

SERMON XIX.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH.

EPHES. iv. 25.

Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

THE method which St. Paul adopts in several of his Epistles, is, first, to lay before his converts an affecting statement of the blessings to which they were admitted by their conversion to Christianity; and, then, from that statement, to infer the necessity of corresponding holiness of practice. This is especially observable in the Epistle to the Ephesians. In the verses immediately preceding my text, he considers them as having *put off the old man*, as having renounced, as having forsaken the evil passions and guilty practices to which they before had been addicted; and as having "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"—as having upon their admission to the *privileges* of the Gospel engaged to acquire—as having in some degree actually acquired—the *moral graces* of the Gospel. It is worthy of remark, that the very first virtue, by which the Apostle enjoins them to show, that they "really" had put off the old man, that they were Christians not in name only, but in reality, is veracity, or a strict adherence to truth. "Wherefore"—as the

natural consequence of what had been just said—"Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour." Exactly in the same manner, and in the same connexion, he says to the Colossians—"Lie not one to another;" and enforces the precept by the same consideration, "seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds."^a *Lying* is the sin of a man in his state of native corruption, of a man unrenewed by the Holy Ghost; but is utterly unbecoming a Christian, utterly unworthy of him who professes to have put on the *new man*.

My friends, these passages are applicable to us, as well as to the Ephesians or the Colossians. We, like them, have been admitted to the privileges of the Gospel; we, like them, have engaged to put off the old man with his deeds—"Wherefore," from the consideration just mentioned, "putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour."

Lying consists in speaking falsely with an intention to deceive. The intention to deceive seems to form the essence of this sin; for where there is no such intention, a man is hardly to be deemed guilty of *lying*. This may be said with reference to tales confessedly fictitious, and to fables and parables, such as are used in Scripture and in other books for the purpose of instruction. And when a man states what he *believes* to be true, but afterwards is found to be false, he is not to be considered as a *liar*. Certainly, he is wrong in speaking without sufficient grounds; is guilty of a blameable heedlessness, and, to a degree, of falsehood; but still, is not chargeable with the guilt of deliberate lying. If what he said reflected upon any one's character, he has to answer for the additional fault

^a Coloss. iii. 9.

of evil speaking, and want of charity. And as a man may speak words, which in themselves are not strictly true, without being guilty of lying, because he has no intention to deceive; so the intention to deceive will fix this guilt upon him in some cases, where what he says is, to a certain degree, true. This is the case with all kinds of *equivocation*;—which sometimes have in them as much guilt as a direct lie; perhaps even more, inasmuch as they show more cunning and contrivance. And so also the intention to deceive, may render a man liable to the blame and punishment of lying, in some cases, where no words are used at all; for a man may be guilty of this sin by deceitful actions, as well as by deceitful words.

In the further prosecution of this subject, I shall,

First, consider some of the occasions on which men are guilty of this sin, and the motives which lead them to it.

And, Secondly, shall endeavour to make you sensible of its guilt.

I. First, then—some men *lie* in mere wantonness of spirit, for the sake, as they pretend, of amusing the company they are in, and for the purpose of acquiring to themselves the sort of consequence or importance which seems to belong to those who can relate what others are ignorant of. Now, the wise man tells us, that “in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin;”^b and in the case which we have been supposing, the sin is rather increased than diminished, by the circumstance of its arising from so trifling, so pitiful a temptation.

In this, and many like cases, men may perhaps say, that the falsehoods they uttered did no one any harm. But the mere violation of truth is a harm. Men have a just *right* to expect that truth

^b Prov. x. 19.

shall be spoken to them; we all expect it ourselves. To be wilfully guilty of speaking falsehood, therefore, even when we do no other harm by it, is to be guilty of *injustice*, is to act contrary to the rule of doing as we would be done by.

Another not unfrequent instance of lying is, when men lightly make promises which, at the very time they make them, they have no intention of fulfilling, or when, though they once intended the performance, they yet neglect it afterwards. They are thus guilty of deceiving their neighbour, and of disappointing the expectations they have themselves raised. When a man has promised any thing, he has made himself a *debtor* to the extent of his promises, and is chargeable with positive injustice if he does not perform it. Making the promise or not, was, in the first instance, a matter of choice; but when it is once made, he is bound to fulfil it. We may here apply what is said in Scripture of religious vows—“Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”^c If a man says, that he cannot perform his promise without inconvenience or loss to himself, he should remember, that it is one of the characteristics of a good man, “that he swear-
“eth”—or, we may add, that he *promiseth*—“to his neighbour, and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.”^d But then, on the other hand, I would observe, that he is not to be regarded as a promise breaker, who really intended the performance, but was *unavoidably* prevented; or he who failed in the fulfilment through the treachery of his memory. I would observe also, that men are too apt to interpret as a promise, what was never intended as such; and to construe into a positive engagement, some general profession of

^c Eccles. v. 5.

