

## XVI

Verse 4, 5.—Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.  
For they that are after the flesh, &c.

If there were nothing else to engage our hearts to religion, I think this may do it,—that there is so much reason in it. Truly it is the most rational thing in the world, except some revealed mysteries of faith, which are far above reason, but not contrary to it. There is nothing besides in it, but that which is the purest reason. Even that part of it which is most difficult to man, that which concerns the moderating of his lusts and affections, and the regulating his walk and carriage;—there is nothing that Christianity requires in these matters, but that which may be persuaded by most convincing reasons, to be most suitable and comely for man, as man. You may take it in the subject in hand. There is nothing sounds harsher to men, and seems harder in religion, than such a victory over the flesh, such an abstractedness from sensual and earthly things. And yet, truly, there is nothing in the world, that more adorns and beautifies a man, nothing so elevates him above beasts as this, in so much that many natural spirits, void of this saving light, have notwithstanding been taken with somewhat of the beauty of it, and so far enamoured with the love of it, as to account all the world mad and brutish that followed these lower things, and enslaved themselves unto them. I take the two fountains of all the pollutions, disorders, and defilements among men, to be the inconsideration and ignorance of God, that eternal Spirit and Fountain-being, and the ignorance of our own souls, those immortal spirits within us, which are derived from that Fountain-spirit. This is the misery of men, that scarce do they once seriously reflect upon their own spirits, or think what immortal souls are within them, and what affinity these have to the Fountain of all spirits. Therefore, do men basely throw down themselves to the satisfaction of the lusts of the flesh. Now, indeed, this is the very beginning of Christianity, to reduce men from these baser thoughts and employments, to the consideration of their immortal souls

within. And, O how will a Christian blush to behold himself in that light, to see the very image of a beast upon his nature, to look on that slavery and bondage of his far better part, to the worst and brutish part in him,—his flesh!

If a man did wisely consider the constitution of his nature, from its first divine original, and what a thing the soul is, which is truly and more properly himself, than his body; what excellency is in the soul beyond the body, and so, what pre-eminency it advanceth a man unto beyond a beast,—he could not but account religion the very ornament and perfection of his nature. Reason will say, that the spirit should rule and command the body, that flesh is but the minister and servant of the spirit, that there is nothing the proper and peculiar good of man, but that which adorns and rectifies the spirit; that all those external things which men's senses are carried after, with so much violence, do not better a man, as man, but are common to beasts; that in these things, man's happiness as man, doth not all consist, but in some higher and more transcending good, which beasts are not capable of, and which may satisfy the immortal spirit, and not perish in the using, but live with it. All these things, the very natural frame and constitution of man doth convincingly persuade. Now then, may a soul think within itself, O how far am I departed from my original! How far degenerated from that noble and royal dignity, that God by the stamp of his image once put upon me! How is it that I am become a slave and drudge to that baser and brutish part, the flesh? I would have you retire into your own hearts, and ask such things at them. "Man being in honour, and understanding not, is even like the beasts that perish," Truly we are become like beasts, because we consider not that we are men, and so advanced by creation far above beasts. The not reflecting on the immortal, spiritual nature of our souls, hath transformed us, in a manner, into the nature of beasts, perishing beasts. Christianity is the very transforming of a beast into a man, as sin was the deforming of a man into a beast. This is the proper effect of Christianity,—to restore humanity, to elevate it, and purify it from all those defilements and corruptions that were engrossed and incorporated

into it, by the state of subjection to the flesh. And therefore the apostle delineates the nature of it unto us, and draws the difference wide between the natural man and a Christian.

