

S E R M O N S

ON

I M P O R T A N T S U B J E C T S,

BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS

S A M U E L D A V I E S , A. M.,

Sometime President of the College in New-Jersey.

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THREE OCCASIONAL SERMONS,

NOT INCLUDED IN THE FORMER EDITIONS;

MEMOIRS AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR;

AND

TWO SERMONS ON OCCASION OF HIS DEATH,

By the Rev. Drs. Gibbons and Finley.

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SERMON XXXVI.

THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL BY THE DIVINE POWER UPON
THE SOULS OF MEN.

A Sermon preached at Hanover, in Virginia, Oct. 17, 1756.

2 COR. x. 4, 5.—*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong-holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

THIS restless world is now in an unusual ferment; kingdom rising up against kingdom, and nation against nation: magazines filling, arms brightening, cannons roaring, and human blood streaming, both by sea and land. These things engross the thoughts and conversation of mankind, and alarm their fears and anxieties. But there is another kind of war carrying on in the world; a war, the issue of which is of infinitely greater importance; a war of near six thousand years standing; that is, ever since the first grand rebellion of mankind against God; a war in which we are all engaged as parties, and in the result of which our immortal interest is concerned; though, alas! it engages but little of the attention and solicitude of the generality among us; I mean, the war which Jesus Christ has been carrying on from age to age by the ministry of the gospel, to reduce the rebellious sons of men to their duty, and redeem them into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, from their wretched captivity to sin and Satan. This is the design in which the apostles were embarked, and which St. Paul describes in the military style in my text. As some members of the Corinthian church had taken up a very low opinion of St. Paul, his design in the context is to raise the dignity of his apostolic office. And for that purpose, he describes in the military language the efficacy and success of those apostolic powers with which he was furnished for the propagation of Christianity, and the reduction of the world into obedience to the gospel. Those powers were such as these; the power of working miracles to attest his divine commission; the preaching of the doctrine of the cross, and the rod of discipline for the reformation of offenders; which in the hands of the apostles, seems to have been attended with the power of inflicting temporal judgments, and particularly bodily sicknesses; and which St. Paul here threatens to exercise upon such of the Corinthians as continued obstinate in their opposition to his ministry.

These powers he here calls weapons of war. This tent-maker and a few fishermen were sent out upon a grand expedition, in opposition to the united powers of Jews, and Gentiles, of earth and hell. All the world, with their gloomy god, were ready to join against them. They were ready to oppose them with all the force of philosophy, learning, authority, threatenings, and all the cruel forms of persecution. For the Christian cause in which these soldiers of Jesus Christ were engaged, was contrary to their lusts and prejudices, their honour, and secular interests. This opposition of the world to the gospel, the apostle also describes in the military style. Their lusts, prejudices, and interests, their vain imaginations and false reasonings, are so many strongholds and high things or castles in which they, as it were, fortify and entrench themselves. These they hold and garrison under the prince of darkness: in these they stand out in their rebellion against heaven, and fight against God, against his gospel, and against their own consciences. And with what weapons did the apostles attack these rebels in their strongholds! Not with carnal weapons, such as the heroes and conquerors of the world are wont to use, but with weapons of a spiritual nature, the force of evidence and conviction, the purity of their doctrines and lives, the terrors of the Lord, and the all-conquering love of a dying Saviour. With these weapons they encountered the allied powers of men and devils; with these they propagated the religion of their Master; and not with the sword, like Mahomet; or with the bloody artillery of persecution, like the church of Rome; or by the dragonnade, like the tyrants of France.

