

SERMON CX.

ON THE DISCOVERIES OF FAITH.

“*Now faith is the evidence of things not seen.*” Hebrews xi. 1.

1. FOR many ages it has been allowed by sensible men, *Nihil est in intellectu quod non fuit prius in sensu*: That is, “There is nothing in the understanding which was not first perceived by some of the senses.” All the knowledge which we naturally have is originally derived from our senses. And therefore those who want any sense, cannot have the least knowledge or idea of the objects of that sense; as they that never had sight, have not the least knowledge or conception of light or colours. Some indeed have, of late years, endeavoured to prove that we have innate ideas, not derived from any of the senses, but coeval with the understanding. But this point has been now thoroughly discussed by men of the most eminent sense and learning; and it is agreed by all impartial persons, that although some things are so plain and obvious, that we can very hardly avoid knowing them as soon as we come to the use of our understanding; yet the knowledge even of those is not innate, but derived from some of our senses.

2. But there is a great difference between our senses, considered as the avenues of our knowledge. Some of them have a very narrow sphere of action; some a more extensive one. By *feeling* we discern only those objects that touch some part of our body; and, consequently, this sense extends only to a small number of objects. Our senses of *taste* and *smell* (which some count species of *feeling*) extend to fewer still. But, on the other hand, our nobler sense of *hearing* has an exceeding wide sphere of action; especially in the case of loud sounds, as thunder, the roaring of the sea, or the discharge of cannon; the last of which sounds has been frequently heard at the distance of near a hundred miles. Yet the space to which the sense of *hearing* itself extends is small, compared to that through which the *sight* extends. The *sight* takes in at one view, not only the most unbounded prospects on earth, but also the moor

and the other planets, the sun, yea, the fixed stars; though at such an immeasurable distance, that they appear no larger through our finest telescopes than they do to the naked eye.

3. But still none of our senses, no, not the sight itself, can reach beyond the bounds of this visible world. They supply us with such knowledge of the material world as answers all the purposes of life. But as this was the design for which they were given, beyond this they cannot go. They furnish us with no information at all concerning the invisible world.

4. But the wise and gracious Governor of the worlds, both visible and invisible, has prepared a remedy for this defect. He hath appointed *faith* to supply the defect of sense; to take us up where sense sets us down, and help us over the great gulf. Its office begins where that of sense ends. Sense is an evidence of things that are seen; of the visible, the material world, and the several parts of it. Faith, on the other hand, is the "evidence of things not seen;" of the invisible world; of all those invisible things which are revealed in the oracles of God. But indeed they reveal nothing, they are a mere dead letter, if they are "not mixed with faith in those that hear them."

5. In particular, faith is an evidence to me of the existence of that unseen thing, my own soul. Without this I should be in utter uncertainty concerning it. I should be constrained to ask that melancholy question:—

Hear'st thou submissive, but a lowly birth,
Some separate particles of finer earth?

But by faith I know it is an immortal spirit, made in the image of God; in his natural and moral image; "an incorruptible picture of the God of glory." By the same evidence I know that I am now fallen short of the glorious image of God; yea, that I, as well as all mankind, am "dead in trespasses and sins:" So utterly dead, that "in me dwelleth no good thing;" that I am inclined to all evil, and totally unable to quicken my own soul.

6. By faith I know that, besides the souls of men, there are other orders of spirits; yea, I believe that

Millions of creatures walk the earth
Unseen, whether we wake, or if we sleep.

These I term angels; and I believe part of them are holy and happy, and the other part wicked and miserable. I believe the

former of these, the good angels, are continually sent of God "to minister to the heirs of salvation;" who will be "equal to angels" by and by, although they are now a little inferior to them. I believe the latter, the evil angels, called in Scripture, devils, united under one head, (termed in Scripture, Satan; emphatically the enemy, the adversary, both of God and man,) either range the upper regions; whence they are called "princes of the power of the air;" or, like him, walk about the earth as "roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour."

7. But I know by faith that, above all these, is the Lord Jehovah; He that is, that was, and that is to come; that is God from everlasting, and world without end; He that filleth heaven and earth; He that is infinite in power, in wisdom, in justice, in mercy, and holiness; He that created all things, visible and invisible, by the breath of his mouth, and still upholds them all, preserves them in being, "by the word of his power;" and that governs all things that are in heaven above, in earth beneath, and under the earth. By faith I know, "there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and that these Three are One;" that the Word, God the Son, "was made flesh," lived and died for our salvation, rose again, ascended into heaven, and now sitteth on the right hand of the Father. By faith I know that the Holy Spirit is the giver of all spiritual life; of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; of holiness and happiness, by the restoration of that image of God wherein we are created. Of all these things, faith is the evidence, the sole evidence, to the children of men.

8. And as the information which we receive from our senses does not extend to the invisible world, so neither does it extend to (what is nearly related thereto) the eternal world. In spite of all the instruction which either the sight or any of the senses can afford,

The vast, the' unbounded prospect lies before us;
But clouds, alas! and darkness rest upon it.

