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THE PULPIT

AND INTELLIGENCER OF THE

ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN

CHURCH.

CONSISTING OF

SERMONS BY THE MINISTERS

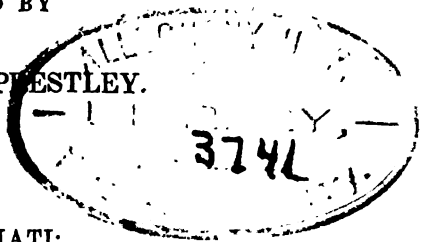
OF THE FIVE SYNODS.

AND

DENOMINATIONAL INTELLIGENCE.

EDITED BY

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SERMON VIII.

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE BODIES OF THE SAINTS.

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“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the effectual working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”—PHIL. iii: 20-1.

If in this life only we have hope, our earthly existence is no desirable gift. If our prospect is bounded by the present life, it may, in truth and soberness, be called a poor prospect: “For, what is life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away. All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof fadeth away. As for man, his days are as grass. As a flower of the field so he flourisheth: for the wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more forever.”

These are the sayings of God, and my hearers will not withhold their assent. It has ever been beyond the power of Satan and sin to furnish our hearts, sinful as they are, with any plausible pretext for disbelieving this portion of God's testimony. All men believe that all men will die; though, were we to judge from the utter neglect of many to make due preparation for that solemn event, we should be forced to think that they cherish a secret hope that they will prove exceptions to the general law. “Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.”

How false are the expectations of that man; how sad will be the disappointment of that man, who hopes that this vapor,

ere it vanishes, will put into his hand a cup which will always overflow with goodness.

But we are not left to suffer the mockery of such a hope as this, unless we choose to have no other and no better. Fellow Christians, God hath provided some better thing for us. In heaven there is an imperishable inheritance reserved for those who are Christ's. Beyond the dark river of death, there is a land of light and love. Some rays of the sunshine of an eternal day come to us, twinkling through the darkness of the grave. At the right hand of God there are pleasures forevermore. At the right hand of God, there is also an Almighty Savior; he is *your* Savior; and he will come at the appointed time, which for you is the best time, and conduct you to the place where he is, that you may share his glory, his joy and his crown. Then shall you see as you are seen, and know as you are known; and shall fear no change. Doubt and anxiety shall be no more; sorrow and sighing shall have forever fled away.

On this "hope which is set before us," let our attention be fixed, while we consider in their order the different points which lie before us in the text:

I. The apostle's description of our present bodies, which is contained in the words, "our vile body," or more literally, "the body of our humiliation."

Human nature is not now what it was in the state of innocence. It is fallen, and humbled, and damaged. Not only is the soul depraved and all its faculties impaired, as it regards spiritual and holy exercises, but the body has shared in the common loss and ruin. It has become subject to disease, death and corruption. The curse of sin rests upon it, and bears it down.

It would be hazardous to attempt a minute description of the body of man while yet in innocence, and the most successful attempt would be more curious than edifying. We must not venture beyond the few general hints which may be derived from the Scriptures.

It is certain that the body of Adam was not such a weak, frail, creature, "perishing day by day," as our bodies now are. The dangers to which our material frame is exposed,

