

SERMON XVII.

HUMILITY.

1 PETER v. 5.

Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

HUMILITY is one of the most important features in the Christian character. It is intimately connected with almost all the right affections of the soul, both towards God and man; and he who wishes to build up the fair edifice of Christian holiness, must begin by laying his foundation deep and low in genuine humility.

In discoursing on this subject, it is my wish,

First, to lay before you the reasons for humility, which are to be found in the nature and condition of man in general, and in our own characters in particular:

Secondly, to point out the close connexion of humility with other parts of the Christian character:

Thirdly, to direct your attention to some of the many passages of Scripture which recommend this virtue:

And to conclude, with such practical advice as shall appear to me most likely to be of use.

I. Humility consists in a low opinion of our own

worth, talents, and acquirements; such an opinion as is agreeable to truth. It consists in complying with the exhortation of the Apostle, "I say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think *soberly*."^a

In order that we may not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, it is necessary that we should acquire a thorough knowledge and feeling of our many wants and imperfections, our weaknesses and sins.

The condition of man in this world is well calculated to make him humble, and to keep him so. As he had his beginning out of nothing, so every moment of his existence he depends entirely upon that Being, in whom alone he lives and moves, and who upholdeth all things by the word of his power: when he hideth his face, his poor creatures are troubled; when he taketh away their breath, they die, and are turned again to their dust.^b "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,"^c was part of the sentence upon man when he sinned; and accordingly, the father of the faithful acknowledges himself to be "but dust and ashes;"^d and the Son of Sirach asks, "Why is earth and ashes proud?"^e Certainly, the feeling, not only that while here we are dependant upon another for life, and health, and all things, but also, that at any moment we may be called away into the forgetfulness of the grave, when we shall say "to corruption, Thou art my father; to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister,"^f ought to produce in us a deep impression of humility. And if we consider ourselves, not only as dependant and mortal creatures, but as creatures polluted with

^a Rom. xii. 3.

^d Gen. xviii. 27.

^b Psa. civ. 29.

^e Ecclus. x. 9.

^c Gen. iii. 19.

^f Job xvii. 14.

sin, we must feel, most forcibly, that "pride was not made for man."^g

When from the condition of man in general, we turn our attention to our *own* infirmities and sins, we shall find still more abundant cause for the deepest humility and self-abasement. Let us reflect how many are our transgressions in thought, word, and deed; how little we do that is pleasing to God, and how even that little is tainted with vanity and worldly motives. Which of us could bear that all that passes in his bosom should be publicly known? that all the vain, all the impure, all the uncharitable thoughts and imaginations, which rise in his mind, should be seen by all the world? The very thought of such a disclosure must fill us with shame and confusion of face.

And while we have such great cause for humility, we have none whatever for pride. For what if we are possessed of any seeming advantages? what if you are more rich, or more beautiful, or more strong, or more learned, than another? none of these advantages are really your own. They all are talents intrusted to your stewardship by God, and you must be asked the question, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"^h Therefore, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches;"ⁱ "but he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."^k

II. Let us, in the next place, consider how closely humility is connected with other parts of the Christian character. It is, in fact, in some

^g Ecclus. x. 18.
^k 2 Cor. x. 17.

^h 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ⁱ Jer. ix. 23.

degree, the ground-work of almost all right affections, both towards God and man.

And first, humility leads us to maintain a right frame of heart towards God. Pride is the great source of neglect and contempt of religion. The proud man, as he will not acknowledge the want of any extrinsic support—any support not proceeding from himself,—so he cannot bear to submit his own will to the will of any other being, however great and excellent that being may be. Such men, consequently, are too prone to discard both the protecting power, and the authority, of God. "Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"^l The humble man, on the contrary, constantly feels his dependance upon God. He knows that it is from him that he receives "life, and breath, and all things;"^m and consequently, looks up to the Giver of all good with humble thankfulness and love. And while he is thankful for mercies already received, knowing that he is indebted for them, not to his own merits, but to the goodness of God; so his sense of his dependant condition, and of his innumerable wants both of body and soul, leads him earnestly to pray to God for the continuance of his protection, support, and help. Thus humility will keep up a habit of piety, a devotional frame of mind.