What unpromising weapons were these! What avails the light of evidence in a world that loves darkness rather than light, and where lust, prejudice, and interest generally prevail against truth and reason? Is the contemptible weapon of the cross likely to do execution? Are the unpopular mortifying doctrines of one that was crucified like a malefactor and a slave, likely to prevail against all the prejudices of education; the attachment of mankind to the religion of antiquity, established by law; the policy of priestcraft; the love of gain; the powers of the world; and the various oppositions of the depraved hearts of mankind? Are such gentle and weak weapons as these likely to have any success? Yes, these weapons, though not carnal, were mighty, resistless, all conquering—but then you must observe, they were mighty through God. The excellency of the power was of God, and such unpromising arms were used on purpose to show this. It was he that gave edge to the weapons and force to the blow. Without the energy of his grace, they could have done nothing, even in the hands of apostles. But, by the might of his Spirit, they became almighty, and carried all before them: these contemptible weapons, with his concurrence, pulled down strongholds; cast down towering imaginations, and reasonings* that seemed impregnable, and demolished every high thing, every battery, castle, or citadel, that was erected against the

knowledge of God, that knowledge of him which the gospel brought to light, and reduced every thought into captivity, to the obedience of Christ. Sinners were brought not only to compliment Jesus with a bended knee, and profess subjection to him with their lips, but to bow their stubborn hearts to him, and let him reign in their affections. That gospel to which they were so averse, gained a complete victory over their minds; their minds, which the Alexanders and Cæsars of the world could not subdue; and reduced not only their external conduct, but their thoughts; not only some thoughts, but every thought, to the obedience of Christ. When God gives the commission, the stately walls of Jericho will fall, even at the feeble sound of rams' horns.

To bring into captivity, is generally understood in a bad sense, and signifies the carrying away of loyal subjects against their wills, into a foreign country, and there enslaving them to the enemy. But here it is a significant catachresis, and signifies the deliverance of sinners from the slavery of sin and Satan, and their restoration into a state of liberty, into favour with God, and this too by their own free consent. And it is called a captivating, to intimate, that, though when the sinner submits he does it voluntarily, yet he had really made a strong resistance, and did not submit till sweetly constrained to it; and that he looked upon his state of slavery to sin as a state of freedom, and was as unwilling to leave it as a free-born subject would be to be captivated and enslaved in an enemy's country.

I foresee I cannot take time to do justice to this copious subject. But I shall endeavour to compress my thoughts in as little room as possible, in a few propositions, to which each head in my text may be reduced. And the whole will be but a short history of the revolt of mankind against the great God, their rightful Sovereign, and their miserable slavery to sin and Satan—of an important expedition set on foot and carried on by the ministry of the gospel, to recover them from their state of slavery, and reduce them to their obedience—of their various methods of opposition to this design; or the various ways in which they fortify themselves against the attacks made upon them by divine grace for this end—of the issue of this siege, particularly the terms of surrender—and their consequent deliverance from the dominion of sin and Satan, and their willing subjection to their rightful Lord and Proprietor.

I. All mankind, in their present state of apostacy, have revolted from God, and surrendered themselves slaves to sin and Satan.

We might produce abundant evidence of this from the sacred writings; but as the evidence from plain undeniable fact may be more convictive, I shall insist chiefly upon it. Mankind are secretly disaffected to God and his government in their hearts; and hence they do not take pleasure in his service. They are not solicitous for the honour and dignity of his government. They will not bear the restraints of his authority, nor regard his law as the rule of

their conduct, but will follow their own inclinations, let him prescribe what he will. Nay, they have no disposition to return to their duty, or listen to proposals for reconciliation; and hence they disregard the gospel (which is a scheme to bring about a peace,) as well as the law. In short, they will not do anything that God commands them, unless it suit their own corrupt inclinations; and they will not abstain from anything which he forbids, for his sake, if they have any temptation to it from their own lusts. These things, and a thousand more which might be mentioned, fix the charge of rebellion upon them. It is undeniable, they are disaffected to his government in their hearts, whatever forced or complemental expressions of loyalty some of them may at times give him. Look into your own hearts, and take a view of the world around you, and you will find this is evidently the case.