the infirmities with which it is oppressed, the irregular and torturing affections and passions of which it is the subject,—belong to our sinful state. When man sinned, human nature fell. Not one part of it, but the whole. The change which sin wrought, passed upon man's body as a part of the whole. As a constituent part of our nature, it fell from God and from its original elevation, and therefore it is called the body of our humiliation. Hence, the diseases and infirmities which belong to our present bodies, are not to be regarded as the inheritance of sinless, but of sinful creatures. They are not the portion of those creatures who remain in the state in which their Maker placed them, but of those who have transgressed his law and brought down upon themselves its penalty. What other account can you give of the sorrows and afflictions of this present life, than that they are the just retributions of a holy God, who thus stamps upon sin the brand of his righteous displeasure? While God, holy, just and good—while the infinitely wise and powerful Governor of the universe holds in his hands the reins of empire, and suffers not even a sparrow to fall to the ground without his will and permission—can we suppose that he would cause the sons of men to drink such large draughts of sorrow, or that he would suffer such numberless miseries to follow them all the days of their lives, if they were not offenders against his government? No; but indeed, the aching head, the parched lips, the trembling limbs, the deep-fetched groan, and the anguished look,—are so many proofs that sin is in the world. When disease invades thy body, thou art reminded that thou art a sinner. When pain racks thy frame, and all thy sensibilities become so many inlets of anguish, thou art reminded that thou art a sinner. That bed of sickness on which thou art gone up, may remind thee that thou art a sinner. And when, if but for a moment, thou dost cast a look beyond this present life, to that bar of the eternal God at which thou must appear, and have judgment passed upon thee according to thy deeds; if thy thoughts trouble thee, and “thy heart meditates terror,” thou art reminded that thou art a sinner. And thou shouldst confess to God, thy sins and thy transgressions, and humble thyself under his mighty hand.

But, its moral pollution is that which chiefly contributes to render the present body a "vile body."

Sin, it is true, cannot be inherent in matter as it may be in spirit. Yet, from the close connection between the soul and the body in this present state, both making one moral and accountable agent; and from the fact, that some of our desires and appetites have their seat in the body, while others are of a mixed nature, having perhaps their origin in the soul, but operating through the body; the body becomes a seat and a source of sin. With respect to all sins which men are tempted to commit from the influence of the objects of the external senses, it is in the body that the evil commences. It is there that sin is conceived; though it is never finished till the will has given its consent. Uncleaness and lasciviousness, and intemperance in all its forms, are sins in which the body has its full share. It is the coadjutor as well as the instigator of the soul. The soul alone would not only be incapable of committing such sins, but incapable of desiring to commit them. Hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, and also pride and envy, may dwell in unembodied spirits; but before they can commit many sins with which men defile themselves, they must be clothed with flesh and blood. Yes, man, under a dispensation of grace; man, under the government of a kind and good God; man, a candidate for glory, immortality and eternal life, commits sins for which devils will never be condemned. Rightly, then, does the apostle denominate the body which entices to such sins, a "vile body."

But this vile body is also a mortal body.

I shall dispute with no man for saying that man's body never had a natural immortality; that is an immortality arising from the purpose, plan or condition of God concerning human nature. It was to be immortal, if man abode with his Maker. Had our first father kept God's covenant, God would have removed him and all his posterity to heaven in their appointed times, without their tasting death. In what manner he would have done it we cannot tell, any more than we could answer many other questions which curiosity might ask, as to what kind of a world this would have been had sin never entered it. But death was fixed as the penalty of sin—

death, as well temporal as spiritual and eternal. Thus man became mortal. Man wastes away and dies. Man goes to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets. His body is laid in the grave and moulders to dust. This is our common lot. The careless foot of the traveler shall yet tread on the ground where we lie, and the wild grass wave over our tomb. In these bodies whose wants now engross so much of our attention, and which are fed and clothed with so much care; in these warm limbs which are now full of life and vigor, loathsome worms shall yet crawl and revel.

But, believer in Christ, to you it is given to know and to rejoice with the knowledge, that though death who comes to all must come to you, he will not come in the way of the curse, but as a messenger from your Savior to call you home to your Father's house in heaven. From his cold embrace—nay, rather from his kind embrace, you will be received into the arms of him who loved you and whom your soul loves. Be not then afraid because you must go down to the grave—be not afraid, only believe. Jesus, your friend and Savior, went down in like manner himself; but he came up again—he arose, and became the first fruits of them that slept. You must be “unclothed,” but it is that you may be “clothed upon with your house which is from heaven.” You must leave your “vile body” in the tomb, as Jesus left his grave-clothes there: but he will provide you and them more beautiful and glorious.

