does he tell you all this, but to make you careless? which being done, he knows you cannot repent.

2. Believe that Jesus Christ is both able and willing to save you from sin and from wrath. You have ground to believe his ability: 1 John 1:7. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Heb. 7:25. "He is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." And you have also ground to believe his willingness: Is. 55:1. Rev. 22:17. both forecited. This will set you a step further on; and truly this being believed by a sensible sinner, the bargain is almost closed. Therefore Satan works against the tossed soul's believing this, to the end he may not come to an anchor or rest, but may plunge up and down in the depths, knowing no landing place. Hence these hellish suggestions, What have you to do with the promises of grace? they will be made out to others, but not to you. But see Acts 2:39. compared with ver. 36. Hence also the suggestion of having sinned the

unpardonable sin. But why is that sin unpardonable? not that the physician cannot or will not cure it, Heb. 7:25. John 6:37; but because the sinner will never after desire to come to him, but willfully and maliciously rejects him. Hence also that suggestion, that Christ died not for him. But surely Satan never saw the roll of those whom Christ died for, and knows it no more than we, Deut. 29:29. forecited. We ought not to call that in question, but leave that matter to the Lord. It is plain, that we are commanded to believe, 1 John 3:23. Let us do so, and we shall have evidences that Christ died for us.

3. Christ has given his consent to be yours in his word; believe it; and do you consent to be his, accepting of the covenant, and of Christ therein to be your head and husband. Take him in all his offices as offered; and solemnly lay the whole weight of your soul, for justification and sanctification, on him. Lay over the burden of your guilt on his blood, of your raging lusts on his blood and Spirit; confidently trusting in him for salvation from sin and wrath. You have good ground to do this: Matt. 22:4, "All things are ready: come unto the marriage." Is. 26:3, 4, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is staid on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Chap. 44:5, "One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Chap. 45:24, "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." This being done, the bargain is closed for time and eternity; Christ is yours, and ye are his, and God is your God in him. Satan strives against the soul here; for he knows, that if this be done, the person is no more his. Hence are these suggestions, Christ is a hard master there is no living with; though Christ says the contrary, Matt. 11:28, 29, 30. Again, it is over soon for that serious work, Psal. 95. If none of these nor the like will do, then he will tell the person, that it is presumption for him to offer at any such thing. But that is but the devil's doctrine, that it is presumption to do it, since God has commanded it, 1 John 3:23, "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." And do what ye will, ye cannot please God unless you do it, John 6:29, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Heb. 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to

please God." Well, if the soul will venture, he is ready to tell him, he had as good let it alone as try it in vain, for Christ will never receive him, nor give his consent to the bargain. But Satan is a liar; for he has given it already: Matt. 22:4, "All things are ready: come unto the marriage. Hos. 2:19, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. The soul is like a traveller come to a deep water-side, over which lies a bridge appearing very thin and narrow; it is pouring on rain on this side, it is fair weather on the far side; he would fain be over; and while he is minding to take the bridge, a false friend tells him, that he will never get over, that the bridge will break with him, or that his foot will slip, &c. And thus the poor man stands, sometimes putting on his foot, sometimes drawing it back again, till the flood rising behind him, he sees he must venture or perish. So he ventures with a trembling heart, and gets safe over, and sees that it was an enemy that made him so distrustful of the passage.

4. This being done, believe that Christ is yours, Cant. 2:16; that God is reconciled to you in him; that your sins are pardoned for Christ's sake, and you are no more under condemnation for them, Rom. 8:1; that you are now in a state of peace with God, and safe under the covert of blood. This will effectually melt your hearts into sincere repentance. And the stronger your confidence be in this point, the fire will be the more keen to melt the soul. Satan will oppose you in this also, that raising the dust of doubts and fears, your hands may be feeble that should fight against your lusts, the legs weak and trembling wherewith ye should turn from sin unto God. But the more he weakens that, the more he serves his own purpose against you.

5. Stand upon this shore, and look to your sins, and Saviour, Zech 12:10. When a soul has, by a believing application of the blood of Christ, passed the gulf of condemnation and sees itself safe on the other side, it stands fairest for a hearty melting for sin, and a free and cordial turning from it unto God, Luke 7:37, 38, compared with ver. 47. It is slavish fear that may be greater before, but it is filial relenting that will be greatest then. The waters of sorrow may make greater noise before, but they will come sweeping down with a more full flood then, as when a hearty thaw comes

after a long frost.

6. Lastly, Believing the promise of his grace, use the means. There are means of God's appointment to stir up a soul to repentance; namely, serious meditations on the sins of our nature, heart, lip, and life; the evil of it with respect to God, and to ourselves, &c. Rev. 2:5, "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent." Psal. 119:50, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." There are promises of repentance, Ezek. 36:31, "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations." Acts 5:31, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." To believe the promise without use of the means is presumption; to use the means without believing the promise, is a selfish unsanctified work. What God has joined, either of these puts asunder, and so must be fruitless. God says to us in this case, as unto Moses, Exod. 17:5, 6. "Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel: and thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee, there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink." The means are as the rock, the faith of the promise the rod of God: the way to get the water was by smiting the rock with the rod.

FOURTHLY, Let us consider the parts of repentance. These are two, namely, humiliation for sin, and turning from sin unto God. These two put together, make up true repentance. Accordingly the Scripture speaks of repenting of sin, 2 Cor. 12:21. "which have not repented of the uncleanness," &c.; and likewise repenting from sin, Heb. 6:1, "Not laying aside the foundation of repentance from dead works, &c. So in the Old Testament repentance is expressed by two words; the one denoting remorse and sorrow, Job 42:6. "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Jer. 8:6, "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" the other denoting the turning of the soul, viz. from sin unto God, Ezek. 18:30. "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions."

But however these may be distinguished, they cannot be divided in true

repentance. The true humiliation issues always in turning; and turning always begins at humiliation. Hence very often the whole of repentance is expressed by returning, and sometimes by humiliation, as Lev. 26:41, "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity." 2 Chron. 33:12, "And when he was in affliction, he be-sought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." We have both together, Joel 2:12, 13, "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

1st, To begin with humiliation. This leads the way in the sinner's return to God by repentance. There is never a soul comes back to God, but it comes the low way of humiliation. The sinner gone from God, is set up against him: but grace puts down the sinner from that seat, and lays him down at the Lord's footstool, where the Lord takes him up: 1 Pet. 5:6. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." As it was with Benhadad's servants, 1 Kings 20:31. 32; so it is with the convinced sinner: faith teaches them, that the King of Israel is a merciful King; repentance girds sackcloth on their loins, and ropes on their heads, and in that posture brings them to him. Now, in this humiliation of the soul there are these five things.

First, A kindly sense of sin, whereby the soul sees and is deeply affected with its sins against a holy, gracious God. I call it so, to distinguish it from the legal convictions spoken of before, which make a terrible reel in the conscience and affections; whereas this kindly soaks into the heart. The former is at the bottom involuntary, comes in, and is kept on against the sinner's will; because the natural enmity of the heart against God is not broken; and makes the man like one under great pain, who would gladly sleep, but still the new stounds awake him, and keep him awake. The latter is voluntary, it is welcome in, and welcome to stay; because the heart is brought low, and would fain be lower before a holy God. When the light appears at a chink, they would fain draw the curtains, and open the windows, that they may get a better sight of their black face and foul

hands, Jer. 3:18, 19. This sense of sin,

1. For the matter of it, is,

1st, A sense of the plague of the heart, or sin of the nature, 1 Kings 8:38; Rom. 7:7, 8. The man that is humbled, sees the corruption of his nature, himself to be a mass of corruption and confusion. He discerns the bias of his heart to the wrong side, the aversion to do good, the proneness to evil, that is interwoven with his very nature. The light of the Lord shining into his soul, gives him the affecting sight of the distortion and pravity that is in all the faculties of his soul, the blindness in his mind, rebellion in his will, and carnality in his affections. The want of this is a flaw in the repentance of many, of whom we may say, as Lev. 13:44, "He is a leprous man, he is unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean, his plague is in his head." They never see the corruption of their nature, and so repent not of it.

2dly, A sense of actual sins: Job 36:9, "Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded." These are the poisonous streams flowing from the impoisoned fountain: Mark 7:21, 22, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." Sin now lies at the door; for those things that were buried out of sight, have a resurrection, and stand before him as an exceeding great army which he has mustered against Heaven. Sins committed many years before, will appear more fresh and green than that day they were committed. What he justified before as no faults, he will be now ashamed of; and what were reckoned tolerable follies, will be accounted monstrous impieties.

3dly, A sense of the particular idol of jealousy, which the man has been most apt to be led away with. The soul is never truly humbled, till deeply sensible of its weak side: Hos. 14:3, "Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." For the penitent will be particularly set against that, as what is particularly offensive to God, Psal. 18:22. This right eye smarts and pains him so exceedingly, that now he would gladly have it plucked out. And as it does especially grieve the Lord's Spirit, it specially grieves

his, as what has been the great make-bate betwixt God and him.

4thly, A sense of the numerousness and multitude of their sins; Job 13:23, "How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin." A true sense of sin will open men's eyes to see innumerable evils compassing them about, countable only by him who telleth the stars, Psal. 19:12. Hence the humbled soul is sensible of a cloud of guilt that it has been wrapt up in; and will see it must plead guilty to every line of the spiritual law: sees itself a mass of iniquity; "from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, there is no soundness, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." Is. 64:6, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," &c.

5thly, A sense of the heinousness of their sins, the aggravating circumstances wherewith they have been attended: Luke 15:18, "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." Each sin pierces the heart of the penitent. And so it is wonderful to see what a dexterity a repenting sinner has in aggravating his sins, in his prayers and complaints. Time, place, person, and each circumstance, shoots as it were a dart through the liver.

Lastly, A sense of the evil of sin. Men may see sin, that see not the evil of it. Hence professing sin, instead of confessing it; turning to it, instead of turning from it. But if one saw the serpent's sting, he would not take it into his bosom, Luke 23:34. But the Lord's language to the soul whom he is drawing to repentance, is that, Jer. 2:19, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." And there is a twofold evil in sin, which the soul is now sensible of.

(1.) The evil of it with respect to themselves. They are sensible of the bitter fruits of sin: Rom. 6:21, "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." They see now "the vine is the vine of Sodom, the grapes are grapes of gall, the clusters bitter, and their teeth are set on edge." They cry out, as the sons of the prophets in another case, 2 Kings 4:40, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot." This is the danger of sin, that they are made sensible

of. They see the guilt of it, laying the soul open to temporal, spiritual, and eternal strokes: Jer. 14:7, "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against thee." Hence "horror takes hold on them, because of God's righteous judgments." They are made to wonder that they are not in hell, drinking the cup of the wrath of God. Their hearts tremble to look back on the ruin that was hanging over their heads in their natural state; that the poisonous cup which they drank has not despatched them. Hence they fear to meddle with sin again, as one would do to take a serpent into his bosom.

(2.) The evil of it with respect to God and Christ; and that in a threefold respect. [1.] As contrary to the holy law of God: 1 John 3:4, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." By sin one breaks over the hedge, yea, breaks it down, and so steps into the devil's ground; what wonder then a serpent do bite him! Now the sinner sees the equity of God's law, and so plainly perceives the evil of transgression: Rom. 7:12, "The law is holy; and the commandment holy, and just, and good." And the breaking over this so glorious a hedge, galls the penitent heart, the ingenuous spirit of an evangelical penitent.

[2.] As contrary to the holy nature of God: Hab. 1:13, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." Sin is the worst of evils in itself, and in the eyes of the penitent. There is nothing so contrary to the chief good, and therefore it is the chief evil. Now, the true penitent loves God, his holy nature and perfections; and therefore his sin is heavy to him, because by it he has walked contrary to him: Lam. 5:16, "Woe unto us that we have sinned."

[3.] As the procuring cause of the sufferings of Christ: Zech. 12:10, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him," &c. Mount Calvary is the Bochim to the true penitent; the sufferings of Christ are the commentaries on sin, which the true penitent reads; the groans of a dying Saviour rend their hearts; and by the wounds of a Redeemer they see the ill of sin.

This is the loathsomeness of sin, Is. 30:22; whereby it is not only hated for what attends it, but is abhorred for itself, as a thing which on no terms

the soul could any longer digest.

2. For the qualities of it. It is,

1st, A particular and distinct sense of sin, not a general and confused one. No man that hears the gospel, having common understanding, but he confesses himself a sinner; but many nevertheless are blind as to particulars. But this puts one in a capacity to lay his hands on his sores, saying, as Psal. 51:4, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." It shews him his particular transgressions wherein he has exceeded, and the particular ills by which he has exceeded and offended in these. As the vermin appear crawling, when the stone is lifted up, which before lay hid; so the ills of the heart and life appear to the penitent: Rom. 7:9, "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."

2dly, It is real, not imaginary. The Spirit of the Lord realizeth the evil of sin to the soul. And so it goes beyond a merely rational knowledge of sin, as far as the sense of the bitterness of gall got by tasting it, exceeds that got by the bare hearing of it: 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 bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." There is a spiritual sensation of spiritual things, arising from the new nature, as well as a natural feeling of what is grievous to us another way: 1 Cor. 2:14, 15, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things."

3dly, It is operative, not dead and idle. The eye of the penitent affects his heart; and the heart being touched, sets all the powers of the soul on work. It is the spiritual phycic, that ceaseth not to work till the whole soul be purged; as in the case of Peter's hearers, Acts 2:37, "who were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" There is a sense of sin which vents itself in nothing but in sighing and going backward, or in dry and fruitless complaints. It is like the disturbance which the sluggard meets with on his bed, which never thoroughly awakens him. But this sense of sin is

thorough work.

Lastly, It is an abiding sense of sin, not a transient one in a fit, and so away, Lam. 3:49, 50, "Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission; till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven." The humbled soul carries it about with him, as long as he carries the body of sin and death about with him, saying with the apostle, Rom. 7:24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" For it is not a slight touch, which goes as it comes, very easily. The removal of the stroke carries off Pharaoh's sense of sin; but here the wound is deeper and so more abiding.

USE 1. An insensible sinner is an unhumbled impenitent sinner; as was the case of the church of Laodicea, who said, "she was rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing; and knew not that she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, Rev. 3:17. They that never digged deep, are not built on the rock. They that have never got a broad sight of themselves in the sinfulness of their hearts and lives, have never yet got a believing sight of Christ. Consider this, ye that have still lived at ease, strangers to any thorough exercise about your soul's case; though the door is shut, the thief is in the house.

1. This shews how it comes that the pride of people's hearts still remains, though under crying guilt of sin. Though they know their sin, they have no due sense of it. If they had, it would be such a burden on their backs as would soon make them stoop, as Peter's hearers did, Acts 2:37. Insensible sinners may sit high in the seat of the scornful, while they see not what a God they have to do with: but when the Spirit of the Lord opens their eyes, and touches their hearts, to let them see and feel the evil of sin, they will lie low in the dust. They will, with the afflicted man, "put their mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope," Lam. 3:29.

3. See here a difference betwixt the saint's humiliation, and that of the hypocrite's. An Ahab may humble himself from a sense of the danger of sin; but a true penitent is humbled from the sense of the loathsomeness of sin, 1 Kings 21:27, 29. Job 42:5, 6. A slave may bow himself for fear of the whip; but the disposition of a son is to be affected with the offence done to a kind father. Many will seem very low under the rod of God, and the

apprehensions of his wrath, who are never touched with his love. They will be cast down under the sense of the evil their sin does to themselves, while the dishonour done to God by it lies far from their hearts.

4. Lastly, Let me exhort you to get and entertain a deep sense of sin on your Spirits. See your sins, and be duly affected with them, and be humbled for them. O how sad is it, that amongst our many thoughts, sin gets so few of them!

For motives to press this exhortation, consider,

1st, That the Lord is anew calling the land by his providence to be sensible of their sins, and to be humbled for them. The Lord took it not long ago as a brand out of the burning; but he is threatening to cast it into the fire again, by a foreign invasion.* For though we were delivered, yet the controversy remains still. We have not been thankful for our deliverance; Atheism, profanity, formality, contempt of the gospel, and a spirit of apostacy and declining from the Lord, and his work and way, wofully abound. How can we miss to fall at length!

2dly, Consider the present dispensation of providence towards this congregation, threatening to leave our house desolate. It fills the mouths of many with what is little worth; would to God it might fill your hearts and mine with a serious inquiry into the causes of it before the Lord. It speaks aloud, O that we were taking up the language of the threatening rod. The melancholy state of this congregation, in the time of the last desolation, needs not be forgot. It would become us all very well on this occasion, to consider what a jealous God we have to do with, and what entertainment has been given to the preached gospel; to lay our hands every one on our own mouths, and consider well what we have contributed to the bringing of the matter to this pass. By taking with our sin, and humbling ourselves befor the Lord, way might be made for the acceptance of prayer through Jesus Christ; and them that humble themselves God will exalt.

3dly, Consider, that however lightly your sins may sit on your spirits, they are a burden to the holy Spirit of God: Amos 2:13. "Behold," says the Lord, "I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves."

And we may be sure the Lord will ease himself of that burden sooner or later. And if it be not by our repentance and humiliation, it will be by his accomplishing his wrath on us: Is. 1:24. "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies." Therefore consider your ways in order to a returning to the Lord. The lighter that sin sits on us, it is the more grieving to the Spirit of the Lord.

Lastly, Consider, that without sense of sin there is no humiliation; that without humiliation there can be no repentance; and that without repentance there can be no escape from the wrath of God. "For except ye repent, ye shall perish." Insensibleness of sin, and the evil of it, locks up the heart in obduration and impenitency; and that will shut up the soul under wrath. But God loves the sensible humbled son: Jer. 31:20. "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord."

Secondly, In true humiliation there is a kindly sorrow for sin: Zech. 12:10, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." The soul is not only filled with remorse, but true grief, for offending a holy, gracious God. He grieved the Spirit in committing sin, his spirit is grieved in repenting of it. The hard heart is broken, the adamant heart dissolved into tears of godly sorrow, the rock is struck by the rod of the gospel, and the waters gush out. The way to Zion lies through the valley of Baca: Jer. 50:4, 5, "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." And it is the mourners for sin whom the Lord comforts with the consolations of his Spirit. This is that brokenness and contrition of heart, which God calls for, and takes so much pleasure in. This is the rending of the heart, which God requires, Joel 2:12, 13. This is godly sorrow, which hath these properties.

1. It is a sorrow for sin as sin; not only for the guilt of it, but the loathsomeness of it; not only for the ill it does to ourselves, but the dishonour and wrong it does to a holy gracious God, Psal. 51:4; Zech. 12:10. The penitent in his sorrow, goes farther than awakened reprobates, who seeing their souls ruined and dead, do put on their mournings. He grieves at the heart, because of the offence done to God, the defacing of his image, transgressing a holy and most just law, furnishing a spear and nails to pierce a Saviour.

2. It is an inward real sorrow. Not the hanging down of the head like a bulrush, Is. 58:5. Not a made sorrow in a disfigured countenance, which lies all in outward appearance. But it is a sorrow soaking into the soul, and piercing the very heart, Is. 61:3. And therefore it follows the man in secret, where no eye sees; making him mourn before the Lord, when the world knows nothing of it. For it ariseth from an inward principle.

3. It is a lively sorrow. The sorrow of the world worketh death. It stupifies a man, and takes heart and hand for duty from him. But the spiritual pangs of godly sorrow for sin quicken a man to his duty: 2 Cor. 7:11, "For behold, this self-same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!" It makes the man active in salvation-work. And the reason is, the one springs from slavish fear, which chills the soul, making it cold and stiff, and unfit for action; the other from love, which warms the heart, and disposeth it for action: Luke 7:47, "Her sins which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much."