^d Psalm xv. 5.

good will, and of an intention to assist them. Those who thus claim promises, where none were made, are guilty themselves of a violation of truth; and if they call those whose assistance they expected *promise breakers*, are chargeable also with the sin of slander or calumny.

This sin of slander is one of the worst kinds of untruth. A falsehood, which is designed to hurt another man's character, is a lie of the very worst description; and exposes those who are guilty of it to the severest punishment. And as we must on no account *lower* a man's character by falsehood, so neither are we at liberty to *raise* it by such means. If we are guilty of ascribing to any one virtues which we know he does not possess, of bestowing upon him praises which he in no way deserves, we are guilty of that violation of truth, which is expressed by the word *flattery*. Flattery is a sin, which not only is culpable as an instance of lying, but also as it tends to encourage vanity and self-conceit—as it may induce him who is the object of it, to neglect the attainment of virtues, the credit of which he has already received—and as it may discourage others, who see praise so lightly and unworthily bestowed. Remember the saying of Solomon—"He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him."^e But then I must remark here also, that this censure must not extend to certain expressions of civility, which are used, without any intention of deceiving, in compliance with custom, and for the preservation of the decencies and courtesies of life.

A very common occasion of falsehood—and here I would request the particular attention of the younger part of my hearers—of the children, and

^e Prov. xxiv. 24.

of those who have lately engaged in service—is *the wish to conceal a fault*. A person, we will suppose, has been guilty of some real fault; or, perhaps, is chargeable only with carelessness: the fear of blame, or of punishment, or, perhaps, a mere feeling of sinful pride, which prevents him from owning himself in the wrong, tempts him to endeavour to conceal it by a lie. He either flatly denies the charge, or invents some false story by way of excuse. Now, there is no maxim better known, or which ought to be more constantly remembered, than this, that *he who commits a fault, and lies to hide it, makes it two*.^f The original fault was perhaps one, which, if it had been honestly acknowledged, would have been easily forgiven. By seeking to conceal it by falsehood, such persons bring upon themselves much shame and uneasiness of mind; they expose themselves to more severe blame and punishment from men, when they are found out—as they generally are found out—and, what is worst of all, they grievously offend God, from whom they can conceal nothing. And here I would request both parents and superiors, when a fault is committed, and fairly acknowledged, not to be very severe and harsh in reproof or punishment—but to let their severity be shown and *felt*, where there is any attempt to hide it by a lie.

Another occasion on which falsehood is too often employed, is, in the sale and purchase of various articles of convenience or luxury. It is observed by the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus, that "sin sticketh close between buying and selling;"^g and, I fear, that the sin of lying especially, sometimes finds place in matters of dealing and traffic. When it is employed by the buyer for the purpose of obtaining goods at a price below their fair worth,

^f Watts' Songs.

^g Eccclus. xxvii. 2.

or by the seller with a view to enhance their value, it becomes doubly sinful. It becomes falsehood and dishonesty; in other words, lying and stealing united together.

I by no means pretend to enumerate all the many occasions or instances of lying; perhaps those which I have mentioned are among the most frequent. I will now go on to offer some remarks upon its sinfulness.

II. The sinfulness of this unworthy vice is strongly suggested to us by the words of the text—“Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.” And why? What reason does St. Paul give for this precept? The reason follows in the same verse—“For we are members one of another.” *We are members one of another*, and therefore should upon no account deceive, but should be influenced, in all our intercourse with each other, by a uniform regard to truth.

We are members one of another, as we are partakers of one common nature, and formed to live together in society, which could not subsist without truth. If truth were generally disregarded, the bonds of society would be broken; mutual confidence would be destroyed; we should not know whom to trust; and should fall into the deplorable state described by the Prophet Jeremiah—“Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.”^b This, my friends, is the description of people who, having lost the fear of God, have thrown off all regard for truth—and a most deplorable picture it is.

^b Jer. ix. 4, 5.

Again—the proper use of language is the communication of our thoughts; and, as members of society, we are under an implied compact or agreement, that our words shall really mean what they express. If we wilfully utter falsehood, we break this compact or agreement, and abuse the gift of speech, that gift by which we are distinguished from the brute creation. We are guilty, in fact, of a sort of injustice, of a violation of the natural rights of those with whom we have intercourse.

“We are,” however, “members one of another,” not only as we are partakers of a common nature, and are members of society, but much more as we are fellow Christians. “We are members one of another,” because we are members of the body of Christ; and this sacred relation, as it unites us most closely together, so it makes it peculiarly incumbent upon us that we should “speak every man truth with his neighbour.” When we were admitted into this holy society, we engaged to have this regard for truth. We then renounced the devil and all his works; and no sin is more peculiarly the work of the devil than *lying*; for, as our Saviour tells us, “*he is a liar, and the father of it.*”ⁱ

Let us consider, too, that we were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and that the relation which we bear to *each* is utterly inconsistent with falsehood. The glorious Being, among whose children and servants we were then enrolled, is emphatically styled the “God of truth;” a God who cannot lie, all whose words are faithful and true, who is essential truth itself. If we wish to be his children, we must be “children that will not lie.”^k So again, we profess to be the disciples of Jesus Christ. But let us reflect, that he

ⁱ John viii. 44.

