

SERMONS
ON
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS

SAMUEL DAVIES, A.M.,

Sometime President of the College in New-Jersey.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

TO WHICH ARE NOW ADDED,

THREE OCCASIONAL SERMONS,

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MEMOIRS AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR;

AND

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SERMON IX.

The Connection between Present Holiness and Future Felicity.

Heb. xii. 14. *Follow—holiness; without which no man shall see the Lord.*

As the human soul was originally designed for the enjoyment of no less a portion than the ever-blessed God, it was formed with a strong innate tendency towards happiness. It has not only an eager fondness for existence, but for some good to render its existence happy. And the privation of being itself is not more terrible than the privation of all its blessings. It is true, in the present degeneracy of human nature, this vehement desire is miserably perverted and misplaced: man seeks his supreme happiness in sinful, or at best in created enjoyments, forgetful of the uncreated fountain of bliss; but yet still he seeks happiness: still this innate *impetus* is predominant, and though he mistakes the means, yet he still retains a general aim at the end. Hence he ransacks this lower world in quest of felicity; climbs in search of it the slippery ascent of honour; hunts for it in the treasures of gold and silver; or plunges for it in the foul streams of sensual pleasures. But since all the sordid satisfaction resulting from these things is not adequate to the unbounded cravings of the mind, and since the satisfaction is transitory and perishing, or we may be wrenched from it by the inexorable hand of death, the mind breaks through the limits of the present enjoyments, and even of the lower creation, and ranges through the unknown scenes of futurity in quest of some untried good. Hope makes excursions into the dark duration between the present *now* and the grave, and forms to itself pleasing images of approaching blessings, which often vanish in the embrace, like delusive phantoms. Nay, it launches into the vast unknown world that lies beyond the grave, and roves through the regions of immensity after some complete felicity to supply the defects of sublunary enjoyments. Hence, though men, till their spirits are refined by regenerate grace, have no relish for celestial joys, but pant for the poor pleasures of time and sense, yet as they cannot avoid the unwelcome consciousness that death will ere long rend them from these sordid and momentary enjoyments, are constrained to indulge the hope of bliss in a future state: and they promise themselves happiness in another world when they can no longer enjoy any in this. And as reason and revelation unitedly assure them that this felicity cannot consist in sensual indulgences, they generally expect it will be of a more refined and spiritual nature, and flow more immediately from the great Father of spirits.

He must indeed be miserable that abandons all hope of this blessedness. The Christian religion affords him no other prospect but that of eternal, intolerable misery in the regions of darkness and despair; and if he flies to infidelity as a refuge, it can afford him no comfort but the shocking prospect of annihilation.

Now, if men were pressed into heaven by an unavoidable fatality, if happiness was promiscuously promised to them all without distinction of characters, then they might indulge a blind unexamined hope, and never perplex themselves with anxious inquiries about it. And he might justly be deemed a malignant disturber of the repose of mankind, that would attempt to shock their hope, and frighten them with causeless scruples.

But if the light of nature intimates, and the voice of Scripture proclaims aloud, that this eternal felicity is reserved only for persons of particular characters, and that multitudes, multitudes who entertained pleasing hopes of it, are confounded with an eternal disappointment, and shall suffer an endless duration in the most terrible miseries, we ought each of us to take the alarm, and examine the grounds of our hope, that, if they appear sufficient, we may allow ourselves a rational satisfaction in them; and if they are found delusive, we may abandon them, and seek for a hope which will bear the test now while it may be obtained. And however disagreeable the task be to give our fellow-creatures even profitable uneasiness, yet he must appear to the impartial a friend to the best interests of mankind, who points out the evidences and foundation of a rational and scriptural hope, and exposes the various mistakes to which are subject in so important a case.

And if, when we look around us, we find persons full of the hopes of heaven, who can give no scriptural evidences of them to themselves or others; if we find many indulging this pleasing delusion, whose practices are mentioned by God himself as the certain marks of perishing sinners; and if persons are so tenacious of these hopes, that they will retain them to their everlasting ruin, unless the most convictive methods are taken to undeceive them; then it is high time for those to whom the care of souls (a weightier charge than that of kingdoms) is intrusted, to use the greatest plainness for this purpose.