4. It is an abiding sorrow. It is not a flash of an affection, which is deceitful, but a "spirit of heaviness," Is. 61:3. The sorrows of many are like a summer-shower, that wets the surface of the ground, but is presently dried up, ere it do any good. But godly sorrow is like that, Eccl. 7:3, "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." The soul, like Mary, mourns till it find the Lord, Lam. 3:49, 50. forecited. It may indeed remit of its degrees; but while sin abides, the spring of mourning abides too.

5. It is an universal sorrow. The true penitent heartily grieves for his own

sin, Psal. 38:18, and for the sin of others, Psal. 119:136. It is like the letting out of waters: it may begin at one sin, but it does not stop there, but goes through all known sin, Psal. 1:5. and unknown too, Psal. 19:12, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." They never truly mourn for one sin, that do not mourn for all: for that which moves sorrow in the repenting heart for one sin, is to be found in all sins, namely, its contrariety to the law and nature of God, the loathsomeness as well as danger of it. And hence, when once the floodgate of godly sorrow is opened, it overflows all; and the sweetest morsel becomes bitter.

6. It is deep sorrow. Peter repenting wept bitterly. He that would have a good crop, ploughs well; and he that would build surely, goes deep with the foundation. It was the want of depth of earth that was the ruin of the stony-ground hearers, Matt. 13:5. And deep digging was the safety of the house founded on a rock, Luke 6:48. This sorrow is a rending of the heart, Joel 2:13; a rending of it as the plough rends the earth, Jer. 4:3; a pricking and piercing of it as with daggers, swords, and spears, Acts 2:37, compared with John 19:34; a cutting it as with a knife, Jer. 4:4.

It is a question, Whether penitential sorrow exceeds all other sorrows for the comforts of this life, or not? If we measure by the moving of the heart and affections, it is evident, that at least always it doth not exceed other sorrows. But if we measure by the settled disposition of the heart, it is as evident that it does exceed them all. As the deepest waters ordinarily make least noise, so men will be more moved in a lesser joy and grief than in a greater; for they are but the lightest joys that move laughter, and oft-times the greatest sorrows are above tears. It settles more firmly, and continues more than any other sorrow whatsoever in the world.

7. Lastly, It is a heart purifying sorrow. It works repentance or forsaking of sin: 2 Cor. 7:10. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of." True mourning and turning are inseparable companions; though there is a mourning for sin, that is not deep enough to turn up the love of sin by the root. True sorrow in the heart is a spring, which as it runneth will work out sin, as to the love, habitual practice, and dominion of it, as a spring works out the mud thrown into it.

USE. 1. There is no repenting with a hale heart, and without repentance no salvation. People must either be broken for their sins in a way of mourning, or God will break them for them in a way of judgment. There are many stout hearts in our day, that will boldly outface challenges from the word and their own consciences, without either breaking or bowing. But let such remember, that there is a day coming when God will make the stoutest heart to tremble, and the heart of adamant to fly in a thousand pieces, Psal. 2:9. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

2. How far must they be from humiliation, that sin deliberately, glory in their shame, and rejoice in ungodly courses and practices! I think providences and ordinances are hardening to many in our day; they are not bettered by them, and therefore they are hardened and made worse under them. Our penny weddings and set drinkings, leaving such a stench behind them, and attended with before unheard of profanity, are speaking evidences of this. Are these Christian methods to help poor people? Will God accept the gift, where such a fat sacrifice is offered to the devil? Is that charity for which drinking must open men's hearts and hands to give? If some methods be not fallen on to prevent these things, they will bring wrath on the congregation.* I appeal to the consciences of all sober persons, if it looked not judgment-like, that in that very time when abroad a design was managing to lay the congregation desolate,* at home many were met for a set drinking, carried on to a monstrous height of profanity, in the day and in the night. It becomes us all to mourn for this, lest we involve ourselves in the guilt. And particularly I warn all such as were any way partakers of that scandalous riot, to repent, lest wrath break out upon them. For it is a fearful thing to stand exposed to the lash of these threatenings, Hab. 2:15, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink: that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness." Is. 22:12, 13, 14, "And in that day did the Lord of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you, till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts."

3. The sorrow of many for their sins, will tend to no good account before the Lord. Few have any remarkable sorrow for their sins at all; but amongst those whose hearts are really grieved and pained for their sin, how few are there that have any right sorrow? The danger of it, the disadvantage by it, the shame of it before the world, pains them a little; but the dishonour done to God by it touches them not effectually. And so their sorrow will be but the beginning of hell, not of repentance.

4. Lastly, Be exhorted to mourn for sin. Labour to get your hearts affected with this mournful object, and be not strangers to this exercise. The sins and threatened judgments of this day call for it; and it is the way to attain particular safety in common calamity: Ezek. 9:4, "And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." If we were more in the duty of mourning, we would share more of the gospel-comforts, Matt. 5:4, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." And the more of the Spirit one has, the more will he be taken up that way.

Thirdly, In true humiliation there is a holy shame upon the account of sin before the Lord: Rom. 6:21, "What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." The remembrance of sin fills the penitent with shame and blushing: hence says Ezra, chap. 9:6, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." Shame was never known in the world, till sin entered; yet sometimes sin comes to such a height with sinners, that it quite banishes shame: but the case of such is very desperate, Jer. 3:9. "Thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed." Shame then is the remains of virtue in a sinner, to which whoso are lost, all are lost to all good, Is. 3:9. "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not." Now, the grace of God awakens this shame, and sanctifies it in the penitent soul, so that he hangs down his head before the Lord, as ashamed of his way and heart.

There are four things occasion shame, and

meet here.

1. Nakedness causeth shame. Hence said Adam to the Lord, Gen. 3:10, "I heard thy voice in the garden: and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." Sin strips the sinners of their beautiful garments, takes away the glory of the rational creature, and leaves them without a covering before the eyes of a holy God. The penitent sees this, and is ashamed; and so the publican, cannot lift up his eyes to heaven, but smites on his breast, as if he would wound the breast that sin bred in, which has brought him to this shameful case.

2. Pollution and defilement, for that makes one loathsome to others, Job 9:31, "Thou shalt plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." Sin defiles the soul, takes away and mars all its beauty, and deforms it in the sight of God. And the penitent sees this, and is ashamed, Is. 64:6, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Never was a man that had been plunged over head and ears in a mire, more ashamed to come before others in that case, than the penitent is ashamed to shew his face before God.

3. Disappointment of raised expectations, Jer. 2:36, 37. The sinner in his impenitent state, looked for his happiness and satisfaction in sinful courses. But when his heart is touched, he is ashamed; for he finds, that instead of bread expected, he has got a stone; instead of fish, a serpent. He finds, that he has been courting his own death and ruin; and that from the wall he leaned on there has come forth a serpent and bit him. And hence is that reflection, Rom. 6:21, "What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

4. Discovering of one's reproach, Jer. 2:26, "Sin is a reproach to any people." In the impenitent state the soul's reproach is hid to it; but when grace touches the heart, and the Lord brings the sinner's ways to mind, lays his sins in broad-band before him, how can he miss to be ashamed? In a special manner, a conviction of base ingratitude fills one with shame, as to be convicted of designs against him who had saved our life. And thus the goodness of God duly considered, fills the penitent with shame

and blushing, while he thinks what an ungrateful wretch he has been: Jer. 3:25, "We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.

USE. 1. Shamelessness in sin is a badge of impenitency, and therefore a forerunner of destruction, Jer. 6:15. Phil. 3:10. A forehead of brass is a sign the heart is of stone. Impudence in sin argues a filthy heart, an obstinate disposition, and a seared conscience. And such are a stage beyond others from the kingdom of God. What hopes can they have of the glory of heaven, that glory in their shame?

2. We see then that sin will bring shame sooner or later, here or hereafter. As for them that live and die without repentance, their shame is sure, and they will be covered with it, before the great congregation of heaven and earth at the last day, and they shall never recover their countenance: Dan. 12:2, "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to shame and everlasting contempt." And if people be recovered by repentance, they will be filled with shame before the Lord, even holy shame. But whatever shame men have, it is no holy shame that keeps them from glorifying God by taking shame to themselves when called thereto; for no grace of God keeps folk back from duty, Josh. 7:19. Common discretion teaches, that one ashamed of an injury done to the honour of another, cannot look him in the face but with shame, till he has done what he can to repair that honour.

3. Lastly, The penitent soul is an ingenuous soul, and heartily at odds with sin. For such an one will be ashamed before God, of what the world cannot tax him with. Many may be sorry for sin before God, because of the terrible consequences of it which they apprehend, who yet are not ashamed before him, because they see not the evil that is in itself. But it argues a child-like disposition, to be heartily ashamed of secret sins before the Lord.

Fourthly, In true humiliation there is self-loathing and abhorrence: Ezek. 36:31, "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations." The penitent not only loathes his

sin, but himself for his sin. He cries out with Job, chap. 40:4, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." Repentance sets a man at variance with himself. He sees his ugly face in the glass of God's law, Christ's sufferings, and the Lord's goodness, and he loathes himself. This self-loathing manifests itself,

1. In the low and mean thoughts the penitent justly entertains of himself. True penitents see such vileness in themselves, as makes them give a very mean account of themselves. Abraham owned himself to be dust and ashes; Jacob, less than all the mercies of God; David, a worm, and not a man; Asaph, as a beast before the Lord; Agur, more brutish than any; the centurion, unworthy that Christ should come under his roof: Paul, one born out of due time, the least of the apostles, nay, less than the least of all saints, nay, the chief of sinners; and the prodigal son, Luke 15:19, reckoned himself no more worthy to be called a son, but to be made a hired servant.

2. In the penitent's being heartily out with himself upon the account of his sin: Job 42:6, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." As one cannot with any pleasure touch himself, that has filth thrown on him, but his very heart stands at himself; so it is in spiritual self-loathing. He looks on himself as an ugly spectacle. He not only has nothing to say in defence of himself, but with indignation he rejects all the shifts and excuses for it, which he was satisfied with before: Luke 18:13. "The publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

3. In holy revenge, 2 Cor. 7:11. He that was going on in sin before, is now divided against himself; so that the devil's kingdom of sin in him must needs go to ruin. He acts the part of an accuser, advocate, and judge, against himself; yea in some sort lashes himself for his sinful heart and life. Hence we find the humbled sinner,

1st, Smiting on his breast, Luke 18:13, as it were thereby declaring, that he deserves to be struck at the heart, and die for his transgression; that within him is the cause of all his sin and sorrows, he may thank himself for all; the source and spring of all is the corrupt heart.

2dly, Smiting on his thigh, Jer. 31:19, as if he would thereby declare, that he would be willing to take vengeance on the feet that carried him out of the way of God; that he is filled with indignation against himself, for his unaccountable practices, saying, What have I done? what a wretched sinner have I been?

There are these five things that stir up this self-loathing especially, in the penitent soul.

(1.) The remarkable blots, and signal miscarriages in his way, that deeply wound and defile the conscience: like Peter's denying his Master, which made him weep bitterly, when he came to himself. These in a peculiar manner cover the soul with confusion, and fill it with self-abhorrence. And hence sometimes repentance begins at some such thing, from whence it spreads to the whole body of sin: Acts 2:36, 37, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

(2.) The fulness of sin seen in the soul: Is. 64:6, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." The penitent being made sensible of his soul's case, sees the leprosy spread over the whole man, his mind under much darkness, his will rebellious against the will of God, his affections disordered, his whole nature corrupted, the seed of every sin in it; so that he concludes, that his heart is full of iniquity, and that the lusts that are hatched there, their name may be Legion. His life is a loathsome spectacle of the outbreakings and workings of that corruption. So that he sees that "from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is no soundness; and therefore he loathes himself."

(3.) The pollution cleaving to his duties: Is. 64:6. forecited. While he sees how the running sore of his natural corruption drops on all his holy things, and defiles them, how can he choose but loath himself? He sees his best works are like a moth-eaten garment, full of holes; never a prayer, nor confession made, but there are provocations against the Lord

in them. His mournings for sin must be mourned over, because of the woful defects thereof; while he goes to mend one hole, still he is sure to strike out another. Thus the penitent is in his own eyes like Job, who had not whole fingers to dress his sores with; so he abhors himself.

(4.) The aggravations of sin, Luke 15:18. A sight of these makes sin look like an opened stinking sore, wherein each of them contributes to make it more and more loathsome. When the penitent considers with what bent of affection he has sinned, the light, the many mercies, vows, and resolutions, &c. he has sinned against, he cannot but loath himself as a wretched self-destroyer, as an ungrateful miscreant, and as a beast before the Lord.

(5.) Instability in any thing that is good: Hos. 6:4, "Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." Wavering hearts, and wavering hands, are very humbling to a soul truly touched. A good frame is a rare hour, and stays but a short while. How often are resolutions fairly taken up, and begin to bud in endeavours for practice, that yet are quickly let fall again? How often do men relapse into the same sins they have sometimes had made very bitter to them? There is nothing more apt than this to stir up self-abhorrence.

USE 1. Self-conceit is a need-nail to a state of impenitency: Rev. 3:17, "Thou [the church of Laodicea] sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." No repentance can be where there is no humiliation, and there can be no humiliation while people are puffed up with a conceit of themselves. Publicans and harlots will enter into the kingdom of heaven, before such self-conceited professors. Whenever the Spirit of the Lord takes a dealing with such persons, and discovers to them the signal miscarriages in their life, the fulness of sin, &c. that swelling conceit of sweet self will fall away, as ever the snow melts in a sunshine day. They that look on themselves as among the chief of saints, will see themselves the chief of sinners.

2. Look into yourselves, if ye would loathe yourselves and repent. Hence said Isaiah, chap. 6:5, "Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips." Things may be going all wrong in the house, and the master

not know it, while he is a stranger at home. Many a poor soul is pining away in its iniquity, and running with loathsome spiritual sores, threatening its ruin, while in the mean-time they are mightily in love with themselves, and fond of their own condition, like a miserable man that is happy in a dream. But heavy will the awakening of such be.

3. Lastly, Sin must needs be a very loathsome thing in the eyes of a penitent, since it makes him loath himself. Alas! many times we love that in ourselves, which we loath in others. But when one loathes himself for his sin against a holy, gracious God, it is an argument that that soul is heartily out with sin.

Fifthly, and Lastly, In true humiliation there is a penitent confession of sin. Hence is that exhortation, Jer. 3:13, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God," &c. This is the way that penitent sinners have always sought pardon and ease to their consciences in: Psal. 32:5, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Confession of sin is the vomit of sin, whereby the sweet morsel is cast up again; and it is the vent of real sorrow, shame, and self-abhorrence. And when the heart is loosed to it, the man becomes like the fish that is boiled in the water which it swimm'd in.

This confession is to be according to the nature of the offence. If the sin be a secret one, a confession to God in secret is sufficient. If it be a private offence, the confession is to be so too: Jam. 5:16, "Confess your faults one to another." If it be a public offence, giving public scandal, the confession is to be public also: 1 Tim. 5:20, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." So penitent David left his confession on record, for the church's edification. And so did the apostle Paul, 1 Tim. 1:13. And the reason is evident, since by sin God's honour is impaired, and we can repair it no other way, but by confessing it with sorrow, shame, &c. the confession must be according to the nature of the offence, else the wrong done to the honour of God is not repaired by it. And in the private and public confession God is our party, and not men only, as well as in the secret one.

Now, confession is a necessary part of humiliation. If the hard heart be loosed to be truly humbled for sin, it follows of course, that the tongue will be loosed to confess it. Hence confession is put for the whole of humiliation, yea of repentance, Hos. 5:15, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence." 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful, and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Confession of sin hath two parts.

1. Self-accusing. God has given a law, the sinner has broke it; the penitent confesseth his transgression with shame and sorrow, to the honour of the lawgiver. He cannot hide it, he dares not deny it; his soul is humbled, and therefore he confesseth it: Psal. 51:3. "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." He approves of the law as holy, just, and good, and disapproves of the transgression. Thus the morsel that was sweet in the mouth, turning bitter in the belly is vomited up.

2. Self-condemning. Hence said the returning prodigal, Luke 15:18, 19. "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." The penitent looks to the law, and the demerit of his sin, reads his own doom, and passeth sentence on himself. He owns that all the evil he smarts under for the present, is just and righteous with God; Dan. 9:14. "Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doth: for we obeyed not his voice." If his broken bones pain him, he will own that it is just. If his sin find him, so that he read it in his punishment, he will acknowledge that it is a just contrivance; and that he deserves to sink under eternal wrath for it, saying with the afflicted church, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not," Lam. 3:22. He will say, that God may justly take the filthy garments of his sin, coyer them with brimstone, wrap him up in them, and cast him into the pit, Psal. 51:4.

Now, this confession should be sincere, full, very particular, free, and accompanied with forsaking.*

USE. 1. Hiding and covering sin, and refusing to confess it in the way that God calls for a confession, is a sign of an heart not humbled for it: Prov. 28:13. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth

and forsaketh them, shall have mercy." Many in our day, falling into public scandals by their works of darkness, put on a forehead of brass, and refuse to confess them for the glory of God, cheating themselves with that, that they will confess their sins to God but not to men. But little do they consider, that by that means they put a bar in their own way to pardon, while by resolute lying they cover one sin with another, and by refusing to honour God at his call. Nor do they consider the weight of that word standing in the way of their peace with God, while they refuse to remove the scandal, that so they may be reconciled to the church: Matth. 18:17, 18. "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." It is true, it is but a word; yea but it is God's word, that will be more terrible to an awakened conscience than any punishment men can inflict.

2. They that shun to see their sins, that they may confess them, cannot repent of them: Jer. 9:6. 7. "Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit, through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, behold I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?" It is true, there are sins which we cannot so see in ourselves as to confess them particularly; but in that case the soul does not refuse conviction, as Psal. 19:12. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." But when one keeps the sweet morsel under his tongue, and has no will to see the evil of it, lest he should be obliged to confess it before the Lord, this is quite another case, and speaks a deceit of the heart, holding fast sin, and refusing to let it go.

3. Lastly Labour to be sincere, full, free, &c. in confessing your sins. We are in debt to the justice of God, we cannot pay our debt; let us confess our debt, to prevent a pursuit, and that we may be capable to pray for forgiveness of it, which otherwise we cannot be. O, if we had a due sense and sorrow for our sins, this would, like an overflowing flood, bear down before them all those things which now hamper us in confessing our sins.

Thus far of humiliation, the first part of repentance.

The returning of the soul unto God from sin

2dly, I come now to the second thing, viz. the returning of the soul unto God from sin. This is the completing of repentance. Whatever sense of sin, shame, sorrow, &c. for it one have, if it end not in returning to God, it is naught. It is under this notion that repentance is so often called for in the Old Testament, Return, Turn ye. And it may be well put for the whole of repentance: for,

First, The impenitent sinner is out of himself, out of his wits; but by repentance he returns and comes to himself. Hence we read, that the prodigal, Luke 15:17. came to himself. There is never a soul that is brought to repentance, but there is as great a change upon him, as on a madman that is returned to his sound mind. He has quite other notions of things than he had before; he looks upon his sinful courses as the effects of spiritual frenzy. This is the first part of repentance, namely, humiliation.

