

sinner, and hath not sat in the seat of the scornful. *Psa. i. 1.*

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path—for their feet run to evil—their feet go down to death—their steps take hold on hell. *Prov. i. 10, 15, 16; v. 5.*

Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing. *2 Cor. vi. 17.*

I have not dwelt with vain persons; neither will I have fellowship with the deceitful. I have hated the congregation of the wicked; and will not sit among the ungodly. *Psa. xxvi. 4, 5.*

A froward heart shall depart from me; I will not know a wicked person. *Psa. ci. 4.*

SERMON IV.

SWEARING.

JAMES V. 12.

Above all things, my brethren, swear not.

OF the many sins into which young men are apt to fall, from the bad example of others, and their own thoughtlessness, one of the most prevalent is the senseless habit of profane swearing.

There is hardly any sinful habit which admits of so little excuse, or which more plainly indicates a want of proper reverence for God's name, an absence of serious religious principles.

The name of God is pronounced in Scripture to be *holy and reverend*,* and you well know the respect for that holy name which is enjoined in the third commandment: *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*† God will not hold guiltless—will surely punish—those who make use of his great name to confirm a falsehood; those, in other words, who knowingly take a false oath, who are guilty of perjury. Neither will he hold guiltless those thoughtless persons who profane his holy name by using it as a light by-word. The words of

* *Psa. cxi. 9.*

† *Exod. xx. 7.*

our Lord Jesus Christ enforce this injunction of the third commandment. *I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communications be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.** The apostle St. James repeats this precept of his divine Master. *Above all things—observe the earnestness of the apostle—ABOVE ALL THINGS, my brethren, SWEAR NOT, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea, be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.†*

Now how are these precepts—thus plain, and thus earnestly enforced—how are they observed in this country? How are they attended to by men who profess and call themselves Christians, who acknowledge their obligation to obey all the precepts and commandments of Christ, and rest their hope of salvation, at the last day of account, on his death and blood-shedding?

The answer to such questions is painful. In our towns and villages it is, I fear, hardly possible to meet a number of people together in their unguarded moments, especially if their passions are in any way excited, without hearing the language of profaneness, the sounds of cursing and swearing. With many thoughtless persons—the children of levity and folly—the name of God and of Christ is a usual expression of astonishment and wonder. The angry and passionate give vent to their wrath in swearing; and too

* Matt. v. 34, 35, 36, 37.

† James v. 12.

often have oaths and curses become the language of authority; and the commands or threatenings of a master, or even of a parent, are enforced by imprecations. The very children in our streets often become proficient in this language of hell. While, from the spirit of our religion, it is from the lips of children—or, in the words of Scripture, *out of the mouths of babes and sucklings*—that the praise of God should be perfected, those lips are too often taught, by the sad example of those by whom they are brought up, almost to lisp in curses, and when they first begin to speak, to utter the language of profaneness and blasphemy. When any thing vexes or irritates them, they are apt to vent their angry feelings in swearing; and as they advance in years, the dreadful habit grows up with them. It is hardly possible, and perhaps would be useless, to pretend to point out all the various ways in which thoughtless people incur, in a greater or less degree, the guilt of profane swearing, or of taking God's name in vain. Some of the most common, however, it may be expedient to mention, in order to make my meaning more plain.

And first, there are every where persons who are in the habit of using the name of God to confirm the most idle assertions, or to give force to the most empty threats; who at any moment are ready to *swear by God* that what they say is true. In addition to the profanation of God's holy name, these men have often even the sin of perjury to answer for; for inconsiderately as they swear, they repeatedly bring—I had almost said, can hardly avoid bringing—that name to confirm a falsehood.

Another numerous description is of those who use this sacred name as an idle exclamation, as

an expression of surprise and astonishment, more especially when they hear any painful tidings, or when any evil accident unexpectedly befalls them. At such a time they unthinkingly cry out, "Good God!" or "Lord!" and consider not that the High and Holy One, whose name they thus unhallow, will for all these things bring them into judgment.