This is my chief design at present, and to this my text naturally leads me. It contains these doctrines:

First, That without holiness here, it is impossible for us to enjoy heavenly happiness in the future world. To see the Lord, is here put for enjoying him; see Rom. viii. 24. And the metaphor signifies the happiness of the future state in general; and more particularly intimates that the knowledge of God will be a special ingredient therein. See a parallel expression in Matt. v. 8.

Secondly, that this consideration should induce us to use the most earnest endeavours to obtain the heavenly happiness. Pursue holiness, because *without it no man can see the Lord*.

Hence I am naturally led,

I. To explain the nature of that *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*.

II. To show what endeavours should be used to obtain it. And,

III. To urge you to use them by the consideration of the absolute necessity of holiness.

I. I am to explain the nature of holiness. And I shall give you a brief definition of it, and then mention some of those dispositions and practices which naturally flow from it.

The most intelligible description of holiness, as it is inherent in us, may be this; "It is a conformity in heart and practice to the revealed will of God." As the Supreme Being is the standard of all perfection, his holiness in particular is the standard of ours. Then we are holy when his image is stamped upon our hearts and reflected in our lives; so the apostle defines it, *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*. Eph. iv. 24. *Whom he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son*. Rom. viii. 29. Hence holiness may be defined, "A conformity to God in his moral perfections." But as we cannot have a distinct knowledge of these perfections but as they are manifested by the revealed will of God, I choose to define holiness, as above, "A conformity to his revealed will." Now his revealed will comprises both the law and the gospel: the law informs us of the duty which we as creatures owe to God as a being of supreme excellency, as our Creator and Benefactor, and to men as our fellow-creatures; and the gospel informs us of the duty which as sinners we owe to God as reconcilable through a Mediator. Our obedience to the former implies the whole of morality, and to the latter the whole of evangelical graces, as faith in a Mediator, repentance, &c.

From this definition of holiness it appears, on the one hand, that it is absolutely necessary, to see the Lord; for unless our dispositions are conformed to him, we cannot be happy in the enjoyment of him: and on the other hand, that they who are made thus holy, are prepared for the vision and fruition of his face, as they can relish the divinest pleasure.

But as a concise definition of holiness may give an auditory but very imperfect ideas of it, I shall expatiate upon the dispositions and practices in which it consists, or which naturally result from it; and they are such as follow:

1. A delight in God for his holiness. Self-love may prompt us to love him for his goodness to us; and so, many unregenerate men may have a selfish

love to God on this account. But to love God because he is infinitely holy, because he bears an infinite detestation to all sin, and will not indulge his creatures in the neglect of the least instance of holiness, but commands them to be holy as he is holy, this is a disposition connatural to a renewed soul only, and argues a conformity to his image. Every nature is most agreeable to itself, and a holy nature is most agreeable to a holy nature.

Here I would make a remark, which may God deeply impress on your hearts, and which for that purpose I shall subjoin to each particular, that holiness in fallen man is supernatural; I mean, we are not born with it, we give no discoveries of it, till we have experienced a great change. Thus we find it in the present case: we have no natural love to God because of his infinite purity and hatred to all sin; nay, we would love him more did he give us greater indulgences; and I am afraid the love of some persons is founded upon a mistake; they love him because they imagine he does not hate sin, nor them for it, so much as he really does; because they do not expect he is so inexorably just in his dealings with the sinner. It is no wonder they love such a soft, easy, passive being as this imaginary deity: but did they see the lustre of that holiness of God which dazzles the celestial armies; did they but know the terrors of his justice, and his implacable indignation against sin, their innate enmity would show its poison, and their hearts would rise against God in all those horrible blasphemies with which awakened sinners are so frequently shocked. Such love as this is so far from being acceptable, that it is the greatest affront to the Supreme Being; as, if a profligate loved you on the mistaken supposition that you were such a libertine as himself, it would rather inflame your indignation than procure your respect.

