

SERMON XI.

On the Final Perseverance of The Saints.

John 10: 28.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The First Sermon on this text.

AS I design to consider among you that most establishing and comfortable doctrine of the saints final perseverance in grace, and certain enjoyment of eternal glory, I have made choice of the words I have now read, as apprehending they are admirably well adapted to this purpose. If we enquire into the occasion of them; we are informed a little before our text, that, as our Lord was walking in the temple, he was accosted by some of the Jews with this question, *How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.*¹ What their immediate design was in this question, we cannot be absolutely certain. The generality of interpreters suppose, that hereby they would have ensnared our Lord; for had he acknowledged himself to be the *Messiah*, as their mistaken notions were terminated in his being an earthly prince, coming to deliver them from the Roman yoke, I say, had he professed himself to have been the *Messiah*, they would have gone and accused him to the civil governor. However, we find Christ, in his reply to them, upbraiding them with their unbelief, says, *I told you, and ye believed not.*² which crime was so much the more aggravated by the mighty works which he wrought, which carried their own evidence along with them, that they were effected by a divine power. Now as God cannot be supposed to set his seal to a lie, so the exceeding greatness of that power, that was exerted for the performance of them, was a sufficient testimony to the authority of Christ's mission, as coming immediately from the Father. And then, our Lord subjoins the great origin of this their incredulity, *But ye believe not.* Well, and why is it? *But, because ye are not of my sheep;*³ or, no part of that trust committed to me by the Father, and so are left to the

¹ John 10:24.

² John 10:25.

³ Verse 26.

unbelief of your own hearts, and this, without the least reflection on the divine justice? *For, as faith is the gift of God,*⁴ so he is under no obligation to bestow it upon any person. It is an act of pure favor, which, those, who enjoy it, have no right to in themselves. Our Lord goes on to give an account of his sheep, and their privileges. And the first thing he mentions, is his propriety in them; *My sheep*, “says he,” “*hear my voice*; they are mine, as they are the purchase of my blood, because I formed them for myself; they are mine, as I have taken them under my care and patronage; they are mine, as I delight in them, and will rejoice over them to do them good. These, having hearing ears, and understanding hearts, given them from myself, attend to my voice; they can distinguish my voice from the voice of a stranger, and are in some measure obedient to my call. To which he adds, *I know them, and they follow me.*⁵ I know them, they are always before me, known unto me are their gifts and graces, all their joys and sorrows, all their dangers and infirmities: and as I know them, I love them, and delight in them. And as a consequence of my writing my laws in their hearts, they *follow me*. And a stranger will they not follow.⁶ Of these things I have spoken to you at large. Then our Lord adds the words of our text, as the greatest blessing of all, *and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand*. In which words we may observe,

1. The great portion and privilege of Christ's sheep, and this of the weakest as well as the strongest amongst them eternal life is theirs; *I give unto them eternal life*, says our Lord:

2. That this blessing comes to them in a way of gift, and not of merit: *I give*, &c.

3. The glorious consequence of this: They shall never perish; which our Lord confirms, both by his own, and by his Father's care and power. *None is able to pluck them out of my hand*, says Christ in the text, and in the verse following, *none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand*. Each of these very well deserve our particular attention. But as that which may have a greater tendency to answer the design I have in view, I shall raise from them the following doctrinal observation:

⁴ Ephesians 2:8.

⁵ John 10:27.

⁶ Verse 5.

THAT Christ's sheep, being given to him by the Father, or committed to him as a great trust, his faithfulness is engaged, that not one of them, how weak, and how languishing or diseased so ever in themselves, shall be finally lost, or fall short of eternal blessedness. I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

In the prosecution of this great and fundamental doctrine of the gospel we shall,

I. Clear our way by some portions, that may have a tendency to explain what we mean by it.

II. We shall endeavor to confirm and establish it, by several arguments;

III. Attend to the most considerable of those objections, which are advanced against it; and,

IV. Consider the great improvement that is to be made of this blessed doctrine, and how far our peace and comfort depend upon the firm belief of it.

We begin accordingly with the first thing,
viz,

I. To clear our way by some general portions, which may serve as illustrations of what we mean by the saints *Final Perseverance*. And in order to state the question, observe,

1. That it is not disputed, whether persons, who have an appearance of religion, make large pretensions to an interest in Christ, and bear a great profession in the world, whether, I say, such persons may not, after all, fall a way and be lost. For we allow that this will be the case with, alas! But too many who have called our Redeemer Lord in this world, and yet have never really been acquainted with his grace, nor indeed have had any lot or share in this matter. It is therefore allowed on all hands, that we may think we are something, and others may think so of us too, yet all the while we may have only a name to live, and be really dead. Again,

2. The question is not whether any man, even a renewed man, is in himself a match for the enemies he is surrounded with, such as Satan, and the corruptions of his own heart. We are ready to acknowledge that we can no more think a good thought, as of ourselves, after conversion, than before all our sufficiency being of God. No, view a man separate from the grace of God, and he is unequal to the least temptation. So that the question is not, whether he hath a sufficiency to overcome his enemies in himself, but whether at length he shall not gain a complete victory over them. But again,

3. The question is not whether, as to the acting, or exercising of grace, the soul may not many times seem to be in a very languishing condition, and in effect sometimes be at a very low ebb indeed. For this we readily grant hath been the case with some of the greatest believers in the world, such as *David, Peter*, and others. And, to add no more,

4. We are not here disputing, whether a believer may not say, through the weakness of his faith, that he is exceedingly fearful, lest he should fall short, and never hold out to the end: we allow this also to have been often the case of the best of men.

But the question lies in this more especially; whether an elect vessel, having once tasted of the grace of God, can entirely lose that which was wrought in him, and so finally perish; whether in the issue, let his apprehensions or fears be what they will, he may either separate himself, or be plucked by any other out of *Christ's* hand. This we must deny, and hope to make it appear very evidently to you, that it is absolutely impossible. You see how express our text is. It is not said, perhaps, or it may possibly be, or there is good ground to hope that they shall not perish, is they hold on believing, or the like but, in an absolute peremptory manner, *they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand*. Which brings us to consider the next general head, and that is,

II. To confirm or establish this great truth, which our Lord himself so strongly asserts in the text. And here we have a very large field opened to us. For as God, in his abundant grace, hath taken special care to furnish his people, in every part of his word, with strong arguments, and gracious promises of consolation; so, as this is one of the main springs of the saints hope and joy, we have such solid, and abundant evidence of it in the scriptures, that one should stand amazed, did we not consider the weakness

of faith in the best of men, that any should entertain a scruple about it. However, we shall begin,

1. With the immutable purpose of God in election, as a foundation every way sufficient to build the position laid down in the text upon, viz. That none of Christ's sheep shall ever perish. And in order to illustrate this, observe,

(1.) That God himself, as in his essence, so in his determinations, is absolutely incapable of the least change or alteration. This is not only confirmed by the word of God, where he is represented as the *Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,*⁷ but may very easily be evinced from reason. For, let it be considered, if the Lord changes, it must be owing to something in himself, or in his creatures. As to God himself, you know, one of the primary ideas that we have of Deity, is, that he should be always that same wise, holy, just and powerful Being, that he ever was. Thus you know that God speaks of himself, *I am the Lord, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*⁸ As to his creatures, there cannot possibly be any thing in them, or done by them, but what was naked and open before him, even from everlasting. Add to this, that was he to alter on their account, or because of something that he did not foreknow concerning them, this would not only be to eclipse the glory of his omniscience, but, so far, to render him dependent on the creature; which, you know, is directly contrary to the nature of an infinite, sovereign, and unchangeable Being. This being allowed us, we observe again,

(2.) That this immutable Being hath, by a peremptory decree, determined the salvation of his chosen. This we might prove to you from that place, where we are told, that *as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.*⁹ plainly supposing, that some certain number of persons were thus really ordained to eternal life. So that from hence it must necessarily follow, that they cannot perish, since an unchangeable Being hath thus decreed that they should enjoy eternal life, who says of himself, *My counsel shall stand and, and I will do all my pleasure.*¹⁰ This is then the first argument, God is

⁷ James 1:17.

⁸ Malachi 3:6.

⁹ Acts 13:48.

¹⁰ Isaiah 46:10.

an immutable being, who hath resolved that not one of his chosen ones shall perish. But this truth will be farther evident, is we consider,

2. That, the same Jesus who hath declared that they shall never perish, hath, by his glorious undertaking, and perfect accomplishment of it, for ever set them so far out of the reach of their spiritual enemies, that all those who would endeavor to *pluck them out of his hand*, shall not be able to effect it. But more particularly.

(1.) He hath delivered them from sin, the worst of their enemies, that which hath a natural tendency to separate betwixt them and their God. Sin, as it is a violation of God's law, so it is an act of rebellion, and highly provoking in his sight. And he who hath once been guilty of it, by this means, has set himself at a distance from God, and declares open war with him. Now is any thing in the world hath a tendency to promote the destruction of a person, it must be sin. And as Christ's sheep, as well as others, have sinned against God, so they must have perished in their iniquities, had he not, some way or other, removed their transgressions from them. Well, this he did by the sacrifice of himself. View him then, as he is represented in the word of God, as taking upon himself the iniquities of his sheep, undertaking, by a voluntary act of his own, to answer for them and then, though they have gone astray in themselves, yet God can be *just, and the justifier of them, who thus believe in him*.¹¹ and as he hath by *one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified*,¹² *there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus*,¹³ that is, to any of his sheep. And thus, you may easily suppose the difference between God and them is made up, as the apostle speaks, *He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*.¹⁴ They are now, become the objects of God's care and delight. And if sin, that enemy which wars against the soul, and which, if any thing in the world would pluck them out of *Christ's* hands, it must be that, if, I say, that hath entirely lost its power of destroying *Christ's* sheep; we may very safely conclude that they can never perish. Sin is undoubtedly that burden which makes *Christ's* sheep groan for deliverance. And though they may cry out, as the apostle did, O wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us from the

¹¹ Romans 3:26.

¹² Hebrews 10:14.

¹³ Romans 8:1.

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

body of this death?¹⁵ yet, at the same time, in a view of their deliverer, they may well bless the name of the Lord, and with the same apostle say, *Thanks be to God, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.*¹⁶ They will carry sin to the grave with them; but as sin would hinder them from entering into glory, so they shall lay aside every degree of it, at their dissolution. Well, this is one, and the principal of the enemies of Christ's sheep, which their great shepherd hath overcome. But again,

(2.) SATAN, that roaring lion, O with what diligence, with what subtlety and malice, doth he endeavor to ruin *Christ's* sheep! He doth all he can to hinder them from coming into *Christ's* fold: and when they are brought thither, he will labor, if possible, not only to destroy their comfort, but even to pluck them out of their shepherd's hands. But, blessed be the Lord, he also is a conquered enemy. Christ as God, hath not only absolute power over him, and keeps him within limits, which he cannot exceed in his tempting of the saints, without his permission; but he hath triumphed over him, as a great conqueror, and that as the head, and in the name of his people. So that, though he may desire to sift, or even to destroy them; yet the glorious captain of their salvation, as he knows the necessities of his people, so also the strength of their enemies, and on all occasions, will appear, one way or other, for their deliverance. And though the destruction of this enemy indeed is not so entire, as that he shall never assault the saints, or never gain, in some measure, the advantage against them; yet this we know, that he shall never be able to separate them from the love of God, or rob them of everlasting life, which *Christ* hath, by his satisfaction and righteousness, obtained for them, and secured to them.

That we may have a more full idea of the malice of this adversary, he is represented in the word of God, not only as a tempter, but an accuser also. He not only endeavors to seduce God's people from their obedience to him, but then presently accuses them of the crime, with all its aggravating circumstances, and pleads it for their ruin. And this he is said to do with unwearied diligence, both day and night.¹⁷ Now to counterpoise this, we are assured, that, if they sin, he himself is their advocate,¹⁸ at the throne; not, as I humbly apprehend, to extenuate our guilt, but to represent continually to his Father, that great atonement, which he himself has made, whereby his people,

¹⁵ Romans 8:24.

¹⁶ Verse 25.

¹⁷ Revelation 12:10.

¹⁸ 1 John 2:1.

though guilty in themselves, are become righteous in the sight of God. And in this he gains a renewed victory over *Satan*; for all his malice can never paint sin in such deep and dreadful colors, but Christ can plead his blood, and prove it to be capable of cleansing it away. His people may indeed have been greatly polluted, and their *sins of a scarlet dye*, yet as washed in his blood, they become *white as snow*.