Secondly, The impenitent sinner is out of his place, like a wandering bird: Prov. 27:8, "As a bird that wandereth from her nest: so is a man that wandereth from his place." And so the soul is out of its rest, and out of its duty. Adam shook himself and all his race out of their rest, and out of that they wander up and down in the devil's common. Repentance is the sinner's returning to his place again, to take up his place again in God's house among his servants. This is the second part of repentance. And whenever the soul comes to itself, it will come to God again. The grace of God finds the sinner, as the angel found Hagar, Gen. 16:8, 9; and as Paul found Onesimus, Philemon ver. 10, 11, 12. Now, in this returning, according to the two terms,

I. There is a turning from sin: Ezek. 14:6, "Repent, and turn from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations." 2 Tim. 2:19, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity." Psal. 34:14, "Depart from evil." The sinner changes his course, and gives up with his former lusts. The impenitent sinner is a misled traveller, who finding himself wrong, will go no farther on, but leave the wrong way, and

seek the right one. To repent of sin, and yet continue in the practice of it, is a contradiction. No; the true penitent ceases from sin, he gives over his work in the service of sin and lusts, Is. 1:16. He forsakes his former ways, chap. 55:7. And though sin remains in him, yet it reigns not as before. If the question be, How the penitent turns from sin, since he is daily offending, and sin abides in him, while he is here? I answer,

1. True penitents turn from it in their heart and affection. There is a bond in the impenitent state, whereby the sinner's heart is knit to his lusts, as ever the sucking child's heart is to the breast, which he can by no means want. Repentance looseth that bond: Rom. 7:24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" So though sin cleaves to the soul, yet the soul cleaves not to it as formerly. It hangs on him, it is true, but only as the chains on the captive, which are his burden; as the grave-clothes on Lazarus raised, which he is working to put off. Thus repentance makes a change of the heart. And,

1st, His esteem of sin is turned to despite. His judgment is set against it: Is. 2:20, "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made, each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats." What he approved before, now he condemns; for the scales are turned, and what was highest before is now lowest. Grace and holiness get the ascendant of sin and wickedness in his esteem. Those he counted most happy sometimes, because they took the greatest liberty in sinful courses, he now accounts most miserable, as slaves to sin, and in the road to destruction; and therefore takes up Joshua's resolution, chap. 24:15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

2dly, His love of sin is turned to hatred of it: Ezek. 14:6. forecited. Psal. 119:113, "I hate vain thoughts." Ver. 104, "I hate every false way." It was good in his eyes before, better than the favour of God, and communion with him. He knew nothing good or desirable but the world and lusts, and what might satisfy the corrupt cravings of the soul. But repentance turns his soul against it, and he hates it as an evil thing, as the worst of evils, worse than suffering and afflictions. Were he left to his choice without fear of punishment, he would never choose it; for he hates it for itself, its contrariety to God's nature and will.

3dly, His liking of sin is turned to loathing of it. Hence repentance is called a casting away of sin, Ezek. 18:31. as one would do some filthy thing that he cannot endure to have near him. For the penitent looks not only on sin as an ill thing, but as a loathsome thing which his heart stands at, Is. 30:22. And this is the ground of that self-loathing which the penitent is filled with.

Lastly, His cleaving to sin is turned into a longing to be rid of it, Rom. 7:24. The man longs to be free from it, as ever the prisoner for the opening of his prison-doors, the captive for his being set at liberty, and the dropping off of his chains. It is a burden on his back, which he groans under; a sickness to his soul, that he would fain have the cure of. And therefore Christ with all his salvation is lovely in his eyes; his sanctifying Spirit, as well as his justifying blood.

2. They turn from it in their life and conversation. He that stood in the way of sinners before, now leaves it, when once the grace toucheth the heart, Is. 55:7. The penitent not only has a pure heart, but clean hands. Repentance will make a visible change on one's life: for it sets men to mortify the members of the body of death, Rom. 8:13; to refuse compliance with lusts and temptations, Tit. 2:12; to starve the lusts of the flesh, Rom. 13:14; and to nail the body of sin with all its members to the cross of Christ, Gal. 5:24. And,

1st, They turn from the gross pollutions of the outward man, Psal. 24:3, 4. An elect soul before conversion may be a habitual profane person, as well as others: but if he may be so after conversion, where is the difference betwixt Christ's sheep and the devil's goats? It is true, they may make gross slips, as David and Peter did: but they do not lie in them, they recover again by repentance. But a profane life is the mark of an impenitent state, Gal. 5:21. And it is a wonder how men can pretend to repentance, while they live in the habitual practice of drunkenness, swearing, sabbath-breaking, lying, dishonesty, and other gross pollutions of the outward man, where one would think the profane devil is not so much as gone out, far less cast out.

2dly, They become tender with respect to the sins of common infirmity, labouring to make conscience of their words and actions, Acts. 24:16.

What others account light of, they will stand at a distance from, as having felt the smart of sin; and that not only before the world, but even in secret where no eye sees but God's. They will stand aloof from temptations, and even from the appearance of evil: and wherein they are overtaken through the frailty of the flesh, they will mourn for it before the Lord.

3. In respect both of heart and life. They turn against sin to oppose and resist it, in the inner and outward man, as taking now the contrary side to the devil, the world, and the flesh. The spiritual combat is begun in the true penitent, Gal. 5:17. The war with sin is proclaimed and begun, which never ends till death. They revolt from, cast off the yoke, and stand up against their old masters, 2 Tim. 2:19.

1st, They resist the motions of sin in their hearts, and endeavour after heart purity, as well as life purity: Psal. 119:113. "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love." The Pharisaical professor may cleanse the outside of the platter, while he is little troubled about its being within full of ravening. But the hardest work a gracious soul has against sin, is with the heart, with what the world neither sees nor can see in him. And the guiding of the heart is the hardest piece of management in his religion.

2dly, They resist the outbreakings of sin in the life: Psal. 18:23. "I was also upright before him: and I kept myself from mine iniquity." They see they are in a world where snares are thick laid; they see their own weakness, and how ready they are to be entrapped, and therefore labour to be on their guard, lest they be carried away with the stream. Hence they are afraid of temptations, and therefore labour to shut their eyes from beholding vanity; sometimes fearing to fall one day by the hand of temptation, and therefore longing to be beyond the reach of sin.

4. And Lastly, Because their turning from sin is never perfect till death, therefore so long they are ay turning, and renewing their repentance, John 13:10, They are not true penitents who look on it as the work of some days or weeks, at the soul's first conversion to God. A true penitent will ay be repenting, as long as he is sinning. He sees that he is often falling into the mire, and therefore must be often washing; daily contracting new debt, therefore must be daily crying for forgiveness. And the more heinous his after miscarriages be, the longer he lies secure, his

repentance will be the more bitter when he riseth up again.

Now, this turning from sin has these properties.

1. It is voluntary, as springing from an inward principle set up in the heart against sin: Job 42:6. "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The penitent does not only cast away sin as a live coal out of his bosom, that would burn him, but as some loathsome thing, that would defile him. Some turn from their sins against their will; they part with their sin as Phaltiel did with his unlawful wife Michal, 2 Sam. 3:15. They dwell in the tents of sin, till the rigging-tree break, and there is no abiding longer there for them; they part with their sins, as the covetous man with his riches at death, when, nill he will he, he must let it go. But true repentance is a turning from sin out of choice: and forced reformation neither is sincere nor will last, Psal. 78:34.

2. It is sincere, as being a turning from sin as sin, a turning from it because it is a turning away from God, a turning from it for its contrariety to God's holy nature and law, Luke 15:18. The man leaves his sin, not for the inferior motives only of danger to himself by it, but from the higher motives, namely, because it is offensive to God, dishonours his Son, grieves his Spirit, transgresses his law, and defaces his image. If your turning from sin proceed not from these motives, God will never regard it as acceptable in his sight. It is done for self not for God; and God will never be the reward of that work whereof he is not the end.

Question. What should one do with respect to those sins he has turned from, from these lower motives of self, or those sins that have left him, before he left them? Answer. Do not turn back to them; but do with them as they use to do with those that die by their own hands, bury them disgracefully, and throw stones on their grave. Look on them and loathe them, rise higher in your motives to forsake them than before. Ye left them for your own sake, put them further away for the sake of God's honour. Set them before your eyes again, and see how provoking they have been to a holy God, how dishonouring to his Son, &c. repent and

mourn over them on these accounts. And then your turning from them will be sincere.

3. This turning from sin is universal: Psal. 119:104, "I hate every false way." Ezek. 18:31, "Cast away from you all your transgressions." Whoever turns sincerely from one sin, turns from all known sin whatsoever; because the reason that moves the true penitent, is to be found in all as well as any one. Partial reformation is not sincere; for God requires the whole heart, and will not be served by halves. Every sin is a deadly wound to the soul; and therefore though many be cured, if but one remain uncured, the man is a dead man by that one: Matth. 5:29. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." A drop of poison will make a whole cup of good wine deadly, and one sin retained will render all other reformation naught; as Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal's concubine was the death of all his seventy sons by his wives except one.

4. It is speedy, without delays: Psal. 119:60, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." As long as a man is undetermined to turn from his sin, or delays to do it, his repentance is not sincere. It is an evidence that the lance of humiliation has not gone deep enough, when the filthy matter does not presently spring forth. A man whose heart is truly touched with a penitent sense of sin, will delay as long the flinging a burning coal out of his bosom, as the casting away of his sin. No: when it goes to the quick, it must off presently; though it were an offending right hand, it must be cut off presently; though it were an offending right eye, it must be presently plucked out.

5. Lastly, This turning from sin is thorough; it makes complete work evangelically, though not legally. It was a flaw in Judah's repentance, that she turned not unto the Lord with her whole heart, but feignedly. Jer. 3:10; and in Ephraim's that he mixed himself among the people, and was a cake not turned, Hos. 7:8. Men turn thoroughly from sin in these four respects.

1st, The true penitent sticks at no known sin, but turns from all without exception, even those sins that are dearest and nearest to them, and

which they have been most easily beset with, Heb. 12:1, "I kept myself from mine iniquity," Psal. 18:23. This turning from sin is never thorough, till it reach the sin that is the sin of one's constitution, the sin that is the sin which most attends his calling, stations, and relations wherein he stands; the sin that he has most frequent and strongest temptations unto. That is the predominant evil which the heart must be loosed from, the right hand and right eye sin, the one thing lacking, which mars all other things, Mark 7:21. Unless there be a turning from, a warring with this, it is all wrong; though indeed they may sometimes lose as well as win in the battle.

2dly, He turns from that which is the ensnaring hook in any of his sins, the handle whereby it caught hold of him, Psal. 131:2. Pharaoh would have been content to let Israel go, so be they would have left their little ones, which he was sure would have brought them back again. And Satan will let people turn from sin for a time, while they retain a reigning love to the bewitching thing that is in a sinful course. For while it is so, the tree is indeed cut, but the root is left in the ground, and will grow again.

3dly, He turns from the occasions of sin, Ezek. 14:6. Wherefore David prays, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;" and Solomon gives advice in case of drunkenness, Prov. 23:31, "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. It is vain to pretend to repent and turn from sin, while men do not watch against the occasions of it, and wrestle against them, as against the sin itself. They that in a siege mind really to defend the town, they will defend the outworks as long as they can; wilfully to let the enemy in there, speaks treachery. Much lies in this point for reformation: Prov. 4:14, 15, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

Lastly, He turns from the enjoyment of the fruits of his sin. To pretend to turn from sin, and yet to feed sweetly on the fruits of it, is an absolutely vain pretence. When sin itself is truly quit, the profit of it is given up with. This the prophet teacheth, Is. 33:15, "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil," &c. This is so

evident, that even Judas in his repentance, such as it was, could no longer brook the reward of his iniquity, Matt. 27:3. A philosopher had bought a pair of shoes, but had not paid the price of them; the tradesman died; the philosopher thought the money was gained; but his conscience caused him bring back the money, and throw it into the shop. "Take it," says he, "thou art alive to me, while dead to all the world besides." Hence two things belong to this part of repentance.

(1.) Restitution, or restoring the thing again, which has been sinfully and wrongously taken away from others. He that can do it, and will not, cannot repent of that sin; for he wilfully feeds on the fruit of his sin; and that is a continuing in it inconsistent with turning from it. And since there is no pardon of that sin which a man does not repent of, it is a maxim in divinity, *Non remittitur nisi restituitur*, namely, to a person that is able, but unwilling to do it. Hence Zaccheus proves himself a true penitent by restitution, Luke 19:8. And one may as well think a thief may repent in the time he is feeding on what he has stolen from his neighbour, as that one may repent of what in other cases he has unjustly taken from his neighbour, and can, but will not restore. When lovers part, they give back their tokens; and so when a sinner parts with his sin, he restores all that he had unjustly taken from others.

(2.) Reparation as far as may be, in those cases wherein proper restitution cannot be made: as in the case of unjust wounding our neighbour's honour, reputation, peace, quiet, and contentment, &c. Hence is that exhortation, Jam. 5:16, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." One may as well pretend to repent and go on in sin, as wilfully to refuse this and repent of the sin. The like reparation is necessary in those scandalous sins, whereby the honour of God is impaired before the world, religion wounded, and exposed to the contempt and scorn of profane men, and the hearts of the godly saddened. To repent of such sins, and yet wilfully to refuse the way whereby the honour of God, and the credit of religion, might in some measure be repaired, is impossible. One may as well pretend to repent of his wounding a man, while he stands looking on him bleeding to death, and will not, though it is in his power, bind up his wounds.

USE. 1. Hence we may see what is the proper way to follow out the design

of our congregational fast; namely, to turn from our sins which have provoked the Lord to wrath against us. For humiliation without reformation can do little service. Let each of us lay our hands to our heart, and consider what has been the coal that we have cast in to raise this flame, and heartily turn from these things. If so, we would readily wear with thankfulness the blessings obtained by prayers.

2. All the trouble, grief, and sorrow that men have for their sin is little worth, if it issue not in turning from sin. For men to be sighing, but still going backward, is not repentance, but of that sort which may be carried on in hell, through eternity. If turning be not joined to mourning for sin, it is unsanctified sorrow, that will neither be acceptable to God, nor profitable to our souls.

3. Turning from sin outwardly, while the heart remains glued to it, is not repentance either. It is an easy thing to reform outwardly; but the great business lies in getting the heart weaned from the world and lusts. If we would be satisfied as to the truth of our repentance, we must likewise examine the motives prevailing with us to turn from sin; for the mean and low motives that rise no higher than ourselves, our own advantage, ease, safety, &c. will never denominate us true penitents.

4. Repentance is not the work of a day or a year, but the work of our whole lives. For so turning from sin is. Sin follows us, while we flee from it; often does it overtake us, and so we must renew our flight. The whole life of a Christian is a war; in that war are many battles, sometimes the Christian gains the day, and sometimes he loses. If he lose, he must renew the battle; if he win, he must pursue the victory, and lay his account with a new engagement. The great comfort is, that though he may lose a battle, yet he shall be victorious in the war: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under his feet shortly," Rom. 16:20.

5. Lastly, See here the necessity of turning from sin. "Except ye repent," says the text, "ye shall all likewise perish." Now, if ye do not turn from sin, ye do not repent; therefore if ye turn not from it by repentance, ye shall perish. Our sins or our souls must go. Turn, or burn in the fire of God's wrath, is the choice. Let us then return speedily and thoroughly from all our iniquities, so shall they not be our ruin.

II. In repentance there is a returning unto God: Hos. 6:1, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord." This is the term to which the sinner comes back. Sin is a departing from God, repentance is a coming back to him again. It is a coming back, like that of a runaway servant to his master, returning to his place and duty in the family. Sin carried away mankind from God two ways.

1. Sin carried men away from God as a portion wherein to rest. He is all-sufficient to himself and to his creatures, and none but he is so. Sin carried man away from God to the creatures for happiness and satisfaction: hence says Jehovah, Jer. 2:13, "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."* There he seeks a rest to his heart. By faith man returns to God as a portion, unites with him again through Christ, and takes up his everlasting rest in him. Thus he returns as the dove to the ark, Is. 60:3, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"

2. Sin carried man away from God as a Lord and Master, to whom he owes obedience. In this respect man returns to God by repentance, returning to his duty, Psal. 119:59, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies;" as Hagar was by the angel sent back to Sarah, Gen. 16:9. Men turning from God, turn their backs on his laws, and make their own lusts their laws; but the repenting sinner turns back to the laws of God, Psal. 119:59, forecited. He has slipped his neck out of the yoke of the commands of Christ, but he comes and takes it on again, never to throw it off more, Matth. 11:29. He has gone off the road, the strait way; but he comes back, and bids an eternal farewell to the broad way. And there is here,

1st, A return of the soul to God himself, 1 Kings 18:37, consisting in the heart's turning to the loving and liking of the Lord as a Lord and Master. Sinners departing from God, not only dislike their service, but the Master and his house: Luke 19:14, "His citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." They are filled with prejudices against him, there is a natural aversion in the heart to him, they cannot away with subjection to him. Hence "they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy

ways," Job 21:14. But in repentance that aversion is cured, and the soul inclines and moves towards him in heart and affections. This consists in three things.

(1.) The soul is brought to esteem the Lord worthy to be served and pleased in all things. The name of God is to the penitent a worthy name, Jam. 2:7. The soul sees the transcendent glory and excellency of God, worthy of all adoration and obedience; and so slights and disdains all other masters, as unworthy of the service of an immortal soul.

(2.) The soul chooseth him as its only Lord and Master, saying, as in Is. 26:13, "O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." This was Joshua's choice, chap. 24:15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The enlightened mind beholds his glory, the glory and excellency of himself, his image, laws, ordinances, and service; and the renewed will consents and cleaves to him. It has tried many masters, "serving divers lusts," Tit. 3:3; but could never have satisfaction in the service of any of them, and therefore says, as Hos. 2:7, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now."

(3.) The soul looks upon the service of God as its great happiness. Hence said the prodigal, when he came to himself, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger? Luke 15:17. And therefore the saints are found declaring them happy who are most employed in his service, as the queen of Sheba said of Solomon's servants: Psal. 65:4, "Blessed is the man whom thou choolest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts." And 84:4, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee." And till the soul come to this, to account the Lord's service the only true freedom and happiness, though they may take up his service, they will not abide with it, because they do not like their Master.

2dly, There is in this returning a return of the soul to its duty to God. Hence said Saul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6. Whoever returns to God, comes home as a servant to enter to work: for idlers about God's house may be nominal servants, but real ones they cannot be. God's servants have higher relations which they stand in to

him; but all of them have duty annexed to them. Are they married to Christ? they must bring forth fruit, Rom. 7:4. Are they friends? they must do whatsoever he commands them, John 15:14. See Mal. 1:6. Now, the penitent returns to his duty in these two respects.

(1.) The penitent returns to his duty in his heart. He is (1.) reconciled to the whole law of God, and the whole yoke of Christ, so far as it is known to him to be his law and yoke, Psal. 119:6, "I have respect unto all thy commandments." He has a love and liking of the duties of piety towards God, and righteousness towards men. Though there remain in him a contradicting principle, yet he can say, as Rom. 7:22, "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man." The heart-enmity against the law and the power of godliness is removed, and nothing is so desirable to him as to be holy as God is holy. (2.) He has a full and fixed purpose of new obedience: Psal. 119:57, "O Lord, I have said, that I would keep thy words." Ver. 112, "I have inclined mine ear to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end." He returns with a purpose never to be what he has been; to pursue holiness, to enter upon, and keep the way of duty, whatever be the hardships and difficulties he may meet with in it. And this purpose is for to-day, not for to-morrow only; not to delay a minute, but presently to fall in with every known duty, as knowing there is no time for delaying.

(2.) The penitent returns to his duty in both heart and life. He is brought to sincere endeavours after new obedience: 2 Cor. 7:11, "Behold, this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! in all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." Purposes without endeavours are but fair blossoms without fruit, which will never prove a penitent. If the lame man be cured, though not perfectly cured, he will rise and walk as he can. It is true, while here we can do nothing perfectly well; but the true penitent will endeavour to do all, and aim at no less than perfection. Hence said Paul, "I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," Phil. 3:14. So the penitent returning to his duty,

[1.] Returns to the practice of every known duty. Hence said David, "I have respect unto all thy commandments," Psal. 119:6. He labours to

know what is duty, and is willing to know it; and when known, endeavours to perform it. He puts hand to external and internal obedience; to serve God in heart and life too; to perform his duty to God and to his neighbour; personal and relative, secret, private, and public.