But to a regenerate mind how strong, how transporting are the charms of holiness! Such a mind joins the anthem of seraphs with the divinest complacency, Rev. iv. 8, and anticipates the song of glorified saints, *Who would not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy?* Rev. xv. 4. The perfections of God lose their lustre, or sink into objects of terror or contempt, if this glorious attribute be abstracted. Without holiness power becomes tyranny, omniscience craft, justice revenge and cruelty, and even the amiable attribute of goodness loses its charms, and degenerates into a blind promiscuous prodigality, or foolish undiscerning fondness: but when these perfections are clothed in the beauties of holiness, how godlike, how majestic, how lovely and attractive do they appear! and with what complacency does a mind fashioned after the divine image acquiesce in them! It may appear amiable even to an unholy sinner, that the exertions of almighty power should be regulated by the most consummate wisdom; that justice should not without distinction punish the guilty and the innocent: but a holy soul only

can rejoice that divine goodness will not communicate happiness to the disgrace of holiness; and that, rather than it should overflow in a blind promiscuous manner, the whole human race should be miserable. A selfish sinner has nothing in view but his own happiness; and if this be obtained, he has no anxiety about the illustration of the divine purity; but it recommends happiness itself to a sanctified soul, that it cannot be communicated in a way inconsistent with the beauties of holiness.

2. Holiness consists in a hearty complacence in the law of God, because of its purity. The law is the transcript of the moral perfections of God; and if we love the original, we shall love the copy. Accordingly it is natural to a renewed mind to love the divine law, because it is perfectly holy; because it makes no allowance for the least sin, and requires every duty that it becomes us to perform towards God. Psalm cxix. 140, and xix. 7–10, Romans vii. 12, compared with 22.

But is this our natural disposition? Is this the disposition of the generality? Do they not, on the contrary, secretly find fault with the law, because it is so strict? And their common objection against that holiness of life which it enjoins is, that they cannot bear to be so precise. Hence they are always for abating the rigour of the law, for bringing it down to some imaginary standard of their own, to their present ability, to sins of practice without regard to the sinful dispositions of the heart; or to the prevailing dispositions of the heart without regard to the first workings of concupiscence, those embryos of iniquity; and if they love the law at all, as they profess to do, it is upon the supposition that it is not so strict as it really is, but grants them greater indulgences. Rom. vii. 7.

Hence it appears that, if we are made holy at all, it must be by a supernatural change; and when that is effected, what a strange and happy alteration does the sinner perceive? with what pleasure does he resign himself a willing subject to that law to which he was once so averse? And when he fails, (as alas! he does in many things,) how is he humbled! he does not lay the fault upon the law as requiring impossibilities, but lays the whole fault upon himself as a corrupt sinner.

3. Holiness consists in a hearty complacence in the gospel method of salvation, because it tends to illustrate the moral perfections of the Deity, and to discover the beauties of holiness.

The gospel informs us of two grand pre-requisites to the salvation of the fallen sons of men, namely, the satisfaction of divine justice by the obedience and passion of Christ, that God might be reconciled to them consistently with his perfections; and the sanctification of sinners by the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, that they might be capable of enjoying God, and that he might maintain intimate communion with them without any stain to his holiness. These

two grand articles contain the substance of the gospel; and our acquiescence in them is the substance of that evangelical obedience which it requires of us, and which is essential to holiness in a fallen creature.