And it will not only render him thankful to God, and frequent and earnest in his prayers; it will also induce him to submit to the divine will in all things, both in doing and suffering it. He will be contented in that state of life in which the providence of God has placed him, and never give way

^l Job xxi. 14, 15.

^m Acts xvii. 25.

to a dissatisfied repining temper. And when visited with any trials or afflictions, he will bear them with resignation and patience. His humility will induce him to feel, that whatever he endures is less than his iniquities deserve; and will dispose him to say from the heart, "Why should a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sins?" He will say with sincerity, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good: Lord, not my will, but thine be done."

And as humility disposes him in this manner to suffer God's will; so will it induce him to do God's will without disputing it. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" will be the genuine language of his soul: and when he knows the will of God, he will try to do it at once, without setting up his own will in opposition to it."

And, as humility leads to the formation of right feelings towards God, so does it bring man thankfully to receive the salvation offered him through Christ. The *proud* feel no want of a Saviour. They that think themselves in a state of perfect health, see no need of a physician. They that conceive themselves to be "rich and increased with goods, and" to "have need of nothing,"^a are ready "to despise the riches of God's goodness," as shown in the redemption of mankind. The humble man, on the other hand, who is deeply penetrated with the sense of his own unworthiness and sin; who feels that in his natural state he is "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," accepts thankfully the mercy proffered to him; he feels his need of pardon, and gladly embraces the pardon offered him through the blood of the cross. He suffers no proud reasonings, no disputings or wisdom of this world, to

^a Rev. iii. 17.

come in his way, but meekly and thankfully submits himself to the righteousness of God, and to the method of justification which the divine wisdom has devised.

Thus too, with respect to the aid of the Holy Spirit. While the proud man thinks that he stands in no need of assistance, but that of his own native strength alone, he is able to do all that is right, that of *himself* he is thoroughly furnished unto all good works; the humble man, who is sensible of his own weakness and spiritual wants, seeks earnestly for the help of the blessed Spirit, and rejoices in the conviction, that there is grace to help him in time of need.

And as humility thus disposes us to be rightly affected towards God, so does it most essentially tend to keep us in a right temper towards man. The foundation of all the duties between man and man is *love* or charity. What now is it that most usually occasions interruptions of this love and charity? What is it that most frequently is the cause of dissensions and quarrels, and consequently of the hatred and malice which grow out of them? I answer, *pride*—the evil pride of our fallen nature. When under the influence of that pride, men in every station of life,—the poor, perhaps, just as much as the rich,—are ready to take offence at every thing. At one time they are offended because they think they are treated with neglect or disrespect; at another, because some little interest of theirs—which, *because it is theirs*, they look upon as great—appears to be invaded. Some thoughtless expression, some unguarded action, perhaps some look, they consider as an insult; their pride is directly up in arms, and they give vent to their feelings in angry language, if not in angry deeds. A really humble man will not quarrel with any one. He makes all possible allowances

for the failings and tempers of other men, and hardly ever takes offence. If they utter against him reproachful language, he feels that he deserves it, if not from them, yet from the hand of God. Perhaps he is not guilty of the faults which angry men lay to his charge, but he is conscious to himself of others, which deserve reproof and punishment. It was in this temper that David, justly penetrated with the sense of his own guiltiness, meekly bore the scornful reproaches and curses of Shimei; "Let him alone," said he, "and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him."^o And thus, when men speak reproachfully of us, and lay to our charge things that we know not, we should look upon them as instruments employed by God for our humiliation and correction. At the same time, humility will induce us to give up our own wills and wishes to other men; not to stand pertinaciously to our own opinions, not to insist loudly that we are in the right, and all who oppose us in the wrong. It will rather induce us to comply with the injunction of the Apostle, "all of you be subject one to another;"^p or, as it is in another place, to submit "yourselves one to another in the fear of God."^q I am sure, my friends, that you must see how many quarrels and dissensions would be prevented by *humility*; and how true it is, that "only by *pride* cometh contention."