This adversary may therefore roar, and threaten, and accuse, during the Christian's pilgrimage, yet still here is his hope, and his city of refuge. And lest he should be dismayed with the terrible apprehensions of falling into the hands of this enemy, when he comes to give up the ghost, who would doubtless then, is possible, take the advantage, were it in his power, and hurry him into everlasting misery, *Christ* hath promised his presence at that time to secure his charge, and a guard of his angels, to conduct the souls of his people safe to that repose he designs for them, in the everlasting mansions of bliss. Thus then, as to this adversary, you see, that he shall never pluck Christ's sheep out of his hand. For, according to that ancient promise, the seed of the woman, has effectually bruised the head, or broken the power, of the serpent.¹⁹ And then,

(3.) The world, both as to its smiles and frowns, shall not destroy one of *Christ's* sheep. Sometimes good men seem to be so much glued to this world, that one is at a loss to know whether they have any desires, or expectations, respecting a removal to their Father's house above. At other times they are so surprised, and distressed by unexpected afflictions and disappointments in outward things, that they can hardly believe the great shepherd takes any care of them at all. Thus, one while they feed upon husks, and another they repine at the blessings they enjoy, and murmur at the providence of God. Why, notwithstanding it may be, and is thus at times, with the best of God's people, and though they may be righteously and severely chastised for it, yet it is impossible it should effect their ruin. For as their shepherd often leads them over dark mountains, and in a way that they have known but little of; yet he hath engaged, and being in himself immutable, his word must stand, that these things instead of separating them from his presence, and care, and salvation, shall *work together for their good*.²⁰ And as he is *the head over all things to the church*;²¹ so it is in his power, you know, to bring good out of the greatest evil, and to bring to pass

¹⁹ Genesis 3:15.

²⁰ Romans 8:28.

²¹ Ephesians 1:23.

what is least expected by the creature. Thus, though the believer finds the world a snare to him, as having a great tendency to confine his regards to itself, and sometimes attacking him with its terrors; yet *Christ* bids his people *be of good cheer*, for he has *overcome the world*.²² They may then be sure it shall not ruin or destroy them. It may eat out a great deal of their present comfort, but shall by no means rob them of their future and eternal happiness. And is,

(4.) And lastly, you add to these death, as rather a supposed, than a real enemy, *Christ* hath also conquered death. And let the believer never so much shrink back, at the thoughts of dying, yet his Lord will be with him, more or less, in that dark valley, and lead him by the hand safe into the future glory. We might be much larger upon each of these, but you know they are matters more usually insisted on and therefore what we are ready to hope you are well acquainted with. That you may see the force of this argument then, observe, that *Christ* hath overcome all the enemies of his sheep, such as sin, Satan, the world, and death; then he hath taken effectual care, that none of these should ever *pluck them out of his hand, and so, that they shall never perish*. If he hath reconciled them to God, by the sacrifice of himself, if he hath rescued them from the power of Satan, and if he will keep them from the evil of the world, and make them conquerors over death, then surely *they shall never perish*; which was the matter to be proved.

I should now proceed to arguments, drawn from the nature of the covenant of grace, the promises, and the perfections of the divine Being, with several other considerations which will serve to demonstrate the great truth in our text: but these I shall reserve to another opportunity. Let me only add these two reflections upon what hath been said. And,

I. Hath our Lord given his people *eternal life*? Then, this at once destroys the doctrine of merit, on the part of the creature, and the pharisaical notion of working for life. Would it not be the most preposterous thing in the world for a person, who has a clear title to a free bounty from a prince, to set about attaining it by some meritorious piece of service of his own, and that too when he is already in the possession of it? Yes certainly, such a one would surely rather endeavor to testify his gratitude, by paying suitable homage to his great benefactor. And yet, so foolish is man, that though the Lord declares, that he gives his sheep *eternal life*, he is too apt to seek it in a way

²² John 16:33.

of desert. This is doing great wrong to our own souls: for if we stay till we deserve this life, before we will entertain any comfortable apprehensions of our interest in it, we may assure ourselves we shall never enjoy it. And such a conduct is indeed a setting up our wisdom in opposition to that of God. He will have the glory of giving us eternal life freely, but we would have it as our own purchase, and in a way of dependence on our own personal merit. Thus then you see how, in this, men oppose the grace of God: and this is not only the temper of those, who are not Christ's sheep, but alas! Too many that are really related to him, they are for deserving eternal life, and not receiving it as his gift, in a way of pure grace. But again,

2. Are we in *Christ's* hands, and therefore secured from perishing? Let this teach us then, where to go for every needful supply of grace, in our way to everlasting blessedness, and for strength against all our spiritual enemies, and victory over them. *For, we are not only more than conquerors, thro' him that hath loved us;*²³ but of *his fullness* we are to receive, and *grace for grace.*²⁴

²³ Romans 8:37.

²⁴ John 1:16.

SERMON XII.

On the Final Perseverance of the saints.

John 10: 28.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The Second Sermon on this text.

HAVING considered the connection of these words in a former discourse, I observed the following things as more immediately contained in them:

1. The great portion and privilege of Christ's sheep: eternal life is theirs:

2. That this blessing comes to them in a way of grace, and not of merit; *I give unto them eternal life*: And,

3. The happy consequence of this; *they shall never perish*; which our Lord confirms, first, by an assertion of his own power, *neither shall any pluck them out of my hand*; and then, in the verse following my text, from his Father's care and power also; *My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand*; and then sums up the whole by averting his equality with the Father, both in power and glory; I and my Father are one.¹ Instead of insisting on these particulars, I chose rather to raise and prosecute the following doctrinal observation, as the subject of our discourse, viz.

THAT *Christ's sheep, being given him as a trust by his Father, his faithfulness is engaged, that none of these should perish.*
For the illustration of which,

I. I laid down some general positions, that had a tendency to explain this important doctrine, which I shall not now repeat; and then,

II. I endeavored to establish the truth of it,

¹ John 10:30.

1. From the immutability of God's counsel, who hath determined their salvation; and,

2. From the effectual care which our Lord Jesus Christ hath taken to subdue all their enemies.

Not to detain you therefore, with what was then delivered; we proceed now to another argument to prove the saints final perseverance, or their never losing, either grace in this world, or glory in the other; and that shall be taken,

3. From the nature of the everlasting covenant, which being founded in the grace of God, and not in the obedience of the creature, is therefore *ordered in all things and sure*:² and every blessing arising from it, must undoubtedly be secured to all those who are interested in it. If you ask what I mean by the covenant of grace, you need only turn to that remarkable account the prophet Jeremiah hath given us of this matter, *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*³ Compare with this the following passage. And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them. *And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*⁴ That this is to be understood of the covenant of grace, or a new covenant (so called, for this reason, amongst others, because there was now a more distinct or new display of it) I say, that this covenant is referred to by these passages, the apostle to the Hebrews puts beyond all doubt, where he says, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand, to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord; *I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.*⁵

² 2 Samuel 23:5.

³ Jeremiah 31:33.

⁴ Chapter 32: 38, 39, 40.

⁵ Hebrews 8:8, 9, 10.

Now observe what the Lord promises here; it is not only that he will put his fear in their hearts, and his law in their inward parts but an assurance is subjoined, that their souls shall cleave unto him; They shall not depart from me. See how effectually God has secured the whole of their salvation to them. Are they guilty? Saith he, *I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*⁶ Are they in fear of losing my favor? *They are born of incorruptible seed, and that seed abideth forever.*⁷ and, I will not turn away from them, to do them good.⁸ Are they apprehensive of falling, or departing from me? I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.⁹ It is not said, perhaps they may, but they shall be to me a people.

But some may object, that this refers to the bringing back the Jews, from their captivity. We allow that this may be the literal signification of the words. But they must have a further reference, as appears from the last quotation out of the epistle to the Hebrews, and from what our Lord himself says, by which he extends it to the whole election of grace. It is written in the prophets, says he, and they shall be all taught of God. *Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*¹⁰ As a confirmation of this covenant, the Lord hath given us many great and precious promises, wherein he hath engaged his faithfulness for the security of his people, and which *promises are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus.*¹¹ Thus, as the origin of this covenant was mere Sovereign Grace, so its foundation is established on the divine faithfulness, and the blessings contained therein have an undoubted security, as put into the hands of the mediator, and made over to us by the promise, and oath of him, who cannot possibly lie, or deceive. He is not a man that he should lie, neither the Son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoke, and shall he not make it good?¹² For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.¹³ And thus saith the apostle Paul, *He is faithful by whom ye are called into the fellowship of his son, who shall also confirm you unto the*

⁶ Jeremiah 31:34.

⁷ 1 Peter 1:23.

⁸ Jeremiah 32:40.

⁹ Hebrews 8:10.

¹⁰ John 6:45.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 1:10.

¹² Numbers 23:19.

¹³ Isaiah 44:10.

*end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ:*¹⁴ And again, Being confident of this very things that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ:¹⁵ And again, The very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it.*¹⁶ And to this the apostle Peter gives in his evidence, when he says, *We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.*¹⁷ But I go on now to another argument to prove this point, and that is,

4. The saints union with *Christ*, as members of his body. The strictness of this union is such, that, what he did is accounted to them, and their sins imputed to him. Now, as this union was founded in grace, so it is indissoluble. And as all things are present in the view of God, he knows what will be the temptations and corruptions of his people; and not withstanding the saving change that passes on them, and the sanctification of his Spirit, he knows what will be the weakness and sinfulness of their conduct; but as this has not hindered their being brought into this relation, so it never can influence him utterly to cast them off; for he is unchangeable, and *his gifts and calling are without repentances.*¹⁸ Our Lord gives us an account of this particular, where he speaks of himself under the character of a vine. *I am the vine, saith he, ye are the branches.*¹⁹ Here some may object, that Christ commands his people to abide in him,²⁰ implying that it must be their act. In answer to this, observe he adds, and *I in you*; and read also those words in the same context, *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and ordained you, that you should go, and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain:*²¹ Now as the security of the branch is in its union to the stock, so there can be no failure of life, whilst the root suffers no decay, and is constant and large in its supplies to every part, since *It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell,*²² *that from his fullness we might receive and grace for grace.*²³ A Christian indeed would soon lose all the grace he has, were it not for that connection there is betwixt his Lord and

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9.

¹⁵ Philippians 1:6.

¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24.

¹⁷ 1 Peter 1:5.

¹⁸ Romans 11:29.

¹⁹ John 15:5.

²⁰ Verse 4.

²¹ Verse 16.

²² Colossians 1:19.

²³ John 1:16.

him. *Christ*, related to us as our head, may well be said to be the author and finisher of our faith.²⁴ As he is pleased by his Spirit to give the principle, so he will secure the finishing stroke in our complete sanctification, and glory. Thus he says, *Because I live, ye shall live also; and in that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.*²⁵

5. We may argue the final perseverance of the saints, from the intercession of our *Lord Jesus Christ*. And here, that you may the better understand the force of this argument, you may observe,

(1.) That our *Lord Jesus Christ*, considered as our mediator, doth intercede in the behalf of his chosen, and more especially, as to their final perseverance. And then,

(2.) That this intercession of his, as being founded in his own merit, and the Shedding of his blood, is always efficacious. From which we may safely conclude, that all those for whom he thus intercedes, shall inherit everlasting life, or *shall never perish*. Our first position, I believe is allowed on all hands, viz.

(i.) That our *Lord Jesus Christ* intercedes, or is represented in the scripture, as pleading in the behalf of his people, and especially as to their final perseverance. This matter is put out of all doubt, by that passage in the evangelist Luke, where our Lord says to Peter, Simon, Simon, *behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not;*²⁶ that is, that it should not finally fail, or the principle, or habit of it be lost. For as to the exercise of it, you know it failed him in a great degree, when a little after he so obstinately denied his Lord. Now if *Christ* thus prayed for *Peter*, the same reason that engaged him to exercise this office of an intercessor on his account, must have the same influence with respect to all the rest, even to the weakest of his flock. For why was it that he prayed for Peter, but because he was part of the trust committed to him by the Father and therefore he was engaged not to lose him? If any should say, this proves nothing, being a particular case, wherein Peter only was concerned: it may with ease be replied, that our Lord mentions that which is equivalent to it, concerning all his disciples. *I pray*

²⁴ Hebrews 12:2.

²⁵ John 14:19, 20.

²⁶ Luke 22:31, 32.

for them says he, *I pray not for the world;*²⁷ plainly making a distinction betwixt his disciples, and those, who were not of that happy number. Well, and what is the reason? Why, see what our Lord adds, for they are thine, thy chosen beloved ones. In a general sense the whole world is the Lord's, as the cattle upon a thousand hills are his. But these are his in an intimate peculiar sense, as himself expresses it, *All mine are thine, and thine are mine.*²⁸ They were his also, and, that not only as their creator, but more especially here as their redeemer, and covenant head. Upon which you may observe, what he says further concerning them. And it is worthy your notice, that this was the parting request which he put up for them, when he was just about to leave them, And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, *I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost,* but the son of perdition: that the scripture might be fulfilled.²⁹ And then a little further, he adds, I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. And again, *sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.*³⁰ And then, lest any should confine this to the disciples, he says, *Neither pray I for these alone; but for them also, which shall believe on me through their word.*³¹ And as the sum of the whole prayer, he adds, Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, *that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.*³² Now this would be impossible, unless they were kept by his mighty power, through faith unto salvation.³³ Thus then you see how our Lord interceded for his people while he was on earth.