But though they are thus disobedient to their rightful Sovereign, yet to sin and Satan, those usurping and tyrannical masters, they are the most tame and obsequious slaves. For these, they will go through the most sordid drudgery, for no other wages than death. For these, they will give up their most important interests, and exchange their souls, and their share in heaven, without any retaliation, but the sorry transitory pleasures of sin. Let temptation beckon, they immediately take the signal, and obey. Let sin command them to hurt their souls and bodies, and perhaps their estates, with excessive drinking, the poor slaves comply. Let sin order them to swear, to lie, to defraud, they submit, though eternal damnation be the consequence. Let sin order them to pursue riches, honour, or sensual pleasures, through right and wrong, at the loss of their ease, the danger of their lives and the destruction of their souls, they engage in the drudgery, and toil all their days in it. Let sin forbid them to serve God, to attend seriously to his word, to pray to him importunately, in secret and in their families, to reflect upon their miserable condition, to repent and believe the gospel; let sin but lay them under a prohibition to those things, they will cautiously refrain from them; and all the arguments which God and man can use with them will have little or no weight. In short, let sin but order them to give up their interest in heaven, and run the risk of eternal ruin; let sin but command them to neglect and disregard the God that made them, and the Saviour that died for them, they will venture upon the self-denying and destructive enterprise. They will do more for sin than they will do for the great God, their rightful Sovereign and constant Benefactor. Sin has more influence with them than all the persuasions of parents, ministers, and their best friends; nay, more influence than the love, the dying groans and agonies of a crucified Saviour. There is nothing so sacred, so dear or valuable in heaven, but they will give it up if sin requires them. Nothing so terrible in hell, but they will rush into it, if sin sets them upon the desperate attempt. They are the most tame, unresisting captives to sin. Sin is an arbitrary, absolute, despotic tyrant over them; and, which is most

astonishing, they are not weary of its tyranny, nor do they pant and struggle for liberty. Liberty to them has lost its charms, and they hug their chains and love their bondage. Alas! are there not many free-born Britons in this assembly, who are slaves in this sense! slaves in a worse sense than the poorest negro among us; slaves to sin, and consequently to Satan; for sin is commander-in-chief under the prince of darkness, the gloomy god of this world: it is by sin, as his deputy, that he exercises his power, and therefore sinners are in reality slaves to him! This, one would think, would be a shocking reflection to them, that they are slaves of the most malignant being in nature; a being not only malignant, but also very powerful; that they have broken off from the indulgent and equitable government of the Sovereign of the universe, and sold themselves slaves to such a lawless, tyrannical usurper! But, alas! they do not resent the usurpation, nor struggle to throw off the yoke, and regain their liberty. They resign themselves voluntary slaves, and love their master and his drudgery.

This is a very melancholy, but, alas! it is a true history of human nature in its present state. Thus are mankind disaffected to the divine government, and held in a wretched captivity to sin and Satan. This is indeed a very dismal and threatening state, and we might tremble for the consequences had we no gospel to inform us of a plan of reconciliation. Here I may borrow the words of one of the greatest and best of Christians.* “When we hear of a sort of creatures that were fallen from God, and gone into rebellion against him; that were alienated and enemies to him in their minds, by wicked works; one would be in suspense, and say, Well, and what became of the business? How did it issue? What was the event? And would expect to hear, Why fire came down from heaven upon them, and consumed them in a moment; or the earth opened and swallowed them up quick; yea, and if the matter were so reported to us, if we did hear that fire and brimstone, flames and thunder-bolts came down instantly upon them, and destroyed them in a moment, who would not say, So I thought; who could expect better?” But what grateful astonishment may it raise in heaven and earth to hear that their offended Sovereign has been so far from this, that he has sent his Son, his only Son, to die for them, in order to bring about a peace! and that,

II. He has set on foot an important expedition, and is carrying it on from age to age by the ministry of the gospel, to recover these rebels from their voluntary slavery to sin and Satan, and reduce them to their duty, and so bring them into a state of liberty and happiness!

This is the benevolent design on which the Son of God came down from his native heaven, and for which he endured the shame and the agonies of

* Mr. Howe, in his discourse on Reconciliation between God and Man.

the cross. This is the design on which he sent out his apostles into the world, armed, not with instruments of mischief and destruction, but with the most beneficent powers, powers of doing good, the powers of preaching the most important doctrines, of proving them by argument, and the evidence of miracles and prophecies, and of exercising proper discipline upon offenders, to bring them to repentance. To carry on this design, the ministry of the gospel is perpetuated in the world from age to age; and for this purpose, my dear people, I would exercise my ministry among you, I would make an attack upon your hearts to break them open for the admission of the King of heaven. I have continued the siege for near ten years, the space spent in reducing the stubborn Trojans; and now, in the name of God, I once more would renew the attack, and summon you to capitulate and surrender.