You must perceive, too, how greatly humbleness of mind contributes to a man's own peace and comfort. When our Saviour says, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart;" he adds, "and ye shall find rest unto your souls."^r Nothing occasions so much disquiet and discomfort in a man's mind as *pride*. Pride makes him envious of

^o 2 Sam. xvi. 11.
^r Prov. xiii. 10.

^p 1 Pet. v. 5.
^s Matt. xi. 29.

^q Eph. v. 21.

one man, jealous of another, and angry with a third. He is always looking for, and finding, some fresh cause of uneasiness and mortification. He is at the mercy of the meanest individual, who, by some apparent neglect, or merely by withholding some customary tribute of respect, which he looks upon as due to him, fills his bosom with vexation. Such was the case with the proud Haman, when Mordecai refused to do him reverence. Though at the height of power, and wealth, and dignity, yet all these advantages were lost to him, because a single individual of a despised nation withheld from him the tokens of respect which were paid him by all others. "All this" honour and splendour, said he, "availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."^s And thus it is with every proud man, without exception. The *humble* man careth little for any of those things. The faults and failings, of which he is conscious, make him feel that he does not really deserve respect, and therefore he is little hurt if it is not paid him. Consequently, he "finds rest unto his soul" from all the great and little vexations, to which the proud are exposed; he finds rest from—he is not discomposed and disturbed by—a foolish touchiness and readiness to take offence; still less by jealousy, or envy, or excessive anger.

III. The time would fail me, if I should endeavour to enumerate all the beneficial effects of humility. What has been said has been sufficient, I trust, to make you understand, with how much reason this virtue is so earnestly recommended and enforced in the Scriptures, both of the Old and of the New Testament.

In the former we are told, that "to walk humbly" with our God,^t is one of the chief things

^t Esther v. 13.

^v Micah vi. 8.

which he requires of us. We are told, that "though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off."^x "Surely he scorneth the scorners; but he giveth grace unto the lowly."^y We are told, that "when pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with the lowly is wisdom:"^z that "a man's pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit;"^a and that "before honour is humility."^b Again, "a proud look" "doth the Lord hate;"^c and "every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord."^d And the prophet assures us, that "the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lifted up, and he shall be brought low." "The lofty looks of a man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."^e

When our blessed Lord entered upon the public exercise of his ministry, and went forth, teaching and preaching the kingdom of God, he appears to have begun his divine instructions with the virtue of humility. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."^f Now nothing is more repugnant to our natural pride, than to be evil spoken of. When the workings of human pride showed themselves in the disciples of the lowly Jesus, he "called a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore," he continues,

^x Psa. cxxxviii. 6.

^a Prov. xxix. 23.

^c Prov. xvi. 5.

^y Prov. iii. 34.

^b Prov. xviii. 12.

^e Isaiah ii. 12, 11.

^z Prov. xi. 2.

^c Prov. vi. 17, 16.

^f Matt. v.

"shall humble himself"—it was in *humility*, especially, that their conversion was to be shown—"whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."^g In other words, the humblest man is the best Christian.

We are repeatedly told, that our Lord gave us an example that we should follow his steps.^h All parts of his example that are imitable by man, we shall do well to follow; his piety to God for instance, his perseverance in prayer, his purity, his temperance, his compassion—but what is the part of his character, which he himself particularly proposes to our imitation?—his *humility and meekness*. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." It was to place his humility in the most striking point of view, for the imitation of his followers, that he gave that wonderful instance of condescension in washing his disciples' feet. And the whole history of his life, and still more, if possible, that of his death, is one continued display of humility and meekness. The apostles repeatedly call us to this imitation of our Saviour, and bid us to let that mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, who condescended so low for our sakes, as to take upon him the nature of man, and suffer death upon the cross. They enforce the same lesson in a variety of other passages. When St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called, to live as became Christians indeed, what is the *first* virtue which he recommends?—*humility*—"all lowliness and meekness."ⁱ And in like manner he exhorts the Colossians, to "put on humbleness of mind,"^k as a leading characteristic of the new man, the real Christian.

^g Matt. xviii. 1—4.