II. The future bodies of believers will be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body.

On the nature of the future bodies of the saints, it becomes us to speak with modesty, for we know but little. That little, however, is, for all the purposes for which such knowledge is valuable, much. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

From the change which we are told will be made on them from “vile bodies,” to bodies fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, it is plain, that while their identity will be preserved, so that they shall still be the same, they will, in many respects, be very different. Indeed these gross cor-

poreal systems which now belong to us, are by no means adapted to the heavenly state, whose exercises and employments and enjoyments are purely spiritual. But let us not enter the wide field of speculation without compass or chart, but keep close to the Sacred Record. The Spirit speaking by Paul has told us, that "flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Our Savior, when correcting some of the gross errors of the Sadducees on this very point, taught that, "in the resurrection they shall be as the angels of God." And when Paul, treating at large on the doctrines of the resurrection, comes to answer the question, "With what bodies do they come?" he teaches that the dead are raised incorruptible. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption." The future bodies of saints will there be endowed with such excellent qualities—qualities of which we can now form no conception, because they do not fall within the range of our experience—as shall place them entirely beyond the reach of decay and putrefaction. They shall not, like all organized bodies with which we are acquainted, have any tendency to dissolution. They shall be spiritual. "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." God perfectly understands all the works which he has made, or ever will make; but here is again an idea which is beyond our depth. We can form no proper conception of this spiritual body, because it is a modification of matter or substance which has never yet come under our observation. Our science, boast of it as we may, is confined to the surface of things and very limited in its range; in heaven, the saints are conversant with wonders of science, compared with which all the great laws of nature, which Newton taught his disciples to demonstrate, and all the celestial glories which the telescope has laid bare, are poor and little.

But we have some idea of a natural body, and the language of inspiration authorizes us to say, that the future body will, in some respects, or in some way, differ from it, as spirit differs from matter—as the spirit differs from the flesh. The natural body is nourished and supported by food, air and sleep. It is also the subject of various sensual appetites, affections and desires, and constantly exposed to sick-

ness and death. But the future body will be of such a sublimated nature, and endued with such spiritual qualities that it will need none of those means by which the natural body subsists. Neither shall it be liable to any sickness or disease, for none of the inhabitants of that happy land shall have cause to say, "I am sick."

They shall also be glorious. "It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory."

The things which have been noticed will contribute to this glory. But their holiness and purity will constitute a leading feature of their likeness to Christ's glorious body. They will be united to Jesus Christ the second Federal Head. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." They, therefore, shall have his spirit dwelling in them as a spirit of holiness. And they shall bear his image. The first man was of the earth, earthy: here on earth we bear the image of the earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven: in the heavenly state we shall bear the image of the heavenly.

But the strong and pointed contrast in the language of the text, should not pass unnoticed. If we overlook it—if we do not endeavor to draw from it all the instruction which the Holy Spirit would communicate to us by it—we are greatly wanting in our duty to ourselves, and in reverence for the word of God. "Who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory?"

Though Christ did not come into the world in sinful flesh, yet he came "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He did not take our nature upon him as it existed in the state of innocence, but as it exists in our present sinful state. Our humiliation, as to its depth, is the perfect measure of Christ's humiliation; that low condition to which sin has reduced us, is the low condition to which Christ humbled himself when he was found in fashion as a man. It was our nature as fallen, though without its moral impurity, that the Son of God took upon him. Though he was without sin, and had done no sin, yet being made under the law, and therefore under the curse, and being made sin for us, he had to drink to its

very dregs, the cup which contained the bitter waters of the curse. But then, when he arose from the dead, or rather when he ascended into heaven, and Jesus humbled, became Jesus glorified; when the man of sorrows, so lately crowned with thorns, entered upon the joy set before him and was crowned with glory and honor—eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath the heart of man conceived the greatness of the change. But Peter, and James, and John, when they were with him on the holy mount, saw a spectacle which afforded them, and may afford us, a feeble glimpse of his glory; and with this we must be content till we shall see him as he is. O, my hearers, shall we all thus see him? He was transfigured before them; his face did shine as the sun; his raiment white and glistening, as white as snow, so as no fuller on earth could white them. It was the glory of heaven radiating from the person of the Son of Man. Such is the glorified body of our Savior. And to this likeness will he fashion this “vile body.” Human nature in the person of Christ is exalted, and in all his saints it will be exalted infinitely above that height from which it fell by transgression. The future body will be a wonderful improvement on Adam’s body. Where sin aboundeth grace doth much more abound.