And, though now heaven conceals him from our sight, yet he is not unmindful of us, he makes the same request for us in that world which he did in this. See to this purpose a passage in the Hebrews, *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*³⁴ And this the apostle John confirms, when he says, *If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father,*

²⁷ John 17:9.

²⁸ Verse 10.

²⁹ John 17:11, 12.

³⁰ Verse 15, 17.

³¹ Verse 20.

³² Verse 24.

³³ 1 Peter 1:5.

³⁴ Hebrews 7:25.

*Jesus Christ the righteous.*³⁵ Thus then we have largely proved our first position, that Christ intercedes for his people, and that he not only did so while he was on earth, but that he doth it now he is in heaven, and more especially for their final perseverance. Our next position is,

(2.) That this intercession of our Lord, being founded in his blood and righteousness, cannot but be efficacious, and so proves the point under our consideration. Observe, it was not an affectionate prayer only that Christ put up to his Father for these blessings on his people, which, by virtue of his interest in him, will be answered, but it is attended with Something, that farther assures us that the blessings he prayed for will be bestowed; for, says he, *I not only pray for them, but, Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me, &c.* And, the apostle John informs us, that we have an advocate with the Father, and he gives us this description of him, that he is *Jesus Christ the righteous* one who stands before the throne, as the righteous head of the church, who though guilty in themselves, are yet righteous and comely in him. And this it is, that makes his intercession effectual; for as our Lord Jesus Christ could not ask any thing of his Father but what is consistent with his glory to bestow, so, for instance, the pardon of sin, the removal of guilt, and the gift of everlasting life, could not be obtained by his intercession, for those who deserve everlasting destruction, unless it were attended with the effectual plea of his own merit. Sin lying at the door, all mankind are naturally and justly condemned, and exposed to ruin, till that is removed by our Lord Jesus Christ; and without that it is impossible either that he should pray for such souls to be admitted to glory, or that such a petition, is made, could be answered. For God's justice, being offended, that must be appeased, before he can be reconciled, or the sinner be admitted to his favor. We are to consider our Saviour therefore, as having by one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified.³⁶ In the virtue of which atonement he is now gone to his Father's right hand, and there pleads in the behalf of his chosen, and that his plea is most prevalent he himself lets us know, by what he says, as it is related by the evangelist John, And Jesus lift up his eyes, and said, *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always.*³⁷ Now if so, then he must needs hear him, when he put up that prayer for the whole election of grace, *Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am that they may*

³⁵ 1 John 2:1.

³⁶ Hebrews 10:14

³⁷ John 11:41, 42.

*behold my glory.*³⁸ From which we may very safely conclude the final salvation of God's elect: Christ intercedes for them that they should not perish, and his intercession is most prevalent, therefore they cannot perish. But to proceed to another argument,

6. The glorious truth contained in our text, may be confirmed by this consideration; that *Christ's Sheep* have his Spirit promised to them, to take up his abode in their hearts, and to remain with them, not for a day or a year only, but for ever. Now is this be true, and we believe him to be possessed of infinite power, wisdom, and grace, his habitation cannot but secure, to all those who partake of such a blessing, a meekness for the inheritance of the saints in light. This meekness, lest we should mistake, may be considered, in a twofold way; either as to worthiness, and then it is in Christ's righteousness that we expect to behold the glory of God to our comfort another day. But then as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, a principle of carnality is not consistent with the perfect purity and happiness of the saints in the world above so here we are to consider it as the work of the Spirit. He it is that brings the salvation wrought out by our Lord, to our souls, subdues our enmity against it, enables us to receive it with pleasure and satisfaction, and then works all our works in us, and for us. Now is we prove that he is not only sent and given to *Christ's* sheep, but that he abides with them all for these blessed ends, then I think it will naturally follow, that they can *never perish*.

Observe then what our Lord says, to this purpose, in the 14th of John. He was now about to depart; well, he will not leave his disciples comfortless: and which way does he take to encourage them? Why, says he, *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*³⁹ Observe, it is not said, he shall abide with you, unless you grieve, affront, and drive him away, and if so, he shall utterly forsake you but in a peremptory way, *he shall be in you, and abide with you forever*. He may be as it were quiescent, and for a time withdraw his consolations, but he will never utterly leave you. And then, that this must not be confined to the apostles will appear very plain, If we consider, that the glorious effect or consequence of this believing, our Lord

³⁸ Chapter 17:24.

³⁹ John 14:16, 17.

hath equally secured to all his sheep, when he says, *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one, &c.*⁴⁰ And is they are all to enjoy eternal life, then they must all partake of the same Spirit, for *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*⁴¹ And he who is not Christ's shall never see his glory, in a way of peace and comfort. Thus then we see that the whole election of grace have Christ's Spirit secured to them, yea, as one that is to remain with them, and that forever. Now, if so, it is impossible that they should ever perish. For observe, this good and glorious Spirit is no less than the most High God, and therefore able, surely, to effect what he pleases. Are they ignorant? He can reveal what he pleases to them; *for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*⁴² Are they disconsolate, or unbelieving? He can enable them to cry, *Abba Father,*⁴³ and lead them to the Son of righteousness for joy and comfort. Are they subject to fall? He can keep them by his own power, make them more than conquerors, and at length accomplish *the good pleasure of his goodness in them,*⁴⁴ and with the dissolution of their bodies destroy even the principle of corruption, that gives them so much uneasiness, while they are on this side the grave. This we might also confirm, by considering the nature of those gifts which this Spirit bestows upon us; such as faith, repentance unto life, and the like. Now as these arise from the free grace of God, as abiding favors, so they are given never to be taken from us, as the apostle Paul expressly asserts, when he says, *The gifts and calling of God are without repentance;*⁴⁵ or, without a possibility on God's part to repent that he has bestowed them upon us. And if so, if life and salvation are connected with these, then those who are made partakers of them can never perish. Now, nothing can be more evident from scripture than that salvation is connected with faith and repentance, or that the same God that gives us to believe in his Son, will also, as another blessing, give us an entrance into glory: *for evangelical repentance is unto life: and as he that believeth shall be saved;*⁴⁶ so we are kept by the power of God thro faith unto salvation.⁴⁷ Thus then he who is partaker of the former will be of the latter, unless it repents the Lord that he hath bestowed these gifts upon him, which is utterly impossible. Observe, we are to consider

⁴⁰ John 17:20, 21.

⁴¹ Romans 8:9.

⁴² 1 Corinthians 2:10.

⁴³ Galatians 4:6.

⁴⁴ Ephesians 5:9. 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

⁴⁵ Romans 11: 29.

⁴⁶ Mark 16:16.

⁴⁷ 1 Peter 1:5.

faith, repentance and eternal life, as the gifts of God. They are all represented to us in his word, under that view. Thus the apostle Paul says, *By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*⁴⁸ And the apostle Peter speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ, says, 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.*⁴⁹ And as to eternal life itself, we find our Lord, in our text, acquainting us that we have it as an act of favor; *I give unto them eternal life.* You may also further observe, that there is a certain order and connection betwixt these blessings, not in a way of merit, but in a way of priority. Thus he whose sins are done away by the death and satisfaction of Christ, Shall in time be effectually called, and this as an act of grace in God, and of power in the Spirit; and then he who is called, Shall be kept through faith; and he who is so kept, Shall at last be completely saved. All these blessings are entirely independent on the creature; and where one is given, all the rest necessarily follow. And the reason is because, as I have said, *the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.*⁵⁰ Is therefore *Christ's* Sheep have these gifts bestowed upon them; then they cannot but enjoy eternal life, which was the matter to be proved. But I proceed now to the last argument.

7. And this may be drawn from the absurdity of the contrary opinion. As one well observes, *that doctrine is undoubtedly to be received, that hath the greatest tendency to illustrate the glory of the divine perfections and no sentiments are to be entertained that in the least reflect on the mercy, sovereignty, immutability or any of those peculiar glories of God, which he will not give to another.* Now I humbly apprehend, that to suppose the possibility of any of Christ's sheep perishing, or that any of those committed to him by the Father, may finally fall from their interest in his favor, carries in it not only an impeachment of every perfection in the Deity, but the greatest slur upon the glory of each of the divine persons in the blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit. And,

(i.) As to the Father, to suppose he hath not absolutely determined the final salvation of the elect is to render him uncertain as to this very important event. For, according to these men, the Lord hath rested eternal life upon certain conditions, which entirely depend on the free-will of the creature, whether he will accept them or not, and according to his acceptance

⁴⁸ Ephesians 2:8.

⁴⁹ Acts 5:31.

⁵⁰ Romans 11:29.

or refusal of these conditions, God deals with him, and either bestows eternal life or excludes him from it. Now observe what this necessarily implies, to wit, uncertainty even on God's part, whether this blessing is to be his or no. For having given him a condition which is at his pleasure, he may either accept or refuse it. But that the Father has determined the final salvation of his people has been already abundantly proved; and as the purpose is from everlasting, and the decree is gone forth, to suppose it shall in any instance fail of success, and prove abortive, is to suppose an imperfection in the Father's wisdom, a defeat in his power; or a disregard to strict justice and faithfulness, or rather indeed a deficiency in all these glorious attributes. And can there be a greater, or a more unworthy reflection on the divine Father? Again,

2. To dispute the certainty of the saints final perseverance reflects great dishonor on our Lord *Jesus Christ*. It is to suppose the insufficiency of his capacity as a Saviour, and the uncertainty of the success of his undertaking; it is to conclude, either that he has not fully answered the demands of divine justice, fulfilled his engagements in the everlasting covenant, and *brought in* a perfect and *everlasting righteousness*,⁵¹ or that he has not taken care to secure his own purchase, though it has been obtained at so inestimable a price; it is to suppose that he will be unfaithful to his own promises, and, though he has said he will *love his own to the end*⁵², that yet he will not make it good; it is, in a word, to suppose, after all he has gone through in order to present the body perfect of which he is the head, he will be content to do it in maimed and dismembered circumstances at last. And again,

3. This doctrine casts great reflection either on the ability, or the faithfulness and goodness of the Holy Spirit, who has undertaken effectually *to shew the things of Christ* to his people,⁵³ to purge and *sanctify*⁵⁴ them, to give them *new hearts*,⁵⁵ to *inhabit them*,⁵⁶ and *make his abode* with them, to communicate to them the *Spirit of adoption* to guide them, by his hand,⁵⁷ to conduct them in the way through this howling wilderness, and at last to

⁵¹ Daniel 9:24.

⁵² John 13:1.

⁵³ John 16:13, 14.

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:11.

⁵⁵ Ezekiel 36:26.

⁵⁶ Romans 8:9, 11.

⁵⁷ John 16:13.

deliver up his charge safe into the hands of Christ, and into the possession of that glory for which he undertook to make them meet.⁵⁸

Having thus explained this blessed doctrines and endeavored to establish the truth of it, I should have proceeded to consider the principal objections against it, but that I must leave to another discourse, and close what I have said with a few words of application. And,

1. Let this be matter of comfort to Christians who have backslidden, and whose hearts mourn on that account. *They have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*⁵⁹ This can be no encouragement to sin, but may be a blessed preservative against despair. That there is a necessity for such an advocate, who can plead a perfect atonement and righteousness on our behalf, is such an evidence of the strict justice of God, and his perfect holiness, that it is the best argument for the necessity of purity to the Christian character, and the greatest motive to engage us to aspire after growing improvements in it. And since in our best condition, in this imperfect state of things, we are still groaning under *a law in our members, which wars against the law of our minds,*⁶⁰ and we are liable to miscarriages which bring us sometimes even into doubt of our state; what a blessed provision of grace is it, to prevent the dreadful consequences of a state of desperation, that we may apply ourselves to such a powerful and successful intercessor, who is always before his Father's throne to plead for us? But again,

2. Let us try ourselves by this way, whether we are of that happy number, who shall never perish. Have we the Spirit of *Christ*? If so, then we are his. And would you know whether you have the Spirit? Why, he always exalts Christ, and humbles the creature. If the more we advance in the appearance of religion, the more vain we grow in the opinion we have of ourselves, and the less we improve in our value for *Christ*, our love to him, and our experimental reliance on him, it is a sad proof that our pretensions are not founded on the work of his Spirit, whose proper business it is to lay the creature in the dust, and to take of the things of *Christ*, and shew them to his people. But if, in the midst of all our weakness, we daily improve in humility, and in our honorable esteem of Christ, and love to him, it is a good

⁵⁸ Psalm 73:24.

⁵⁹ 1 John 2:1.

⁶⁰ Romans 7:23.

sign that we are under the influence of his Spirit, in whose hands we can *never perish*. Once more,

3. And lastly, can any of us say, that we have had the experience of *the gifts and callings of God*, and believe them to be without repentances let us then be looking and longing for *Christ's* appearance: for *unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation*.⁶¹ and, in the mean time, let us labor to walk as those who have received so glorious an inhabitant into our hearts, as the Spirit of God. Are we *temples of the Holy Ghost*?⁶² *O what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness*?⁶³ How should we labor, by our living testimony, to refute the cavils of those who cast contempt on his glorious person, and his almighty work? How should we constantly endeavor to preserve and improve the divine consolations he came to ensure, by a watchful, tender, humble and holy walk? Then may we hope for growing light, and: growing comfort; and, in one word, then may we hope to be instruments to spread the glory of rich grace, and maintain a steady confidence of our personal interest in the eternal love of the divine Father, in the perfect atonement of our great Redeemer, and our everlasting safety in the hands of his Spirit.