There are many other expressions which in reality are short prayers or ejaculations to the throne of grace, *to save us, to bless us, to have mercy on us*, and the like. These, as well as those which I have just mentioned, are most fitting to be used at any time, and more especially in time of distress or danger, with seriousness and devotion, and, like them, probably had their origin in genuine fervent piety. But when used as idle exclamations, as mere expressions of astonishment and wonder, these also are surely to be considered, in some degree, as profanations of God's name.

The sinfulness and danger of any such profanation is evident, not only from the third commandment, but from other passages of holy writ. *Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God.** To profane, is to treat as common that which is sacred, not to be used but with reverence. The name of God, we are told, is *holy and reverend*, most unfit to be uttered as an idle exclamation, a light by-word. Again; whenever we use the Lord's prayer, we beg of God that his name may be HALLOWED. After such a petition, it is surely a sort of mockery of God, if we are ourselves guilty of *profaning* or *unhallowing* it.

* Lev. xix. 12.

What has been said of the profanation of the name of God, applies equally to that of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As he is God, his name cannot be unhallowed without an express violation of the third commandment. It is ordained by the Almighty, *that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father; and we are told that God has given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.* To use the name, therefore, of *Jesus*, or of *Christ*, as an exclamation of surprise, or of pain, or in any other way than with respect and reverence, is doubtless a violation of the duty which we owe to God. I wish you also to remark and to recollect, that to *swear* by Christ, is the same as to swear by God the Father; and that the sin is similar, whether we swear by the express name of either of these divine Persons, or by that of the relation in which they stand to us as our Maker, our Redeemer, or our Saviour.

Without seriousness and reverence to ask any thing *for the love of God* or *of Christ*, or *for God's* or *Christ's sake*, must also be ranked among the violations of the honour due to the name of the Most High.

A practice which, though not a direct violation of the third commandment, is yet of kin to the sins above mentioned, is a light, profane use of words which signify things of a divine and holy nature, which relate entirely to religion and the concerns of the life to come, such as our *faith*, our *redemption*, or *salvation*. To swear by any of these in our common talk, is to incur both the guilt of profaning holy things, and that of vain and rash swearing. How expressly this latter is

forbidden by our Saviour, no one ought to be ignorant. *I say unto you*, says he, in the passage of his sermon on the Mount, which I have already quoted, *I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King: neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.* St. James repeats the injunction of his divine Master: *Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea, be yea; and your nay, nay; lest you fall into condemnation.* In each passage the prohibition, you will observe, is universal. All swearing in our ordinary communication is expressly forbidden.

On fit and solemn occasions, indeed, it is oftentimes not only lawful, but even our duty, to swear; on occasions, that is, when we are required so to do by the laws of the land, or when the purposes of justice or charity can be served by it. *Thou shalt swear*, says the prophet Jeremiah, *thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness.** and the apostle remarks, that *an oath for confirmation is the end of all strife.* Indeed, the lawfulness of an oath, on weighty and solemn occasions, is confirmed by the practice of patriarchs and holy men of old, by that of St. Paul, who repeatedly calls God to witness, and by the express directions in holy writ.

Swearing, in whatever manner, however, in our ordinary communication, and when it is unnecessary, is directly contrary to the prohibitions

* Jer. iv. 2.

which I have just read to you. It all *cometh of evil*, or of the evil one, the devil; and will all tend to bring us *into condemnation*; for we are assured that God will not hold such swearers guiltless.

Another practice which I am here bound to censure, but which, from its hateful nature, I am unwilling to enter upon, is that of those persons who, upon the slightest provocation—oftentimes upon no provocation at all—are in the habit of pouring forth the bitterest *curses* and *imprecations*. When their anger is stirred up by any, or by no cause, these persons are wont to call upon God to *damn*, or to *blast*, and to *confound* the object of their wrath. Sometimes they call down the severest infliction of the divine vengeance on their children, and on those who ought to be most dear to them;—sometimes even on themselves, and in their madness consign themselves, their own souls and bodies, to eternal perdition.

My people, says the Lord by his prophet Hosea, *my people doth not consider.* Surely if the persons of whom I have been speaking would but for a moment *consider* the dreadful meaning of the imprecations which they so heedlessly utter—the real meaning of that awful word *damnation*—they would shrink from using them, with compunction and dismay. *Cursing will happen to those who delight in cursing.* May God bring them to repentance, so that they may not, by sad experience, feel how dreadful a thing that *damnation* is, which they so thoughtlessly call down!