For this purpose the ministers of the gospel have their arms; they begin the attack with the artillery of the divine law, which thunders the terrors of the Lord against you. They surround you with troops of arguments, which one would think would soon overpower a reasonable creature, and constrain him immediately to submit. They reason the matter with you, and lay before you the wickedness, the baseness, the unnatural ingratitude, and the dangerous consequences of your rebellion. They inform you what a good king and what an excellent government you have rejected; what holy, just, and good laws you have insolently broken; what rich mercies you have ungratefully abused; what long-continued patience you have provoked; and what friendly warnings you have despised. They expose to your view the terrible consequences of your rebellion, if you persist in it: they honestly warn you that *the wages of sin is death*; death in all its terrible forms; death temporal, spiritual, and eternal; that if you continue the unequal war against heaven, it will issue in your eternal, remediless destruction. They open to you the corruption of your natures; the aversion of your hearts to all that is spiritually good and excellent; your innate propensions to sin, and voluntary indulgence of your lusts and guilty pleasures. They put you upon a review of your lives, to recollect your wilful omissions of duty to God and man, and your commissions of known sin, in spite of the restraints of authority, the allurements of mercy, and the admonitions of your own consciences. When they have thus discharged the dreadful artillery of the law, the thunders and lightnings of Sinai against you, the way is prepared for proposing the terms of surrender and articles of reconciliation. They make an attack upon the citadel of your heart, with the gentler arms from the magazine of the gospel of peace. They represent your injured Sovereign as reconcilable, reconcilable through Jesus Christ. They give you the strongest assurances from his own word, that he is willing to make up the difference and conclude a lasting peace with you; that upon your laying down your arms (that is, forsaking your sins and submitting upon his terms,) he will freely pardon all your past rebellion, and receive you

again into his favour. They also inform you of the strange method in which this peace may be brought about, consistently with the honour of his character as the Ruler of the world, and with the sacred rights of his government, and that is, through the mediation of his Son, the great Peace-maker, who, in your stead, has obeyed that law which you have broken, and endured that penalty which you have incurred. They likewise inform you in what manner you are to accede to this treaty, or consent to this plan of accommodation, namely, by believing in his Son, by accepting peace with God, and every blessing as his free gift through Jesus Christ, by a deep ingenuous repentance for your past rebellion, and by devoting yourselves to his service for the future. These overtures of reconciliation they enforce from various topics, which, one would think, you would not be able to resist. They represent to you the riches of divine grace and mercy, and the all-conquering love of Jesus. That contemptible weapon, the cross, is a weapon of tried and well-known energy; many a hard heart has it broken; many an obstinate rebel has it subdued. They *pray you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God*; and if you should be hardy enough to refuse such a request, they urge it with arguments drawn from its reasonableness in justice and gratitude, from its being of the last importance to your happiness, as being the only way in which apostate creatures can re-obtain the favour of their injured Sovereign—and from the terrible consequences of a refusal; for unless you submit upon these terms, you may expect nothing but wrath and fiery indignation, which shall devour you as adversaries.

You cannot but know, my brethren, that the ministry of the gospel has, with such arms as these, laid close siege to your hearts, year after year. And who would have thought that one heart among you would have been proof against this divine artillery, and stood it out so long? Some of you, I doubt not, have surrendered, and are now the willing subjects of your heavenly King. But, alas! do not some of you still obstinately refuse to submit, and persist in your rebellion? And are you not fortifying yourselves more and more against the attempts, made to reduce you to obedience? This naturally leads me,

III. To give you a kind of history of the various ways in which sinners oppose this benevolent design of the ministry of the gospel to subdue them to the obedience of Christ.