^h 1 Pet. ii. 21.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 2.

^k Col. iii. 12.

Humility, therefore, being of such importance in the Christian scheme, it behoves *us* to consider how far *we* are actuated by this heavenly grace. Have *we* put "on humbleness of mind?" have we acquired a lowly temper of soul? are we "clothed with humility?" are we humble in our behaviour both towards God and man? With respect to God—do we humbly feel our dependance upon him for every thing? are we thankful for his mercies, earnest in our prayers, contented in our stations, and resigned under trials and afflictions? are we deeply impressed with the sense of our spiritual wants, with our need of a Redeemer and a Sanctifier?

And thus in our behaviour towards men—do we show that we are duly sensible of our own faults and follies, and ready to make allowance for those of others? are we ready, as far as possible, to give up our own wills and opinions? are we free from envy and jealousy? slow to take offence, and ready to forgive and pass over a transgression? In particular, how do we bear to be told of our faults? it is an act of kindness in any one to point out to us where we are wrong. If, on such an occasion, we feel our spirit rise within us—if, instead of acknowledging ourselves in the wrong when we really are so, we immediately begin to frame excuses, and to justify ourselves—we have reason to fear, that we have much of pride remaining within us. So again—how do we feel when we hear another praised, especially for some quality in which we imagine ourselves to excel? Do we feel no lurking wish to lessen the praise bestowed upon him? Do we never feel a sort of uneasiness, as if he was eclipsing our reputation? Surely there can hardly be a stronger proof of our being wanting in humility. My friends, let me entreat you to endeavour, by all the means in your power, and especially by

fervent prayer for God's grace, to cultivate a genuine spirit of Christian humility, both in yourselves and in your children: check in both all those feelings of vanity, all those risings of the pride of our corrupted nature, which would tend to produce envy, and discontent, and anger, and repining against God. Be humble and modest both in mind and in outward behaviour. Let your dress, your speech, your general manner, be expressive of lowliness. Be on your guard against all appearance of vanity and ostentation, and be very backward in speaking of any thing which may redound to your own praise. The wise man observes, "most men will proclaim every one his own goodness;"¹ but his advice is, "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips"^m—"not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."ⁿ This praise of himself lowers him in the sight both of God and man.

Be ready to give up your own wills, and wishes, and opinions. Consider how much harm you know of yourself, compared with what you know of other persons. "In lowliness of mind," therefore, "let each esteem other better than themselves;"^o and himself least, and most undeserving of all. "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility." Put on humbleness of mind. Remember that Christ himself calls upon all his followers to learn of him; and that the great lesson which he taught, both by precept and example, both in his life and in his death, was, that we should be meek and lowly of heart.

¹ Prov. xx. 6.
ⁿ 2 Cor. x. 18.

^m Prov. xxvii. 2.
^o Phil. ii. 3.

THE PRAYER.

O thou that resistest the proud, and givest grace to the humble, give us the grace of *humility*: and make us so lowly in our own eyes, that we may be accepted in thy sight. Make us, Lord, of the number of those *poor in spirit*, of those *humble and contrite ones*, to whom thou wilt look with favour, and with whom thou wilt dwell. Enable us to "walk humbly with thee," to be clothed with humility, and so to follow the example of the great humility of our Saviour, that we may be made partakers of his resurrection, through his merits and mediation.

SERMON XVIII.

THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

MATT. xxii. 39.

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

THE great foundation of all the duties between man and man is *love*. The love of our neighbour, accordingly, is one of the most important subjects that can engage our attention. In treating of this duty, I mean,

First, to say a few words upon its importance, nature, and extent;

Secondly, to point out the manner in which it ought to show itself—some of its various acts and offices;

And, thirdly, to lay before you some additional motives for cultivating this lovely feature of the Christian character, together with a few hints of advice on the means of acquiring it.

I. By the term *neighbour*, as used in the New Testament, we are to understand, not merely those who happen to reside near to us, but all men who come within our reach, all to whom we can do either good or harm, and most especially, all our fellow Christians.

The divine Author of our religion represents the love of our neighbour as being the distinguishing