

DISCOURSE.

I CORINTHIANS, 15. 53.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

THE hope of existing after the present life was not utterly lost, from among mankind, even amidst the darkness and corruptions of paganism ; but the prospect was so obscure and the hope so uncertain that it could afford but small consolation in their last moments to the wisest and most virtuous men of the heathen world. And, to all others, it was so blended with the melancholy phantoms of a superstitious imagination that it served rather to oppress than to shed any comfort on the hour of death. But, in the gospel of our blessed Saviour, the doubtful expectations of nature are rendered clear and certain ; the obscurities of reason are enlightened ; and to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, there is added a principle which the human mind had never dared before to conceive ; I mean, that of the resurrection of the body, and its future and eternal re-union with the soul in a happy state of existence.

This doctrine, which is peculiarly precious to man, inasmuch as it brings our future existence more within the comprehension of the mind, and gives it a stronger interest in the heart, was received at first with astonishment and incredulity.

equally by Jews and Grecks. Against the objections or the doubts of the one and of the other, the apostle, in this chapter, demonstrates both its possibility, and its conformity to reason, and points out the unspeakable consolation which the pious hope, that *this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality*, is fitted to impart to every true believer, amidst the various trials and sorrows of this life.

Let me invite you, therefore, to employ with me a few moments, while we are here assembled in the presence of Almighty God, in meditating on the resurrection of the body—the certainty, and importance of the doctrine, its practical uses, and its spiritual consolations. And may it impart to us those holy comforts, those blessed supports under all the distressing vicissitudes of the world, and finally, that victory over the fears of death, which amidst labors, and persecutions, and the certain anticipations of martyrdom for the cause of his Redeemer, formed the joy and triumph of the apostle himself!

In the first place, let us contemplate the evidences of the resurrection of the body, notwithstanding the insurmountable objections which the laws of nature are said to oppose to it.

It has been at all times, as well as in the age of the apostles, an objection to this doctrine—*With what bodies do they come?* Can these corporeal systems, after they have been long dissolved into their original elements, and variously dispersed by winds and waves in a thousand different directions; after they have successively passed perhaps

into a thousand different bodies, be again collected, and re-organized in the same body which perished at death? If it were possible, would it be a reasonable object of desire, in that spiritual and immortal state, that the soul should be again united to a sluggish mass which might be regarded as its former prison, which impaired its active powers, and was, perhaps, the seat of all the errors of reason, and of all the disorders of the passions?

The sacred writer, who presents these objections, answers them by a beautiful analogy, taken from the grain which the husbandman casts into the earth. It seems to perish; it becomes a mass of putrefaction, like the body laid in the grave; but still there is a delicate and almost imperceptible germ which survives, and presently assumes a new and much more beautiful form. Can we doubt but that the stalk, the foliage, the flowers which display such beauty to the eye, and the fruit with which the tree is loaded, were all included in that minute and invisible particle which receives a new life in the midst of death? And, may not the soul, (it is the suggestion of an ancient philosopher) in parting from its present abode, carry along with it that material principle which shall become the germ hereafter, of a new and more glorious organization? Shall we deem this impossible, because the fineness and subtilty of this principle at present, eludes our perceptions? But, are we not constantly surrounded with forms of matter not less imperceptible to sense? Is that mysterious power obvious to our sight or feelings, which

points the needle to the pole; or that mightier influence which binds to one centre the vast orbs that compose our system, which, however, is constantly operating within us and around us?