Now, it is evident, that without either of these the moral perfections of the Deity, particularly his holiness, could not be illustrated, or even secured in the salvation of a sinner. Had he received an apostate race into favour, who had conspired in the most unnatural rebellion against him, without any satisfaction, his holiness would have been eclipsed; it would not have appeared that he had so invincible an abhorrence of sin, so zealous a regard for the vindication of his own holy law; or to his veracity, which had threatened condign punishment to offenders. But by the satisfaction of Christ, his holiness is illustrated in the most conspicuous manner; now it appears, that God would upon no terms save a sinner but that of adequate satisfaction, and that no other was sufficient but the suffering of his co-equal Son, otherwise he would not have appointed him to sustain the character of a Mediator; and now it appears that his hatred of sin is such that he would not let it pass unpunished even in his own Son, when only imputed to him. In like manner, if sinners, while unholy, were admitted into communion with God in heaven, it would obscure the glory of his holiness, and it would not then appear that such was the purity of his nature that he could have no fellowship with sin. But now it is evident, that even the blood of Immanuel cannot purchase heaven to be enjoyed by a sinner while unholy, but that every one that arrives at heaven must first be sanctified. An unholy sinner can no more be saved, while such, by the gospel than by the law; but here lies the difference, that the gospel makes provision for his sanctification, which is gradually carried on here, and perfected at death, before his admission into the heavenly glory.

Now it is the genius of true holiness to acquiesce in both these articles. A sanctified soul places all its dependence on the righteousness of Christ for acceptance. It would be disagreeable to it to have the least concurrence in its own justification. It is not only willing, but delights to renounce all its own righteousness, and to glory in Christ alone. Phil. iii. 3. Free grace to such souls is a charming theme, and salvation is more acceptable, because conveyed in this way. It would render heaven itself disagreeable, and wither all its joys, were they brought thither in a way that degrades or does not illustrate the glory of God's holiness; but O how agreeable the thought, that he that glorieth must glory in the Lord, and that the pride of all flesh shall be abased!

So a holy person rejoiceth that the way of holiness is the appointed way to heaven. He is not forced to be holy merely by the servile consideration that he must be so or perish, and so unwillingly submits to the necessity which he cannot avoid, when in the meantime, were it put to his choice, he would choose to reserve some sins, and neglect some painful duties. So far

from this, that he delights in the gospel-constitution, because it requires universal holiness, and heaven would be less agreeable, were he to carry even the least sin there. He thinks it no hardship that he must deny himself in his sinful pleasures, and habituate himself to so much strictness in religion; no, but he blesses the Lord for obliging him to it, and where he fails he charges himself with it, and is self-abased upon the account.

This is solid rational religion, fit to be depended upon, in opposition to the antinomian licentiousness, the freaks of enthusiasm, and the irrational flights of passion and imagination on the one hand; and in opposition to formality, mere morality, and the self-sprung religion of nature on the other. And is it not evident we are destitute of this by nature! Men naturally are averse to this gospel method of salvation; they will not submit to the righteousness of God, but fix their dependence, in part at least, upon their own merit. Their proud hearts cannot bear the thought that all their performances must go for just nothing in their justification. They are also averse to the way of holiness; hence they will either abandon the expectation of heaven, and since they cannot obtain it in their sinful ways, desperately conclude to go on in sin, come what will; or, with all the little sophistry they are capable of, they will endeavour to widen the way to heaven, and persuade themselves they shall attain it, notwithstanding their continuance in some known iniquity, and though their hearts have never been thoroughly sanctified. Alas! how evident is this all around us! How many either give up their hopes of heaven rather than part with sin, or vainly hold them, while their dispositions and practices prove them groundless? And must not such degenerate creatures be renewed ere they can be holy, or see the Lord?

4. Holiness consists in an habitual delight in all the duties of holiness towards God and man, and an earnest desire for communion with God in them. This is the natural result of all the foregoing particulars. If we love God for his holiness, we shall delight in that service in which our conformity to him consists; if we love his law, we shall delight in that obedience which it enjoins; and if we take complacency in the evangelical method of salvation, we shall take delight in that holiness, without which we cannot enjoy it. The service of God is the element, the pleasure of a holy soul; while others delight in the riches, the honours, or the pleasures of this world, the holy soul desires one thing of the Lord, that it may behold his beauty while inquiring in his temple. Psalm xxvii. 4. Such a person delights in retired converse with heaven, in meditation and prayer. Ps. cxxxix. 17. and lxiii. 5, 6, and lxxiii. 28. He also takes pleasure in justice, benevolence, and charity towards men, Ps. cxii. 5, 9, and in the strictest temperance and sobriety. 1 Cor. ix. 27.