III. Our Savior will produce this change “according to the effectual working whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.”

Our Redeemer is strong. He is the Lord, strong and mighty. Who among all the great captains and conquerors of earth, may once be compared to the “Captain of our salvation?” He will surely subdue all his own, and all our enemies.

Satan, the grand enemy of God and man, had introduced sin into the world. Death, which entered by sin, was passing backwards and forwards among the sons of men, and was producing fearful ravages. From generation to generation the whole race were to fall under his dominion and be laid low in the grave. The dominion of death and of Satan, who has the power of death, is founded on sin. He, therefore, who would be the Savior and deliverer of men, must be able to put away sin. Such a Savior is Christ. For this purpose

was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil, or in removing the guilt of sin by his atoning blood, the first and more immediate enemy of his people is destroyed. That enemy is destroyed by whose power the dominion of death, the last great enemy, is upheld. The sting of death is taken away. Those who believe in Christ can die in peace; their souls are immediately received into his glory, and their flesh rests in the hope of a blessed resurrection. The pains of death are loosed, so that it is not possible that his people should be holden of it beyond God's set time. The pillars of the empire of death are shaken, and it begins to totter to its fall. But still, death, the last great enemy, is not yet destroyed. His right to exercise dominion over the bodies of men which he obtained in consequence of their yielding themselves the servants of sin and Satan, is taken away; but he refuses to let the prisoners go free, and still holds the bodies of God's saints under his dominion. But Christ must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. This is the decree, and all on earth, and all in hell shall not be able to hinder its execution. For its execution he puts forth the effectual working, or energy, according to which he is able to subdue all things to himself. This effectual working will be terrible to his enemies. Devils and wicked men, who would not submit themselves to his sceptre, will be broken beneath its stroke. He will send forth his mighty angels and gather them from the four corners of the earth, to appear before his bar of judgment. He will stretch forth the rod of his anger, and drive them away into everlasting punishment. He will wound their heads over many lands. He will trample on their necks and dip his feet in their blood. And *Death*—who would not let go his hold on the redeemed from among men, though his right to retain them under his dark dominion was taken away—will be swallowed up in victory. There shall be no more death. His very being shall be destroyed. An invisible, but irresistible energy, put forth by the Savior, shall raise up the bodies of the saints to enjoy a future and endless life. No impediments shall be able to hinder. Though their dead bodies may have been cast into the depths of the sea, and their dust

find its resting place at its fathomless bottom—though they may have been buried on the tops of mountains or in low valleys, and their dust been led by neighboring rivulets into some mighty river and deposited all along its windings, or carried into the ocean and tossed over its vast surface—though they may have fallen on the tented field, and their bodies become food for ravenous beasts, or birds of prey:—these, and all other difficulties which a futile imagination might accumulate, are nothing to Christ; for Christ is God: and can any thing be too hard for God? By his powerful voice he will call up his saints from the dust of the earth; each one will come forth with his own proper body, but it will be fashioned like unto the glorious body of his Lord. Bone will come to his bone, and sinews and flesh shall come up over them. The Spirit of Jehovah shall infuse life. The building—this new Temple of the Holy Ghost—shall rise in silence like the temple of God on the top of Mount Zion, but in grandeur and glory as far surpassing it, as the heavens are higher than the earth. The soul shall return and have its dwelling place there as in a tabernacle, which the Lord hath pitched and which shall never be taken down. Is the question asked, How can these things be? The answer is at hand—“With God all things are possible.” Hath he said it, and shall he not do it? Must his promise fail?—sooner shall omnipotence fail him. Of the dust of the earth, he formed these bodies which our souls now inhabit; and from the dust of the earth he will raise them up again by that Almighty power which he put forth in the beginning. Let not his enemies hope to escape his righteous judgment. Can you hide yourself from God? Could the hills and the mountains cover you from his sight? Or would you indulge the abject hope that you will escape, as a lost or forgotten atom in his universe? And let no child of God fear to go down to the chambers of death. Your Redeemer went down before you, and he came up again, traveling in the greatness of his strength along the path of life. He knows the way well, and he will conduct you in it to the presence of God, where there is fullness of joy. This is the will of the Father who sent him, that of those who were given him he should lose