[2.] Returns to spirituality in every duty: Phil. 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."* The true penitent will not sist in the carcase of duties, but will endeavour to get in to those unseen things where lies the life and soul of duties; namely, to have his heart imbued with love to God as the principle of his obedience, touched with regard to the honour of God as his end, raised above selfish ends and designs, and performing all in faith, leaning on the Lord for strength.

Now, this returning to the Lord is,

1. A sincere returning, not feigned and hypocritical, with the whole heart, Jer. 3:10. Hypocrites are said to have a heart and a heart, a divided heart, one for God, and another for their lusts. But the Lord says in this case, If ye take me, let these go away. For no man can serve two masters. It is a returning to him to abide with him for ever, as Onesimus to Philemon, ver. 15. The penitent, like the servant under the law, his ear is nailed to God's door-posts, to serve him for ever. To return for a time is naught.

2. A voluntary return. The penitent comes back with heart and good-will, Psal. 110:3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power;" as one that is going back to a good and honourable master, and will serve him with gladness: Psal. 100:2, "Serve the Lord with gladness." They that are only driven back to God, by heavy rods or sharp convictions, will come away again; yet people may be driven at first to God, who seeing his glory and excellency, and the desirableness of his service afterwards, do voluntarily and heartily yield themselves to him.

3. A speedy return: Psal. 119:60, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." They that are sincere will not delay for a moment; they will make no truce with sin. The moment wherein true repentance touches the heart, is the precise term of going home to God; for they know that if they delay a moment longer, that moment may be the fatal

moment to them.

4. A thorough return. The soul sticks at no known duty, but embraces all, be it ever so hard, and unpleasant to flesh and blood. Hence said the Lord of David, Acts 13:22, "I have found David the son of Jesse; a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will." The penitent puts a blank in God's hand, saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Speak, Lord," says he, "thy servant heareth." He is for the will of God, without disputing. For God is an absolute master, and is therefore to be obeyed without reserve.

USE of this point. It lets us see, that negative reformation is not sufficient for repentance. One must not only turn from sin, but turn unto God. We must not only put away evil, but take in to us the contrary good: Is. 1:16, "Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well," &c. We must not only give up with such and such lusts, but be endued with the contrary graces. Some people reform from the evils of their life, but they do not go forward to the positive ways of holiness. They satisfy themselves, with the proud Pharisee, that they are not unjust, no extortioners, &c.; but, alas! they do not consider, that when the house which the devil goes out of is empty, he returns with seven spirits more wicked than himself, and so the last state of such a person is worse than the first, Matt. 12:44, 45.

THE APPLICATION

I come now to the application of the whole. And here I would sound the alarm in the ears of impenitent sinners, to repent, and turn from their sins unto God. O sinners, repent, repent; ye are gone away to your lusts and idols, turn from them; ye have turned your back on God, turn to him again. In prosecuting this call to repentance, I shall,

1. Endeavour to convince you of the need you have to repent.
2. Lay before you a train of motives to repentance.
3. Shew you the great hindrances of repentance. And,

4. Give directions in order to your obtaining repentance.

I. I shall endeavour to convince you of the need you have to repent, to make way for the motives to it. There are three sorts of persons that will readily stave off all our calls to repentance.

1. One says, I repent of my sins daily. Well were it with thee, if it were so. Surely there is need for it. But none are so ready to pretend to this, as those that never yet knew what it is to repent. If ruing the ill thou hast done, a sigh for it, and a short-winded wish for mercy, be repentance, it is easy work. But it is not so. Thou canst not repent with a hale heart: that heart of thine must be rent for sin, and rent from it; thou must turn from sin unto God in all known duties of obedience. If ye pretend then to repentance, bring forth fruits meet for it. But to such pretended penitents we may say, as Samuel to Saul, 1 Sam. 15:14, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen?"

2. Another says, I have repented already. But O consider, repentance is not the work of a day, but of thy whole lifetime, since thou art never free of sin, Jer. 8:6. New provocations require new repentance; nay, old sins are not to be forgotten. Hence said Moses, Deut. 9:7, "Remember, and forget not how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness." And hence prays the Psalmist, Psal. 25:7, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." And if thou repent of them thoroughly, thou wilt be ashamed, and the wound will bleed afresh at the remembrance of them. Hence said the apostle, Rom. 6:21, "What fruit had ye in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?"

3. Another sees no need of repentance for him; for such persons are of that blinded generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness, Prov. 30:12. They deny their sin instead of mourning over and confessing it, saying as ver. 20. "I have done no wickedness." They possibly keep free from the gross pollutions of the outward man; and for the positive duties of religion, they either see no need of them, or if they do perform them too, they are blind to the corruption of their nature, and to heart sins, and the spirituality of the law of God. But ye need repentance as much as the proud Pharisee, Luke 18 and as the Apostle Paul, Rom. 7:9. compared with Tit. 3. But O

consider,

1st, Are there not many of us that never got a sound awakening all their days? They had lived under the sound of the gospel, but it never broke their rest effectually in a sinful course. I will read the mystery of your case, Luke 11:21. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." Repent then, else ye are undone.

2dly, Are there not many whose awakening has produced a partial change on them, but it has ended in a fearful apostacy from the way of God? 2 Pet. 2:22. "It is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and, the bow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." Their fair blossom they once had, has gone up as dust. Repent, or your backsliding will be your ruin.

3dly, Are there not many sleeping virgins at this day, who are in a course of departing from God? The life, vigour, and tenderness they sometimes had, is gone; and death has settled down on their eyelids, and they are turned to be of the colour of the earth. To these we must say, as Rev. 2:5. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."

4thly, Are there not many living in known sin? They know the particulars wherein they are wrong, and yet on they go, as an ox to the slaughter. Their corruptions are too strong for conscience. Ye must repent, or ye will perish. Profane courses will make a miserable end, and one sin retained will ruin the soul.

5thly, Look and see whether thou canst perceive the footsteps of Christ's flock, or of the devil's drove, on the way which thou art going, Cant. 1:8. Is your case the case wherein the fair company walked with displayed banners to Cannan, or that wherein many have slept and slipped away to the pit?

6thly, Canst thou deny but that there are many foul steps thou hast made and art making? O then repent. Go no farther on; one step more may put you beyond returning, Luke 14:24. Little knows the sinner how soon God may take the foot from him, either by clapping a withering curse on him,

as on the fig-tree, Hos. 4:17. or by taking him red-hand in his sin, and sending him to the pit, Prov. 29:1. "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Motives to Repentance

II. I will lay before you a train of motives to repentance

MOTIVE 1. Consider the obligations that lie on you to repent. Sit down and consider how manifold ties are on you to it.

1. The command of God obligeth you to it: Acts 17:30. "God commanded all men every where to repent." And will ye not have regard to the sovereign authority of him that made you? The command to repentance is one of the two great commands of the gospel, Acts 20:21. "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the command which the prophets of old did so often inculcate, Ezek. 18:30. "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." This our Lord Jesus and the Baptist preached, and his disciples, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This the Apostles preached, Acts 2:38. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." And this all along is the joint sound of the preachers of the gospel. So it is an old and new command too. No command is more peremptorily laid on, as in the text. As ye regard then God's authority, repent.

2. Your baptism obligeth you: Mark 1:4. "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins." It is a solemn tie laid upon you to return to and serve God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; to die unto sin, to live unto righteousness. Ye have then taken on the Lord's badge; how dreadful must it be to continue runaways from your Great Master? Repent, then, and return, as ye would not be treated as runaways from your colours, as rebels that cast off your allegiance sworn to the King of heaven.

3. Your mercies oblige you in point of gratitude; Rom. 2:4, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" your common mercies, and special ones, preventing, restraining, &c. Every mercy is forfeited by sin; yet ye are still in God's debt, and every day a new load of favours is laid on, and these are strong ties to repentance.

4. Lastly, Your profession obligeth you. Ye profess yourselves Christians. If ye will name the name of Christ, then depart from iniquity, 2 Tim. 2:19. Why do ye call God Father, if ye will needs do the works of the devil, (John 8:44.) which Christ came to destroy? Do ye profess Christ your Redeemer, the Holy Ghost your Sanctifier? why then do ye continue in bondage to your sin, in unholy courses? Do ye believe every sin deserveth God's wrath? what madness is it then to be treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath? Quit your profession then, or quit your sinful courses.

MOTIVE 2. Seriously consider what sin is, that ye are so fond of, prefer to Christ, and for the enjoyment of it forfeit the favour of God. What do you see in it, that does so powerfully charm you? If you are taken with the profit of it, ye would consider that no advantage will quit the cost of the soul's ruin brought about by it: Matt. 16:26, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Job 27:8, "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" If you are taken with the pleasure of it; that is dear bought, being purchased at the rate of eternal flames, which sin will bring men to without repentance. The pleasures of sin are but momentary, Heb. 11:25. And there is far more in God's service, even in this world: Psal. 4:6, 7, "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." Consider, I pray you,

1. Has not every bait a hook with it? Prov. 23:31, 32. Is there not a trap, gin, and snare in them all for you? How often have ye seen there has been death in the pot, when ye have sit down to feed your corruptions? Ye have snatched at the bait, but have ye not in the meantime felt yourselves wounded with the hook? ye have smelled the rose, but have not the

prickles mean while annoyed you? And how can it be otherwise? for "he that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him," Eccl. 10:8.

2. Is there any solid rest in a sinful course? No, surely: Is. 57:21, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Do not your consciences witness, that the sting of guilt in the conscience is like a dead fly in the ointment, causing all to be unsavoury? Is there not always a worm at the root of every sinful gourd you sit down under the shadow of? Do not the very may bees of conscience suck the sap out of your lusts many times? Will any man say, that ever he found rest to his soul in a course of departing from God? No, no; ten thousand worlds will not satisfy an immortal soul.

3. Do not ye find sin to be an insatiable tyrant, like the grave and the barren womb, never saying, It is enough? Is. 57:20. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." O but they have a hard task, that have living raging lusts to feed! James 4:2, 3, "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. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." Psal. 78:18, 19, "And they tempted God in their heart, by asking meet for their lust. Yea, they spake against God: they said, can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" The more they are indulged, the more they grow rampant: the more their thirst is cared for, the greater thirst is created. Hence men in a sinful course go from evil to worse.

4. Is not a sinful course a most foolish course? No man is unfaithful to God, but he is unfaithful to himself, and his own interest and happiness. The Lord offers to reason the matter with you, and to make your consciences judge; Isa. 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." It stands betwixt you, and temporal and eternal happiness. It is a poisonous cup, bringing death along with it. And how foolish is it for men to hug a serpent in their bosom, when called to throw it out; to drink a cup of poison, when called to throw it away; to take coals in their bosom, when it is told they will burn them; to court their own death and ruin?

5. Is not sin the separation wall betwixt God and you? Is. 59:2, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Does it not mar your comfort from the word, your confidence in the Lord, and your access to God in duties? does it not make as it were a gulf betwixt Heaven and you, that whatever communion others have with Heaven, your unrepented-of sins lets you have none? Shall this be your choice? Sure, then, ye need not wonder, if ye will not come back to God, he bid you at last depart from him, "into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

6. Lastly, Consider what will be the end thereof. Sorely it will be bitterness in the end: Jer. 2:19, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." However pleasant the cup seem to be at the brim, the dregs of it will be bitter: Prov. 9:17, 18, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell." However taking the entertainment be, the reckoning wilt be dreadful.

MOTIVE 3. Consider ye must die: Heb. 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die." Death is certain, and therefore repentance is necessary. O if men would realize death to themselves, sinners would soon find it necessary to turn a new leaf. One hearing Gen. 5. read in the church, was so impressed with the thoughts of death, that he presently betook himself to a new course of life, that he might die well. We must all meet with death, lie down in the grave; let us view it aforehand, and see how it calls us to repent. Look to thy dying hour, and to thy grave, O impenitent sinner, and consider these few things.

1. Wouldst thou be content to die as thou livest? Thou livest in thy sin, without God; wouldst thou desire to die so? Many indeed entertain Balaam's wish, for the death of the righteous, while they care not for their life, Num. 23:10, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." But remember he did not get it, chap. 31:8, "Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword." And while death is so uncertain, it is the hanging of an eternal weight on a hair, to look to get

matters mended then, that are not mended now.

2. Consider, what will a sinful life look like on a death-bed? How will ye be able to look your unrepented-of guilt, and a long eternity in the face together? Ezek. 22:14, "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it." Sin sits easy now on a sleepy conscience, while health and strength lasts, and death appears not. But when death stares thee in the face, and the awakened conscience flies upon thee, it will cut thee to the heart, that thou hast not repented before.

3. What will it be to die, and go to another world with a load of unrepented-of guilt on thy back? Look to your grave aforehand; think with yourselves, how will it be to lie down there with your bones full of your iniquity? Is it not best now, to shake off and east away your transgressions, as knowing that however ye may live with them, ye cannot die with them well.

4. At a dying hour ye must part with the world, and the enjoyment of your lusts. The foul feast ye sit at now, death will overthrow the table, and the sad reckoning for it comes in then, and continues for ever. O rise up now, and leave it by repentance. Part with these things at God's call, which ye must part with ere long, whether ye will or not.

5. Lastly, There is no repentance in the grave, Eccl. 9:10. Ye must repent, or ye perish; and it is now or never. Mar matters now by an impenitent life, and let death catch you there, ye shall never be able to mend them more. The working time, and time of trial is over then. If the brittle thread of life were broke, which may be snapt asunder in a moment, then ye are beyond the line of mercy. The candle burnt to snuff, shall be as soon brought to born again, as time shall be recalled.

MOTIVE 4. Take a view of the tribunal of God, before which thou must appear: 2 Cor. 5:10, 11, "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." O sinner, knowest thou not that there is a judgment to come, and how this calls thee to repent? Acts

17:30, 31, "God commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." Were men to lie for ever neglected, without a future reckoning, as the beasts that perish, they might live as they list, the hazard of condemnation for an eternity would not press them. But it is not so: Heb. 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Consider,

1. While thou art going on in sin, thy debt to the divine justice is increasing, the accounts are swelling; and the reckoning for them before the tribunal will be terrible, however little ye think of them now, Eccl. 11:9. They may fall out of thy memory, but they will not fall out of the book of God's remembrance, Hos. 13:12. But now is the time to get them laid over on the cautioner's score.
2. Though thou wilt not seek them out now to mourn over them, and turn from them, they will find thee out before the tribunal of God, Happy would the sinner be, if his sins would part with him at the grave; but they "shall lie down with him in the dust," Job 20:11: or if they would lie down with him there, if they would lie still and never rise again; but "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil," Eccl. 12:14. The Judge is omniscient, nothing can be hid from him, he is not capable to forget the least injury which the sinner has done to his glory; all must come into the account.
3. When thou seest Christ come again, and his throne set for judgment, when the trumpet shall blow, and the dead arise, and made to compare before that tribunal, when the heavens and earth shall pass away, what will be thy thoughts of staving off repentence?
4. Lastly, Thy state for eternity will be determined there according to thy deeds done in the flesh. Impenitent sinners will get a long eternity to rue their obstinacy in, while those that repented in time shall be happy for ever.

MOTIVE 5. To move you to repentance, consider the sufferings of Christ.

A Roman senator intending to provoke the people to revenge the death of Cæsar killed by Brutus, brought forth his bloody robe, and cried, "Here is the robe of your late emperor." And O will ye look to the bloody robe of Christ, hung up on the pole of the gospel, to move you to repentance? Zech. 12:10, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him," &c. And learn here,

1. How dreadful must God's indignation against sin be, which is written with the blood of Christ, pierced with the sword of justice. Is it not "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God?" And shall we continue in sin, against which such indignation appeared?

2. Sin appeared terrible in Sodom when in flames, but yet more terrible in mount Calvary, where the justice of God pursued the Son of God with the sword of vengeance. A spectacle of amazement, the Son of God set up for a mark to the arrows of God! Do ye not ask into the cause of all this? It was sin. The children ate the sour grape, and the father's teeth were set on edge. They contract the debt, justice lays hold on him, and he "restores what he took not away, Psal. 69:4. The elect took on the debt jovially, but he is put to tears and strong cries in the paying of it. And will we not hate and loath sin?

3. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods from above nor from below drown it. "Behold how he loved you." He might have been happy in his Father's love, though mortals had never shared of it with him. But such was his love to sinners, as made him lay down his life for them, that so a way might be pared for the egress of his Father's love towards them. And will ye not hate and loathe sin which was the cause of his death? Is this your kindness to your friend?

4. When Christ suffered, the earth quaked, rocks rent, the dead arose, the sun was struck, blind with the sight, and hid his face for shame: and how can we stand unmoved, who were the first movers of the bloody tragedy, whose sins furnished a Judas to betray him, a Pilate to sentence him? &c. Look here, and mourn for, and turn from sin.

5. Lastly, Did he not suffer enough? must he suffer more still, even in his state of exaltation? will ye grieve his Spirit, trample on his laws, yea and

his blood, continuing impenitent in your sins?

MOTIVE 6. Consider the wrong done to God by your sin, in which ye may see the ugly picture of it. This kept Joseph from yielding to a strong temptation, Gen. 39:9; and pierced David's heart with repentance for his sin, Psal. 51:4; and lay heavy on the prodigal son, Luke 15:18. Every sin reacheth the throne of God in heaven, and him that sits on it. It is true, the malice of sinners against God is impotent malice, and can do him no real prejudice, do their worst. They cannot make him less happy, they cannot disturb his peace, Job 35:6–8. But the sinner is like the beggar full of sores lying on a dunghill, venting his spite against the prince on the throne. He wrongs the honour of God, his declarative glory, though he can do nothing against his essential glory. Sinner, thou wrongest God by thy sin,

1. By setting thyself in opposition to his nature and will. What is sin continued in without repentance? "A walking contrary to God," Lev. 26:21; an interpretative aim to throw him down from his sovereignty, Psal. 14:1, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." Thou mayst put what fair colours thou pleasest upon it; but it is a throwing out the flag of defiance against the God that made thee. For dost thou not thereby in effect disregard his all-seeing eye, and presence every where, bid defiance to his justice, and call in question his truth, despise his goodness and mercy, and run counter to his holy nature and will, while thou runest still on that of which he has said, Jer. 14:4, "Oh do not this abominable thing that I hate!" And is this a course to be insisted in?

2. Thou wrongest God by trampling on his laws, Is. 33:22. He has given thee a law to be the rule of thy life, he has stamped it with his own sovereign authority, fenced it with punishments threatened, suitable to his infinite greatness: but thou makest no more of these than if they were cobwebs fit only to catch flies. Thou breakest through the fences, and in contempt of his authority, will be over into the forbidden ground. Thus thou affrontest the God that made thee: will he sit with it think ye? No, he can avenge the affront, James 4:12, "There is one lawgiver, who is able to destroy;" and he will do it, Luke 19:27, "Those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."

3. Thou wrongest God by despising his Son, John 5:40. Ye wrong God at the rate heathens cannot do, and therefore your condemnation will be greater than theirs, John 3:19. God has sent his Son into the world, by his death to procure reconciliation betwixt God and sinners; he has "exalted him to give repentance," Acts 5:31: but by your continuing in sin, ye slight his death, and the purchase of his blood: you love your disease so, as you loathe the Physician. What will be the end of these things? Acts 13:41, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish."