⁶¹ Hebrews 9:28.

⁶² 1 Corinthians 6:19.

⁶³ 2 Peter 3:11.

SERMON XIII

On the Final Perseverance of the Saints.

John 10: 28.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The Third Sermon on this text.

THE doctrine, which from this subject I have been endeavoring to explain and confirm, is the certainty of the saints final perseverance; which I have inferred, at large, from the unchangeableness of the nature of that God, who, as he hath power to bring to pass what he pleases, so he hath by a peremptory decree secured this blessing to all his chosen; from the effectual care which our Lord *Jesus Christ* hath taken to secure them from all their enemies; from their interest in the covenant of grace, established upon the best promises; from their union with *Christ*, their interest in his intercession, and their enjoyment of his Spirit to abide with them, the nature of whose gifts and graces are incorruptible and have everlasting life connected with them. And I have proved it also from the absurdity of the contrary opinion, and the dishonor it reflects on the divine Being; on Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

To which I may add, that the reason which is assigned why any, who have made a profession of religion, are left to final apostasy is, their not being of the number of God's chosen; plainly implying that those who are, should be preserved from it. Thus *Judas* was the son of perdition.¹ And the apostle John says of such, *They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But ye have an unction from the holy One, &c.*²

I might also, in the last place, confirm this doctrine from the various similitudes by which it is represented to us in the word of God, which are abundant evidences that *Christ's sheep shall never perish, neither shall any*

¹ John 17:12.

² 1 John 2:19, 20.

*pluck them out of his hand. They are the Lord's own portion, and the lot of his inheritance;*³ *they are his jewels;*⁴ *they are set as a seal on his heart, and on his arm;*⁵ *they are graven on the palms of his hands, and their walls are continually before him;*⁶ *they are the members of that mystical body of which Christ is the head;*⁷ *the living branches of the true vine.*⁸ *Christ is the bridegroom,*⁹ *and they are espoused to him;*¹⁰ *they are the Lord's building,*¹¹ *founded on the Rock of Ages;*¹² *God himself is a wall of fire round about them,*¹³ *their place of defense is the munitions of rocks,*¹⁴ *and the gates of hell shall never prevail against them,*¹⁵ *their faith is more precious than gold that perisheth,*¹⁶ *their hope as an anchor sure and steadfast, cast within the vail, whither Christ as their forerunner is for them entered:*¹⁷ *and whosoever drinketh of the water he gives, shall never thirst; but the water he shall give him shall be a well of water in him springing up, into everlasting life.*¹⁸

Having thus at large established the doctrine itself, I come,

II. To consider the most material of those objections which are raised against it. And here,

1. Some argue from the fall of our first parents from their state of innocence, and say, if they, in the rectitude of their nature, were subject to fall, much more a poor weak believer, who has the same enemies, and less strength with which to encounter them. To this it is replied; that there is a vast deal of difference between grace in the believer, and innocence in *Adam*. The one was in its own nature mutable, the other is incorruptible. The condition of *Adams* standing was settled; the possibility and danger of his fall represented, and the punishment that was to follow. He stood in his own

³ Deuteronomy 32:9.

⁴ Malachi 3:17.

⁵ Cant. 8:6.

⁶ Isaiah 49:16.

⁷ Colossians 1:18.

⁸ John 15:1, 2.

⁹ Chapter 3:29.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:2.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 13:9.

¹² Isaiah 26:4.

¹³ Malachi 7:24.

¹⁴ Isaiah 33:16.

¹⁵ Matthew 16:18.

¹⁶ 1 Peter 1:7.

¹⁷ Hebrews 6:19.

¹⁸ John 4:14.

natural strength, and so he fell. But it by no means follows, that the believer should perish from that state, his stability in which is secured by the immutability of God, the steadfastness of the everlasting Covenant, the satisfaction and strength of *Christ*, and the habitation of the Spirit. But I proceed,

2. To the consideration of the Scriptures, which are principally brought in defense of the possibility of the saint's final apostasy? Such as,

(1.) That account we have of the stony ground hearers, who *received the word with joy, and yet afterwards fell away*;¹⁹ where I need only observe, that of these it is only said, that they received the external message of the gospel *with joy*, which is very consistent with the want of that faith in our Lord *Jesus Christ*, Which is absolutely necessary to salvation. And you know it is added that they *had not root in themselves*; and so only endured for a while. To which I will add, that when Paul and Barnabas preached to the gentiles at *Antioch*, it is said of them all in general, that they *were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord*; but it was only as many among them as were *ordained to eternal life that believed*.²⁰ But this we shall confirm at large under another head, and proceed,

(2.) To consider that passage in Ezekiel, where it is said, *that when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die*.²¹ And here it is to be first of all observed, that it appears from the whole scope of this context, that the prophet is vindicating the equity of the divine proceedings with respect to the people of the Jews, on whom he had brought heavy temporal judgments, for the heinous instances of their rebellion against him, and departure from him. And if we take the words in a still larger sense, it is very evident they are not to be referred to the covenant of grace, because they speak not the language of it, but of the law. They say *the soul that sins shall die*.²² whereas the voice of grace is, *that God hath*

¹⁹ Matthew 13:4, 5, 6, and Verse 20, 21.

²⁰ Acts 13:49.

²¹ Ezekiel 18:24.

²² Ezekiel 18: Verse 4.

*sent forth his Son to be a propitiation for us,*²³ and that *whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*²⁴ In one word, there is nothing said here of the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is that alone that justifies, but of a righteousness which is a man's own; and which is not the fruit of faith, or of a principle of grace wrought in the heart, but a mere moral, partial, temporary reformation, which however useful it may be, often deceives others by its appearances, and will fatally deceive that man himself who depends upon it, And as a man may fall from it, into open practical wickedness, contempt of all his outward profession, and into obdurate and final apostasy, and receive suitable punishment; all this we allow: but no argument can be drawn from hence in opposition to our text, and the current of the scriptures, which assure us of the eternal safety of Christ's sheep. I go on now to consider,

(3.) That passage in the epistle to the Hebrews, where it is said, *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers, of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*²⁵ The argument advanced from these words is to this purpose: If the persons mentioned in the text are true believers, then believers may fall away; but the former is true, therefore the latter. As a confirmation of which, it is observed that the persons spoken of here, are not only said to be *enlightened*, but to have tasted of the heavenly gift, that, is say they, to have been fed by faith, on the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and have been *made partakers of the Holy Ghost*. Now these are discriminating privileges of believers; therefore the apostle must be supposed to have his eye upon those in this passage, and if so, then there is a possibility for the most eminent saint to apostatize. This is the sum of, the objection, I think, in its greatest force.

In answer to which I would first observe, and that only for argument sake, for I hope to show you the contrary, that though we should grant that what the apostle says here might be referred to the believer; yet I humbly apprehend, that the words being proposed conditionally, to argue any thing from thence, in a matter of disputation, is little more than begging the question. For I cannot but apprehend that it is highly consistent with the

²³ Romans 3:25.

²⁴ John 3:16.

²⁵ Hebrews 6:4, 5, 6.

glory of God, as a Holy Being, to declare in his word the connection there is between final apostasy and everlasting punishment, without supposing the one or the other as necessarily the case and portion of any of his children. And that he may have wise ends in this is equally evident; for as the believer may be considered under a two-fold view, either as in himself or in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, so the Lord may bespeak him as thus considered in his word. Thus for instance, as to the matter in hand, the most eminent saint while in a state of conflict, view him in himself, separate from the grace and strength of *Christ*, and he is liable every moment to apostatize, because of that propensity there is in his nature to turn aside from God, but view him, on the other hand, as related to, and united with *Christ*, as standing in and by his strength, and it is absolutely impossible. Which though it be undoubtedly the case, yet doth this hinder the Lord from declaring in his word the inseparable connection there is betwixt final apostasy, and the punishment of it? This he may do for the humiliation of his children, and the exalting, his own grace. Thus what is more natural than for a child of God, when looking round on all his enemies, in the sense of his own inability to encounter them, to lie in the dust: before the Lord, adoring his grace that ever he should be preserved by his mighty power unto salvation, and all this without the least doubt or hesitation as to the security of the blessing itself? May I not say, that unless the Lord keep me I shall certainly fall, and if I do fall finally, I shall certainly perish, without contradicting my well founded faith and hope, that he who hath kept me hitherto is able to preserve me, and bring me off victorious, and that he will do so? You see then, that if we refer it to believers, the objection proves of no force, since it is only a declaration of the connection there is between sin and punishment.

But as I cannot but apprehend that the design of the Holy Ghost here was not to speak of believers; so, if I show you that there is nothing in the text which can give us just ground to confine it to them, and give you some instances of persons who have arrived at all these attainments, and yet have been strangers to faith in the Son of God, that faith which denotes a man an heir of salvation, then I hope it must be allowed that the passage is entirely out of the question. For though a person, how exceedingly so ever distinguished from the rest of the world by his profession and outward appearance, nay by the eminency of his talents, but wanting the root of the matter, may apostatize; yet we are not from thence to conclude, that true believers may.

And here, for your better understanding the mind of the Holy Ghost in this passage, let me observe in general, that, as every gift comes from God a Sovereign Being, he distributes these according to his own pleasure to some he gives greater, to others less attainments: just as it is in the common bounties of providence, some have as much as heart could wish, while others are in great straits. This we see also confirmed as to natural abilities: some the Lord endues with quick apprehensions, solidity of judgment, and exceeding retentive memories; while others are in want of all these, and this without the least reflection on the justice of God, because they are favors which we have no right to, and he may do what *he will with his own*.²⁶ And thus it is also as to spiritual abilities, or attainments in religion: some shall be under unavoidable necessity of remaining strangers to the sound of the gospel, as the heathens; while others shall enjoy it, and attend all their days upon it, and yet be almost as ignorant of the great things contained in it, as the very pagans themselves: others again, and which comes to the matter in hand, shall receive the gospel in the letter of it, and arrive at a competent measure of knowledge as to the way of salvation by *Christ*, and yet, contenting themselves with this, are very far from the kingdom of God. Others, again, shall go one step higher, and receive the message, as it brings happiness with it, with pleasure, and satisfaction, and perhaps continue to *rejoice in it for a season*, till afterwards it appears that they had no root in them²⁷ by their apostasy from it. Some of these have been found, in all ages of the church, to have been favored with many eminent gifts, such as freedom of expressing themselves either to God in prayer, or for God in the work of the ministry, and which perhaps, though coming from a dead unrenewed heart, being, clothed with the energy of the Holy Ghost, hath brought life with it to other souls, while the instrument hath been left in the natural enmity of his mind against it. That this may be, and really hath been the case with many, is too well known to be disputed, However our Lord puts it out of all doubt, when he assures us, that many will plead their right to the kingdom of heaven in the day of account, in that they *have prophesied in his name, and in his name have cast out devils, and done many wonderful works*; but notwithstanding all this, shall be rejected by him.²⁸ Now it is evident, that; without some more than common gifts, these persons could not be said to do these things. Thus *Judas* doubtless preached *Christ*, and very likely wrought miracles, when at the same time his heart was under the government of the basest covetousness, and in order to gratify this wicked

²⁶ Matthew 20:15.

²⁷ Matthew 13:20, 21.

²⁸ Chapter 7:22, 23.

principle, he had entertained in his mind the most deniable purpose of betraying his Lord and master. And, as the last thing I shall mention under this head, see the account we have of this matter from the prophet Isaiah. *Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice: they take delight in approaching to God.*²⁹ Here were persons, not only under a profession of religion, but who seemed to bid very fair for sincerity, and yet were all the while guilty of the greatest hypocrisy and deceit.

Now observe, if this may be, and hath been the case with many persons, then, if I show you that the apostle in this passage hath his eye to such professors as these, and not to true believers, the objection, how forcible so ever in its first appearance, will prove invalid. That he hath not then his eye to believers in this place I prove thus: There is nothing, in the whole of it mentioned, either of faith in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, or what is equivalent to it; nor on the other hand any of those privileges by which believers are described, such as their *being chosen, called, and saved, according to the purpose of his grace,*³⁰ *elect according to the foreknowledge of God,*³¹ *chosen in Christ,*³² and the like; but those things only are mentioned, which persons, making a bare profession of religion, may attain unto, in common with those who are really regenerated. Now you will plainly see, that we are not to argue, from that which is common to unbelievers with believers, any thing whereby we may properly infer a man to be really born of God. Thus, for instance, all that are born of God have their measure of light and knowledge in the things of God. But all that have light and knowledge are not born of God, as we have before proved to you. And taking this remark along with us, let us now proceed to examine the passage itself.