Moreover, the mere formality of performing religious duties does not satisfy the true saint, unless he enjoys a divine friendship therein, receives communications of grace from heaven, and finds his graces quickened. Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

This consideration also shows us that holiness in us must be supernatural; for do we naturally thus delight in the service of God? or do you all now thus delight in it? is it not rather a weariness to you, and do you not find more pleasures in other things? Surely you must be changed, or you can have no relish for the enjoyments of heavenly happiness.

5. To constitute us saints indeed there must be universal holiness in practice. This naturally follows from the last, for as the body obeys the stronger volitions of the will, so when the heart is prevailingly disposed to the service of God, the man will habitually practise it. This is generally mentioned in scripture as the grand characteristic of real religion, without which all our pretensions are vain. 1 John iii. 2–10. and v. 3. John xv. 14. True Christians are far from being perfect in practice, yet they are prevailingly holy in all manner of conversation; they do not live habitually in any one known sin, or wilfully neglect any one known duty. Psalm cxix. 6.

Without this practical holiness no man shall see the Lord; and if so, how great a change must be wrought on most before they can see him, for how few are thus adorned with a life of universal holiness? Many profess the name of Christ, but how few of them depart from iniquity? But to what purpose do they call him Master and Lord, while they do not the things which he commands them?

Thus I have, as plainly as I could, described the nature and properties of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; and they who are possessed of it may lift up their heads with joy, assured that God has begun a good work in them, and that he will carry it on; and on the other hand, they that are destitute of it may be assured, that unless they are made new creatures they cannot see the Lord. I come,

II. To show you the endeavours we should use to obtain this holiness. And they are such as these:

1. Endeavour to know whether you are holy or not by close examination. It is hard indeed for some to know positively that they are holy, as they are perplexed with the appearances of realities, and the fears of counterfeits; but it is then easy for many to conclude negatively that they are not holy, as they have not the likeness of it. To determine this point is of great use to our successful seeking after holiness. That an unregenerate sinner should attend on the means of grace with other aims than one that has reason to believe himself sanctified, is evident. The anxieties, sorrows, desires, and endeavours of the one should run in a very different channel from those of the other. The

one should look upon himself as a guilty and condemned sinner; the other should allow himself the pleasures of a justified state: the one should pursue after the implantation; the other after the increase of holiness: the one should indulge a seasonable concern about his lost condition; the other repose an humble confidence in God as reconciled to him; the one should look upon the threatenings of God as his doom; the other embrace the promises as his portion. Hence it follows, that while we are mistaken about our state, we cannot use endeavours after holiness in a proper manner. We act like a physician that applies medicines at random, without knowing the disease. It is a certain conclusion that the most generous charity, under scriptural limitations, cannot avoid, that multitudes are destitute of holiness; and ought not we to inquire with proper anxiety whether we belong to that number? Let us be impartial, and proceed according to evidence. If we find those marks of holiness in heart and life which have been mentioned, let not an excessive scrupulosity frighten us from drawing the happy conclusion: and, if we find them not, let us exercise so much wholesome severity against ourselves, as honestly to conclude we are unholy sinners, and must be renewed before we can see the Lord. The conclusion, no doubt, will give you a painful anxiety: but if you was my dearest friend, I could not form a kinder wish for you than that you might be incessantly distressed with it till you are born again. This conclusion will not be always avoidable; the light of eternity will force you upon it; and whether is it better to give way to it now, when it may be to your advantage, or be forced to admit it then, when it will be only a torment?

2. Awake, arise, and betake yourselves in earnest to all the means of grace. Your life, your eternal life is concerned, and therefore it calls for all the ardour and earnestness you are capable of exerting. Accustom yourself to meditation, converse with yourselves in retirement, and live no longer strangers at home. Read the word of God and other good books, with diligence, attention, and self-application. Attend on the public ministrations of the gospel, not as a trifler, but as one that sees his eternal All concerned. Shun the tents of sin, the rendezvous of sinners, and associate with those that have experienced the change you want, and can give you proper directions. Prostrate yourself before the God of heaven, confess your sin, implore his mercy, cry to him night and day, and give him no rest, till the importunity prevail, and you take the kingdom of heaven by violence.