Alas! they also have their artillery, with which they labour to repel all the attacks made upon them by the gospel. They, as it were, throw up various lines of intrenchments around them, to defend them against conviction. Particularly,

Sinners hide themselves in the darkness of ignorance; ignorance of God, of Jesus Christ, of the law and gospel, and consequently of themselves. They endeavour to keep up their courage by refusing to know their danger. They

muffle themselves up in ignorance, so that they do not see their almighty enemy, nor the instruments of death he has prepared for them; and hence they are so stupid as to conclude that neither does he see them, nor can find them out. They also fortify themselves, as it were, in the enclosure of a hard heart; a heart of rock and adamant, which is proof against the artillery of the gospel. This, like an impregnable cave cut in a rock, stands out against all the terrors of the Lord set in array against it. The sinner, shut up in this stronghold, can laugh at the shaking of Jehovah's spear! Let the law thunder out tribulation and wrath, indignation and anguish against him: let the gospel attack him with the cross of Christ, with all the love of a dying Saviour, and all the mercy of a reconcilable God, he is still secure, and bids defiance to all these attacks. The rock is impregnable till the power of God gives force to these weapons, and then indeed it begins to tremble; then the sinner is struck into a consternation, and is dreadfully apprehensive he cannot hold out the siege. This natural fortification, (so I may call it, for his ignorance and hardness of heart are natural to him, though dreadfully improved by art,) this natural fortification, I say, begins to fail him; and hereupon he sets himself to work upon artificial fortifications, which may enable him to hold out the longer in his opposition.

He throws up an intrenchment of objections and excuses, or (a little to alter the metaphor) he discharges whole volleys of objections and excuses against those that besiege him. Perhaps he dares to plead that he is already a dutiful subject to the King of heaven, and therefore that the ministry of the gospel has missed its aim in directing its artillery against him as an enemy. And if to this plea it be answered, that his temper and conduct towards his Sovereign plainly show that he is really disaffected to him in his heart, whatever outward professions of duty he may make; he replies, that if in some instances he allows himself in the breach of the divine laws, yet he has no bad design in so doing; that he has a good heart notwithstanding; and that he hopes the King of heaven will not be so strict as to take notice of these things. He objects, that he is as loyal as other people about him, and why may not that suffice; and that, if he should be very punctual and zealous in his duty, he would soon be out of fashion, and draw the contempt and ridicule of the world upon him. He objects, that he has not been so bold and daring a rebel as many others, and therefore he cannot think that so mild and gracious a King will severely punish him. He objects, that he is now too busy about other things to listen to proposals of reconciliation; and therefore begs that the matter may be put off, at least, till he has finished some important affairs he has now in hand. And he promises, that the next year, or in old age, or upon a death-bed, he will submit, and conclude a peace. He pleads that he enjoys a great deal of pleasure under his present master, sin, which he must give up as unlawful, if he should change masters; and that the ser- vice of

God is a drudgery to him, and that he has no relish for it, and that the laws of the King of heaven are so strict, that he cannot live under them. These, and a thousand other pleas, the rebel urges to excuse his non-compliance with the proposals of reconciliation; and in these he trusts as a sufficient defence.

Moreover, the lusts of the flesh, his pride, presumption, and love of ease, the cares of the world, the company of the wicked, who persuade him by all means not to surrender, and furnish him with arms and all the assistance in their power to continue the war, these are all so many strongholds in which the sinner fortifies himself against the Lord Jesus.

But if the weapons of the gospel prove mighty through God to diminish these strongholds, and the rebel finds they can defend him no longer, then he abandons these outworks, and intrenches himself secretly in his own righteousness. He, as it were, surrounds himself with a line of good works, repentance and reformation. And now he thinks he is safe. Now he hopes he shall pass for a friend and subject of the King of heaven, as he is holding a place for him, and that the artillery of the law will continue to play upon him no longer. This is the sinner's last refuge; and it is the greatest difficulty of all to drive him out of this. He will not abandon this, till he is driven to great extremity indeed. And here many continue in it until they are dragged out of it to the tribunal of their supreme Judge.