^k Isaiah lxlii. 8.

was the "faithful and true witness," who "came to bear witness to the truth," and in whose mouth no guile was found. We must walk in truth, if we would be his disciples indeed. The Holy Spirit, also, by whose guidance all Christians are conducted, is the Spirit of truth. If we profess to be led by him, we must be careful to live according to his direction, and to bring forth his fruits, and the fruit of the Spirit is found "in all righteousness and truth."

Accordingly, the servants of God have always been distinguished by their regard for truth. It was one of the injunctions of the Jewish lawgiver, "Ye shall not—deal falsely, neither lie one to another."¹ In the book of Proverbs, we are told, that "lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight."² Holy David, in the fifteenth Psalm, lays it down as one of the marks or characteristics of an inhabitant of the heavenly Jerusalem—of him "who shall ascend the hill of the Lord"—that "he hath used no deceit with his tongue," but speaketh the truth from his "heart." Of himself the Psalmist says, "as for lies, I hate and abhor them; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight."

From what I have said, you will, I trust, sufficiently perceive that lying is a sin—as it is a violation of natural justice, a violation of the implied agreement, the fair understanding, that our words shall express the real truth—that it is a sin most hateful to the God of truth—a sin utterly inconsistent with the Christian profession, utterly unworthy of the Christian character—that it is, in short, a sin, which is a direct and gross violation of our baptismal vow.

And if the sinfulness of lying is so great and so

¹ Levit. xix. 11.

² Prov. xii. 22.

evident, no doubt its punishment will be severe. "He that speaketh lies shall not escape"ⁿ—shall not escape shame and punishment both in this world and the next. Even in this world the liar is the object of scorn and contempt; so much so, that to call a man by this hateful appellation—in common language, to give a man the lie—is generally looked upon as one of the sorest affronts that can be offered. And as the liar is the object of contempt, so he cuts himself off from all the advantages of society. No one will trust him; and he can hardly obtain belief, even when he speaks truth. And in the world to come, his punishment will be awful indeed. We are assured in the book of Revelations, that "whosoever loveth and maketh a lie," shall be for ever shut out from the heavenly Jerusalem, together with murderers and idolaters; and again, that "all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death."^o Having behaved like the children of the father of lies while on earth, and done his works, they will hereafter share his punishment.

I will not pretend to add any thing more to the passages of Scripture which I have just quoted. Nothing can be stronger or more awakening. Let us, my friends, both from the dread of these awful sufferings, and from a sense of what is required of us by our Christian hopes and Christian profession—and above all, from a filial love and obedience to the God of truth—be unceasingly careful to "put away lying, and to speak every man truth with his neighbour."

You who have children, take care to bring them up with a strict regard to truth. Make them understand very early, that you can pass over almost any fault rather than a lie; and that, if they at-

ⁿ Prov. xix. 9.

^o Rev. xxi. 8.

tempt to conceal a fault by a falsehood, they will bring upon themselves your severest displeasure. Do not allow them to get into a habit of lying in jest. Maintain, on your part, a constant attention to truth. Never make use of deceit, as a means of procuring their obedience, but set them in all things an example of Christian truth and Christian simplicity.

Let us all, finally, endeavour to acquire the habit of "speaking the truth in love;" of being guided in our intercourse with each other by a spirit of open frankness, of simplicity, and godly sincerity. And since some impediment to this will arise from the remains of our native corruption, from the old man not being perfectly and entirely put off, let us fervently seek the assistance of God—let us beg him to take from us the way of lying, and to cause us to make much of his law—let us implore the Spirit of truth to guide us into all truth—into a habit of truth in our intercourse with each other, as well as to the knowledge of religious truth—and keep us in the ways of truth and holiness.

THE PRAYER.

O Lord, the God of truth, who hatest a lie as being the work of the great enemy, instil into our souls such an unalterable love of truth, that no temptation may lead us into the ways of falsehood. Let our hearts and tongues always go together; and keep far from us all manner of deceit, either in words or actions. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of him who came to bear witness to the truth, thy Son Jesus Christ.

SERMON XX.

HONESTY.

EPHES. iv. 28.

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

HONESTY is a virtue, which holds a high place in the estimation even of those who are little influenced by religion. If not always scrupulously attentive to this virtue themselves, they still wish to see it observed by all other men. To the character of a real Christian, it is absolutely necessary. Indeed, to speak of a *dishonest Christian*, would be a sort of contradiction in terms. St. Paul accordingly, when laying before the Ephesians some of the principal virtues which it became them to practise, now that they were become Christians, now that they had put on the new man, makes early mention of *honesty*. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Far from depriving another of what belongs to him, sincere Christians—even those who have least—even those who labour for what they get—will be glad to impart what they can to the necessities of others. I would here remark, by the way, that if St. Paul