4. Thou wrongest God by grieving his Spirit, Eph. 4:30. Hear God's complaints of impenitent sinners, Ezek. 6:9, "I am broken with their whorish heart which hath departed from me, and with their eyes which go a whoring after their idols." Amos 2:13, "Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves." How often has the Spirit of the Lord been at work with you to turn you from your sins, speaking to you by the word, providences, the secret checks of your own conscience, and secret motions and whispers within your own breast, but all to no purpose? This will not last: Gen. 6:3, "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh." And it will have a doleful end, if ye do not repent: Is. 63:10, "They rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." If sinners continue to be a burden to the Spirit of God, and do not take off the burden by repentance, God will throw it off to their cost: Is. 1:24, "Therefore saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies."

5. Thou wrongest God by defacing the remains of his image in your own soul, "God made man upright, after his own image." Adam's sin ruined his image in us. But the more we go on and sin, we render ourselves still the more unlike God, and the more contrary to him. How fearful is this, to be still blotting out any appearance of the traits of God's image in us?

6. Lastly, Thou wrongest God by the ill influence your example has on others. Hence says our Lord, Matth. 24:12, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Every impenitent sinner is an agent for the devil, and invites and encourages others to despise God and his ways, and so will be made to reckon for the mischief his sin does that

way. The rich man in hell was sensible of this, though it would seem not before, Luke 16:27, 28, "I pray thee, father," said he to Abraham, "that thou wouldst send him [Lazarus] to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."

Now, will ye go on, thus wronging God by your sin, and not turn from it unto him? Consider, I pray you,

1. He is your Creator, Eccl. 12:1. He gave you a being, and brought you out of the womb of nothing, and will ye not be for him? will ye be against him? Has not he that made you a right to rule you? does not reason itself say, that God's creating us gives him a sovereign dominion over us? O why will the creature thus set itself against the Creator? Will the potsherds strive against the potter.

2. He is your Preserver, Heb. 1:3. Acts 17:28. You live on his earth, feed on his good creatures, breathe in his air, and will ye not hearken to his voice? Who was it that preserved thee in the womb, that brought thee out of it, so that it was not made thy grave? Who has kept the brittle thread of thy life from being broken hitherto, and fed thee all thy life long? Is it not the Lord? And wilt thou fight against him with his own benefits which he has bestowed on thee, yea, is bestowing on thee while thou goest on in thy sin? Shall the life, strength, comforts of life, time, &c. which he has given thee, be employed to the grieving of his Spirit? What will the end of these things be?

3. He can destroy you, and that when he will, Matth. 10:28. Your life and breath is from him, and he can stop it when he pleaseth. He does not suffer you to go on to your sin, because he cannot help it, nay, the moment thou provokest him, he can strike thee dead, or send thee down alive into the pit. But he waits to be gracious. And this one consideration might determine sinners to repent, if madness were not in their hearts, setting them to provoke him, who in a moment can destroy them, and make them silent in the grave.

4. He is your Witness, Psal. 51:4. Luke 15:18. Sinners that like not to retain God in their knowledge, do in effect please themselves with the

notion that God is closed up in heaven, Ezek. 9:9. "For they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not." But the day comes when they will see themselves miserably deceived. No; he is a witness, though many times a silent witness; but he will speak in due time, Psal. 50:21, 22. The opening of the book of conscience, and of God's remembrance, will clear his being a witness of your whole way and every step of it.

5. Lastly, He will be your Judge, 2 Cor. 5:10. And he is an omniscient one, from whom nothing can be hid; a just one, that will reward every one according to his works; an omnipresent one, from whose presence there can be no escape; an omnipotent one who can without fail make his sentence take effect. Will men pretend to believe a judgment to come, and yet be at no pains to make the judge their friend beforehand, but keep up the war against him, and not break it off by repentance? Alas! horrid unbelief is at the bottom of impenitency.

MOTIVE 7. God is calling you to repentance. Be not deaf to the calls of God, lest the Lord pay home your rebellion, by refusing to hear you when ye call to him, Prov. 1:24. and downwards. God is calling you to repentance,

1. By the mercies wherewith he is daily loading you. Quot beneficia, tot ora. Rom. 2:4. "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? These are the cords of a man wherewith God is drawing you. That you are spared on God's earth, that you are kept out of hell, that he gives you daily bread, and does not lock up heaven and earth that they may not help you, call aloud to you to repent, and turn to him. And he takes notice how little these prevail, Jer. 5:24. "Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God that giveth rain, both the former and the latter in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest."

2. God is calling you to repentance by the crosses and afflictions, either laid on you, or threatened. Every cross providence is a messenger from Heaven calling you to repentance: Mic. 6:9. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it. They meet you in the way of sin, as the angel did Balaam; they bid you halt, and go no farther on; nay, they bid you return

to the Lord. God is speaking to the land this way, to this church, and to the congregation, and to every one of us at this day.

3. God is calling you to repentance by the preaching of the word, Acts 17:30. This is the great scope of all our preaching, that ye may repent and turn from your sins unto God. And while God continues his gospel with us, it is a sign he is waiting for our repentance: but to continue in sin over the belly of all warnings, will have a fatal end to take us from the gospel, or the gospel from us; which we have ground to fear at this day on more accounts than one. Hence says Christ to the church of Ephesus, Rev. 2:5, "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

MOTIVE ult. Consider the text, "Except ye repent, ye shall perish." There are two things in this to press you to repentance.

1 If ye repent not, ye shall perish. Sin unrepented of, brings ruin upon kingdoms, churches, congregations, families. And that is like to be the ruin of our land, and of our church, at this day. For, alas! the face of all at this day is like that described, Jer. 8:6. "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned unto his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." God has threatened us with desolating strokes, and is yet threatening but the generation is like to those scoffers spoken off, 2 Pet. 3:4. saying, where is the promise of his coming? And because God does not speedily execute the sentence, therefore men cast off fear, and go on in their sins, in defiance of heaven. But that concerns us nearly: Jer. 9:9. "Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Sin unrepented of will ruin your souls; Except ye repent, ye shall perish. Consider, your life, your souls lie at stake. Sinner, thou hast gone away from God, thy soul is left in pawn that thou shalt return by repentance. If thou return not, thy pawn, thy soul is lost, lost for ever. Heaven's gate is too narrow to let you in there with a burden of unrepented-of sin on thy back. Nay, heaven thou canst never see; hell thou canst not escape, if thou repent not. The gospel calls you to repent; if not, the Lord Jesus shall be

revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on you that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Thess. 1:7, 8. Have pity therefore on your souls, Ezek. 18:31, 32, "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make yon a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." To this narrow point the matter is brought, Repent, or perish eternally; quit your sins, or quit heaven.

Now, I pray you consider here,

1st, The certainty of your ruin in an impenitent state. Ye have it from the mouth of the Lord himself, in most plain and peremptory terms, that "except ye repent, ye shall perish." If it were but a may-be, it were sufficient in all reason to determine us to repentance; for it is unaccountable to put the soul in hazard of everlasting destruction, for all the profit or pleasure of a sinful course; a thousand times more than for one to put himself in hazard of drowning to catch a fly. But it is not a may-be, but certainly it shall be.

2dly, All other grounds of hope are out off, if ye repent not. Tell me, O impenitent sinner, that will not turn from thy sin, what wilt thou trust to for salvation from the wrath of God? Wilt thou trust to the mercy of God? I tell thee thou art a despiser of mercy, Rom. 2:4; and thou canst not have it in this case, but over the belly of the truth of God; for he has said, "Except ye repent, ye shall perish." Pray consider, if thou wouldst have mercy, thou must seek it in God's way: Is. 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."

Wilt thou trust to Jesus Christ, his blood and merits? Do not deceive yourself. Is not this Christ's own word, "Except ye repent ye shall perish?" does not the Saviour tell thee this? Q. d. None of my blood shall ever be wared on a sinner to save him from wrath, that will not repent and turn from his sin. Why does any body at all perish that hears the gospel, if folk may continue impenitent, and yet share of Christ's blood? No, no; to

whom Christ will be a Saviour from wrath, he will be first a Saviour from sin, Matth. 1:21. He will first give repentance, before he give access to heaven; for Christ's blood was never shed to bring in dogs and swine into his Father's house, but shed, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, Tit. 2:14.

3dly, Where will the fruit of sin be, when this dear reckoning begins? Heb. 10:31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Thou mayst get a time to run thy course: but at length thy eye-strings will break, the last pulse beat, and the soul will take wing and go to another world, and because of unrepented-of sin, be condemned to everlasting flames. And when thou enterest there, what will abide with thee of all the satisfaction thou hast had in thy sinful courses? No; then thou must bid an eternal farewell to all satisfaction, ease, or delight whatsoever, either in God or thy lusts.

4thly, How wilt thou be able to stand under the load of wrath in the pit of destruction? Is. 33:14, "The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites: who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? How wilt thou be able to grapple with vengeance, the Mediator's vengeance, while God shall hold thee up with the one hand, and punish thee with the other? Think in time on the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never quenched: for either thou must repent now, or that worm will gnaw thee, and that fire scorch thee for ever.

Lastly, Consider the eternity of this state. The pleasure, profit, and ease of sin are but for a moment; but the destruction for sin unrepented of is for ever, 2 Thess. 1:9. O madness! to run the risk of everlasting pain for a moment's pleasure! If ruing, sorrow, remorse, rage against one's self for sin, were repenting, there would be repentance enough in hell. Men stave off repentance now for the bitterness of it; but there is a sweet in it too: but then ye shall have the bitterness of it in full measure, but never taste of the sweetness of it; for then the hopes of mercy are razed; and a fearful sight of an everlasting continuance of misery, without end.

Have pity then on your own souls, and throw them not away for that

which cannot profit.

2. If ye repent, ye shall never perish. Repentance is the way to keep off the wrath of God from nations, churches, &c. Repentance is the way for each of us to escape the wrath of God: Ezek. 18:30, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Acts 2:38, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." All the threatenings of wrath are summons to repent, and have always that clause understood in them, "Except ye repent, ye shall perish:" Rev. 2:22, "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds." Though ye have sinned with the world, if ye repent with God's elect, ye shall not perish with the world. Consider,

1st, It is not falling into sin, but lying in sin without repentance, that ruins folk to whom the gospel comes, John 3:19. For there is a remedy provided; and it is for all diseases of the soul, even the worst and most desperate: and so nothing can be fatal to those that are willing to employ the Physician, and to undergo his method of cure. They are in glory this day, whose sins have been of the first magnitude, as David, Paul, Manasseh, Peter, &c. but they were repenting sinners.

2dly, There is mercy for thee, if thou wilt repent, and come to Christ. Good news, O sinners, If ye repent, all your sins shall be blotted out, ye shall be embraced in the wide and warm arms of mercy; if, as ye have gone away from God, so ye will come back again; Is. 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." Rev. 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." O sirs, will not bowels of mercy draw you? God is now on a throne of mercy; he stretches out the golden sceptre to you for peace, if ye will have it in his own way: and in his name we proclaim mercy to all poor sinners that desire to turn from their sins unto God. O will not the proclamation of the indemnity touch the hearts of rebel sinners, and cause them to relent?

OBJECTION 1. But my sins are many and great sins, ANSWER. God's

mercies are many, Psal. 51:1. and great too, Psal. 86:13; and his mercy is magnified in pardoning of such. If thy sins were as great as mountains, as many as the catalogue of them would reach from heaven to earth, there is mercy for thee, if thou wilt repent: Is. 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." There are riches of mercy, Eph. 2:4 abundance of pardoning grace, Is. 55:7.

OBJECTION 2. I have relapsed, gone back with the dog to the vomit, and with the sow that was washed, to the wallowing in the mire. ANSWER. There is mercy for backsliders too: Jer. 3:14, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you." Ver. 22, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." If it were not so, who could be safe? Men must forgive in that case, and much more God will, Luke 17:4. For as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's thoughts above ours: Jer. 3:1, "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord."

OBJECTION 3. But I have despised and alighted mercy, and the remedy of sin. ANSWER. They had gone all that length, who had so far despised mercy, and the remedy of sin, as they had murdered the Lord of glory, and yet they obtained mercy, Acts 2:36, 37, 38. Despise and slight it no more, and your former sins shall not be remembered.

OBJECTION 4. I have so long gone on in sin, that I can have no hope. ANSWER. The longer the greater is your sin; yet God has not discovered to us any particular time, beyond which he will not wait. There are some called at the eleventh hour; and those that come in then, are not rejected. So was the thief on the cross. See Ezek. 33:10, 11; Luke 14:22; Joel 3:21.

OBJECTION 5. But there is no body's case like mine. ANSWER. Consider the case of Manasseh, 2 Chron. 33. and of Paul, 1 Tim. 1:13. Such instances are designed to encourage sinners to repent in hope of mercy, Eph. 2:7. Adam's case was more hopeless, who had sinned against more light and mercy, than ye were capable to do. But suppose your case is a

non-such evil, the mercy of God and the blood of Christ are non-such remedies. And ye may be sure, since he has said, John 6:37, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out," that he will work a new thing on the earth, rather than that your case be unhelped, if ye will put it in his hand. So I conclude that there is mercy for you, if ye will repent.

Lastly, Thou shalt certainly be saved for ever, if thou dost repent: Ezek. 18:30, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." No true penitents go to hell. Heaven is the landing-place of all true penitents. They that turn from their sins now, and turn unto God, shall for ever be with the Lord in another world.

O look to the glory that is above, and let your souls be moved to repentance by it. Cast not away the hope of eternal happiness for what does not profit.

Now, sinners, consider these things, and be stirred up to repentance, and do not adventure over the belly of fair warning to go on in a course of impenitency. Impenitency under the gospel is a sin of a deep dye; beware of it.

1. It is a continuation of sin; it draws out the thread of a God-provoking course, adding sin to sin, till God cut the thread of life. And O are there not enough of items standing in God's accounts against you already? why will ye be still adding more, instead of diminishing and breaking off the course by repentance?

2. It seals sin and guilt on your soul. Impenitency keeps all the rest of your sins fast on your souls: John 3:19, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." If you would repent, no sins whatsoever you are guilty of should ever be able to ruin you: but if you do not, that one will keep all the rest in life and vigour, to your utter ruin.

3. It flies in the face of the gospel, of Christ himself, his apostles and ministers, who with one voice call sinners to repentance. If ye do this, ye do all; if ye do not this, ye do nothing; ye receive the grace of God in vain; it will be in vain to you that ever you heard the gospel, that Christ died for

sinners, &c.; for ye will have no benefit by any of these things.

4. Lastly, It is a bloody sin, that will involve you in everlasting misery. For there is no escaping of the wrath of God; if ye do not repent, ye are undone for ever. For "except ye repent ye shall perish."

Now, ye have had a message from the Lord, what answer shall I return to him that sent me? I think I may rank up all in these six sorts of sinners.

1. The brutish sinner, that hears as if he heard not. The word makes a noise in their ears, because they are capable of hearing; but, alas! they are no better than the beasts, in so far as they make no reflections on it, with respect to their state and case. What shall I say to you, but that the time comes when these souls of yours, drowned in a mass of flesh and blood, will be separate from your bodies, and get a long eternity to reflect on the calls ye have had to repent? Is. 1:3, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Psal. 32:9, 10, "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked."

2. The sullen, desperate sinner, whose answer will be that, Jer. 2:25, "There is no hope. No, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." Their hearts are glued to their sins, they have no will to part with them, and they have no hope that ever they shall be made willing, or if they were so, that God would receive them; and therefore they are resolved to take their time. But O consider, they have been reformed that have been as mad on their idols as you, as Manasseh and Paul. If that cannot draw you, pray answer that question, Is. 33:14, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

3. The crafty, subtle sinner, whose answer will be that of Saul to Samuel, 1 Sam. 15:13. "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." But let the return to them be that of Samuel to Saul, ver. 14. "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" What means your continuing in sin, your not wrestling and striving against it in heart and

life, if it be so?

4. The presumptuous sinner, whose answer will be that, Deut. 29:19. "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart." There are some who have a heart of adamant, and put on a forehead of brass, that nothing of this sort can affect them. Let the messengers of the Lord be saying what they will, they will be doing. They will have their course, and persuade themselves all shall be well. To such I would say, as vers. 20, 21. "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 the Lord shall separate him unto evil, out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant, that are written in this book of the law." See Is. 28:16. and downwards.

5. The slothful sinner, whose answer will be that of Felix to Paul, Acts 24:25. "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." They are convinced that they must repent, and resolve to do it, but not yet. Young folk put it off to old age; old folk delay it till a death-bed. Every one puts it off from time to time. But O sirs what certainty have ye of an hour, much less of a year? How many are there that never see old age? How many drop into eternity ere ever they are aware?

6. Lastly, The convinced sinner, who being awakened, says, "What shall I do to be saved?" For which reason I shall,

III. Show you the great hinderances of repentance. And,

1. Thoughtlessness is a great hinderance of it: Jer. 8:6. "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." Men do not consider their souls' state, case, and way. They sleep away their time carelessly without due reflection; and therefore their spiritual state goes to wreck and they pine away in their iniquity, and are not aware of the same.

2. The love and cares of the world are great hinderances of repentance, Luke 8:14. These take up men's hearts so, as that they have neither heart

nor hand for the case of their souls. How many are there, whom the world keeps in a constant hurry all their life long, that they never come to consider their way till death stare them in the face?

3. Prejudices against religion and seriousness are great hinderances of repentance. Some see no profit in it; but "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. 4:8. Some see no pleasure in it; but "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," Prov. 3:17. Some think that it is needless to be at all that pains, for less will serve: but, alas! they do not consider what a holy jealous God the Lord is, and how many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

4. Presumption is a great hinderance of repentance, Deut. 29:19. They hope still all shall be well, however they take their liberty in a sinful course. They abuse the mercy of God as a screen to their lusts; not remembering that he will by no means clear the guilty.

5. Unbelief, the not embracing of Christ, and apprehending the mercy of God in him, is likewise a great impediment in the way of repentance. And,

6. Lastly, Slothfulness, whereby the business is still put off from time to time.

IV. I shall give directions in order to your obtaining repentance. Supposing what I have said before of the way to gain repentance by believing, I offer further these following directions.

1. Labour to see sin in its own colours, what an evil thing it is. Jer. 2:19. What makes us to cleave to sin, is false apprehensions we have about it. To see it in itself would be a means to make us fly from it. For this end consider,

1st, The majesty of God offended by sin. Ignorance of God is the mother of impenitency, Acts 17:30.

2dly, The obligations we lie under to serve him, which by sin we trample upon.

3dly, The wrath of God that abides impenitent sinners.

4thly, The good things our unrepented-of sins deprive us of.

Lastly, The many evils which are bred by our sin against the honour of God, our own and our neighbour's true interest.

2. Be much in the thoughts of death. Consider how short and uncertain your time is. Hopes of long life bring many into a hopeless case. And who knows when he may have outlived his day of grace, when the moment comes that God shall say, "My Spirit shall not strive any more with this man, for that he also is flesh?"

3. Dwell on the thoughts of a judgment to come, where ye shall be made to give an account of yourselves.

4. Meditate on the sufferings of Christ.

5. Pray for repentance and believingly seek and long for the Lord's giving the new heart, according to his promise, Ezek. 36:26. "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Ver. 32. "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel."

6. Lastly, What ye do, do quickly. The sooner you begin, the easier will the work be.

Take the three following marks of true repentance.

1. Sorrow for sin, as offensive to a good and gracious God, Zech. 12:10.

2. Hatred of sin, as the most abominable thing, Rev. 2:6. This will be, 1. universal, against all known sin; 2. constant, without intermission; 3. implacable, without reconciliation; and, 4. vehement, without tolerating it.

3. A fixed purpose and desire of eschewing sin, and following duty; guarding against present sins, and the occasions of these we are in hazard

of; honestly endeavouring after it in the use of means, and labouring to remove the hinderances to a holy life.