But, after all, acknowledge that it is God that must work in you both to will and to do, and that when you have done all these things you are but unprofitable servants. I do not prescribe these directions as though these means could effect holiness in you; no, they can no more do it than a pen can write without a hand. It is the holy Spirit's province alone to sanctify a degenerate sinner, but he is wont to do it while we are waiting upon him in the

use of these means, though our best endeavours give us no title to his grace; but he may justly leave us after all in that state of condemnation and corruption into which we have voluntarily brought ourselves. I go on,

III. And lastly, to urge you to the use of these means, from the consideration mentioned in the text, the absolute necessity of holiness to the enjoyment of heavenly happiness.

Here I would show that holiness is absolutely necessary, and that the consideration of its necessity may strongly enforce the pursuit of it.

The necessity of holiness appears from the unchangeable appointment of heaven, and the nature of things.

1. The unchangeable appointment of God excludes all the unholy from the kingdom of heaven; see 1 Cor. ix. 6; Rev. xxi. 27; Psalm v. 4, 5; 2 Cor. v. 17; Gal. vi. 15. It is most astonishing that many who profess to believe the divine authority of the Scriptures, will yet indulge vain hopes of heaven in opposition to the plainest declarations of eternal truth. But though there were no positive constitution excluding the unholy from heaven, yet,

2. The very nature of things excludes sinners from heaven; that is, it is impossible, in the nature of things, that while they are unholy, they could receive happiness from the employments and entertainments of the heavenly world. If these consisted in the affluence of those things which sinners delight in here; if its enjoyments were earthly riches, pleasures, and honours; if its employments were the amusements of the present life, then they might be happy there, as far as their sordid natures are capable of happiness. But these trifles have no place in heaven. The felicity of that state consists in the contemplation of the divine perfections, and their displays in the works of creation, providence, and redemption; hence it is described by seeing the Lord, Matt. v. 18, and as a state of knowledge, 1 Cor. xiii. 10–12, in the satisfaction resulting thence. Ps. xvii. 15, and a complacency in God as a portion, Ps. lxxiii. 25, 25, and is perpetual serving and praising the Lord: and hence adoration is generally mentioned as the employ of all the hosts of heaven. These are the entertainments of heaven, and they that cannot find supreme happiness in these, cannot find it in heaven. But it is evident these things could afford no satisfaction to an unholy person. He would pine away at the heavenly feast, for want of appetite for the entertainment; a holy God would be an object of horror rather than delight to him, and his service would be a weariness, as it is now. Hence it appears, that if we do not place our supreme delight in these things here, we cannot be happy hereafter; for there will be no change of dispositions in a future state, but only the perfection of those predominant in us here, whether good or evil. Either heaven must be changed, or the sinner, before he can be happy there. Hence also it appears, that God's excluding such from heaven is no more an act of cruelty than our

not admitting a sick man to a feast, who has no relish for the entertainments; or not bringing a blind man into the light of the sun, or to view a beautiful prospect.

We see then that holiness is absolutely necessary; and what a great inducement should this consideration be to pursue it; if we do not see the Lord, we shall never see good. We are cut off at death from all earthly enjoyments, and can no longer make experiments to satisfy our unbounded desires with them; and we have no God to supply their room. We are banished from all the joys of heaven, and how vast, how inconceivably vast is the loss! We are doomed to the regions of darkness for ever, to bear the vengeance of eternal fire, to feel the lashes of a guilty conscience, and to spend an eternity in a horrid intimacy with infernal ghosts; and will we not then rather follow holiness, than incur so dreadful a doom? By the terrors of the Lord, then, be persuaded to break off your sins by righteousness, and follow holiness; *without which no man shall see the Lord.*