The natures of things are dark and hidden in themselves, but they come to be known to us by their operations and acting. Their inclinations and instincts are known this way. Grace is truly a very spiritual thing, and the nature of it lies high. Yet as Christ could not be hid in the house, neither can grace be hid in the heart,—it will be known by its working. Christ can be better hid in a house than in the heart, because, when he is engaged to restore that heart and soul to its native dignity and pre-eminency over the flesh, this cannot but cause much disturbance in the man, for a season. To change governments, to cast out usurpers, and to restore the lawful and righteous owner to the possession of his right, cannot be done secretly and easily. It will shake the very foundations of a kingdom to accomplish it. So it is here,—the restitution of the soul to the possession of its right and dominion over the flesh,—the casting out of that tyrannous and base usurper, the flesh, cannot be done, except all the man know it, feel it, and in a manner be pained with it. Now, the nature of Christianity doth lay itself open to us in these two especially, in what it minds and savours, and how it causeth to walk. Life is known especially by affection and motion. A feeling, thinking, savouring power, is a living power; so a moving, walking power is a living power, and these are here. The Christian is shortly described by his nature. He is one after the Spirit, not after the flesh; and by the proper characteristical operations of that nature, first, minding or savouring the things of the Spirit, which comprehends his inward thoughts, affections, intentions, and cogitations. All his inward senses are exercised about such objects. And then he is one walking after the Spirit; his motions are in a course of obedience, proceeding from that inward relish or taste that he hath of the things of God. It is not without very good reason, that the name of a Christian is thus expressed,—one after the Spirit. That is his character that expresses his nature unto us. Whether ye look to the original of Christianity, or the prime subject of it, or the chief end of it, it deserves to be called

by this name. The original of it is very high, as high as that eternal Spirit, as high as the God of the spirits of all flesh. Things are like their original, and some way participate of the nature of their causes. "That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit," John 3:6. That which is born of God who is a Spirit, must be spirit, 1 John 5:1. How royal a descent is that! How doth it nobilitate a man's nature! Truly, all other degrees of birth among men are vain imaginary things, that have no worth at all, but in the fancies of men. They put no real excellency in men. But this is only true nobility. This alone doth extract a man *de fœce vulgi*, out of the dregs of the multitude. There is no intrinsic difference between bloods, or natures, but what this makes, this divine birth, this second birth. All other differences are but in opinion, this is in reality. It puts the image of that blessed Spirit upon a man. Truly, such a creature is not begotten in the womb of any natural cause, of any human persuasion, or enticing words of man's wisdom, of any external mercy or judgment. No instruction, no persuasion, no allurement, nor affrightment can make you Christians in the Spirit, till the Spirit blow when it pleaseth, and create you again. It must come from above,—that power that can set your hearts aright, and make them to look straight above.

Christ Jesus came down from heaven unto the earth, and took on our flesh, that so the almighty Spirit might come down to transform our spirits, and lift them up from the earth to the heaven. We cast the seed into the ground of men's hearts, (and alas! it gets entry but in few souls, it is scattered rather on the highway side, and cannot reach into the arable ground of the heart); but it can do nothing without the influence of heaven, except the Spirit beget you again, by that immortal seed of the word. Therefore we would cease our wondering, that all the means of God's word and works do not beget more true Christians. I do rather wonder that any of Adam's wretched posterity should be begotten again, and advanced to so high a dignity, to be born of the Spirit. O that Christians would mind their original, and wonder at it, and study to be like it! If you believe and consider that your descent is from that uncreated Spirit, how powerful might that