It must also be observed, that the sinner tries all the arts of dissimulation to secure his stronghold. When he finds he cannot defend himself as an open enemy by his declared hostilities, he feigns a submission; he pretends to capitulate and surrender; but then, he does not cordially consent to all the terms. He makes a reserve of some favourite lusts, and will not deliver them up to the sword of the conqueror: he has secret exceptions to the conditions of surrender, and will not comply with them all. There are some instances of duty, from which he will excuse himself. In short, his heart is not well-affected to the Conqueror. His submission is forced and involuntary, and therefore is resented as the basest treachery by him that searches the heart, and must reign in the hearts of all his subjects.

Arc not some of you, my brethren, now intrenched, and fortified against the gospel in these strongholds? And such of you as are now the willing subjects of Jesus Christ, may you not recollect, that thus did you once strengthen yourselves in your opposition to him! But he has sweetly overcome your enmity, and constrained you to submit. And this leads me,

IV. To describe the issue of this war, where it is effectually carried on, and particularly the terms of surrender.

The success of this war depends entirely upon the concurrence of the almighty power of God. If the weapons of our warfare prove mighty, it is through God. Let the ministers of the gospel attack the sinner with all the arms with which the magazines of the law and gospel, of scripture and reason

furnish them, they will never subdue one soul to the obedience of Christ: the sinner will still stand it out, and bid them defiance. What is the reason that there are so many secure presumptuous rebels among us, though the gospel-ministry has so often and so long played off its artillery against them? The reason is, the weapons of our warfare are not made mighty through God. God does not give edge and force to these arms by the all-conquering power of his Spirit. But when he begins to work, then the hardest sinner begins to tremble, the rocky heart breaks to pieces, and his strongholds are demolished. All his objections are silenced; he is convinced that he is indeed a rebel against his rightful Sovereign; that his rebellion is most unnatural, ungrateful, unreasonable, and the height of wickedness; and that it is a most astonishing instance of condescending grace, that his provoked Sovereign should stoop to treat with him and deign to propose him articles of reconciliation. He sees that he might justly cut him off, without one oiler of mercy. He is struck with horror to think that ever he, a poor dependent worm, should engage in a war against the Lord of armies, who has universal nature at his command, and especially that he has dared to stand out so long against him. He is sensible of the danger of delays, sensible that he has been ungrateful and rebellions too long already, and that, if he delays his submission, his almighty enemy may take his strongholds by storm, and put him to the sword. He is now sensible that the slavery of sin is intolerable; that his lusts are tyrannical masters, and will give him no other wages but death; and therefore he pants and struggles for liberty. The artillery of the divine law demolishes the promising intrenchment which he had formed for his own good works, and leaves him naked and defenceless to its vindictive fire. Conscience also calls to the sinner to surrender, to surrender in time, while terms of peace may be obtained, and warns him of the dreadful consequences of continuing the war. The trumpet of the gospel is still publishing peace, and summoning him to submit. The gospel assures him of pardon and acceptance, if he will but surrender. Now also (if I may so boldly accommodate the military style of this subject) now his provisions and ammunition begin to fail he finds he can subsist no longer; and, like the prodigal, is *just perishing with hunger*. He finds he can defend himself no longer, but must submit or die. If he continues in arms, he is sure to die; but if he submits, he has some hopes of pardon; for O! he has *heard that the King of Israel is a merciful King*. He must however make the trial. All this time the Spirit of God is at work within, sweetly inclining the stubborn heart to yield, *casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God*. He gives the rebel favourable thoughts of the government of the Conqueror, and the infinite advantages of living under it. In short he enforces upon the heart all the applications made from without by the ministry of the gospel.

And now the sinner begins to think in earnest of surrendering; now he eagerly listens to terms of peace; and at length he lays down his arms, submits to the Conqueror, falls at his feet, casts himself upon his mercy, and welcomes him into the citadel of his heart. This is the most happy and important hour the sinner ever saw; the transactions of this hour extend their blessed consequences through all his future life, and to the remotest periods of eternity. It may be necessary for me to inform you more particularly of the manner of this surrender.

(1.) The sinner surrenders himself as an obnoxious rebel, lying entirely at the mercy of the Conqueror. He has no plea to excuse his rebellion, no merit to ingratiate himself, or procure, a pardon. He pleads guilty, and surrenders himself to the will of the Conqueror, conscious that he may do with him as he pleases. His high imaginations of himself are all demolished, his confidence in his own righteousness is entirely mortified, and he has nothing to plead but mercy, free unmerited mercy. On this he casts himself as his only ground of hope.