And here observe, that the persons spoken of are said to be enlightened. The original is (Greek word), which some have chose rather to render *baptized*, than *enlightened*, because of the frequent use of the word in that sense among the ancients, who very commonly when they speak of a person's being baptized, and so received into the Christian church, make use of the same word which we translate here enlightened. Now if you

²⁹ Isaiah 58:2.

³⁰ 2 Timothy 1:9.

³¹ 1 Peter 1:2.

³² Ephesians 1:4.

understand the word here in this sense, you remember that, as in the *Jewish church*, all were *not Israel*, who *were of Israel*;³³ so, in the Christian church, all are not members of Christ who come under that ordinance: this is so apparent that none deny it. But taking the word, as it is translated, I hope none will dispute whether *Judas* must not be supposed to be, in some measure, *enlightened* (and the degree is not set down here) before he could preach *Christ* with the rest of the apostles; and yet who have supposed him to have true grace? And thus, though all believers are *enlightened*, as we observed before, it doth not follow that all enlightened persons are believers. So that the first expression hath nothing in it but what the Christian enjoys in common with many, who are not in the same relation with himself to the Lord *Jesus Christ*; and this character cannot therefore be brought as an argument that the apostle's design is to speak of believers.

The next expression is their having *tasted of the heavenly gift*. By the *heavenly gift* the objectors for the most part understand the Lord *Jesus Christ*, and thence infer that these persons must be believers. To this I answer, that persons may be in some measure convinced of their sins, and be full of trouble and anxiety about their condition, and so be looking out after a remedy, and hearing of Christ in the gospel as the saviour of sinners, may find some pleasure and satisfaction in the message, and so be said to *taste the heavenly gift*, who yet are never made saving partakers of it. Observe, it is not said having fed *on Christ by faith* for, were that the case, our Lord soon puts an end to the controversy, by alluring us, that whoever *eateth his flesh and drinketh his blood hath life eternal*.³⁴ So that *tasting* in the text must be something different from *feeding on Christ*; or else apostasy, final apostasy I mean, and that is what we are contending about, would be impossible. This expression therefore hath nothing in it that proves the persons to be believers. For a person may have some slight superficial *relish of Christ* in the gospel, and yet never be *drawn* to him by the Father.³⁵

The next expression, and that which they most rely upon, is their being *made partakers of the Holy Ghost*. Now, observe, the Holy Ghost in scripture is put either for the third person in the sacred Trinity, as one with the Father, and the Son, *God over all blessed for ever*; or else for those gifts and graces which he bestows upon mankind. That he is thus to be understood in scripture is universally allowed. If therefore you understand

³³ Romans 9:6.

³⁴ John 6:54.

³⁵ John 6:44.

the words in the former sense, we have before at large proved to you, that wherever he comes, it is to take up his abode for ever, which must necessarily prevent final apostasy. So that it must be referred to those gifts, which, in a Sovereign way, as I have before shown you, he gives to many, whom he never designs to bring to glory.

As to the next expression, viz. their *tasting of the good word of God*, I have already explained it, by observing, that persons may receive the gospel with joy, and yet not mix it with faith. And as to *the powers of the world to come*, if you understand this of the doctrines of the resurrection and the final judgment, these may influence a person to a considerable degree of morality in his conversation, who may be yet *wholly ignorant of God's righteousness*, and going about to establish a righteousness of his own,³⁶ and seeking salvation, *as it were by the deeds of the law*,³⁷ may fall short of it.

Thus then I have shown you that there is nothing in all this passage that contradicts the proposition laid down in our text: for though persons arriving at all these attainments may fall away, yet the least of Christ's sheep shall not, being under his care and patronage. And as a further confirmation of it, let me only add, what the apostle says to these very Hebrews, in the words just following those under our consideration, *but beloved we are persuaded, that is, we are confident of better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak*.³⁸ As if he had said, " Though we speak to you all as professors of religion, and assure you, that if any of you having made such a profession, and rest in external attainments, and afterwards fall away, and apostatize, it will be next to impossible, that is very difficult, that you should be renewed again to repentance; yet for your encouragement *who are beloved*, we are persuaded that this will never be your case, God having now bestowed upon you those graces of the Holy Ghost which accompany salvation.

And here, lest any doubting soul should from this text write bitter things against himself, remember, that though the words seem to run in an absolute way, yet the word we translate *impossible* hath been taken in other places, and I apprehend it must in this, with limitation. Thus our Lord says, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man

³⁶ Romans 10:3.

³⁷ Romans 3:20.

³⁸ Hebrews 6:9.

to enter into the kingdom of God;³⁹ and yet we know that many who have been rich, and for a time have trusted in their riches, are now set down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in that blessed kingdom. And besides our Saviour adds, when his disciples were astonished at these words, with men it is impossible, *but not with God: for with God all things are possible.*⁴⁰ So that all allow, that our Lord is only expressing the great difficulty that attended it: and why may not the word have the same sense here? Thus then I have largely considered this passage, and I have been the more particular upon it, not only because of its difficulties, but the very great applause it hath met with when produced in favor of the apostasy of the saints; whereas in reality it hath no manner of reference to them, and if it had, it is only an intimation of the connection between apostasy and the punishment of it, for the humiliation of the saint, and the exalting the glory of the grace of God,

(4.) The same answer may be given to that passage, where the apostle says, *For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment; and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries:*⁴¹ which, if you understand it of final apostasy, it supposes nothing, in fact, as to the possibility of the saints falling under it; but only, in general, that wherever any fall from their profession, if they renounce the sacrifice of Christ, there is no other provision for their salvation. And should any man infer from my saying to a fellow Christian, if you should appear in the end to be no true believer, by your final apostasy, you will certainly be damned; would it, by any rational conclusion follow, that therefore the saint that is really so, may be liable to so dreadful a condition? Thus then I hope I have let you a little into the fallacy of the reasoning that are made use of from this passage.

(5.) The next portion of scripture I shall turn you to, that is advanced in favor of the saints apostasy, is that where it is said, *Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw hack unto perdition: but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul.*⁴² Those who plead for the possibility of the saints falling from grace, find fault here with our translation of the words, and render them thus: Now the just shall live by faith, but if they draw back,

³⁹ Mark 10:25.

⁴⁰ Verse 27.

⁴¹ Hebrews 10:26, 27.

⁴² Hebrews 10:38, 39.

my soul shall have no pleasure in them. From whence they form this argument; if by the just man here is meant the believer, then, if there is a possibility of his falling, there is also a possibility of the falling of the greatest saint upon earth. But the former is true, therefore also the latter. As to the first proportion, that it is spoken of believers is evident, from the character that is given of them they are *the just*, and they *live by faith*. So that they think they have good ground to conclude, that the meaning of the words runs thus: *The just shall live by faith*, that is, if he continues in his faith, *but if he draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*. This I take to be the sum of what is produced from this text in their favor.

In answer to which, what I said under another objection will, I think, solve every difficulty that can remain in this. For, observe, if you suppose it to refer to the believer, what doth it conclude, but this, that God may declare, for the humiliation of the saint, and the exaltation of his own grace, the connection there is betwixt sin and punishment, without supposing either the one or the other necessarily in his chosen? It is evident to every one, that the words are proposed in a conditional form: and to argue any thing from thence to a matter in dispute, as I have before shown you, is begging the question. Were this all that we could say to the objection, for my own part, I cannot see but it might be sufficient to convince every one acquainted with the word of God, and duly attending to it. But if, on the contrary, I show you, that the design of the Holy Ghost was to speak of the believer only in the first expression, and of a person making only a profession of religion, and having only a form of godliness, in the next; it must be allowed, that the argument drawn from hence to support the final apostasy of the saints cannot but be entirely inconclusive. For though some may *draw back* in the sense of the text, yet it doth not therefore follow, that the true believer may.

But that you may better understand this passage, you may observe, that the apostle is, through the whole of this chapter, speaking of two sorts of persons, both having a form of godliness, and one of them no more than a form. Thus he speaks a little before of some *who forsake the assemblies of Christ*, and this, in contradistinction from the true members of his mystical body, who desire to preserve a due regard to the honor of his institutions.⁴³ And many other instances might be mentioned in the context, were it needful: but I believe, if you consult it at your leisure, you will easily perceive the truth of this observation. Well, taking this along with us, we

⁴³ Hebrews 10:25, 26.

may see how beautifully the apostle carries on the same design in the words before us. There are two different states mentioned which are applicable to two different sorts of persons. These two states are Greek word & Greek word on the one hand, and Greek word on the other, of them that believe, and of them that *draw back*.

Observe again the different ends that are assigned to these persons; the one shall live, and *believe to the saving of their souls*, and the other shall be disowned by God; *he will have no pleasure in them*, notwithstanding all their pretensions, and in the issue shall fall into perdition. And now what can any infer from all this, but that the believer, *being kept by the mighty power of God*, shall in the end obtain everlasting salvation whereas, on the contrary, persons who *draw back* shall certainly be destroyed? Which may with the utmost freedom be allowed, without denying the doctrine of the saints final perseverance. Thus then you see how foreign this passage is from the purpose for which it is brought; for instead of containing any thing of that nature, it appears to carry in it a plain evidence of the contrary truth, which I have been endeavoring to confirm. For you will observe, what the apostle says, *we are of them that believe to the saving of the soul*; that is, eternal life will be our portion. And what is the reason? Why it is given to us to believe in the Lord *Jesus Christ*, as an instance of his kindness to us, and as he hath begun his good work in us, we may depend upon the full inheritance, as well as the first pledge of it. But,

(6.) The next considerable passage that is brought to prove the saints apostasy, and indeed the last that I shall mention, is in the writings of the apostle Peter, when describing the dreadful character and condition of the apostates of those times, he says, *When they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure, through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error: while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them, But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in*

*the mire.*⁴⁴ The argument drawn from this passage is of the same nature with the preceding, viz. If the persons spoken of in the text are said to *have escaped the pollutions of the world, and that through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*, they must be believers: and if so, then believers may turn as *dogs to their vomit*, and so be lost.

In answer to this I shall only observe, that it is so very evident, even upon the bare reading of the text, who the persons are that the apostle would describe, that one would wonder any man should ever suppose them to have really believed in the Son of God. Who knows not but persons may have escaped from error, and have arrived at a moral conversation, and so may be said to have *escaped the pollutions that are in the world*, and yet afterwards make it appear that this was not upon a right foundation, by a returning to their former course? May not a man that never tasted of the grace of God, know the way of righteousness, and seemingly set out with much zeal in it, and yet all the while be an enemy to God in his heart, and so turn again to his folly; whose knowledge instead of profiting him may prove an aggravation of his guilt? These things are so commonly insisted on in practical discourses, that you cannot but be well acquainted with them. And now, understanding the passage in this sense, and if you read the context at your leisure, you will see how confident it is with the design of the apostle. What is there in it to oppose the saint's perseverance? Though some, who may have the name of saints, and also a degree of knowledge in common with those who are really so, may *turn away from the holy commandment* yet it doth not hence follow that saints may.

And thus I have gone through the most considerable texts of scripture which are produced by the adversaries of the saint's final perseverance. I should now have gone on to the consideration of those instances that are given, by which they think they can demonstrate that this hath been the case with some, and therefore may be with all. But this I must leave till another opportunity, only let me drop these two reflections.

1. Are there many who may go a great way in religion, and yet not one spiritual and believing step towards the kingdom of God? How earnestly then should we beg of God, that we may not be left to deceive our own souls? Every grace hath its counterfeit; and we know the *heart is deceitful*

⁴⁴ 2 Peter 2:18, ---22.

*above all things, and desperately wicked.*⁴⁵ But would we judge safely concerning our own state; let us ask ourselves where we are putting our trust and dependence. Is it in Christ, or in ourselves? Do we look for glory, immortality, and eternal life in him, as the only refuge set before us? Why then,

2. We may assure ourselves, that he who hath been *the author*, or *beginner*, will be *the finisher of our faith*.⁴⁶ Though many shall appear in this world like stars for their brightness, and in the issue lose their luster and fall into hell; yet, where grace hath once taken possession of the soul, it shall never be loft. Though many may have received light and seeming satisfaction under the means of grace and may have had eminent gifts of the Holy Ghost, and yet after all *fall away*, and are never *renewed unto repentance*; yet that soul who has those things which necessarily accompany salvation, shall certainly in the issue arrive at the full enjoyment of it.

⁴⁵ Jeremiah 17:9.

⁴⁶ Hebrews 12:2.

SERMON XIV.

On the Final Perseverance of the Saints.