be to conform you more and more to him, and to transform more and more of your flesh into spirit! There is nothing will raise up the spirits of the children of princes more, than to know their royal birth and dignity. How should the consideration of this make your spirits suitable to your state or fortunes, as we use to say? You would labour to raise them up to that height of your original, and to walk worthy of that high calling. O that we could learn that instruction from it, which Paul gives, 1 Cor. 1:30, 31, "But of him are ye in Christ; therefore let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord!" Truly, a soul possessed with the meditation of this royal descent from God, could not possibly glory in those inglorious baser things, in which men glory, and could not contain or restrain gloriation and boasting in him. "The glory of many is their shame," because it is their sin, of which they should be ashamed. But suppose that in which men glory, be not shame in itself, as the lawful things of this present world, yet certainly it is a great shame for a Christian to glory in them, or esteem the better of himself for them. If this were minded always,—that we are of God, born of God, what power do you think temptations, or solicitations to sin, would have over us! "He that is born of God sinneth not, he keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not," 1 John 5:18, 19. Truly, this consideration imprinted in the heart, would elevate us above all these baser persuasions of the flesh. This would make sin loathsome and despicable, as the greatest indignity we could do to our own natures. The strength and advantage of sin, is to make us forget what we are, whom we have relation unto,—to drink us drunk with the puddle of the world, or then with our own jealousies and suspicions, that we may forget our birth and state, and so be enticed to any thing. If you would have wherewith to beat back all the fiery darts of the devil, take the shield of this faith and persuasion; how would it silence temptations? "Shall I, who am a ruler, flee," saith Nehemiah? Shall I, who am born of the Spirit; shall I, who am of God in Christ, abase myself to such unworthy and base things? Shall I dishonour my father, and disgrace myself.

Then Christianity's chiefest residence, its royal seat, is in the spirit of man, and so he is one after the Spirit. "Be ye renewed in the spirit of your minds," Eph. 4:23. As it is of a high descent, so it must have the highest and most honourable lodging in all the creation, that is, the spirit of a man. Without this there is no room else fit for it, and suitable to it, in this lower world, "My son give me thine heart," saith wisdom, Prov. 23:26. It cares for nothing besides, if it get not the heart, the inmost cabinet of the imperial city of this isle of man; for "out of it are the issues of life," that flow into all the members. Do not think that grace will lodge one night in your outward man,—that you can put on Christianity upon your countenance or conversation without. Except you admit it into your souls, it can have no suitable entertainment there alone. It is of a spiritual nature, and it must have a spirit to abide in. Every thing is best preserved and entertained by things suitable to its nature; such do incorporate together, and imbosom one with another; whereas things keep a greater distance with things different in nature. A flame will die out among cold stones, without oily matter. This heavenly fire that is descended into the world, can have nothing earthly to feed upon. It must die out, except it get into the immortal spirit, and then furnish, so to speak, perpetual nourishment to it, till at length all the spirit be set on flame, and changed, as it were, into that heavenly substance, to mount up above, from whence it came. Do not think, my beloved, to superinduce true religion upon your outside, and within to be as rotten sepulchres. You must either open your hearts to Christ, or else he will not abide with you. Such a noble guest will not stay in the suburbs of the city, if you take him not into the palace; and truly the palace of our hearts is too unworthy for such a worthy guest, it hath been so defiled by sin. How vile is it? But if you would let him enter, he would wash it and cleanse it for himself.

Will you know then the character of a Christian? He is one much within. He hath retired into his own spirit, to know how it goes with it; and he finds all so disordered and confused, all so unsettled, that he gets so much business to do at home, as he gets no leisure to come much abroad again. It is the misery of men, that they are wholly

without, carried into external things only; and this is the very character of a beast, that it cannot reflect inwardly upon itself, but is wholly spent on things that are presented to the outward senses. There is nothing in which men are more assimilated to beasts than this, that we do not speak in ourselves, or return into our own bosoms, but are wholly occupied about the things that are without us. And thus it fares with us, as with the man that is busy in all other men's matters, and never thinks of his own. His estate must needs ruin; all his affairs must be out of course. Truly, while we are immersed and drowned in external things, our souls are perishing, our inward estate is washing away. All our own affairs, that can only and properly be called ours, are disordered and jumbled. Therefore, Christianity doth first of all recall the wandering and vain spirit of man into itself, as that exhortation is, Psal. 77:6, to "commune with his own heart," to make a diligent search of his own affairs; and, O how doth he find all out of course, as a garden neglected, all overgrown, as a house not inhabited!—all dropping through, in a word, wholly ruinous, through intolerable negligence! It was the first turn of the prodigal to return to himself, "he came to himself," Luke 15:17. Truly, sin is not only an aversion from God, but it is an estrangement from ourselves, from our souls, from our own happiness. It is a madness that takes away the use of reason and consideration of our own selves. But grace is a conversion, not only to God, but to ourselves. It bringeth a man home to his heart, maketh him sober again who was beside himself. Hence that phrase, 1 Kings 8:47, "When they shall turn to their own hearts, and return." It is the most laborious vanity, or the vainest labour, to compass heaven and earth,—to be so busied abroad,—to know other things, and then to know and consider nothing of that, which of all things most nearly concerns us,—ourselves. "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?" for that is himself. And what shall it profit to know all, and not know his soul, to be every where but where he ought to be. Well, a Christian is one called home from vain impertinent diversions, one that is occupied most about his soul and spirit, how to have all the disorders he finds in himself ordered, all those distempers cured, all those defilements washed. This is the