The Danger of Delaying Repentance

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.
So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth, and thy want as an armed man." - Prov 6:10-11

I HAVE been pressing sinners to repentance from the former text, and I hope by this time all of you may be convinced of the necessity of it But, alas! delays in this matter kills their ten thousands. Men put off the work from time to time, till time be gone, and they are surprised into ruin, as we may learn from this text. Where,

1. We have the sluggard's picture drawn in reference to his eternal concerns; which is the main thing here aimed at. He is one that puts off his great work from time to time, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep."

In the 6th verse the slothful sinner is set to school to learn a lesson of the emmet; which though she has not the advantages that he has, yet has so much natural sagacity, as to provide for winter, in the time of summer and harvest, when meat is to be got. In the 9th verse there is a rousing call to the sinner to follow that example. But behold how he entertains it; as a person that is loath to arise, he begs "a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep." Here is,

1st, Something supposed; and that is threefold.

(1.) The sleeper convinced that he has slept, and neglected his work. There are many who see themselves wrong, yet have no heart to endeavour to get right. They are convinced that their great work is far behind, yet have no heart to stir to set it forward.

(2.) The sleeper convinced that he must awake, and set to his work. Slothful sinners may see that the case they are in, is not a case they would

venture to die in: they see that it is necessary to turn over a new leaf, to mind their salvation at another rate than they have done, or are doing.

(3.) The sleeper resolved to awake, and mind his business. He would fain sleep, but he does not design to sleep long, to sleep always. No; he designs but a little sleep, if ye will believe him, and afterwards to awake; though, poor soul, he does not consider that he is sleeping within the sea-mark, and may be swallowed up ere he awake out of his little sleep.

2dly, Something expressed; and that is threefold too,

(2.) A delay craved: "Yet a little sleep," &c. He is not thinking never to waken, never to repent, but only he cannot think on doing it as yet. However long a sleep he has taken in sin, yet he must have more. For as men, the more they sleep, the more they would sleep; so the more they continue in sin, the more they would continue. And the more they put off repentance, they are the more unfit for it.

(2.) The quantity of this delay: it is but a little in the sluggard's conceit. Though the Spirit of the Lord be grieved and wearied with waiting on his awakening, yet he thinks that all is but little. If the sluggard considered that his whole time is but little in comparison of eternity, the least time he spends in his sleep would appear very great. But, alas! he considers it not.

(3.) The mighty concern he is in for this delay. Though his ruin be wrapt up in it, he is fond of it, his heart is set upon it; and he pleads for it, as a starving man for bread. Ease is sweet to him; and so he speaks, "A little sleep, a little slumber." There are three things here which he craves, each less than the other; which shews how loathe he is to bestir himself. (1.) "A little sleep;" not a dead sleep, but a moderate one. (2.) If that cannot be granted, let him have but "a little slumber;" a napping, as it were, a middle betwixt sleeping and waking. (3.) If he cannot get that, yet he would have "a folding of the hands to sleep;" (Heb.) to lie a-bed. Let him but lie still loitering, and embracing his sweet self, and not presently be obliged to rise to put hand to work. Love to folded hands goes deep with him.

Observe, how the hearts of sinners are glued to their sins, and carnal security. When conscience begins to draw them out of their bed of sloth, they will not yield, they will dispute every foot of ground with it. And they will take very little ere they want all. O were we as nice in the point of our salvation, as in the state of blindness, in the point of our ruin, how happy might we be?

2. We have the fatal issue of this course. Delays are dangerous, but most of all in matters of eternal concern. The issue of these delays is, the man is ruined, he never awakes till it is out of time. His little sleep, &c. spends all his little time, and throws him out quite unprovided into a long eternity. Here consider,

1st, What ruin comes upon him: Poverty and want. It is held forth under these notions, to answer to the provision the ants make for themselves. They provide for themselves in summer and harvest: so that when the winter comes, when they cannot stir out of their holes, they live on the provision they have laid in. There is a winter abiding us, a time wherein no man can work, when there will be no access to God's grace and favour. Death brings in this. This time is our summer and harvest, wherein matters may be secured for eternity: but, alas! the sluggard sleeps in working time; and so when it is over, he must starve and perish for ever.

2dly, How this ruin comes upon him. It comes on,

(1.) Swiftly and speedily. So the word rendered one that travaillet, imports: one that walketh vigorously, as a man in a haste upon the road. Though the sinner lies at ease on his bed of sloth, yet his ruin hasteth on apace, 2 Pet. 2:3. The sun stands not still, though the sluggard's work goes slowly on. Every breath he fetches in his spiritual sleep, draws his destruction a step nearer.

(2.) Silently and surprisingly; "Thy poverty shall come as one that travaillet." If we send one on an errand, we will be looking for him again at the time appointed; but we know nothing of the traveller, till he come at us. So ruin comes on the delaying sinner ere he is aware; destruction is at his bedside ere he is awakened, Prov. 29:1.

(3.) Irresistibly: "Thy want shall come as an armed man;" (Heb.) a man of a buckler, who may hurt thee; but not thou him, for his buckler defends him. Were this traveller unarmed, the danger were not so great; or were the party attacked watching, and armed too, he might possibly come off safe. But alas! the poor man is naked, and sleeping too; how then can he make his part good against his enemy? He cannot; he must fall a sacrifice to his own sloth. Which brings me to consider,

3dly, What all this is owing to: "So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth," &c. It is all owing to the cursed love of ease, to sloth, to the delays and pot-offs, wherewith precious time is squandered away, and the precious soul is irrecoverably lost. They delay and delay on, till the golden opportunity is lost, and they are swept away into the pit, with all their good resolutions for the time to come, which they never see.

The point I intend to speak to from these words, is,

DOCTRINE, The delaying and putting off of repentance or salvation-work, is a soul-ruining course among gospel hearers.

In discoursing this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. Why it is that gospel hearers delay and put off repentance.

II. That this delaying is a soul-ruining course.

III. Lastly, Make application.

I. I shall shew why it is that gospel hearers delay and put off repentance. There is a generation that are not resolved never to repent, never to ply salvation-work; but only they are not for it yet. They hope to mend and reform afterwards, but for the present they have no heart to it: so by cheating themselves out of their present time, they put a cheat on themselves for ever. They are called by the word, and by their own consciences, to make ready for another world, to work out their salvation; but their hearts say, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep;" and their practice is conformable thereto. Why is it so?

1. Satan has a great hand in this. If he cannot hold out the light altogether from disturbing them, he will do what he can to lull them asleep again, before they be fully wakened: Luke 11:21. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." Thus he did with Felix, Acts 24:25, who, "as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." When the soul begins to think on making its escape, all the art of hell will be employed to hold it fast; and it is easier to get one to put off salvation-work till afterwards, than downright to refuse it altogether. And thus Satan is always on one of the two extremes, urging either that it is too soon, or else that it is too long a doing.

2. The cares and business of the world contribute much to this. Hence our Lord explained "the seed which fell among thorns, to be those, who when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection," Luke 8:14. How often are people in such an unsanctified throng of business, that they cannot find a convenient season for putting their salvation-work to a point? They have so many other cares upon their hands, that they jostle out the care of their souls. They find themselves wrapt up in a cloud of cares; but think with themselves, that were they but once through that, they shall ply their main work. Well, but they are no sooner out of that, than they are in to another; and so on, till the work being put off from time to time, is quite neglected. The truth is, persons in such a case will hardly find a time for that work, till they be resolute that they shall take it as they can find it.

3. The predominant love of carnal ease: Prov. 26:15, "The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom, it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth." We are all naturally like Issachar, who saw "that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute," Gen. 49:15. Could people get sleeping to heaven on the sluggard's bed, would drowsy wishes carry them thither, many would be the passengers in that way. But that will not do. Men must labour, strive, and wrestle; and that is hard in the eyes of carnal men; and therefore, if it cannot be altogether refused, it is put off as long as may be.

And hence never will a soul ply salvation-work in earnest, till it be effectually roused out of its lazy disposition.

4. The predominant love of sin. Why do persons stave off repentance, but because they are like those who entertaining their friends whom they have no will to part with, do therefore put off their departure from day to day? The parting with sin is like the cutting off of a member of the body, Matth. 5:30; which one will never yield to, unless he be very resolute. No man will delay a minute to throw a burning coal out of his bosom; but they will love to keep a sweet morsel under the tongue, who yet know that they must spit it out at length. And hence it is, that no purpose of reformation, which is only for afterwards, can be sincere; because it argues a love to, and loathness to part with sin.

5. A natural aversion and backwardness to holiness: Rom 8:7. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The heart will never be reconciled to the yoke of Christ, till grace make it so, Psal. 110:3. But like as the bullock unaccustomed to the yoke is loath to stoop to it, and therefore still draws aback; so will the heart of man do, till overcoming grace reach it, Jer. 31:18. Hence, when light is let into the mind, but the aversion still remains in the will, what can be expected, but that the business of repentance, which they dare not absolutely refuse, will be delayed?

6. The hope of finding the work easier afterwards. The sluggard thinks with himself, that a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep, would make it easier to him to get out of his bed; though, on the contrary, the more he sleeps unseasonably, the more he would sleep; and the longer persons delay the work of repentance, it is the harder to go through with it. For sin is a disease, which, the longer it lasts, gathers the more strength, and is harder to cure. And he that is not fit to-day to repent, will be less fit to-morrow.

7. A large reckoning on the head of time that is to come: Hence the rich man reckoned, "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But let us hear the judgment of God concerning this speech: "But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall

those things be which thou hast provided?" Luke 12:19. 20: God has given no man a tack of years, no nor hours; yet every body is ready to tell what they will do to-morrow, next month, or next year. The young people think they have a great deal of time before their hand for repentance; the old people think they have enough before them for that too: and in people's conceit there is always enough, till their time be gone quite, and they be wakened out of their dream. Hopes of long life have ruined many a soul. O to be wise! James 4:13. 14. "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go unto such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." But what folly is it to venture eternity on such uncertainty!

8. A fond conceit of the easiness of salvation-work. There is a generation that please themselves with the thought, that it is but to believe and repent, and that is soon done. What persons can do with a touch of their hand, they think they need to be in no haste with. But O how contrary is this to the whole strain of Scripture, and the saint's experience? Matth. 7:14, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Luke 13:24. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Eph. 1:19, 20, "The apostle speaks of the exceeding greatness of God's power toward them who believe, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. 1 Pet. 4:18. "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Did men believe this, that there is such a difficulty in getting to heaven, they would not dare delay for a minute entering on the way.

9. A conceit of sufficient ability in ourselves to turn ourselves from sin unto God. That the doctrine advancing the power of natural reason and ability in spiritual things, does take so much with the world, is no wonder, since man naturally is such a stranger to his own spiritual impotency. Hence it is observed, that the first question with the awakened is, "What shall I do to be saved?" It is worth observing how the carnal heart turns itself into different shapes, to retain its sinful lusts.

Sometimes the man says, that he is not able to do any good; but when his sin cannot find shelter under this covert but he is pursued hot with conviction, he puts off his reformation and repentance to another time; thereby in effect declaring that he can do it, if he had but a season for it. He that is to use his oars may row at what hour he pleases; but he that must sail by the help of the wind must set off while it blows, because he cannot command it.

II. I shall show that this delaying is a soul-ruining course.

This is evident if ye consider,

1. It is directly opposite to the gospel call; which is for to-day, not for to-morrow: Heb. 3:7, 8, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." All the calls of the gospel require present compliance, and do not allow sinners to put off till another day. It is true, salvation-work must be deliberate work; but ye are not allowed a time to deliberate whether ye will come to Christ and be holy or not. It is like the call to quench fire in a house, that must presently be done, yet done deliberately, so as the work be not marred in the making. How then can it be but a soul-ruining course?

2. It is threatened with ruin. The text is very express, "So shall thy poverty come as one that travaileth, and thy want as an armed man." And one with a thousand times more safety might venture on a sword-point, than the edge of such a divine threatening. See Prov. 23:21; Eccl. 10:18. And this threatening has been accomplished in many, whom their slothful delays have caused to perish; as in the case of Ephraim, Hos. 13:13. and of Felix, Acts 24:25. Many have been not far from the kingdom of God, who yet never came to it.

3. Whenever grace touches the heart, men see that it is so. Hence says the Psalmist, Psal. 119:60, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." When men are in earnest to get into Christ by faith, and to get back to God by repentance, they dare linger no more in the state of wrath, they flee out of it, as one fleeing for his life, Matt. 3:7. Their eyes are opened to see their danger, and therefore they are presently determined.

4. It has a native tendency to soul-ruin, which inevitably overtakes them, if they do not at length break off all delays, and come away. This is evident, if ye consider,

1st, The state of sin is a state of wrath, where ruin must needs compass a man about on every hand: John 3:36, "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." To have staid in Sodom that day it was to be burnt, was dangerous; but to abide a moment in the state of wrath, is far more dangerous. Who would venture into a house that is about to fall? who would not presently leave it? And will men venture "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," in a state of enmity with God? Surely such persons know not God's greatness, nor the worth of their own souls.

2dly, The longer ye continue in sin, your spiritual death advanced the more upon you. Every sin sets you a step farther from God, is a new bar in the way of your peace with him, strengthens your natural enmity against him, and alienates you more from the life of God. And where can this natively end, but in your souls' ruin? Ah! are we not far enough on in that way already? why delay more, that we may go yet farther off from God?

3dly, While ye remain in this state, there is but a step betwixt you and death, which you may be carried over by a delay of ever so short a time. All that is your security in this case, so far as ye can see, is the brittle thread of your life, which may be broken with a touch, and then ye are ruined without remedy. So that every delay, shorter or longer, of repentance, is a venturing of eternity on that uncertain life of yours, which in a moment may be taken from you.

USE I. For Information. This lets us see,

1. That delayers of repentance are self-destroyers, self-murderers. Well may it be said to such, as Ezek. 18:31, "Why will ye die?" Should a man wilfully neglect a remedy for his disease, which puts him in hazard of his life, he could not be guiltless of his own death; more than one who being called to rise and quench the fire in his house, and yet would lie still till it were consumed to ashes, would be blameless of its ruin. Self-love, that is,

love of sinful self, is the source of the greatest cruelty; whereby lusts are spared to the destruction of the life of the soul.

2. By delays the interest of hell is advanced; where many are this day who had resolved to repent, but death did not wait their time, and so they were disappointed. No wonder new grounds of delay be still laid to persons' hands, for it is Satan's great drift to get men entangled in the wilderness, that they may not make forward to Canaan's land. And every new entanglement sets the soul a step nearer to destruction: and who questions but Satan has art enough to coin new pretences for delays?

3. No wonder Satan is most busy to ply the engine of delays, when a sinner is somewhat awakened by conviction; as he did with Felix, Acts 24:25. "A soft answer turneth away wrath;" and delays will blunt the edge of convictions, as much as a peremptory refusal. Under convictions, at a sermon, or on a sick-bed, the sinner is awakened out of his sleep; but then nothing can serve Satan's purpose better, than yet a little sleep: which if they get, they sleep off the edge of convictions.

4. They are sinners' best friends, that give them least rest in a sinful course. And whatever men think of them now, they will think so afterwards, Prov. 5:11, 12, 13. Every body loves ease, and therefore faithful preaching and dealing with souls, is a torment to those who love to be undisturbed in their rest in sin, Rev. 11:10. But what suits best with our sinful inclinations, is worst for our souls, and will in the end be found so. Flattery has ruined many, when plain dealing and fair warning has brought many out of the snare.

USE 2. Of Lamentation. We may lament here the case of many, nay of most that hear the gospel. They put off their work from time to time, and so their spiritual case is going to wreck day by day. This is the case in natural things: Eccl. 10:18. "By much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through." They are in a dying condition, the physician comes to their bed-side, and offers them a remedy; they do not absolutely refuse it, only they put off the taking of it. In the meantime their distemper increases, and death is advancing apace. The market of free grace is opened, and they are called to come and buy: they see they need to buy, yet they are not like to stir till

the market be over. O madness and folly to be lamented with tears of blood! Poor slothful creature, that is yet for a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, there are four things thou knowest not.

1. Thou knowest not the worth of a precious soul, which thou art throwing away for what will not profit. Will the sweet sleep is sin quit the cost of the soul's ruin? No, no: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matth. 16:26. Christ left the bosom of the Father, and shed his precious blood to redeem the soul. He was wise that paid the price; and if less would have done, he would not have been at needless expense of blood: he was a Father that received it; and would not have put his Son to that if it had not been necessary. Satan goes about without intermission to ruin it. But what low thoughts dost thou entertain of it, that wilt not break thy rest to save it from ruin?

2. Thou knowest not the excellency of precious Christ; sleep locks up thine eyes that thou canst not see the ravishing sight, John 1:10. The eyes of saints and angels are fixed on him, as the glory of the upper house: the eyes opened here by grace, are arrested by his overcoming glory. Hence are these rapturous expressions in Scripture, Psal. 73:25. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." Cant. 1:3. "Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee." Zion's crowned King is making his progress through the city where thou dwellest; the cry to come out and behold him, reaches thine ears, Cant. 3. ult; but while he goes by, thou must have "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," and so thou lovest the sight. The royal Bridegroom stretches forth his hand unto thee, to espouse thee, saying, Behold me, behold me: thou openest thy drowsy eyes, and beginnest to stretch forth the hand; but sleep overcomes thee, thine eyes close, and thy hand falls down again, and the match is marred. The chariot of the covenant that is driving on to his Father's house halts at thy door, and thou art called out: the ship is to sail to Immanuel's land, thou art called to come aboard: but "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," and all is lost.

3. Thou knowest not the worth of precious time. The Apostle will have time redeemed, Eph, 5:16; but thou squanderest it away as a thing of no value; and working time is turned by thee into sleeping time. Precious moments slip away, and thou regardest not; though once gone, they can never be recalled. What would those who are past hope, give for an hour of that time, whereof thou lettest days, months, and years slip, without any improvement for eternity? O unhappy soul, who "knowest not in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace!"

4. Thou knowest not the weight of the wrath of God. It is true none can have a full comprehension of it, Psal. 90:11. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" But all the elect of God get such a notion of it, as rouses them up to fly from it, 2 Cor. 5:11. "Knowing the terror of the Lord," says the Apostle, "we persuade men." And if thou hadst tolerable apprehensions of it, it would break off thy sleep and slumber, and cause thee put forth thy hands to work. Didst thou consider what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, and how when thou fallest down again into thy bed of sloth, thou art truly in hazard of it, it would give thee such a gliff as would keep the waking.

There are three things thou dost not observe.

1. Thou dost not observe what speed thy ruin is making, while thou liest at ease; how thy judgment lingereth not, "and thy damnation slumbereth not," 2 Pet. 2:3. The avenger of blood is pursuing thee, though thou art not fleeing from the wrath to come. Thou art like a man sleeping in a leaky ship, which is drawing water every moment, and within a little it will be full, and sink to the bottom of the sea, if he do not awake and help it. Every hour thy debt is growing, the cup of wrath is filling, and fills so much the faster, as thou art secure.

2. Thou dost not observe how near thy destruction may be. Thou art like the old world, who "were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away," Matt. 24:38, 39. Thy spiritual lethargy and dead sleep hinders thee from hearing the sound of the feet of the approaching stroke. Thou liest open to the most terrible surprise, to sleep the sleep of death, which thou mayest never awake out of till in hell,

Luke 12:19, 20. and 16:23. And O how sad is it for men to be past hope, ere they begin to fear; to have the house falling, ere they get over their bed!

3. Thou dost not observe how utterly unable thou art to ward off the blow when it comes: Is. 33:14, "The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprized the hypocrites: who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Ezek. 22:14, "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it." Can worm man stand before the almighty God, whose patience may be worn out ere thou awake? And if mercy and patience quit the field, justice will succeed into their room; and then there shall be no more sleeping, nor ease for ever.