Learn another lesson on the resurrection from the numerous transmutations of the insect tribes which daily pass under our view. A deformed and sluggish grub weaves a tomb for itself. It seems to become extinct; but, in a little time, we see it mount into the air in a new form, disporting with active wing, and adorned with the most beautiful colours. Of spiritual and celestial objects, which are so far above the reach of our present faculties, frequently we can judge only by analogy. And although such analogies can never convey adequate images of those *things which eye hath not seen, and of which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive*, yet they serve to throw some feeble rays of light upon subjects, otherwise so obscure, and to offer some foundation on which the mind, exhausted by its efforts to conceive them, can rest. Look round thee then, O man! who thinkest that the dead cannot be raised from the dust, and from that profound oblivion in which they seem to be forever lost; and does not all nature teach thee important lessons, and present thee with impressive images of the future resurrection of the saints? Behold the resurrection, the new creation, which every vernal season produces! Do we not see plants and flowers of every species; in a word, all the glories of the year, springing, if I may speak so, from the tomb of winter? These images, indeed, are only imperfect illustrations, adapted to the

weakness of our senses, of that great object of faith ; the only solid and immovable foundation of a christian's hope is, the infallible promise of the spirit of truth : *But now is Christ risen, and become the first fruits of them that sleep. The time is coming when all they who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth, they that have done well to the resurrection of life and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.*

Another objection against this doctrine is drawn from the ills and inconveniences, to which the soul is subjected by its union with the body in the present life. This sluggish and unwieldy mass of matter, is supposed to be rather the prison than the helpful companion of the active spirit, to cloud and darken the clearness of its preceptions, and to oppress and enchain the activity of its powers.

Although this should be true of the present gross and disordered bodies which we inhabit, yet such is the nature and order of human spirits that it is only by being united to some corporeal and organized system that they can receive any ideas. And at the resurrection of the just, all that is gross, all that is disordered, all that is impure, shall be forever separated from the bodies of the saints raised to immortal life ; and their powers, their activity, and glory shall correspond with the exalted rank which the soul shall hold in the scale of being in her celestial state. Do you ask, then, if they can be the same bodies which we inhabited here, which shall assume such a different and glorious appearance ? My brethren do we not continually

behold the same elements capable of receiving the most various forms? What resemblance is there between those beautiful and active tribes which fill the air with their harmony, and the lifeless egg from which they have sprung? Do not the same elements compose the unsightly clay which we trample beneath our feet, and the resplendent diamond which glitters in the crowns of princes? The lightning which in its destructive course, rends oaks and rocks to pieces, and the mild and glorious rays of the sun that give life, and health, and beauty to the whole universe! Accordingly the apostle hath said, *all flesh is not the same*, in its outward form and visible appearance; *there is one flesh of men, and another of beasts; there is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars*, though all proceeding from the same light. Not less difference, O believers! may you expect to find between your present tenements of clay, which, at death, return to their original dust, and those celestial temples in which the glorified spirit shall dwell forever. Raised to heaven by the power and love of your Redeemer, to inhabit those glorious worlds of light above, this corporeal system will be conformed in beauty and perfection to its immortal habitations. *This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. Sown in weakness it shall be raised in power; sown in dishonor, it shall be raised in glory; sown a natural or gross and animal body, it shall be raised a spiritual body; that is, a body infinitely refined and purified from the dregs of matter, and*

possessing, at once, both the rapid energy and the imperishable nature of spirit. It shall there be invested with new powers and be fitted with new organs, adapted to its celestial state ; and, having attained its highest perfection, shall shine with undecaying lustre in the kingdom of God.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body, therefore, as it is explicitly taught in the holy scriptures, so it contains nothing which violates reason, and which is not even supported and rendered credible by the course of nature.

Let us then in the next place, take a brief review of the importance of this doctrine. I mean not merely the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, but that of the resurrection of the body, and its immortal existence in re-union with the soul.

In the first place, it meets, in the best possible manner, our ideas and hopes of happiness. Spirits there may be of a superior order, which have no connexion with any material system, and are not dependent for their knowledge or their enjoyments on any sensible organs. But of their modes of existence, and their sources of happiness, we can frame no conception. All our ideas, and all our pleasures come to us through the medium of sense. Our spirits are of such an order, as has been before remarked, that their knowledge, their felicity, their perfection depend on their connexion in some way, with a corporeal system ; every thing connects us with the body, every thing attaches us to the body ; even the severest afflictions, the keenest pains, do not quench in the soul this strong and inextinguishable love of its com-