business he is about in this world, "to wash his heart from wickedness," Jer. 4:14,—to cleanse even vain thoughts, and shut up from that ordinary repair, his own heart. He is about the inclosing it, to be a garden to the Well-beloved, to bring forth sweet fruits. He is about the renewing of it, the adorning it with the new man, against that day of our Bridegroom's appearing, and bringing him up to celebrate the marriage. Though he be in the flesh, yet he is most taken up with his spirit, how to have it restored to that primitive beauty and excellency, the image of God in it; how to be clothed with humility, and to put on the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit,—that he accounts his beauty; how to rule his own spirit,—that he accounts only true fortitude; and thinks it a greater vassalage and victory to overcome himself than his enemy, and esteems it the noblest revenge, not to be like to other men that wrong him. He is occupied about the highest gain and advantage, viz. to save his spirit and soul; and accounts all loss to this,—to bring Jesus Christ into the heart, that this is the jewel he digs for, and esteems all dung in comparison of it.

If you be Christians after the Spirit, no doubt, you are busied this way about your spirit. For others, they are busied about the flesh,—to make provision for its lusts; and there needs no other mark to know them by. Alas! poor souls, that you have never yet adverted that you have spirits, immortal beings within you, which must survive this dust, this corruptible flesh; what will ye do, when you cannot have flesh to care for? When your spirits can have nothing to be carried forth into, but must eternally dwell within the bosom of an evil conscience, and be tormented with that worm, the bitter remembrance of the neglect of your spirits, and utter estrangement from them, while you were in the body. Then you must be confined within your own evil consciences, and be imprisoned there for ever, because, while yet there was time and season, you were always abroad, and everywhere, but within your own hearts and consciences,—and is not that a just recompense?



Then again, as Christianity descends from the Father of Spirits, into the spirit of a man, to lodge there for a while, it doth at length bring up the spirit of a man, and unites it to that eternal Spirit; and so, as the original was high and divine, the end is high too. It issues out of that Fountain, and returns with the heart of man, to imbosom itself in that again. And truly, this is the great excellency of true religion above all those things you are busied about, that it elevates the spirit of a man to God, that it will never rest, till it have carried it above to the Fountain-spirit. Our spirits are sparks and chips, to speak so with reverence, of that divine Being; but now they are wholly immersed and sunk into the flesh, and into the earth by sin, till grace come down and renew them, and extract them out of that dunghill, and purify them. And then they are, as in a state of violence, always striving to mount upwards, till they be embodied, or rather inspirited, so to speak, in that original Spirit, till they be wholly united to their own element, the divine nature. You know Christ's prayer, John 17. "That they may be one, as we are one, I in them, and they in me, that they may be made perfect in one," ver. 22, 23. Then spirits have attained perfection, then "will they rest from their labours," when they are one with him. This is the only centre of spirits, in which they can rest immoveable. You find all the desires and affections of the saints are as so many breathings upward, pantings after union with him, and longings to be intimately present with the Lord. Therefore a Christian is one after the Spirit, groaning to be all spirit, to have the earthly house of this tabernacle dissolved, and to be clothed upon with that house from heaven. He knows with Paul, that he is not at home, though he be at home in the body, because the body is that which separates from the Lord, which partition wall he would willingly have taken down, that his spirit might be at home, present with the Lord, 2 Cor. 6:1, &c. "Who knoweth (saith Solomon) the spirit of a man that ascends upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth," Eccles. 3:21. Truly, the natural motion of man's spirit, should be to ascend upward to God who gave it. When this frail and broken vessel of the body is dissolved into the elements, the higher and purer nature that lodged within it should fly upwards to heaven; even as the spirit of