USE 3. Of Reproof to delayers of salvation-work. Why do ye go on in this soul-ruining course? Have ye no respect to the calls of the gospel, none to your souls, none to eternity? Why do not ye with all your might whatever your hand findeth to do? I would apply myself here,

1. To delaying saints.

2. To delaying sinners.

1. To delaying saints; for such there may be, and of such there are many at this day, Cant. 5:2, 3; and our text is a general truth and warning. Spiritual sloth is so interwoven with our corrupt natures, that it will never be quite rooted out, till the corrupt nature be perfectly expelled. And as it remains in great measure in the saints, so it is fruitful of delays. There are these five delays incident even to the saints.

1. A delay of righting their case when matters are wrong, by renewing their repentance, and the actings of faith. Sometimes their case is quite out of order: their graces are not in exercise; they are strangers to the Spirit's influences, and to access to and communion with God in duties. They have a secret dissatisfaction with this, and are resolved to get to their feet again; but sloth masters them, and the work is put off from time to time; as was the case with the spouse, Cant. 5:2, 3, "I sleep, but my

heart waketh," says she, "it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"

2. The delaying to give up with some bosom-idol that mars their communion with God, Cant. 3:1; Psal. 66:18. They are convinced, that the harbouring of it does much harm to their souls' case, and many resolutions they have to put the knife to the throat of it, but still they draw back their hand. And from one time to another the crucifying of it is put off; so that still it lives, like a waster in the candle, causing the soul's case go to wreck.

8. The delaying to clear their state before the Lord. They see need to have marches rid, and to be brought to a point whether they be in Christ or not, whether in a state of grace or not. They have resolutions to put it to a solemn trial, to examine themselves, and search what evidences they have for a title to heaven: but still the heart draws back, and the trial is put off.

4. The delaying of some particular duty, or piece of generation-work, which they are convinced God calls them to. They have often thoughts of setting about it in earnest; but still some one thing or other intervenes, and it is put off. They begin perhaps sometimes; but it is broken off again, and they must yet have "a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep."

5. Lastly, The delaying of actual preparation for eternity; like the virgins, Matt. 25:5, who, "while the bridegroom tarried, all slumbered and slept." They see that it is no easy thing to die; they resolve to labour to put themselves through grace into a case for it; but day after day it is delayed. The lamps are not trimmed for meeting the Bridegroom. Though they be in a good state, they have not a dying frame.

To all such I would say, as Jon. 1:6, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee, that thou perish not." Let me expostulate with you upon this head, O delaying saints.

1. Do ye find yourselves any thing the nearer your purpose by all your delays? Nay the longer ye delay, do not ye find yourselves the farther from it? Does not your aversion and backwardness to duty grow upon you the more? and is not your confidence in the Lord still the more lessened? Yes; the more ye give yourselves to spiritual sleep, the more ye will desire to sleep.

2. Do not ye find this the way to rank poverty and want? Your consciences will witness the truth of that, that where the diligent shall abound with blessings, the idle soul shall suffer hunger. Is it with you as in months past? Have ye that sense and gust of religion, that access to God in duties, which ye have had when ye were doing with your might what your hand found to do?

3. Has not your poverty come upon you as one that travaileth? Have ye not been sometimes like Samson awaked out of Delilah's lap, and found your strength gone from you when you had most to do with it? Perhaps thou hast spent many days in estrangement from God, with much ease; but at length some strong temptation, or piercing trial has overtaken you; and then you have sucked the bitter sap of your slothful delays.

4. A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep, and the occasion may be lost, the opportunity for doing neglected duties may be lost. Either they may be taken from you, or ye from them. No man has a tack of his life, nor of occasions of doing good; and therefore "as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith," Gal. 6:10. And though the soul that is in Christ shall be saved surely, yet this will make the salvation to be so as by fire.

5. Lastly, The long delayed work is hard work when it comes to the setting too, Cant. 5:5–8. When the awakening comes, there may be little time, much opposition, and less strength than otherwise thou wouldst have had, and yet more to do with it than otherwise. The longer thy hand is from thy case the more ravelled will it be. And it will readily occasion much fear, darkness, and perplexity in a dying hour.

II. I would apply myself to delaying sinners, to those that are yet out of

Christ, and have all to do for eternity still. They are living in a state of wrath, and yet they linger, and put off their removal from Sodom. They delay repentance, and go on in their sin. I would say to you, as Prov. 6:9, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" I must expostulate with you on this head.

First, Ye young people, why do ye delay repentance? why are ye like the wild asses' colts, untractable and unteachable? No doubt, ye think it is too soon for you; that it may be time enough several years after this. Ye think repentance and seriousness suits best with the wrinkled brows, the pale face, and hollow eyes, &c.; that it is pity to spoil the bloom of youth with such work. When do ye mean to repent then? It is like, it is when ye are settled in the world, or when ye grow old; at least the days of youth must be over first. But, poor fool,

1. Is the debt of sin so small upon thy head, that thou must run thyself deeper in the debt of God's justice? Dost not thou know that thou wast born a child of wrath? Eph. 2:3; that thou broughtest that into the world with thee, that will damn thee, if thou repent not, and come to Christ? And will not that sink thee deep enough in destruction, though thou add no more to it, unless thou repent?

2. Is not the same holy law binding on thee, since thou couldst discern betwixt good and evil, that is binding on the oldest alive? Have the young a liberty to sin, and to cast off the fear of God and religion, more than the old? See Gal. 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Here there is no exception. The follies of youth men may pass; but assure yourselves, God will not pass them: Eccl. 11:9, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." And I doubt not, but if ye saw your sinful thoughts, words, and actions, whether vain or vile, laid before you, as you must reckon for them at length, how few soever your years have been, you will see them to be more than the hairs on your heads. And I must tell you, that being yet unrenewed, and strangers to the life of grace, all your actions have been sin: Prov. 21:4, "An high look,

and a proud heart, and the ploughing of the wicked, is sin." And is it not then time to repent?

3. Who has assured thee, that ever thou shalt see the age thou speakest of? Go to the churchyard, and ye will see graves of all sizes, of your length and under. There are far more young corpses, than there are of those that carry gray hairs, ten to one.* Most men and women are cut off before they come to old age. What has befallen others as young and flourishing as you, may befall you too. And therefore, since ye know not but ye may die young, repent while ye are young, lest in the end ye find yourselves miserably disappointed.

4. Who has best right to your youth and strength? God or the devil? God is courting you for his own gift: Eccl. 12:1, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Satan will labour to keep his possession. God is the first and last; and he required the first and best, the first-fruits, the first-born, the morning-sacrifice; and he requires the first of your days, and he takes pleasure therein: Jer. 2:2, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." And will ye devote the first and best to sin and Satan, reserving the last and worst to your Creator?

5. Great is the advantage of those that get a gripe of religion while they are young, beyond others, in many respects. (1.) Readily their passage in the pangs of the new birth will be easier than that of others. In none is that scripture fulfilled more, Mark 4:27. of the seed's springing and growing up, none knoweth how, than where grace joins with good education in young persons. The nail lately driven, draws easily in comparison of that which has been long rusted in. Where grace catches persons before they begin to dip into the gross pollutions of the world, it frees them of much remorse that these must occasion to those that have been led away with them. (2.) Young people's affections are easiest moved; and as they move easiest, so they move most vigorously, whatever way they be set. Hence they lie most fair for tasting the sweet of religion: Hos. 2:14, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." God sometimes dandling young converts upon the knees, and giving them sensible tastes of the pleasure of religion, is agreeable to the particular promise made for their encouragement, Prov.

8:17, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." (3.) They are in the fairest way to have most access to serve God in their generation. Suppose a man to be converted when he is old, his salvation will be secure; but, alas! his time for serving God's honour in the world is almost gone ere he puts hand to work.

6. Lastly, God commands you to repent presently, and therefore it is on the peril of your soul, that ye venture to delay a moment longer: Heb. 3:7, 8, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Remember that word, Eccl. 11:9, 10, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity." A sinful youth will at length make a sad soul. Ye know not how soon God may be provoked against you to cut you off, if you delay. Monuments of the Lord's anger have been set up in childhood and youth, as well as in old age. Witness the children at Bethel, 2 Kings 2:23, 24.

Let not Satan deceive you, as if there were no pleasure in religion. No, Wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," Prov. 3:17. There is a sweet in religion a thousand times preferable to all the pleasures and vanities youth gades after.

Secondly, Ye middle-aged people, why do ye delay repentance? why do not ye think with yourselves seriously, where ye are like to take up your eternal lodging, and prepare for eternity by repentance? No doubt ye think ye have time enough too; but no time at present, for ye have another thing ado, the care of a family upon your heads, Luke 14:20. When is your term-day of repentance? It is like it is when ye shall have more time than now, or when ye grow old. But, O sirs,

1. What know ye that ever you shall see old age? Yea what dost thou know, but, as Luke 12:20, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee"? Alas! shall men thus from time to time venture their eternal state upon a mere uncertainty? Thy life is but a day, a short day, a winter day, and thou hast a long journey to go; thy forenoon is past already, and wilt thou sleep on till the evening that will soon be upon thee? The declining sun

calls thee to awake.

2. What reason is there, that thy business in the world should shuffle out thy business for eternity? Remember they had as good excuses as you, who upon the sending of them were rejected, and it was declared their day of grace was past, Luke 14:18, 19, 20, 24. Oh hast thou not a soul to provide for, thy eternal state to look after? Can ye wonder, if, as ye prefer the world to Christ now, he give you your portion in this life; and if ever the time come that thou set thyself to repent, he deny thee his grace, and hid thee go to the gods thou hast served?

3. Consider the advantages thou hast now for seriousness, when the foam of youth has settled, and the infirmities of old age have not yet drawn on. O consider, and shew yourselves men. Ye have spent your youth in vanity, and will ye spend this age too that way? What is it ye design for God, the dregs of thy years, that age that is the sink of infirmities? and ye will part with sin, when ye can follow it no longer. O sirs, what confidence can ye have, that God will accept that off your hand? Mal. 1:8. "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts."

4. Suppose ye should live till ye grow old, O how few are there that get grace to repent when they are old? I shall not say, there are none such; but truly though they be, they are very rare. Be not ye encouraged to delay, because some were called at the eleventh hour, Matth. 20:6; for if ye mark the text, these were others than those that were standing there at the third, sixth, and ninth hour. We set no bounds to sovereignty; but as for those that live under the gospel, and spend their best days in sin and estrangedness from religion, common observation tells us, that it is God's ordinary way to plague them with hardness of heart, when they grow old: Job 20:11. "His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." About three hundred years after Christ, there was one that had lived a pagan till he was an old man; when he told Simplicianus that he was a Christian, he would not believe him: but when the Church saw that he was really so, their was great shouting and gladness, saying, Caius Marius Victorius is become a Christian! They wondered to see a man when he was old born again.

5. Lastly, Will ye see the deceit of delays. When ye were young, did ye not put it off to this time? and now when that is come, ye are as unready as before. Delay no more then lest ye sleep the sleep of death.

Thirdly, Old people, why do ye delay repentance: why is not your heart bowing to God's call, when ye are begun to bow to meet the grave? Ye that have always thought ye had time enough all your days, ye will think there is time enough yet. But when is your term-day for repentance? a death-bed, it is like. And when ye come there, ye will hope it will be but a sick-bed, and so drive off your work till the utmost point. But, O sirs,

1. May not the time past of your life suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh? Most ye have "yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep?" Well, when ye have taken it over the belly of God's call to you all your days, what confidence can ye have to look for grace or mercy then? Sin, Satan, and the world shall have all your time, and ye will look to God, and seek his favour, when ye can do no more. O, are ye not afraid, that that be accomplished on you? Prov. 1:24. &c. "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you," &c. I trow, if your conscience were awakened just now, ye should have enough ado to fasten your feet on a promise of mercy.

2. How do you know, that ye will get a death-bed or sick-bed? What do ye know, but that in a moment ye may drop into eternity, as many have done? Mind him who used to say, three words would do his turn at death. Death does not always send messengers to warn us of its approach. Nay, see what our Lord says expressly, Matth. 24:48–51. "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming. And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken: the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not ware of; and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

3. Lastly, And is dying such an easy business, that ye must be laying up other work, yea your main work, for a dying time? I should think, that dying itself, with the pains, throes, and sickness that ordinarily attend it, were enough of themselves. Surely, if we were rightly exercised in health, we would endeavour, that when we come to die, we should have nothing ado but to die. But I pray you remember, you may come to die roving, without the exercise of your reason. But though ye should have it to the last, I pray you consider, is the work of repentance such an easy work as to leave it till the time you can do nothing else? Will ye put off turning to God, till ye are not able to turn yourselves on a bed, but as ye are lifted? taking heaven by storm, till your strength be gone? crying to God, till ye are not able to speak two sentences at once? making ready for death, till it be come to your bed-side?

USE ult. I exhort you all to delay repentance and salvation-work no longer.

MOTIVE 1. Consider ye do but mock God, and cheat yourselves by your delaying. For it is inconsistent with a sincere purpose to repent and turn from sin, 1 Pet. 4:1, 2, 3. For he that sincerely minds to turn from sin, will presently turn from it.

MOTIVE 2. Repentance is not in your power; it is God's gift, which he gives when he will, Acts 5:31. "God hath exalted Christ with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel." The time of God's grace is limited: a time wherein he will be found, and when not: Is. 55:6. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Death certainly puts a period to it. But it seems to be clear, that men may outlive their day of grace: Luke 14:24. "I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper." Time was when Esau might have had the blessing, but then he despised it; but the time came when he could not have it: Heb. 12:17. "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." Strike in then with the occasion; for if wind and tide fail, there can be no setting to sea.

MOTIVE 3. Though we knew certainly, that our day of grace were far

from the end; yet it is a most unworthy thing so to deal with God. Shall men abuse mercy and grace because the Lord waiteth to be gracious? Will men abuse the divine patience, because it suffers long? What a folly is it to stand off as long as we can from him to whom we must needs submit ourselves at length?

MOTIVE 4. The time is short, the work great, and so is the opposition. Salvation-work is a great work; it is no easy thing to be a Christian; ye must lay your account with all the opposition the devil, the world, and the flesh can make you; ye have but an age that is an handbreadth, as nothing to do it in.

MOTIVE 5. Your life is most uncertain. We are tenants-at-will, we have no tack for to-morrow, Jam. 4:13, 14. forecited. We are agreed about the necessity of repentance; the only question is, When shall it be done? God says, To-day; and to morrow is not yours, but God's. How then can ye destinate for this use the time that is not yours? Return to God one day before thy death, say the Jewish doctors. Wisely said; return then to-day, for it may be ye shall die to-morrow.

MOTIVE 6. The longer ye delay, the work will be the harder. For sin becomes stronger, as the waters, the farther from the head, the greater they grow. And the arrow that going from the bow strays from the mark, how far wide will it be ere it come to the utmost point? It is observed, that Christ groaned at the raising of Lazarus four days dead; but not so at the raising of the young man of Nain, or Jarius' daughter. 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." Their number increaseth; the devil who comes alone at first, at length his name is Legion. The heart grows harder, the mind blinder, the will more perverse, the affections more carnal.

MOTIVE 7. A moment's delay may be an eternal loss, because thou knowest not any moment that may not be thy last.

MOTIVE ult. God commands you to repent presently, Heb. 4:7. Therefore upon your peril it is, if ye delay any more.

OBJECTION. The thief on the cross repented at the last gasp. ANSWER. His repentance was one of the miracles at Christ's death; and he glorified God more at his death than ye could if ye had been a penitent all your days. But though there was one that none might despair, yet there was but one that none might presume. The other thief even died as he lived.

The Case of the Thief on the Cross No Argument for Delaying Repentance

Two Sermons preached, at Ettrick, in June, 1717.

LUKE 23:42,

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

THE love that sinners bear to their lusts, and the conviction men generally have of the necessity of repentance, each of them putting in for a share, do natively produce a delay. And Satan and the corrupt heart join to support the delaying temper, both by pretended reasons, and abused examples: amongst which last none is more so than this of the thief who repented on the cross.

My great design being to convince you, that this instance can be no encouragement to delay repentance, I need not here lay for a foundation the proof of this man's sincerity, which the text and context put beyond all doubt; nor insist on explaining this his prayer, full of faith and repentance, which had a most gracious answer.

Every body knows the story; and they that know very little of the Bible, will be found acquainted with this instance of the penitent thief on the cross; and they abuse it to their own ruin, drawing encouragement from it to put off repentance till they come to a death-bed.

We need not much wonder, that this becomes a stumbling-stone to many,

on which they are ruined. Hearing the thief was converted near the last gasp, and having led a sinful life, the thread was suddenly broken, and he died happily; his day was a dark day all over, till in the evening, the sun broke out with a bright though short glimpse, and then set; That this, I say, is abused and turned to a stumbling-stone by impenitent sinners, is no great wonder, if ye consider the following things.

1. As a vicious stomach corrupts the best of meat; so impenitent sinners abuse the best things to their own ruin: so that what raises up others taught of God, is an occasion of falling to them. The altar of God, and the whole law was so to the unbelieving Jews, Rom. 11:9. Is not the very gospel, and the preachers thereof, a savour of death to some? 2 Cor. 2:16. Nay, Christ himself is a stumbling-block to them. 1 Pet. 2:8.

2 There is a particular disposition in the hearts of impenitent sinners to abuse and wrest the Scriptures. Hence Peter, speaking of Paul's epistles, says, "In them are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction," 2 Pet. 3:16. The Scripture is a light, and a rule of divine authority; and it may well be expected, that if sinners can persuade themselves of a shelter there for their sins, it will be the most effectual one. This is the most feasible means for stilling the clamours of an ill conscience, and cheating men into their own ruin.

3. Abused Scripture is one of the chief pieces of Satan's armour, wherewith he maintains and promotes his kingdom among those that have the Scriptures. Thus Satan said to Christ, Matt 4:6. "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Hence unclean persons still their consciences with the example of David, swearers with that of Joseph by the life of Pharaoh, or Peter's, &c. Men that are mere moralists screen themselves with that, Mic. 6:8, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And others satisfy themselves with good meanings and desires, because of that, Matt. 5:6, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Others think, they may repent at any time, from that Scripture,

Ezek. 18:27, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." And thus it becomes harder to convince men that have some notional knowledge of the Bible, than those that never knew it.

4. Reigning love to sin makes people very dexterous to find out shifts to preserve their lusts; as in Saul's speech to Samuel, 1 Sam. 15:15, "They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God, and the rest we have utterly destroyed." What people would fain have to be true, it is easy to persuade them of: and what they are loathe to part with, it is not hard to invent shifts to hold it still. Were men willing to be the Lord's, they would be so presently; and they would be loathe to delay one moment, lest they should never see another.

To come to this particular instance in the text, I must tell you, That though here is ground of hope for poor trembling sinners, that they may be brought to repentance, and be accepted of God; yet there is no ground here for crafty delaying sinners to put off repentance, in hopes to go through with it afterwards, especially in a dying hour.

I. There is ground of hope for trembling sinners. And we may learn from this instance these following lessons.

1. They may go long on, and far on in the way to hell, whom yet God may bring home to himself. Here is a man, a thief, whoso course brought him to an ill end, to a violent death, and yet grace reaches him. See the following remarkable passage, 1 Cor. 6:9, 10, 11, "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. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." From this it appears, that some of the Corinthian converts had been formerly the vilest of wretches, and guilty of the most enormous lewdness and impiety; and yet became famous monuments of the triumphs of sovereign efficacious grace. What a length did Manasseh and

Paul go; and yet what illustrious penitents did they afterwards become? The latter justly acquired the character of the greatest of saints, and the most eminent of all the apostles.