John 10:28 28.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The Fourth Sermon on this text,

I have, in some former discourses from these words, endeavored to explain the meaning of the great doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, and to establish the truth of it by several arguments; and then I came to answer the most considerable of those objections which are advanced against it. And here, I have gone through the most remarkable texts of scripture, which are produced by the enemies of this doctrine in order to overthrow it, and shall now go on,

3. To the consideration of those personal instances, which are found in the word of God, of defection and apostasy, by which they think they can demonstrate that final falling from grace hath been the case with some, and therefore may with all. And here, before I come to a particular examination of these instances, allow me to lay down a distinction or two, which may have a tendency to lead us through this part of the argument. And,

(1.) Let it be considered, that two principles, though in their own nature perfectly distinct, and contrary to each other, may subsist, at the same time, in the same person. This I think the apostle Paul proves at large to be his own case, in his epistle to the Romans, where he speaks of a two-fold law that subsisted at the same time in him: *I delight, says he, in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.*¹ And I cannot but think, that every man, who hath been acquainted with the plague of his own heart, and is himself in the experience of the grace of God in his soul, will set his seal to the same thing;

¹ Romans 7:22, 23.

that he finds two laws, or two principles within him, the one arising from the depravity of his nature, the other from the Spirit of God.

Which, though it is an entire mystery to a man unacquainted with the things of God, yet none, I think, ever disputed the possibility of it. And when we have the testimony of the word of God, and the universal experience of the saints for the proof of it, I think we may, without being charged with prejudice for our own scheme, acknowledge our belief of it. Which being allowed, I observe again,

(2.) That the exercise of either of these principles, upon this or that occasion, doth not necessarily imply the loss or deprivation of the other. Thus when *Paul* was in the experience of the striving of the law in his members, it doth not imply the cessation of the other principle, to wit, the principle of grace in his mind. Observe, grace and corruption may be compared to two contending parties. The field that they engage in is the soul of every renewed man, while here below; and sometimes one, and sometimes the other prevails: and yet both remain, till, at death, one is entirely vanquished by the great Captain of our salvation. So that we are not to say because the law in the members of a good man hath had the better of him to day, though a very humbling consideration, that therefore he never had grace, or hath entirely lost it, any more than, because, upon another occasion, when in the exercise of grace, he may be perhaps a stranger to any remarkable power of corruption, at that season; that therefore, either he never was depraved, or hath now entirely got rid of his corruptions.

Well, taking these two things along with us, let us now consider the examples which are produced of the saint's apostasy. And here we shall confine ourselves to those of *Noah, David, Solomon, and Peter*, who are all of them so many instances indeed that the saints may fall, and fall very low, and yet not fall from grace, either as to their interest in the favor of the Lord, or the principle of it in their souls.

To begin then with *Noah*; and you have the account of his sin at large in the book of *Genesis*.² The sum of it is this, that after his great deliverance he planted a vineyard, which became a snare to him, and accordingly he was drunken with the wine of it. Now take the sin in all its aggravations, viz. that it was an instance of the greatest ingratitude to God, who had shown such

² Genesis 9:20, 21.

miraculous and distinguishing kindness to him, in delivering him, and only him and his family from the common and universal destruction; view it again as an ill precedent to his family, and with all the other aggravating circumstances that can be supposed; and doth it any more prove that he had lost the principle of grace, than that his ready compliance with God's command in building the ark for the safety of his house, and afterwards his sacrificing to the Lord as a testimony of his thankfulness, prove that the principle of corruption was entirely rooted out of him? Alas! When *Noah* was sacrificing, and that acceptably too, he still had the seeds of corruption in him, or else he had never been drunken. And when he was overtaken by this sin, though grace seemed to lie inactive in his soul, he had still the principle, otherwise (and which, notwithstanding his great fall, puts his final perseverance out of all doubt) he could not have been reckoned by the apostle among those, who died in faith.³ The same might be said with respect to Lot, upon a like occasion.

But to come to the case of David. I will allow them to consider his sin with all imaginable aggravations. Suppose him then a special favorite of God; taken from the sheepfold, and exalted by God's own hand to be captain of his host, and king of all *Israel*; preserved from the envy and rage of *Saul* upon many occasions, even in a miraculous way, and from a thousand other dangers; partaker of the richest spiritual as well as temporal blessings; under the strongest vows as well as the strongest obligations; see him now in the enjoyment of all things heart could wish, seated in a state of peace and tranquility upon the throne of *Israel* and then suppose him contriving the wicked gratification of his sensual appetite, and the most cruel method of concealing it with the utmost foresight, engaging in it with the greatest pleasure, and remaining afterwards under the most amazing stupidity, insensible, in a great measure, of what he had done. And doth all this prove that he had lost entirely what was wrought in him by the Spirit of God? I say this transgression, great and complicated as it was, doth no more suppose him to have been without grace; than when he said, *O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day,*⁴ or when his soul was thirsting and panting after God, that he was then without a principle of corruption. But, as his humiliation was deep, so let me observe, that he not only had pardon of this sin declared to him, almost as soon as he was made truly sensible of it; but we find him afterwards speaking to this purpose, *Cast me not away from thy*

³ Hebrews 11:13.

⁴ Psalm 119:97.

*presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me.*⁵ Which supposes that he had then some experience of God's presence, and some enjoyment of his Spirit, and is, as though he had said, " Truly Lord, I deserve that thou shouldst throw off any concern for me; but I flee to thy grace, to thy covenant, to thy promises, and to thy faithfulness, in which thou hast caused me to hope." And so it is rather expressive of the becoming sense he had of his own guilt, than any fear of his losing the habitual presence of the holy Ghost, which was impossible. And the happy event is abundantly proved by the account we have of his death, in the old testaments, and the character given of him in the new:⁶

The same may be said as to *Solomon* and *Peter*: corruption had the upper hand in them both, on sad occasions indeed; but it is not difficult to prove that they were not then without grace in the habit.

As to *Solomon*, though his sins were very great, yet the many gracious experiences that are recorded in his life, and the testimony he bore to true religion in his inspired writings, especially in the close of it, abundantly show that the principle of grace in his soul was still preserve to the last.

And then as to *Peter*, is you will take our Lord's word for it, he assures us, that he had *prayed* for him that his *faith* should *not fail*:⁷ and you know his prayer is always prevalent, being founded in his own merit, as I have before proved at large. Now view *Peter's faith*, as to the exercise of it, and you will find it did *fail* him, and that in a most lamentable manner so that our Saviour's prayer must refer to the principle, which, though covered with abundance of corruption, was not so entirely defaced, but the author of it soon renewed it, and it appeared again in fresh, illustrious exercise. Thus then you see how little these examples serve to their purpose, who would prove from them the possibility of the final apostasy of true believers: whereas all that can be concluded from them is only this, that the most eminent saint, when left to himself, may fall into sin, into great sin and that it is not grace received that will preserve them, when under the power of temptation, but they must have fresh measures from the fountain. But then, on the other hand, these instances will also prove, that though they may fall, and sink very low, yet they shall not be swallowed up, and utterly lost: for the hand of the Lord still in a measure sustains them. And let me add this,

⁵ Psalm 51:11.

⁶ Hebrews 11:32.

⁷ Luke 22:32.

that instead of weakening, they serve exceedingly to strengthen our cause. For is persons falling thus low, have been raised again, then the foundation of God cannot but stand sure, and the truth in our text be confirmed, that *Christ's sheep shall never perish*, being under his care. I proceed now,

4. To another objection against this doctrine. And you may take the force of it in this proposition, That the doctrine which is according to godliness, and hath the greatest tendency to promote practical religion, is undoubtedly from God; and whatever is of a contrary nature is not from him. And thus they who plead for the possibility of our falling away, even after the greatest measures of grace received, conclude that their doctrine has a natural tendency to excite caution and circumspection, whereas the contrary leads directly to a sinful carelessness and security. Or you may take it thus, Religious fear is the main spring of obedience: but the doctrine of the saints final perseverance takes away occasion of fear, and accordingly tends to destroy instead of promoting true godliness, and therefore is not of divine authority. This I take to be the sum of what can be offered from this head. And that we may the better come at a full and satisfactory answer to it, we must,

First, Endeavour to explain what we mean by true gospel obedience, or consider what we are in reality to understand by it. And then,

Secondly, Show you that the doctrine of the saints final perseverance has the greatest tendency to promote it. Accordingly I begin,

First, With the thing itself that is the foundation of this objection, viz. gospel obedience: and we are to inquire into the true nature of it. And in general it consists in conformity to the will of God, as revealed in his word. And would we know concerning this or the other particular action, whether it be a part of this gospel obedience, we must enquire,

(1.) Into the matter of it, whether it be an human appointment, or commanded by God. For the most exact adherence to any thing in religion, which is of our own invention, and that is either contrary to, or not revealed in God's word, is very far from deserving the character of gospel obedience. What is so, must have God's authority in stamped upon it, as a warrant for our regard to it. Again,

(2.) As the matter of it must be good, and appointed by God, so it must arise from a right principle, or else, though it may be called obedience, yet it is not gospel obedience. A man must first have his heart renewed by grace, before he can serve God, in any sense acceptably. Thus you know the apostle says, *Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin.*⁸ And *without, faith it is impossible to please God.*⁹ So all things, of a religious kind, in which we engage, is our obedience be acceptable, must arise from a principle of affection to God, who commands them, as well as a becoming sense of our duty to him, as our Lord and King. And they must also be done in faith; that is, not only in dependence upon the merits of *Christ*, for our acceptance therein, but with a believing regard to him for assistance in the discharge of them. Thus, suppose a person setting about any religious duty, such as prayer for instance, if he is sensible that prayer is his most reasonable Service, that as God is the giver of his mercies, so he hath an indisputable right to all the homage he is able to pay him; is he is convinced that it is most reasonable, *that as he lives and moves and has his being in, and from God*, so he ought in an humble and explicit manner to acknowledge his dependence upon him; and is to this he adds the remembrance that God hath commanded this at his hands, that thus *saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them;*¹⁰ and is what he does is under a sense of duty, he may be said to act from right principles. Well, but this is not all, for he must act also from a principle of love to God, such a principle as, under the influence of the Spirit, leads him as a child to his Father: and as he knows that without him he can do nothing, so at the same time that he is bowing before him in a way of duty, he must look for assistance from him in a way of grace: he must eye not only the precept, but the promise; the one as the warrant, for what he does, and the other as an encouragement to the performance of it. Thus not only the matter of the action must be good in itself, and commanded by God but the principle from which it arises must be the new creature formed in the soul, a principle of faith and love, implanted there by the Spirit of God. And this might be confirmed by many places of scripture: but the very nature of the thing shows the necessity of it: for how can we suppose a man to draw nigh to God as a child to a Father, whilst he hath a reigning principle of enmity in his soul against him? Or how can he come to him acceptably, unless it be in the exercise of that faith, which is *his gift,*¹¹ and *without which it is*

⁸ Romans 14:23.

⁹ Hebrews 11:6.

¹⁰ Ezekiel 36:37.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:8.

*impossible to please him?*¹² An unbeliever, a man that hath never tasted of the grace of God, may indeed, come up to the letter of many of God's precepts, but while in that case, he is, in God's account, a stranger to gospel obedience. For the first act of evangelical duty, or however one of the first, is to obey God in that great command of his, *that we honor the Son, even as we honor the Father*¹³ and that is by believing on him; which we cannot possibly do, but by the influence of the Spirit of God. And till he hath given us thus to believe in the Son of God, though we may boast, or pride ourselves ever so much in our conformity to the divine law, we shall find, in the issue, that it is not sufficient to entitle us to the character of Christians. But, then again,

(3.) Our obedience must not only be thus good, both as to the matter and principle of it; but also it must be genuine as to the end we have in view, which must be the glory of God. I know to this it is said, that were there no heaven in view, perhaps none in the world would trouble themselves about obedience: so that while we deny seeking ourselves, this is only in pretence, and the fact is far other wise. But to this I think it is easy to reply, that what God hath joined together no man should separate; and we know it is impossible to seek the glory of God as our ultimate end, without pursuing our own greatest, and best interests: and the regard a believer hath to heaven and eternal life, naturally arises from a principle of grace, and the *love of Christ* shed abroad in his heart, by which he concludes that the Lord hath loved him with an everlasting love, and that he hath in reserve for him more than heart can wish: and is this reflection draws forth his desire to walk becoming the gospel, and animates his obedience, it is by no means in a way of merit, but of gratitude. He may have regard to God as a rewarder, in a way of grace, and from this be encouraged in his duty, while the glory of God is the great end he has in view; and while he firmly believes that the blessedness he hopes for, is secured beyond the possibility of his losing it; that heaven and happiness are his; that God hath given him eternal life; and therefore, as the best evidence of his love to God, he desires to keep his commandments. This I say is the principal end a good man purposes in the discharge of his duty, viz. to glorify God: and here we may see a very material difference betwixt evangelical and legal obedience, for in the latter men seek their own things, and little else but their own; they are looking for an interest in the favor of God in a way of merit, and, by mistaken

¹² Hebrews 11:6.