(2.) He surrenders himself entirely upon the terms prescribed by the Conqueror. He is conscious that he has no right to dictate, or to stand upon terms. His province is to submit. The way of reconciliation revealed in the gospel, appears to him infinitely reasonable, and to stand in need of no amendment. Particularly, he is willing to lay down his arms; that is, to forsake his sins, and to walk for the future in ways of holiness; or to make the pleasure of his Sovereign the rule of his conduct. Above all it must be noticed, that he is willing to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. The mediation of Jesus Christ, the glorious peculiarity of the Christian religion, is the only medium through which he would approach to God, and expect reconciliation with him. It is only in the righteousness of Christ he trusts to make atonement for his guilt, and procure the divine favour. In short, he is willing the Conqueror should make his own terms, and he submits, if he may but have his life for a prey. He puts a blank into his hands, desirous he should fill it up with what articles he pleases, and he will cheerfully subscribe to them. His language is like that of Paul, when struck down prostrate at the feet of the persecuted Jesus, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Acts ix. 6. Lord, do thou command, and I will obey. Now the rebel is all submission, all obedience.

(3.) He submits voluntarily and cheerfully. The power of divine grace has rooted out the enmity of his carnal mind, and implanted the principle of love in his heart. He breaks off from sin and Satan, as from the most cruel usurpers and destroyers; and he submits to Christ, not merely as to an irresistible Conqueror, but as to a Deliverer. He enters upon a religious life, not as a state of slavery and unwilling captivity, but as a state of the most glorious liberty. He submits to the terms of reconciliation, not as the arbitrary impositions of an imperious usurper, but as the gentle and reasonable prescriptions of a wise

and good ruler. He esteems all his laws holy, and just, and good: and with all his heart he acquiesces and rejoices in the blessed gospel of peace. In short, the rebel's heart is now entirely changed and rendered well-affected to the divine government: and consequently, he cordially and freely submits to it. Once indeed he hated it, and then he did at best but feign submission to it; but now, his enmity being subdued, he surrenders himself with all his heart. It is one of the freest acts of his whole life.

(4.) He makes an universal surrender of himself and all that he is and has to Jesus Christ. He makes no reserve of one favourite lust, but gives them all up to be slain; he makes no secret exceptions to any of the articles of reconciliation, but heartily consents to them all. He devotes his whole soul and all its faculties to God, in and through Jesus Christ; his understanding to know him; his heart to love him; and his will to be governed by him. This is implied in my text; *Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*. Every thought, every passion, every motion of the soul must submit to Christ, and every insurrection of sin in his heart alarms him, as an intestine enemy. He also yields his body to God, and his members as *instruments of righteousness unto holiness*. He also devotes all his accomplishments, his genius, learning, influence, and popularity, his riches, and in short all his possessions of every kind; willing to employ them all in the service of his new Master, or to resign them all, if their perversion should be inconsistent with his duty to him. O! how different a temper is this from that which is natural to the sinner!

Thus the treaty of peace is happily concluded; and he that was once a rebel against Heaven, and an enemy to the Cross of Christ, is now become a friend and a loyal subject. The past difference is entirely forgotten and buried, and he is received into favour, as though he had never offended. Once God was angry with him every day, but now he accepts him in the Beloved. Now the prince of hell has lost a captive; and Jesus has the satisfaction of seeing one more of his spiritual seed born unto his family. Now there is joy in heaven, among the angels of God, upon this addition to the number of loyal subjects. O! the happy, the glorious peace! O! the blessed change in the circumstance of the poor condemned criminal!

What now remains?