Let me entreat such young men as have in any degree contracted the sad habit of swearing, seriously to reflect upon its great folly and danger, and to resolve to break it off without delay. You

say that you swear *without thinking*. My object and my wish is to make you *think*.

Reflect on the *frequency* of this sin. *If for every idle—every sinful—word that a man shall speak, he shall give account thereof in the day of judgment,** think what a load of guilt, what a multitude of oaths, the common swearer will have to answer for. Every single oath you utter is recorded against you in the book of God's remembrance, and it will be brought against you at the last day, unless it shall be blotted out, upon your repentance through faith in the atonement of Christ. *For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.†*

Reflect too on the *smallness* of any real temptation to this sin. Among the most powerful temptations to transgress the laws of God, are the gratification of some bodily appetite, and the advancement of some worldly retreat. Neither of these temptations applies to the sin of the profane swearer. By swearing he gratifies no craving appetite, he procures from it no advantage, no earthly good whatever; but sins, properly speaking, WITHOUT TEMPTATION. The strength of a temptation must never be pleaded as an excuse for doing wrong; for whatever the temptation may be, God will, by his grace, if we are not wanting to ourselves, enable us to resist and to overcome it. Still, to sin without temptation, must certainly be considered as no little aggravation of guilt. For a man to hazard his eternal welfare for the greatest possible earthly advantage—to lose his own soul for the sake of gaining even the whole world, would be a most unwise bargain. But what words can express the fool-

* Matt. xii. 36.

† Matt. xii. 37.

ishness of him who will risk his salvation for the sake of uttering blasphemous words; who can consent, by swearing, to throw away his soul, though he knows that by so doing he shall gain nothing!

Let me then again entreat such young men as have unhappily contracted the habit of profane swearing, to endeavour at once to break it off. Firmly resolve—*be utterly purposed—that your mouth shall not offend*, either in this or in any other manner. You say, perhaps, that as you swear without thinking, so you hardly know when you swear. Then desire your friends and your companions, whenever you *do* swear, to tell you of it, and be really thankful to them for so doing.

Above all, implore the help of God to enable you to get the better of this evil habit. Say, *Set a watch, O Lord, before my lips; keep the door of my mouth*. Beseech him to grant, that the words of your mouth, as well as the meditations of your heart, may be always acceptable in his sight, that you may always use his holy name with reverence and honour.

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The Prayer.

O Almighty God, whose name is holy, grant that I may never speak unadvisedly with my lips, but may always treat thy holy name, and all that belongs to thy honour and service, with respect and reverence. Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Mercifully forgive the innumerable offences of my tongue. Bless with the grace of thy Holy Spirit all those

against whom I have at any time uttered imprecations, and grant that the awful curses which, in my madness, I have at any time called down either on myself or on others, may be all done away, through him who was made a curse for us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Texts to be committed to memory.

Above all things, my brethren, swear not.
James v. 12.

I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King: neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communications be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.
Matt. v. 34—37.

Thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness. *Jer. iv. 2.*

Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. *Matt. xii. 36, 37.*

SERMON V.

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 SOBRIETY.
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ROM. xiii. 13.

Let us walk honestly, as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness.

IN several of his Epistles, St. Paul powerfully urges the consideration of the light and privileges of the Gospel as an argument for avoiding the sins which were practised during the night of Heathenism, which sins he accordingly terms *works of darkness*. At the head of these works of darkness he names, in the text, *rioting and drunkenness*; and certainly there is hardly any sin more unbecoming a Christian, or more fitly called a work of darkness. *They that be drunken*, says St. Paul in another place, *are drunken in the night*.* This low sin, which proceeds from the darkness of folly, and the darkness of ignorance and unbelief, ought to be ashamed to show itself in the light of day.

The sin of drunkenness is a sin so shameful in its nature, so dangerous in its consequences, and in every way so opposite to Christian engagements, and Christian principles, and Christian hopes, that I can hardly be too anxious to guard you against it. Allow me therefore to mention

* 1 Thess. v. 7.