the beasts, being but the prime and finer part of the body, not different in nature from the earth, naturally falls down to the earth with the body, and is dissolved into the elements. But I think, the consideration of that woful disorder, that sin hath brought into the world, that all things in man are so degenerated and become brutish, both his affections and his conversation, that carnal and sensual lusts have the whole dominion over men; I say, the serious and earnest view of this might make a man suspect and call in question, whether or not there be any difference between men and beasts. Whether or not there be any spirit in the one of a higher nature than in the other? Truly, it would half persuade, that there is no immortal spirit in man, else how could he be such a beast all his time, "serving diverse lusts." Can it be possible, might one think, that there is any spirit in men, that can ascend to heaven, when there is no motion thither, to be observed among men? I beseech you, consider this,—the spirit must either ascend or descend when it goes out of the body, as now in affection and endeavour it ascends or descends while it is in the body. There is an indispensable connection between these. What way soever the spirit aims at, which way soever it turns and directs its flight, thither it shall be constrained to go eternally. Do you think, my beloved, while you are in the body, to bow down yourselves to the earth, to descend into the service of the flesh all your time, never once seriously to rise up in the consideration of eternity, or lift up your heads above temporal and earthly things, and yet in the close to ascend unto heaven? No, no, do not deceive yourselves; you must go forward. This life and eternity make one straight line, either of ascent or descent, of happiness or misery; and since you have bowed down always, while in the body, there is no rising up after it. Forward you must go, and that is downward to that element, into which you transformed your spirits; that is, the earth, or below the earth,—to hell. Your spirits have most affinity with these, and down they must go, as a stone to the earth. But if you would desire to have your spirits ascending up to heaven, when they are let out of this prison, the body, take heed which way they turn. Bend and strive, while here in the body. If your strugglings be to be upward to God, if you have discovered that blessedness which is in

him, and if this be the predominant of your spirit, that carries it upwards in desires and endeavours, and turns it off the base study of satisfying the flesh, and the base love of the world; if thy soul be mounting aloft, on these wings of holy desires of a better life than can be found in any thing below, certainly the motion of thy spirit will be in a straight line upward. When thou leavest thy dust to the earth, angels wait to carry that spirit to that bosom of Christ, where it longed and liked most to be. But devils do attend the souls of most part of men, to thrust them down below the earth, because they did still bend down to the earth.

## XVII

Verse 5—For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, &c.

Though sin hath taken up the principal and inmost cabinet of the heart of man, though it hath fixed its imperial throne in the spirit of man, and makes use of all the powers and faculties in the soul to accomplish its accursed desires, and fulfil its boundless lusts; yet it is not without good reason expressed in Scripture, ordinarily under the name of flesh, and a body of death; and men dead in sins are said to be yet in the flesh. The reason is, partly because this was the rise of man's first ruin, or the chieftest ingredient in his first sin,—his hearkening to the suggestions of his flesh, against the clear light and knowledge of his spirit. The apple was beautiful to look on, and sweet to the taste, and this engaged man. Thus the voluntary debasement and subjection of the spirit, which was breathed in of God, unto the service of that dust which God had appointed to serve it, hath turned into a necessary slavery, so that the flesh being put in the throne, cannot be cast out; and this is the righteous judgment of God upon man, that he that would not serve so good and so high a Lord, should be made a drudge and slave to the very dregs of the creation,—partly