V. We take a view of the true convert's state and conduct in consequence of this reconciliation.

This you may be sure is very different from what it was before. He is now delivered from his sordid slavery to sin, as well as from guilt, and the sentence of condemnation. He is justified and accepted before God, through Jesus Christ, and entitled to a heavenly crown and kingdom. Sin, indeed, is not entirely subdued; it forms frequent and violent insurrections, and struggles hard to recover its former power over him. The old man with his affections

and lusts was immediately crucified, upon the sinner's surrender to Christ; but crucifixion is a lingering death, and hence sin is never entirely dead while he continues in this imperfect state: it is every day plotting against him, and labouring to ensnare him. And hence his life is a constant warfare, an incessant conflict. He lives the life of a sentinel, perpetually upon the watch; or of a soldier, night and day under arms. If he is off his guard but for an hour, he is liable to be surprised, and sometimes, alas! he is overcome. But he rises again, and renews the combat, and will rather die than submit: he would resist even unto blood, striving against sin. In short, whatever inadvertences lie may fall into, he is habitually on God's side: he espouses the cause of God in this rebellious world, whatever it costs him. He is an enemy to the kingdom of darkness, and all its interests; and it is the great business of his life to oppose it in himself and others. The longer he lives under the government of King Jesus, the more he is attached to him, and in love with his administration; and it is his habitual endeavour to lead a life of universal obedience.

And now, my brethren, there is an inquiry I would set you upon, and that is, whether you have ever been captivated into a willing obedience to Jesus Christ? I am afraid this matter is not so plainly and unquestionably in your favour, as to render all inquiry into it needless. I am afraid it is dismally dark and doubtful, with regard to some of you, whether you are the servants of Christ or the slaves of sin and Satan. Nay, I am afraid, there are plain evidences against some of you. However, put the matter to trial, that you may see how it will turn out; for I assure you it is a matter of too much importance to be slightly passed over.

Now it is evident, in the first place, that you are still the enemies of Jesus Christ, unless you have been deeply convinced of your enmity. It is impossible you should be reconciled to him, till you have seen your need of reconciliation; and it is impossible you should see your need of reconciliation till you are convinced that you are at variance with him. Such of you therefore are undoubtedly his enemies, who imagine you have always been his friends.

In the next place, turn the substance of what has been said into so many queries to yourselves, and by these means, you may discover the truth of your case. Has ever the dreadful artillery of the law discharged its terrors upon you? Have you ever been driven out of all your carnal confidences, and particularly your own righteousness? Have you ever surrendered yourselves to the Conqueror? Has he overcome you by the sweet constraints of his love? And upon what terms did you surrender? Did you surrender as a rebel, lying at mercy? Did you submit to his terms without pretending to dictate any of your own? Did you submit voluntarily and cheerfully? Did you surrender yourselves universally, without any reserve? Do you since endeavour to behave as dutiful subjects? And do you find his service to be perfect freedom?

And now, in consequence of this trial, *is upon the Lord's side? Who?* What is your real character? Are you to be ranked among the subjects of Christ, or among the enemies of his crown and dignity?

Could I now collect the rebels together into one company, I would tell them some very alarming things from that God to whom they refuse to submit. Yes, sinner, as Ehud said to Eglon, king of Moab, *I have a message from God to you.* Judges iii. 20.

In his name, and as his ambassador, I warn you of the dreadful consequences of your unnatural rebellion against him. You cannot make good your cause against him. *He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?* All nature is subject to him, and he can order the meanest part of it to be the executioner of his vengeance upon you. If you refuse to submit, you shall as surely perish as you have a being. Of this you have reason to be apprehensive at all times, but especially at this time, when your almighty enemy is attacking your country with the terrors of war, and your neighbourhood with an epidemical raging distemper. Sickneses are his soldiers, and fight in his cause against a rebellious world. *He says to one, Go, and it goeth; and to another, Come, and it cometh.* And are you not afraid some of these deadly shafts may strike you now, when they are flying so thick around you? God has for many a year used gentler weapons with you, but now he seems about to take the citadel by storm. Now, therefore, now without delay, lay down your arms and surrender yourselves to him.

I have also joyful news to communicate, even to you rebels, if you are disposed to hear it; and that is, that your injured Sovereign is willing to be reconciled to you after all your hostilities, if you will now submit to the terms of reconciliation.

Therefore, *I pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God.* Christ is not here in person; but lo! I am here to manage the treaty in his name, though I also am formed out of the clay.