none, but raise them up at the last day. Your life is hid with Christ in God, and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, give diligence that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.

IV. The persons on whom this glorious change shall be wrought, are those whose "conversation is in heaven, where also they look for the Savior."

The word conversation here, denotes that manner of life which becomes a citizen of a State, society, or city. He lives according to its laws, conforms himself to the customs and manners of its people, exercises its privileges, and seeks its honor, safety and peace.

Christians were by nature children of wrath even as others. "At that time they were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise." But now, being reconciled by the blood of the cross, "they are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." They are citizens of heaven; that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Its privileges and blessings are theirs—theirs in right; and knowing that the day approaches, and is near at hand, when they shall be theirs in possession, they are giving diligence that they may be prepared to exercise and enjoy them. Their inheritance is in heaven; there it is reserved for them, and by their Savior's grace, and according to his word, they are praying and striving that they may be made meet to be partakers of that inheritance. Their treasure is in heaven; and according to that universal law, that where a man's treasure is there his heart will be also, they set their affections on things above, and not on the things of earth. Their home is in heaven; and to it, as the place of their quiet rest, they return in their thoughts, from the business and the bustle, the cares and the sorrows, the troubles and the turmoils of this world. There is their Father's house. And claiming God as their Father in heaven, they keep his commandments, they love him, they converse with him, they tell him all their wants and fears and sorrows, they confess to him their sins

and faults, they ask his fatherly forgiveness, they supplicate his fatherly guidance and protection. They are of the household of faith. Claiming all the children of God as their brethren, they rejoice with them in their joys, sympathize with them in their sorrows, and pray and labor together with them, that the kingdom of their heavenly Father may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Thus, while yet on earth, they are employed about the things which are eternal in the heavens; the things with which they will soon be entirely conversant.

They look for the Savior from Heaven.

At Bethany, where their Lord ascended, as the disciples stood gazing up into heaven, after he was lost to their sight in the clouds, an angel stood by them and said to them: "This same Jesus who is taken up into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go up into heaven." His own promise, while he was yet with them in the world, was,—“I will not leave you comfortless; I will come again.” This promise he rendered more definite by assuring them that he would come to conduct them home to their Father's house in heaven, in which there are many mansions, suited to be the everlasting habitations of his children. The time when he would fulfil this promise, they understodd well, would be “at the time of the restitution of all things,” the “end of the world,” or “the last day.”

This, his second appearance or coming, will be very different from the former. The meek and lowly one, the man of sorrows, the despised and rejected of men, will appear as the triumphant conqueror of death and the grave, the Head of principalities and powers, the Judge of the quick and the dead. The heavens will declare his righteousness, and all men will see his glory. Fearful as it will be to the wicked, dreaded as it is even now by his enemies, if they would confess the truth, it is an object of desire and hope to the righteous.

It will be the day of their complete redemption; the day when they will be bidden of their Lord to come and inherit the kingdom, prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

But none others do or can regard Christ's second coming

as an object of desire and hope. The Holy Spirit has been at great pains to shew that this looking for the Savior is inseparably connected with a holy and godly life. This he testifies: "The grace of God which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men; teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present evil world, looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the Great God, even our Savior, Jesus Christ." And again, after Peter had given a most grand description of the end of all things, he was directed by the Holy Spirit to turn to his Christian brethren, and say to them,—“Wherefore, beloved, seeing all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting to the coming of the day of God?”