2. Grace sometimes catches them that in appearance, and to the eyes of the world, are farthest from it. It passeth by the most likely, and pitches on the most unlikely objects. While chief priests, scribes, and elders mock Christ, the thief on the cross is converted. The Lord loves to set up the trophies of his victory in the midst of the devil's kingdom. Hence is that promise, Is. 55:5, "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee, shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God; and for the holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee."

3. Grace makes a vast difference betwixt those betwixt whom it finds none. Here are two thieves, both on the cross: grace touches the heart of the one, but passeth by the other; and makes the one a convert, while the other dies hardened. So true is Paul's observation, Rom. 9:16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

4. Lastly, While there is life there is hope. Here is one converted when near the last gasp; while his last sand was running, grace overtakes him, opens the eyes that before were closed, wins the heart that had been all along hardened. But I stay not on these things. Only the use that is to be made of this, is,

1. Let those that seek God early be encouraged from this, that they shall find him: Prov. 8:17, "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." Was he so ready to receive a penitent soul coming in at the last hour, then surely he will be very ready to receive thee that comes in before that time. He rejected him not because he was long a-coming; but received him because he came. Come then forward with assured hope of thy acceptance upon thy early return.

2. Let not those whose day is almost gone, before they have begun their work, despair. Who knows but that may be done in the evening, that was neglected the whole day before? A gale for heaven may blow, that may put life in an old sinner, and make his flesh fresher than that of a child. The

door of the vineyard stands open for labourers to come in even at the eleventh hour. Sovereignty is not pent up to times and ways, but takes a latitude in both.

3. Lastly, Let us sow beside all waters, in the morning and in the evening. It depends on the working of free grace, which shall prosper. We are ready to be hopeless of success, where persons have long stood out against the Lord. But God's heavy hand on a man, and a view of eternity, may afford a season wherein the wild ass may be caught.

II. But there is no ground here for the crafty delaying sinner to put off repentance, especially till a dying hour. To set this matter in a true light, consider these following things.

1. It is a most rare example. There is not an instance like it in all the book of God, unless it be that of Achan, Josh. 7:20, 21. Yet the Lord has left that case of Achan's much under a cloud; so that it is not positively determined as this is, though we may charitably hope the best in his case too. Now, here I would have you to consider,

1st, What less could there have been to have cleared a possibility of acceptance with God, for a sinner at the last, after he has spent all his days in sin? If we had not had this instance, what could have been said to shew such wretched mispenders of time, that ever any that was so long a setting off in their journey to heaven did get in? And because this says, that none should despair; must it therefore import, that they may safely delay? The sun once stood still in the days of Joshua; which says it is possible such a thing may be: but will any man delay his work in hope of such an extraordinary cast again? And why will ye?

2dly, As one swallow makes not spring, so neither can this one event make a general rule that you or I may trust to. The ordinary rule is, that as men live, so they die; a holy life, a happy end; a graceless, careless life, an unhappy and miserable end. Because Providence may go off the ordinary road, and do that in a few minutes with some, that ordinarily costs many years to others; can you venture eternity on that, that he will do so with you? Moses fasted forty days and nights, Exod. 34:28: yet who will venture on that in hopes of having his life preserved without food?

3dly, Are there not eminent instances to the contrary, wherein men living in their sin have been struck down in a moment, getting no time to repent of them, but fiery wrath has put an end to their days? Consider the case of Nadab and Abihu, Lev. 10:1, 2, of whom it is thought they had erred through drink, ver. 9; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Numb. 16:31, &c.; Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5, who died instantly with a lie in their mouth. But why do I instance in particular persons? Did not millions die together in their sins, by the deluge that swept away the old world, the fire and brimstone that burned up Sodom, Gomorrha, Admah, and Zeboim? What multitudes were there there, who, being warned, put off to the day they never saw? And shall this one instance encourage you to delay, over the belly of the dreadful example of millions on the other hand?

4thly, The most that this so rare an example can amount to, is a possibility. It is not to so much as a probability or likelihood. That is a probable event, which though it does not always fall out, yet for the most part it does so; as that the husbandman shall get more than his seed again. But from what is said it appears, that for the most part it falls out otherwise, namely, that people even die as they live. So that it is probable, that if thou do not repent before, God will deny thee grace to repent at the last. How then can a man that has any belief of a God, a heaven, and a hell, venture his salvation on a mere possibility, while the probability lies the other way?

2. Though there were two thieves on the cross at that time, yet it was but one of them that got grace to repent. The one indeed was a true penitent; but the other died as he lived, hardened in his sin; nay, perhaps worse; for he died blaspheming the Son of God, before whose tribunal he was to appear, ver. 39. Now, upon this I would make these rational reflections.

1st, Is it not possible that thou mayst die blaspheming, if thou do not repent now in time? Thou canst not deny the possibility of it, when there is such a plain instance of it in the case of one of these thieves. Thou thinkest it may be thou mayst die a penitent with the good thief; and I say, it may be thou mayst die blaspheming with the other. The one is even as certain, as to us, as the other. Thou livest impenitent all thy days; when thou comest to a death-bed, God may withhold his grace from thee which

thou hast all along refused; he may let thee see thy case hopeless for ever, and thou mayst be filled with despair; and in that case it is more than possible that both tongue and heart may rise against God.

2dly, It is at least an equal venture, that thou mayst die impenitent, as that thou mayst die a penitent. Thou hopest to repent at the last; why? because the thief on the cross repented. And I must say, that delaying repentance till then, thou runnest the risk of dying impenitent; for the other thief died so. And who has told thee, whether thy lot shall be with the one or with the other? Now, to repent presently, makes thy salvation certain; to delay it, does at best leave it to a venture. And consider with yourself seriously, if salvation and damnation be such trifling things, as to be left to an uncertainty, you do not know how it may fall.

3dly, It is inconsistent with common sense, to leave that thing to a venture, which may be made sure, where a hit or a miss is of the utmost concern. Suppose a rebel might certainly have his life by a willing submission to his prince, should he choose to stay till he were apprehended by the officers, he would act most unreasonably, sonably, and put his life in hazard where there is no need; as in the case of Shimei, 1 Kings 2:42. A thousand times more unreasonable art thou in such delays of repentance, for now thou mayst make heaven sure: but if thou delay, thy soul is left to a dreadful venture; and if thou miss when it comes to the point, thou art ruined for ever.

4thly, Nay but the venture is very unequal; for it is far more likely that delaying thou mayst die impenitent, than that thou mayst die penitent. Few took part with the good thief amongst all the crowd of spectators; the multitude went the other thief's way, mocking, ver. 35. And what casts the balance here in case of likelihood, is,

(1.) Common observation, that tells us, that most people even die as they live. Repentance is a flower rarely seen springing up from a death-bed. A melting of heart for sin, because of the dishonour done to God by it, is seldom seen in such as have lived a graceless, careless, presumptuous life; but that disposition even hangs about them to the end.

(2.) It is certain that few are saved, in comparison of them that are left:

Matt. 7:14, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." As to what some say of the infants of all mankind; all that are saved must go by the strait gate, and still these are few. It is evident, that most men live impenitent; yet all must die; and therefore it follows, that few get grace to repent at their last, but most of those that live impenitent even die so too.

(3.) The sad threatenings denounced against sinners going on in their sin, with respect to their latter end: Prov. 1:24–27, "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." Ezek. 24:13, "In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." Now, show me one promise in all the Bible, promising the grace of repentance to those that delay, for to balance this. It is true, the gospel-offer is general, and excludes none while in this world: but O what a hazard is there, that these threatenings be accomplished to the denying the grace to lay hold on them then.

(4.) Corrupt nature sticks fast in thee; and it will harden thee in the face of death as well as it does now, unless thou get grace from above. Now, that corruption has possession long continued already, thou art sure of it; but thou hast no certainty for the grace of God to break it in thee, and work repentance in thy so long impenitent heart. And therefore I must conclude the venture to be very unequal.

(5.) Repentance is not to be wrought by the sinner's being brought to an extremity, as you may possibly imagine. Here was a man that was hanging on a cross, bleeding to death in great torment, having a present prospect of eternity before him, who could have no more pleasure in the world. But did that humble him? No, no. His heart remains obdured to the last gasp. He is going into eternity; yet he is adding sin to sin, and going out of the world as he lived in it, if not worse. We find from Matt. 27:44, that after the chief priests, scribes, and elders had mocked and railed on Christ, it is added, that "the thieves also which were crucified

with him" joined in the railing. Whence some think, that even the other too joined in this railing on Christ, till grace broke in upon him and overcame his nature.

(6.) The most powerful and likely means of grace will not prevail, unless accompanied with a special operation of the Spirit. This blaspheming thief was near Christ himself, and might hear his words and groans. He had the example of his companion moving him to repent. Grace was at work working wonders upon his neighbour. He had a dying preacher to call him to repent. The sun's light was eclipsed, the earth quaked, the rocks rent, the graves opened: yet for all these he died impenitent, and hard-hearted. Think on this, ye that deem it so easy to repent, if ye were come to your last.

(7.) They that delay repentance till a dying hour, readily find they have another thing to do then, than to repent; as is evident from the case of the other thief on the cross, ver. 39. "And one of the malefactors which were hanged, railed on him, saying, if thou be Christ save thyself and us." Death is the destruction of nature, and therefore nature wrestles against it, though there be no hope. This man was more concerned to get his body saved than to get his soul saved. And, alas! is not this the case of the most part at that time? They have so much ado with the disease, that they can hardly get a due concern for their souls, or a composed thought.

3. There is no evidence that this thief had before such means of grace as you have. Who can say, that ever he heard the gospel preached by Christ or any of his disciples? It is most likely he was a rake; that if he heard any thing of God, it was from the Scribes and Pharisees at times; and may be, when he might have heard either them, or Christ and his disciples, he was about his thievish trade. Now,

1st, It is unreasonable to think, that it should fare at the last with those who have had means of grace all their days, and despised them, as it may do with those who never have such means till they come to die. One would think it no wonder at all, to see a man converted at his last, who gets the first notice of Christ and the way of salvation when on his death-bed. But what is that to thee, who hast all along been invited to repent, and come to Christ, but wouldst not? The former is no wonder in

comparison of the latter.

2dly, This conversion of the thief doubtless was a perfect surprise to him, a thing he was not looking for. But thou art setting tryst with repentance at thy last hours. Can you believe, that ever this thief delayed repentance in hopes of what he met with, namely, to die on a cross with Christ, and then to feel the power of his grace? Nobody can believe it. What is his example then to thee? Is it rational for thee to expect that favour which one has sometimes been surprised with, and got when he was not looking for it?

4. This thief was converted, when by the hand of public justice he was to die. When he was made a public example to the world, and as a malefactor brought to an untimely end for his crime, he got repentance at the gallows, not on a death-bed. He was cut off perhaps in the midst of his days; at least he died not by the course of nature, nor by any sickness, but was executed for his evil deeds. And it is observable, that the one other case which looks likest to this in the Bible, was of the same sort, namely Achan's. Now,

1st, It is evident, that wicked men who are running on in such courses as will bring them to an untimely death, by the laws of the land, such as thieves, robbers, murderers, &c. have a fairer ground from this to delay repentance till they come to the scaffold, than you have, who are looking for a death-bed, and delay repentance till you come there. For their case is nearer akin to this than yours. But are not they most foolish if they so do, even in your eyes? No doubt they are. And so are ye in the eyes of others, whose eyes God has opened.

2dly, If we compare the case of this thief put to death for his crimes, and of other malefactors so dying, with the case of men that have lived impenitently dying in their beds; though grace is alike free to both, yet, humanly speaking, there is more hope of the repentance of the former than of the latter. And this I say on these three grounds.

(1.) It is more easy to convince a malefactor upon the scaffold, of his crime, and the evil of it, and of those other sins that have been the inlets to it, than to convince another of his sin upon a deathbed, as common

observation sheweth. Hence our Lord says, "that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before the self-righteous Pharisees," Matth. 21:31. Many a time is sabbath-breaking, disobedience to parents, drunkenness, neglect of the means of grace, confessed and regretted on a scaffold, while there is not one word of them from a death-bed, in cases where there is perhaps as good ground for it. When the corruption of nature breaks out in some atrocious crime that brings a person to an untimely end, there is more access to convince them of it, than others who have the same plague in them, but it has not so appeared.

(2.) The view that the thief had of eternity upon the cross, and that other malefactors have in such a case, is more certain than what impenitent sinners generally have on a death-bed. The one see they must die without peradventure, the other have some hopes of life generally while they have breath. And so the terror of death must needs be more operative in the one than the other; forasmuch as there is such a difference in the certainty of the view of it.

(3) If we except the time wherein both are actually grappling with death, the one with a violent death, the other with a natural one; the former have less hinderances from the body to prepare for death than the latter; forasmuch as the one is tossed with bodily sickness and indisposition, the other commonly is not.

5. The conversion of the thief on the cross was an extraordinary manifestation of our Lord's power, made for special reasons. And therefore though it shows what the Lord can do; it does not show what ordinarily he will do. Consider here, to evince this, that,

1st, It was done in such a juncture of time, as the like never was, and the like never will be again; namely, when the Lord of glory, the Saviour of the world, was actually hanging upon the cross, paying the ransom for the lost elect world; Rom. 6:9, "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."

2dly, It was a wonder wrought in a time allotted in a particular manner beyond all times, for God's working wonders. The time of the Lord's giving the law on Mount Sinai, was a time of wonders; but not

comparable to this. The leading wonder there was God's making his voice to be heard, and speaking forth a holy law; and it was attended with other wonders, namely, thunders, lightnings, a thick cloud upon the mount, smoke, and fire, and the sound of a terrible trumpet waxing louder and louder, Exod. 19:16, &c. But the leading wonder on Mount Calvary was yet greater, namely, the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, hanging, groaning, dying on a cross: and therefore the attending wonders were proportionably greater. For,

(1.) The sun was under a dreadful eclipse, for the space of not a few minutes, but three hours, Matth. 27:45. The eye of the visible world was struck blind at the sight.

(2.) The vail of the temple was, without hands, rent from the top to the bottom, Matth. 27:51; to shew that by this death an end was put to the ceremonial law, and the way unto the holiest of all made open.

(3.) The earth quaked at the dreadful fact of crucifying the Lord of glory, Matth. 27:51.

(4.) The hard rocks rent, upbraiding the spectators and guilty multitude with the hardness of their hearts, Matth. 27:51.

(5.) The graves were opened, and many of the dead saints arose, to shew that Christ by his death had overcome the power of death over his people, Matth. 27:52.

(6.) The spectators of those strange things smote their breasts, being struck to the heart, Luke 23:48.

(7.) Lastly, The centurion and his soldiers were convinced, that he whom they had crucified was the Son of God, Matth. 27:54.

Now, upon all these I would make these reflections.

[1.] Is it reasonable, because the thief was converted at the last hour, in a time that the like never was, nor will be, for thee to expect that it shall fare so with thee? Thou mayst as well throw thyself into a burning fiery furnace, and hope to come forth safe, because Daniel and his fellows were

once so delivered. Were Christ to come again, and to be crucified a second time between two malefactors, and thou wert one of them to be crucified with him, it might be that thou mightst be converted at thy last hour. And yet thou couldst not be sure; for it might be thy lot to be the hardened one, as it was the other thief's. But since it is not so, how darest thou trust to such a late repentance?

[2.] Is it any wise strange, that amongst all these wonders of justice, power, and faithfulness, there was one wonder of mercy upon the thief on the cross? that the same power that was rending the rocks, did mercifully open the heart of one of those thieves to receive Christ and his grace? But how canst thou think, that the time of thy departure will be a time of such wonders? And if not, how canst thou deceive thyself into a delay of repentance, in expectation of receiving such a signal display of divine grace and mercy?

[3.] Was it not very becoming the divine wisdom, that when the divine glory of the Son of God was veiled upon the cross, a ray of it should break forth in the conversion of one of two that were hanging there with him? that when his judges, and the rulers and people had got him on the cross as a malefactor, he should have his glory owned by one of those crucified with him: but what is that to thee in a day wherein it is long since Christ was set down at his Father's right hand, and his glory published through the world by the gospel?

[4.] Is it any thing strange, that when our Lord was triumphing over principalities and powers, he set up one trophy, one sign of his victory, in the field of battle? Col. 2:15. Was it not very natural, that he who when he should be lifted up, was to draw all men after him, should actually at the time draw one after him? But what encouragement can that be to thee to delay to the last, when that nick of time is over long ago? And now there are thousands of visible monuments of Christ's conquest by his death set up, so that thou wilt never be missed, though thou die as thou livest, impenitent.

6. Lastly, The penitent thief on the cross was not only sincere, but he glorified Christ more in his late repentance, than thou art capable to do by thine, nay more than if thou hadst lived a penitent all thy days. For

consider,

1st, When our Lord was in his lowest step of humiliation, he professed his faith of his divine nature, and his being King of the other world: "Lord," says he, "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." What wonderful faith was this, that while Christ was so low as hanging on a cross, he owns him King of heaven; that dying, he was going to receive a kingdom; that he has all power there; that he is full of mercy, compassion, and faithfulness; so that the very remembrance of him would be sufficient to secure his eternal welfare! thou mayst believe and profess all this, but never at such a time. He is now the exalted Redeemer, who has ascended far above all heavens, and sits on the right hand of God. But what is that to the glorifying of him in his lowest humiliation?

2dly, When others had crucified him as a malefactor, and were mocking him, and railing on him, as one that deserved not common compassion, he was praying to him, as Lord of the other world. If thou shouldst now do so too; yet remember how small a thing is that in comparison of what the good thief did in these circumstances.

Lastly, All this he did, and more, publicly before a multitude of spectators, which thou art not likely to have when thou comest to a death-bed. He justifies God before them all; he condemns himself; he does what he can to convince and convert his poor graceless companion, who possibly sinned with him as he did suffer; he condemns those that crucified Christ, and gives his public testimony against them, as men that feared not God.

To conclude this matter: Repent ye timeously, and trust not to a late repentance. Let not this example of the thief on the cross, or any thing else, make you to delay. Many a call ye have had to return to the Lord; but, alas! to the most part they have been ineffectual. God is giving us a providential call to repentance, at this time: he is saying to us, as he did to the church of Ephesus, Rev. 2:5, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." God knows what our present trial may end in. But in that dark dispensation we may clearly see that God is a jealous God, and makes

people's sins to find them out. Repentance would be the most feasible means to extricate us out of our difficulties. If there were a spirit of prayer and mourning for the causes of the Lord's controversy with us, it would be a token for good. But, alas! the work of repentance for the most part is put off from time to time, till it be put off to a death-bed; and who can secure the tryst to be kept there?

There are three things I would say of death-bed repentance.

1. If it be got, it is the most unuseful repentance for God, and the most uncomfortable for one's self. Unuseful; for then men begin their work for God, when their time is ending; and so though they may be saved, yet God gets little honour from them. And uncomfortable to persons themselves; for being saved, they are saved so as by fire; they must go to heaven by the brink of hell; while they see their last sand running, and get their consciences awakened, eternity must be to them a dreadful spectacle.

2. Death-bed-repentance is seldom sincere. The king of terrors may make a Pharaoh say, I have sinned. But what sincerity is in the most part of those things that begin on death-beds, may be learned from the case of many, who being past hopes of recovery from their sickness, either as to themselves or others, do yet recover, and turn just the old men and women they were before. When the best appearances of death-bed repentance are, it is hard to make sure conclusions; but as Augustine said in such a case, *Non dico damnabitur, non dico salvabitur; sed tu, dum sanus es, poenitentiam age.**

3. Lastly, Many trust to deathbed repentance that never see it. Some are surprised into eternity; some are tossed so with sickness that they cannot have a composed thought; some quickly lose the use of their senses and reason; and most part die as they live: Therefore repent ye in time, and delay no more, lest ye bring the ruin on your souls that will never be recovered.

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