panion, unless guilt, by creating despair, has first induced a dread of future existence. Hence the apostle has said ; *We who are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not that we would be unclothed ; not that it is the object of these anxious desires to be disembodied, but clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven ;* with that celestial, that regenerated body which shall be freed from all the pains and imperfections of this mortal flesh, and which is only our present nature exalted to its ultimate perfection and glory. *The earnest expectation of the creature,* continues the same apostle, *waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God, at the resurrection of the just. The whole creation groaneth, and even those who have received the most precious gifts of the spirit groan within themselves, waiting for the redemption of the body.* What, indeed, would be the pleasure of existence to the soul, if we can suppose it conscious of existence, deprived of ^{the} action, and the aids of the senses, which are at present, the only inlets of its knowledge, and the chief sources of its enjoyments ?

The christian doctrine of the resurrection, then, corresponds with the dearest hopes and wishes of the human heart. It assists, likewise the perceptions of faith. We are not now left in total uncertainty and darkness with regard to the nature of our future being. Some conjectures we can frame concerning it, without the hazard of being lost entirely in the unsubstantial regions of fancy. A future existence is no longer an inscrutable mystery. Although it offers to our hopes, a condition

of being inconceivably improved above the present, still we can discern between them some points of resemblance, which present to us ideas on that subject, at once intelligible to reason, and infinitely precious to the human heart. There, believer! your faculties will be employed as here, but with an activity and vigor, inconceivably augmented, in searching into the wonderful works of God; in admiring the order, the beauty and harmony of the universal system; in adoring, and with the angels, endeavoring to penetrate the astonishing mysteries of divine grace to man. Blessed and eternal sources of knowledge, and of happiness! The faculties which you now feebly exert in the search of truth, in the love and service of your Creator, your Redeemer, and your fellow men, will be new created in celestial vigor, and raised in a state of undescribable excellence and perfection. All the obstacles to your advancement in knowledge, at present, arising from the narrowness of this corporeal sphere; the imperfection of these mortal powers, the inactivity and sluggishness of these gross and earthly organs, will be forever removed.— That carnal and disordered mass which now renders the body the seat of impure passions, and impedes the holy aspirations of the soul, will be refined and purified. A body of celestial and incorruptible light; a *spiritual body*, as it is stiled by the apostle, that is, a body, active and unembarrassed in its movements, like spirit, rapid as imagination and thought, will, in heaven, be the fit instrument of the glorified soul in its sublime and blissful employments.

From the doctrine of the resurrection of the same body results another happy anticipation, the future knowledge of our pious friends with whom we have been connected on earth; the re-union in the highest felicity, of the same hearts which have been united here in the tenderest affections. Delightful and ravishing hope! What pictures may imagination frame of friendships renewed in heaven; of the mutual joys of pious friends who meet on that happy and eternal shore, escaped from all the ills and dangers of life; of their sweet intercourse, purified from all the passions and weaknesses of the flesh which disturb the harmony of this world; of the range they may be permitted to enjoy in each other's society, among the innumerable glories of the heavenly world to nourish their devotion, and to diversify their happiness; of those flights which they may be allowed to take together into distant provinces of the universal empire of God, to collect the knowledge of nature, or to admire and adore him in the astonishing operations of his hands; or of the rapture with which every ray of the Sun of righteousness will penetrate their hearts when they turn their faces towards the heavenly Zion, the more immediate residence of the divine glory to raise their common devotions to the Father of the universe, and to recognize at the foot of his throne, their mutual and boundless obligations to redeeming love. But restraining all unlicensed excursions of fancy; exquisite, and now ineffable, must be the felicity, springing from a thousand different sources which you shall enjoy from meeting, in those blissful