Of a truth, those whose conversation is in heaven, are not strangers to a longing desire to be with Jesus Christ, which is far better. However it may be with any of us, whatever may be our experience or non-experience on this subject, this is one of God's sacred truths. Yet, for holy and wise reasons, and by purposes which he means to accomplish by the continuance of his people on earth till the appointed time, this longing desire is held in check by that natural love of life which he has implanted in the human bosom, and by various earthly ties and attachments, which his Gospel recognizes, and his grace sanctifies; while, it is sometimes (might we not say often?) abated by the want of a full assurance of an interest in God's covenant mercy. Like Paul, believers are often "in a strait betwixt two." But as the day approaches, their heavenly Father ordinarily unties their bands, loosens their attachments to things here, by various trials, crosses and disappointments, winds up their earthly business, makes them sick of the world and its vanities, directs their hearts into the patient waiting for of Christ; and excites them more earnestly to press after perfection in knowledge, love, peace and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. When the time of their departure is at hand, those gracious instincts which point to heaven, and seek their gratification in heaven, become more vigorous and active, declaring

plainly, that they seek a country that is an heavenly. And now, feeling that they are "not long for this world," they say, as they never said before, "Even so, come Lord Jesus, come quickly."

The patriarch Jacob had early avouched the Lord to be his God. Yet, till after he went down to Egypt, perhaps there was no time in his life, when, if the choice had been presented to him between a long continuance in this world of sorrow and sin, and an immediate entrance into that rest which remains for the people of God, he would not have been in "a strait betwixt two." To remain yet a while on earth, would have appeared, in various respects, more needful. But, after experiencing a long series of very peculiar trials, when he had seen the "end of the Lord," and had seen "the mystery of God finished," and had seen his Joseph once more, and could leave his family under the care of Joseph, and Joseph's God, and his own God, he expresses the longing of his soul for death as his final deliverance, in those calm and resigned, but earnest words, "I have waited for thy salvation, O, God."

And now, believer in Jesus, thou child of immortal hopes, cheered as thou art or mayest be by such a bright prospect, what afflictions in thy person, or in thy lot should appear to thee grievous and hard to be borne? Hast thou the prospect of blessedness and glory hereafter, and canst thou bear no cross now? Is there a crown of life laid up for thee, and wouldst thou snatch it from thy Savior's hand, and put it on thy head, without striving lawfully for it—without running the race which is set before thee? Lift up thine eyes and behold the glory which shall be revealed, and then say what thou thinkest—say if the sufferings of this present time, and all the reproaches thou must bear for Christ's sake, are worthy to be compared to it? Through manifold tribulations thou must enter the kingdom of God. It was not Jesus thy friend, it was an enemy that told thee thou wouldst find it otherwise. So God has ordained, and no arrangement could be better for thee, or he would have made that better arrangement. He loved thee, even when thou wast dead in trespasses and sins; and now, that he has quickened thee to-

gether with Christ, so that thy heart warms with an earnest affection toward him, and thy lips can speak, or at least stammer his praise, he can not but love thee still, and for Christ's sake he will love thee to the end.

But to each one who hears, we say, *Beware!* Take not this consolation to thyself unless thy conversation be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ. Dost thou mind earthly things? Dost thou live without God, and forget to seek him? Dost thou never pray; or is it but seldom? Hast thou no concern for his glory, and carest only that thy worldly interests may prosper, and thy worldly goods increase? Art thou a stranger to godly sorrow for sin, so that thou knowest not what it is to grieve and be ashamed before God for thy vileness and ingratitude? O, if such is thy character, we can not say that thy conversation is in heaven; we dare not say it, and thou must not, indeed thou must not, for thou canst not look for the Savior to change thy vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body. And if thou wilt not receive this as the word of truth, and lay it to thy heart, and choose that good part which shall never be taken away from thee, why then, heaven is lost; the pleasures which are at the right hand of God, others shall enjoy them, but not thee. Thy soul is lost. And eternity will be too short for thee to find out all that thou hast lost.