¹³ John 5:23.

apprehensions of themselves and their services, and of the nature of the divine Being, they are ready to conclude, that he is to be appeased by this or the other instance of obedience, and his glory has the least share in their view. Thus then I have endeavored to state the true notion of gospel obedience. And this leads us to the next thing, which is,

Secondly, To show you that the doctrine of the saints final perseverance has the greatest tendency to promote this obedience in the Christian; for it is only of such we are speaking. And, in general, I think it must be allowed, that is, as we have before proved this obedience flows immediately from love and confidence in God, then, whatever principles have a tendency to, draw out and increase these graces in our souls, must be allowed to have the greatest likelihood to promote gospel obedience. For, observe, as it cannot be performed without them, so in proportion to the increase or diminution of these graces, it hath been experienced, that we either run the ways of Gods commandments with delight and pleasure, or are careless, cold, and indifferent. And here, that we may guard against all mistakes, observe, that no doctrine in itself, how great a tendency so ever it may have to promote any good ends in us, will be of any service to us, but as it is set home by the Spirit of God. Christians themselves may sit under the clearest displays of God's love in the gospel, and yet be unmoved, unless the Spirit of God set home the word, and attend the discovery with power and energy from himself; but, when in the hand of the Spirit, it must be allowed, that the doctrine of the saints perseverance has the greatest tendency imaginable to promote evangelical obedience. Since it is not only every where in sacred scripture recommended as an argument to excite us to it; but it gives us such evidence of the infinite greatness of the love of God to us, that must, in its own nature, powerfully tend to draw forth our love to him., which is the great hinge upon which all our obedience is to move. To reduce this to an argument you may take it thus, The more we see of God's love to us, the more we shall love him; and the more we love God, the more conscientious we shall be in obeying him. Now nothing hath a greater tendency to discover God's love to us, than what we have revealed to us in the comfortable doctrine of our perseverance. Therefore this doctrine, instead of obstructing, encourages, and promotes our obedience. The truth of this will more fully appear, is we consider how this doctrine abounds with intimations of God's special, and particular regard to us. And.,

(1.) It sets before us the immutability of God's love to us. And can any thing in the world encourage a Christian more in a walk becoming his

profession and character, than this? What says the child of God with regard to it? *Hath the Lord not only loved me from everlasting, but is it continued for ever? Is he ever mindful of me? Oh how vile, how disingenuous, and ungrateful have I been, to forget my duty to him, or to perform it in so careless, and negligent a manner? Surely the former part of my conversation shall suffice, that I have walked in rebellion and disobedience against him, or in a cold and indifferent discharge of any duty. Oh that I may now begin to act as one that hath been the object of such remarkable grace! O I am ashamed of myself,"* says such a soul, *that when the love of God to me hath been like mountains of brass,¹⁴ my goodness and love to him hath been as a morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away!¹⁵* Whereas, on the contrary, suppose the poor soul regarding his interest in the love of God, as founded on his obedience, and therefore liable to be lost; suppose him to be never so certain of his present interest in it, may he not justly argue thus with himself? *I am now in the favor of God, but alas how soon may it be otherwise! The devils themselves were once in the same case with me, but are now reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, the judgment of the great day.¹⁶ They had no enemies to encounter with, no subtle tempter, no indwelling corruptions, no alluring world; and yet they fell and oh how much more then, may I expect the same portion, who have a heart that is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked!¹⁷ Who have no Strength to look to, that I can depend upon for certain assistance, no established promise upon which to ground my hope of Standing! Surely it is preferable for me to take my fill of present enjoyments, since I have no certain security of better in another world."* This I humbly apprehend is the very natural language of a person under apprehensions of the possibility of his falling away, after grace received. And I believe I may, in this appeal to the experience and observation of the most thriving Christians, of those that are the best established in the immutability of God's counsels, that in the view of their interest in his unchangeable love, they walk most cheerfully and thankfully. But again,

(2.) This doctrine represents to us the nature of God's love, as perfectly free, as well as unchangeable; and thus it hath a tendency to draw out our love to him, and consequently our regard to his will. It represents God's love to us as a favor that we never deserved, and that was never

¹⁴ Zech. 6:1

¹⁵ Hosea 6:4.

¹⁶ Jude 1:6

¹⁷ Jeremiah 18:9.

bestowed upon us, with regard to any thing that was excellent or valuable in us, or that God expected from us: *for God loved us, and so quickened us, when we were dead in trespasses and sins;*¹⁸ he foresaw nothing good in us, but what he designed to bestow upon us; and could not therefore be said to love us because of those qualities, but to love our persons, and from that to bestow them upon us. And therefore a soul, duly affected with this, will say, hath the Lord thus acted towards me? What, to love me when vile and exposed to his wrath! Oh what shall I render to him for all his mercies! Can I ever think anything too dear to be sacrificed to such grace! Oh who shall deliver me from this law that leads me aside from God, when I should by such goodness be every day more effectually, and intimately drawn to him! But then again,

(3.) This doctrine represents the love of God to us as pregnant with the best of fruits. It is not a disposition of kindness only, but a love that influenced the Father, when nothing less would do for our salvation, to part with his only begotten Son out of his bosom to die for us; to provide the sacrifice, and then to accept it in our room and stead. It is a love also that influenced the Son of God, in this manner, freely to give his soul an offering for our sins, and by his sufferings and death to make atonement for us. And is it possible that we can be properly acquainted with this love, and not be constrained by it to some suitable returns? What can fill us with greater detestation of sin, than a believing view of it, as done "away by the blood of the Son of God? When we consider that it was no less than this blood that was sufficient to cleanse us from it, and are apprised of the grace of God in providing it for us, I say, what monsters in nature must the children of God be supposed to be, to draw from thence encouragement to commit it? Would not that man be justly branded as an instance of unparalleled brutishness, who, when his friend had laid down his life for him, should from thence take the greater liberty to treat his counsels with neglect, and his name and memory with contempt? And can we suppose a child of God to behold his very creator bleeding, or the Son of God, in his nature, dying on the cross, to remove his guilt, and from thence be the more attached to those sins which cost his Saviour so dear, and the more encouraged to commit them? No, you must see, that whatever abuse men may make of this doctrine, yet it is very far from having any such tendency in its own nature. Whereas the contrary doctrine, which tells a man that God hath loved him indeed, and *Christ* hath died for him, but notwithstanding all this, his salvation depends on his own

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:1.

doings, and, though his faith be of the right kind, it may fail, his hopes may be dashed in pieces, and he may perish at last I say, if a man is at all acquainted with his own heart, this doctrine must lay him under great discouragement. *“What,” says he, “hath Christ” died for me, and yet am I lest at such an uncertainty about my salvation? Can I do nothing without him? And have I no security “that he will assist me; though if he doth not I must perish? Why, as this is but a very small intimation of his love to me, who might have entirely secured my salvation, had he pleased; so it is likely to have but a proportional influence on me.* Thus then you see, upon the comparison, which doctrine hath the greatest tendency to draw out our love to God, and to promote our obedience to him. To sum up the argument then, let me add, in the last place,

(4.) That we may safely conclude, that the doctrine of the saints perseverance, or that doctrine wherein we are assured of the everlasting continuance of our interest in the love of God, must be according to godliness because the holy Ghost hath been pleased to make use of this very way of reasoning, all along, to unbelievers. I believe there is hardly any observation more common than this, that in almost every epistle we have extant, and in almost every other place, where we have any duty recommended, we have some privilege laid down as an inducement to it. Now, is it maybe allowed that the Spirit of God best knew what was the greatest inducement to obedience, I believe we shall find it almost universally fall on our side. I might turn you to many places; but a few that are most remarkable shall suffice. See particularly that passage in the epistle to the Romans, *How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein*¹⁹ that is, we that are entirely delivered from the power and dominion of it, as bringing condemnation along with it, how shall we continue in it? And again the apostle says, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*²⁰ And once more, in his epistle to Titus.—*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.*²¹ I thought to have concluded this subject at this time; but there yet remains one head, and that is, to set before you the way in which we are to account for the exhortations and threatening, which are scattered up and down in the word of God; how these

¹⁹ Romans 6:2.

²⁰ Chapter 12:1.

²¹ Titus 2:11, 12.

are consistent with the absolute security of salvation; which, together with some general remarks upon the Whole subject may serve for another discourse. I shall conclude therefore at present with a reflection or two. And,

1. From hence we may see how easy it is to have mistaken notions of obedience. When, we act from any other principle, but love and duty to God, we may think what we please, but it is far from being acceptable to him. The matter of the act may be good, and the manner of the performance in our apprehensions may be right, and yet the end may be foreign to what it ought to be. Our obedience was never designed, under the covenant of grace, as the matter of our acceptance. No, this is Christ alone, in his Mediatorial character, in the virtue of his blood and righteousness. And, if our obedience is well pleasing in the sight of God, it must spring from faith in this all sufficient Saviour, from a sense of the love of God in this salvation, and be the product of a principle of grateful love, wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God. Which, leads me to add,

2. That, is we would grow and flourish; in religion, we should earnestly pray for larger discoveries of the divine love. This is not only of the greatest consequence to support and comfort us under the various afflictions, and despondencies we are subject to, in our passage thro this vale of tears; but to animate us in the various conflicts with which we must be tried, to fortify us against temptation, and to enable us to maintain a steady, constant, and un-fainting obedience to God's righteous, and reasonable commandments.

SERMON XV.

On the Final Perseverance of the Saints.

John 10: 28.

And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The Fifth Sermon on this text.

It is mentioned, you know, by the apostle *Peter*, as a very great and honorable circumstance in the character of Lot, that he was *vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked*.¹ And I think it cannot but sensibly affect the minds of the truly serious, who have felt the divine energy of the Holy Ghost, to observe the increase of impiety and profaneness among mankind. Perhaps it hath been from this principle, that in all ages, it hath been the common voice of the church that the day wherein they lived exceeded that which went before, for daring instances of rebellion against God. But I am sully persuaded, as to this day, that a man must be a stranger in our *Israel* indeed, is he is not apprised, that error and iniquity, those two inseparable companions, seem, the one to have seated itself in the minds, and the other to have possessed the conversation, alas! But of too many, from whom, some time since, we were ready to hope better things. And can we, ought we, who are set for the defense of the gospel, to hold our peace, and not bear our testimony against them? Shall the foundations of our hope be assaulted, with daring arrogance, in public, and every thing, of a religious nature, prove the subject of raillery and banter in private, and we sit looking unaffected on? Some indeed gild over such a conduct with the specious title of charity. But I wish, how exceedingly fond so ever, for the present, they may seem to be of this pretended charity, it may not be charged upon them, as an instance of unfaithfulness at the great day. With this view, in order to bear my testimony against error, I have been endeavoring, for some time, to establish the glorious truth, that shines forth with so much brightness in the words of our text, I mean that of the saints final perseverance. Which doctrine, as it is

¹ 2 Peter 2:7.

the very basis of our comfort, and has been so, in the esteem of the saints in all ages; so we can never be too well established in the belief of it.

In some former discourses I have endeavored to confirm your faith in this truth by a variety of arguments, which, is thoroughly understood, and weighed in the scripture balance, may sufficiently arm, even the weakest of *Christ's* sheep, so that they need not be afraid or ashamed, when called by the providence of God, to contend with the wise and prudent, for this part of that faith which was once delivered to the saints. I shall give you a very short recapitulation of what I have delivered, for the refreshment of your memories, and then proceed to the last thing, with which we shall close our thoughts upon this subject. Our proportion then was to this effect,

That Christ's sheep, being given him by the Father, or committed to him as a trust, have such a security in him, that not one of them shall ever perish, but Christ will give unto them all eternal life.