Sense does not let in one ray of light, to discover "the secrets of the illimitable deep." This, the eternal world, commences at death, the death of every individual person. The moment the breath of man goeth forth, he is an inhabitant of eternity. Just then time vanishes away "like as a dream when one awaketh." And here again faith supplies the place of sense, and gives us

small importance,) that this faith is only the faith of a servant, and not the faith of a son. Because this is a point which many do not clearly understand, I will endeavour to make it a little plainer. The faith of a servant implies a divine evidence of the invisible and the eternal world; yea, and an evidence of the spiritual world, so far as it can exist without living experience. Whoever has attained this, the faith of a servant, "feareth God, and escheweth evil;" or, as it is expressed by St. Peter, "feareth God, and worketh righteousness." In consequence of which he is, in a degree, as the Apostle observes, "accepted with Him." Elsewhere he is described in those words: "He that feareth God, and keepeth his commandments." Even one who has gone thus far in religion, who obeys God out of fear, is not in anywise to be despised; seeing "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Nevertheless, he should be exhorted not to stop there; not to rest till he attains the adoption of sons; till he obeys him out of love, which is the privilege of all the children of God.

14. Exhort him to press on, by all possible means, till he passes "from faith to faith;" from the faith of a *servant* to the faith of a *son*; from the spirit of bondage unto fear, to the spirit of childlike love: He will then have "Christ revealed in his heart," enabling him to testify, "The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*,"—the proper voice of a child of God. He will then be "born of God;" inwardly changed by the mighty power of God, from "an earthly, sensual, devilish" mind, to the "mind which was in Christ Jesus." He will experience what St. Paul means by those remarkable words to the Galatians, "Ye are the sons of God by faith; and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." "He that believeth," as a son, (as St. John observes,) "hath the witness in himself." "The Spirit itself witnesses with his spirit, that he is a child of God." "The love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him."

15. But many doubts and fears may still remain, even in a child of God, while he is weak in faith; while he is in the number of those whom St. Paul terms "babes in Christ." But when his faith is strengthened, when he receives faith's abiding impression realizing things to come; when he has received the

abiding witness of the Spirit, doubts and fears vanish away. He then enjoys the plerophory, or "full assurance, of faith;" excluding all doubt, and all "fear that hath torment." To those whom he styles *young* men, St. John says, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." These, the Apostle observes in the other verse, had "the word of God abiding in them." It may not improbably mean the pardoning word, the word which spake all their sins forgiven; in consequence of which, they have the consciousness of the divine favour without any intermission.

16. To these more especially we may apply the exhortation of the Apostle Paul: "Leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ," namely, repentance and faith, "let us go on unto perfection." But in what sense are we to leave those principles? Not absolutely; for we are to retain both one and the other, the knowledge of ourselves, and the knowledge of God, unto our lives' end: But only comparatively; not fixing, as we did at first, our whole attention upon them; thinking and talking perpetually of nothing else, but either repentance or faith. But what is the perfection here spoken of? It is not only a deliverance from doubts and fears, but from sin; from all inward as well as outward sin; from evil desires, and evil tempers, as well as from evil words and works. Yea, and it is not only a negative blessing, a deliverance from all evil dispositions, implied in that expression, "I will circumcise thy heart;" but a positive one likewise; even the planting all good dispositions in their place; clearly implied in that other expression, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul."

17. These are they to whom the Apostle John gives the venerable title of *Fathers*, who "have known him that is from the beginning;" the eternal Three-One God. One of these expresses himself thus: "I bear about with me an experimental verity and a plenitude of the presence of the ever-blessed Trinity." And those who are fathers in Christ, generally, though I believe not always, enjoy the plerophory, or "full assurance, of hope;" having no more doubt of reigning with him in glory, than if they already saw him coming in the clouds of heaven. But this does not prevent their continually increasing in the knowledge and love of God. While they "rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything

give thanks," they pray in particular, that they may never cease to watch, to deny themselves, to take up their cross daily, to fight the good fight of faith; and against the world, the devil, and their own manifold infirmities; till they are able to "comprehend, with all saints, what is the length, and breadth, and height, and depth, and to know that love of Christ which passeth knowledge;" yea, to "be filled with all the fulness of God."

YARM, June 11, 1788.

SERMON CXI.

ON THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

"Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord."

Jeremiah xxiii. 24.

1. How strongly and beautifully do these words express the omnipresence of God! And can there be, in the whole compass of nature, a more sublime subject? Can there be any more worthy the consideration of every rational creature? Is there any more necessary to be considered, and to be understood, so far as our poor faculties will admit? How many excellent purposes may it answer! What deep instruction may it convey to all the children of men; and more directly to the children of God!

2. How is it then that so little has been wrote on so sublime and useful a subject? It is true, that some of our most eminent writers have occasionally touched upon it; and have several strong and beautiful reflections, which were naturally suggested by it. But which of them has published a regular treatise, or so much as a sermon, upon the head? Perhaps many were conscious of their inability to do justice to so vast a subject. It is possible, there may some such lie hid in the voluminous writings of the last century. But if they are hid, even in their own country, if they are buried in oblivion, it is the same, for any use they are of, as if they had never been wrote.