and everlasting habitations, the friends whom you have most tenderly and affectionately loved upon earth. Oh! how is the religion of our ever blessed Saviour adapted to the best, and most excellent feelings of human nature! How is it fitted to cherish the noblest and sweetest sympathies of the human heart! Away with that cold philosophy which would destroy these precious consolations! which, at death, would devote our existence to eternal oblivion, and hopelessly rend asunder those delightful unions which form the dearest portion of ourselves; the chief joy of our being! Yes; christian friends! beloved relatives! though you may be separated by death from those whom you have most loved; although you may often be clothed with the emblems of mourning which but feebly express the deep affliction which penetrates your hearts, religion points you to a source of divine and eternal consolations: You are separated for a moment, only to be restored to each other in a most blissful and eternal union. A tear, a pang you are allowed to give to nature; but it is the command of the gospel, *weep not as those who have no hope*. Jesus! Saviour! Who art the first fruit of the resurrection from the dead! Who art thyself the resurrection and the life! We adore and bless thee who hast given this consolation to suffering humanity!

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body seems also to be intimately connected with our accountable state in this world, and with our future judgment. In this view it will have the most important moral influence upon the conduct of man-

kind. If the soul were not to be re-united to the body, not being the same persons hereafter, that we are here, might we not lose the consciousness of a former existence, and of our accountability for the actions of a being, in all respects, so different? But believing in the resurrection of the body, in the completeness of the same person, in the consciousness which each one shall have of all that he has done in a previous state of existence, then every action, every word, every thought, becomes important in reference to eternity; and is continually impressing some colour, or some shade of colour on our everlasting destinies. The body which shall be raised being included in the present, being of its substance, having the same organization, the whole man shall preserve the same dispositions, habits, and affections, which form the character in the present life. These shall decide our condition in happiness or in misery, on which the judgment of heaven shall fix its everlasting seal. What we have been, we shall be forever. The impressions which we receive, the pursuits in which we have been engaged, the inclinations which have been created and cherished in the heart, in our probationary existence shall form the basis of our character throughout an immortal duration.

What, then, are the conclusions, what are the exhortations we should derive from these serious and interesting truths? The same which the apostle has already urged on all christians. *Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies.* Purify yourselves from *all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.* Dishonor not your bodies by intemperance and lust, for *they*

are the temples of the living God. And never let it escape your memory, and attention, in whatever you undertake, or do, in necessary business, or in lawful amusement, in the plans of deliberate design, or under the impulse of more sudden passion, that *we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, to receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Christians! What sublime, and glorious prospects does our holy religion present to the imagination; what blessed and delightful hopes to the heart! I speak of sincere believers. For although the doctrine of the resurrection applies also to the *wicked* who *will rise to shame and everlasting contempt*; yet the apostle in this passage, confines his reflections wholly to the destiny of the righteous. But what tongue of men or of angels, can describe the heavenly Jerusalem, the celestial Eden, the paradise of God, those scenes of everlasting peace and blessedness, those mansions illuminated by the eternal splendors of the Son of righteousness, those bodies of light, those souls of fire? It would require the eloquence of heaven to speak of them as they deserve; to understand them fully would require the ripened powers of immortality. *For eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for those who love him.* Christians! disciples and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ! are you destined to such glory and happiness? Have you the same foundation for this precious hope as for your religion itself? Let it

prove to you the most powerful motive to cultivate in your hearts those affections of piety, in your lives those habits of holiness, which will prepare you for your eternal existence in the heavens. By temperance, by purity, by the exercise of every virtue, endeavor to assimilate more and more these perishing bodies, to that pure and celestial nature in which you shall hereafter behold the glory of God.

Listen, christians, to one reflection more on this interesting subject! The hope of the resurrection strips death of its greatest terrors. Death is no longer what it appears to be—the destruction of our being. It yields to the grave only the grossest parts of these mortal bodies. The finer essence shall still cleave to the soul, and be improved with immortal vigor and glory at *the resurrection of the just*. The stroke of death shall cause no intermission in the consciousness of a happy existence. Even if the soul itself, according to the opinion of some good men, should sleep till the revivification of universal nature, there is no perception of time in the insensibility of sleep. The moment of our dissolution shall touch on that of our restoration to life. The grave, sanctified by the death, triumphed over by the resurrection of our blessed Saviour, is now, to all his disciples, only the gate to a new, a glorious, and immortal existence. *This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. O Death! where, then, is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?* Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Amen!