And I told you the question lay in this: Whether an elect vessel, having once tasted of the grace of God; can entirely lose that which was wrought in him, and so finally perish. The in possibility of this, and the truth of our proposition we established from the immutable purpose of God in election; from *Christ's* having, by his glorious undertaking, and the accomplishment of it, set them out of the reach of all their enemies, viz. sin, Satan, this world, and death itself; so that none of those who would pluck them out of *Christ's* hand, shall be able to effect it. We further established this truth from the consideration of the nature of the covenant of grace, which is *ordered in all things*, and sure; from the saints union with *Christ*, as members of his body; from *Christ's* intercession for them, which being founded in his blood and righteousness, cannot but be efficacious; from the promise of the Spirit to take up his abode in the hearts of *Christ's* sheep, and to remain with them forever; and lastly, from the absurdity of the contrary sentiment, as derogatory to the glory of Father, Son, and Spirit. And then we came to answer objections made against it; and, in the last discourse, considered at large the tendency this doctrine hath to promote practical religion, or gospel obedience, in answer to that cavil of our opponents, that it opens a door to licentiousness. And here I observed to you, that as love to God, and faith in him are the great springs of evangelical obedience; so, this doctrine, as revealing God's love to us, and his ability to assists us, hath the greatest tendency to draw forth those graces in our souls, which cannot but be most likely to encourage the Christian in a conversation becoming the

gospel. And I confirmed this by observing, that it is the very same way in which the Holy Ghost always proceeds. Thus you find the inspired apostle speaking, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*²

What remains at present to be attended to, is the objection arising from the exhortations and threatening which are scattered up and down in the word of God. And you may take the sense of it, in its greatest latitude, thus: The doctrine of the saints perseverance, considered in that absolute, unconditional way, in which we have represented it, renders all the exhortations to duty, and threatening of punishment, in case of failure; perfectly useless and insignificant, not to say impertinent. What avails exhorting me (says such a person) to take heed lest I fall, if I am sure this shall never be my case? or such an exhortation as that of the apostle, *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God,*³ if I am assured that God will hold me so fast, that I never shall depart from him. All that fear and circumspection, which the Christian is commanded to be in the exercise of, is entirely useless. For why should he be afraid of that, which he is sully assured shall never come to pass? Thus, I think, (our adversaries themselves being judges) the objection is represented in its full force. And, if I mistake not, it is in the very Words of one of their greatest champions. And now, that I may give a distinct and full answer to it, I shall,

1. Premise something in general concerning the fear of God. And,

2. Lay down some positions concerning the will of God in his exhortations and threatening. And, from the consideration of both these, I hope to make it evident, that this objection, notwithstanding all its appearing force, is really invalid. I begin,

1. With endeavoring to state the true meaning of the fear of God. And I cannot but observe,

- (1.) That there is a fear of God, which, in a believer, is absolutely unlawful, and therefore is expressly prohibited. This I think must be

² Romans 12:1

³ Hebrews 3:12.

universally allowed, being so evident from many passages of sacred scripture. So, for instance, in Isaiah's prophecy, for the encouragement of the timorous soul, it is said, *Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not,*⁴ *and again, fear not, for I am with thee:*⁵ and so in the prophecy of Zechariah, God says, *fear not, but let your hands be strong.*⁶ And Christ says to his disciples, *fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*⁷ And in another place, *Let not your hearts be troubled: ye Relieve in God, believe also in me.*⁸ This then being a slavish fear of God, must be looked upon as a sin, else it would not be prohibited. And is this fear is a sin, then none of those exhortations to fear God, that we meet with in other places of scripture are to be understood in this light, because that would be charging the Holy Ghost with the most palpable contradiction in the world, in commanding in one place, what he expressly forbids, and that in the same persons, and under the same considerations, in another. I might also show you, that the children of God, being very prone to this sinful fear, the Lord hath in many places promised them deliverance from it. You have a remarkable passage in the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, wherein this matter is set before us in a very beautiful light. *Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord, neither be dismayed, O Israel: for lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest and quiet, and none shall make him afraid.*⁹ And you know what is said of the good man; *he shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord.*¹⁰ Now is God hath thus expressly forbidden it in his children, and given them promises of deliverance from it, it must necessarily follow, that such a fear is displeasing to him. To which I add,

(2.) The contrary to this slavish fear, is an humble reverential awe of God, arising from a due sense of the infinite distance there is Between him and us; and this is perfectly consistent with the greatest confidence in him, both as to grace here, and glory hereafter. It is an empty conceit of the enemies to this doctrine, that because a believer is not to fear God as an enemy, or to be under a slavish apprehension of losing his favor, therefore

⁴ Isaiah 35:3, 4.

⁵ Chapter 43:5.

⁶ Zach. 8:15.

⁷ Luke 12:32.

⁸ John 14:1.

⁹ Jeremiah 30:10.

¹⁰ Psalm 112:7.

he is not to fear God at all. There are other considerations that put him upon this duty, as he labors to set the Lord always before him, so it is in a way of filial, religious fear, and holy awe of him, not as an enemy, but as a friend, infinitely glorious. As an evidence that perfect love to God, nay, the greatest sense of our interest in his love, doth not exclude, but indeed fill the soul with this fear, see what the prophet Isaiah says. After he had been favored with a most intimate discovery of God's glory, he cries out, *Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*¹¹ God's absolute purity carried a convincing evidence along with it to the prophet's mind that he was defiled. And thus it will be wish us; the more intimate our communion with God is, the more we shall see of his purity, and our own pollution: and in proportion to it, we shall abhor, and humble ourselves in dust and ashes; and the more we see of his glory, the more we shall be filled with holy awe and reverence. When the Lord draws nigh, to us in a way of gracious discovery, we shall be ready enough to say, that *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints; and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.*¹² One main thing wherein this fear differs from that which is slavish, is, that the one springs from love to God, and delight in him, and the other is always attended, either with some aversion to him, or exceeding hard, and unbecoming thoughts of him.

These things being premised, I come now more immediately to attend to the objection. And I cannot but think that an absolute assurance, that the God who hath begun, will carry on his work in our souls, is perfectly consistent with an holy awe, and a proper degree of a reverential fear of him, who by exhortations and threatening hath acquainted us with our duty, as well as by promises of assistance hath encouraged our faith. For your farther satisfaction respecting this truth, I shall now proceed,

2. To lay down the following positions, which will, I apprehend, abundantly confirm and illustrate this matter. And,

(i.) The saint's special relation to God, as children, doth not disannul, or abrogate their obligation to fear and serve him, as their creator, but indeed confirms, and establishes it. Take a view of man, as the workmanship of God's hands, and as in this respect he is God's property, so he is bound to be

¹¹ Isaiah 6:5.

¹² Psalm 89:7.

subject to the pleasure of his Creator, in all those laws that he shall prescribe: a failure in which you know properly calls for punishment, but does not imply a freedom from prior obligation. Thus, for instance, if we take a view of *Adam* when fallen, why, he had indeed broken God's law, and so contracted an inability, ever again, to come up to the spiritual part of any of its precepts, in his own strength. But this weakness or infirmity doth not suppose a cessation of his obligation to obedience, according to that known observation,

THOUGH *man has lost his power of obeying, God hath not lost his right of commanding.*

And now let us transfer this to a child of God. Our Lord *Jesus Christ*, he hath fulfilled the law, indeed, for him, removed the curse, that so he might inherit the blessing; but hereby, he hath not dissolved God's right, as a Sovereign, to the obedience of his children. For observe, though it is absolutely impossible *that they should do good and sin Not*,¹³ and though this shall not be the matter of their condemnation, *Christ being made sin for them*, that they *might be made the righteousness of God in him*;¹⁴ yet it doth not follow, but that God has a right to all the obedience they are able to perform. Their being redeemed ones doth not dissolve their relation to God, as his creatures, though it secures them from the punishment which would otherwise be the result of their deficiency in their obedience. This I need not dwell long upon; for concerning even the blessed spirits above, though they are in a state of perfect felicity, and in the full possession of everlasting life, yet the Lord hath the same right to homage from them, as ever. For as the obligation arises from the relation, between God and them as creatures, so it remains for ever. And the work of eternity will be not only to enjoy, but to fear, and adore, the author of all our happiness. So that though, I say, we are delivered from the law, as a covenant of works, yet I very readily grant that we are obliged, in point of duty, to be found in the performance of the precepts of it. And at the same time, we can bless God that though we come short in every thing, yet this shall not be the matter of our condemnation, Christ having fulfilled the law for us. Nay, this relation of ours to God, as children, is so far from destroying, that it abundantly confirms, and establishes our obligation to him, according to that saying of our Lord, *If you love me keep my commandments*.¹⁵ As if he had said, If you are sensible of

¹³ Eccles. 7:20.

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

¹⁵ John 14:15.

the greatness of my love to you, in giving myself for you, and this hath a tendency to excite your affection to me, show it by endeavoring to keep my commandments; this do in my strength, for *without me ye can do nothing*;¹⁶ follow me in those ways, in which I have gone before you. This then is our first observation, that the saint's relation to God, as children, doth not destroy, but abundantly confirm their obligation to serve him, as they are his creatures. And this being allowed us, we go on to observe,

(2.) That an exhortation to that, which is our duty, may be perfectly consistent with an absolute promise of grace to assist us in the discharge of it. This is so evident from the general current of the word of God, that I think it must remain indisputable. Thus, you know, we are commanded to *sanctify the Lord of host himself and to let him be our fear, and to let him be our dread*;¹⁷ and it is said, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength*;¹⁸ and thus we are commanded to put our trust in him, and serve him, and the like. Well, and are not the very same things mentioned in a way of free and gracious promise? Doth not God say, *I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me*?¹⁹ And again, *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them*?²⁰ Now, either these must be consistent with each other, or the Spirit of God must contradict himself. For you see that the very same things which God requires in a way of duty, in one place, he promises in a way of favor in another. Which being granted, we observe in the next place,

(3.) That all the threatenings, which are to be found in the sacred scriptures, were never designed to excite a slavish fear of God in the believer, either as to his losing his interest in him, or falling from grace: this being directly contrary to that joy, peace, comfort and satisfaction for which the Lord hath made abundant provision in his word. We cannot suppose a Being infinite in wisdom, in one place, exhorting us to rejoice in him, and in another, to be filled with the most tormenting apprehensions of his being an enemy to us, these two are incompatible. If it is our duty to joy and rejoice in the Lord, and place our confidence in him, then certainly it is not so, to be tormenting ourselves with melancholy apprehensions, that, through the

¹⁶ John 15:5.

¹⁷ Isaiah 8:13.

¹⁸ Mark 12:30.

¹⁹ Jeremiah 32:40.

²⁰ Ezek. 36:27.

imperfections of our obedience, we shall lose our interest in the divine favor. Nothing can be more apparent, than that the design of the Lord is, that his people should honor him by believing, and rejoicing in him. And for this reason it is, that we have such repeated exhortations thereto. *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord,*²¹ says the apostle Paul in his epistle to the *Philippians*; and a little after, *Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say rejoice;*²² and thus he exhorts the *Thessalonians to rejoice evermore.*²³ Now if this is our duty, as redeemed ones, it cannot be the design of the Holy Ghost, in the threatening which are in his word, to excite that which is contrary to it, even, a strangeness to God, and a slavish fearfulness of him. But,

(4.) And lastly I observe, that, notwithstanding what I have before said, these exhortations and threatening are not without their use even to believers themselves. As in the one, they have their duty laid before them, and are admonished to the discharge of it, as obedience is their own act, while, at the same time, by the promises of God, their faith is encouraged to look to him for assistance: so in the other, they have the connection there is between sin and punishment set before them, for their humiliation on the one hand, in a just apprehension that, unless the Lord was to keep them, this would certainly be their case, as well as it is the case of those who perish; and on the other hand, it is to excite their gratitude to God, by whose grace and assistance they are sensible they shall be preserved.

Thus, for instance, when they consider such a passage as that, *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him,*²⁴ they are instructed first, that they should certainly fall back, even to perdition, unless kept by the mighty power of God, and then, from the dreadful condition of those nominal professors who fall in that sort, they are quickened to holy watchfulness, and circumspection. And then, in the view of their being of that number who hold on believing to the saving of their souls, they cannot but admire the grace of God, that this distinguishing; favor should be thus given to them. Thus then you see how weak this objection is. For though the exhortations to duty suppose no sufficient power in a man of himself, and without the divine aid, to discharge it; nor threatening, in case of failure, are any just ground for the believer to fill himself with slavish and tormenting

²¹ Phil. 3:1.

²² Phil. 4:4.

²³ 1 Thess. 5:16.

²⁴ Hebrews 10:38.

sear; yet they are not without their use, in the hand of the Spirit of God, For as believers, in their relation to God as children, are under equal, is not superior obligations to serve him, as his creatures and therefore may and ought to be acquainted with, and exhorted to their duty, these exhortations being perfectly consistent with promises of grace for the discharge of it; so they may converse with the threatening of God, without sinking into a slavish fear of him, as an enemy; those threatening being designed for their humiliation before God, *that no flesh should glory in his presence*; but, *that, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord:*²⁵ and that, from a consideration of the terrible consequences of the final apostasy of others, they may be excited to holy diligence in duty, and a grateful discharge of it, in some proportion to such distinguishing grace.

And, thus then, I have finished what I designed, in a doctrinal way, from this subject. I intended to conclude the whole with a more large and general improvement; but as I have made some remarks on each part of this glorious truth, of the saints perseverance, as I have gone along, so I shall close all with a few reflections on this last discourse. And,

1. Hence we may see the wisdom and grace of God, in this remarkable instance of it, the connection he hath been pleased to make, between what is our duty, and the promises of his grace to assist us in the discharge of it. As the one might make us afraid, when we consider our inability, so by the other we can converse with our duty with pleasure, knowing where our help is laid. But,

2. We may also here see the preference of the covenant of grace to the covenant of works. The one like the *Egyptian* taskmasters requires the full tale of bricks, without affording the least straw to assist: the other gives every thing freely; first, an interest in the favor of God, and then grace to help us to walk becoming the dignity of our character.

3. Hath *Christ* engaged that his sheep shall never perish, what a distinguishing instance of grace must it be, to be one of his flock and to have some comfortable assurance that this is our case? How may this comfort the weakest in the fold? And how may it support them under all the trials and dangers, they pass thro, in their way to the everlasting rest?

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:29, 31.

4. And lastly, let us be ashamed of ourselves, that we walk no more worthy of this privilege, and that our hearts are no more filled with praises to this Redeemer, whose trust we are. Let him have all the glory of his own work. Say not, my mountain stands so strong that it shall never be moved, in a way of presumption, but in a way of triumph, and thankfulness. And while you maintain this temper of mind, you will find yourselves, under the influence of the strongest obligations, to behave agreeably to your believing character, and to your glorious, and your well founded expectations.