

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 15

Ver. 1. *Then drew near to him*, etc.] To “Jesus”, as the Persic and Ethiopic versions express it: this was on the sabbath day, and either when he was in the Pharisee’s house, where he was invited to dinner, (^{<401>}Luke 14:1) or rather when he came out of it, when the multitude, who could not come near him whilst there, took the opportunity of gathering about him;

even all the publicans and sinners; whom the Pharisee would not admit into his house, it being contrary to their traditions to eat, and drink, and converse with persons of such an infamous character; (see Gill on ^{<400>}Matthew 9:10”) (see Gill on ^{<401>}Matthew 9:11”) The word “all” is omitted in the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Persic, and Ethiopic versions; but the Arabic version has it, and the Greek copies; and signifies that there were a very large number of them, even all that were in that place, and in the adjacent cities and towns, that got together

for to hear him, or “from him”, as the Arabic version; or “doctrine” from him, as the Persic version adds: these having heard much of him; and it may be, might be under some remorse of conscience on account of their vicious lives, came to hear him preach.

Ver. 2. *And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured*, etc.] When they saw the easy access these wicked men had to Christ; and that he stopped and stayed with them, and very freely imparted instructions to them: saying,

this man receiveth sinners. The Persic version reads, “publicans and sinners”, as in the preceding verse: the word “man” is not in the original text, it is only “this”; which is to be understood not by way of eminence, as this great person, this prophet, this master in Israel; but by way of diminution and reproach, this fellow; as it is sometimes supplied: the word “man” be very rightly inserted, for they took him to be a mere man; though it is certain he was more than a man, even the true and mighty God; and therefore was able to save those sinners that came to him: and great condescension and grace did he show in receiving them who were “sinners”, not only by nature, but by practice; and not merely guilty of

common infirmities, but were notorious sinners, covetous, extortioners, oppressors of the poor, and very debauched persons; and such as these Christ “receives”: hence no man should be discouraged from coming to Christ, on account of sin; all that do come to him, should come as sinners, for he receives them as such; nor does he receive any for any worthiness there is in them: these persons he received first at his Father's hand, as he did all the elect, as his portion, and to be preserved and saved by him; with all gifts, grace, blessings, and promises for them; and in consequence of this, he receives them upon their coming to him as sinners, into his open love and affection, into his arms; which denotes communion and protection; into his house and family, and not only to hear him preach, or preached, but to converse and eat with him at his table, and even to live by faith upon him; and when he has freed them from all their sins, he will receive them to himself in glory. And there is the greatest reason imaginable to believe, that Christ still does, and will receive sinners; since he came to save the chief of sinners; and has bore their sins, and died for them; and now makes intercession for transgressors; and by the ministers of the word calls sinners to repentance.

And eateth with them; as he did in the houses of Matthew the publican, and of Zaccheus; (see ^{<11910>}Matthew 9:10 ^{<1147>}Luke 14:7) each of which occasioned great murmurings among the Pharisees; and who therefore traduced him as a friend of publicans and sinners; and he is indeed so in the best sense: and not only did he eat with them corporeally, but in a spiritual sense, as he still does; admitting them into his house to eat of the provisions of it, to live on him the bread of life, to sup with him, and he with them; and feeding and delighting himself in the exercise of those graces, which he himself is the donor and author of, in them.

Ver. 3. *And he spake this parable unto them*, etc.] To the Pharisees, for their conviction and confutation; and to the publicans and sinners for their encouragement; and in vindication of himself; and not only this, but the other two, concerning the lost piece of money, and the prodigal son, which were said at this time, and on the same occasion;

saying, as follows.

Ver. 4. *What man of you having an hundred sheep*, etc.] A flock of sheep, consisting of such a number; (see Gill on “^{<11812>}Matthew 18:12”),

if he lose one of them, by straying from the flock,

doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, upon the common where they were feeding,

and go after that which is lost until he find it? by which parable Christ vindicates his conduct in conversing with sinners, and neglecting the Scribes and Pharisees; for if it was right for an owner of an hundred sheep, when he had lost one of them, to leave all the rest, and go in search after that one till he had found it; then it was right in Christ to do what he did. The Jewish nation seems to be designed “by the hundred sheep”, who are frequently represented as a flock of sheep, (^{497A}Psalm 77:20, 95:7, 100:3, ^{464D}Ezekiel 34:2,3,30,31) which are divided into ninety nine, and one: for by the “ninety nine” left in the wilderness, cannot be meant angels, as some have thought; for angels are never called sheep; and besides, the one lost sheep is of the same kind with the ninety and nine; and, according to this sense, must design an angel, or angels likewise; whereas none of the fallen angels are sought up, recovered, and saved. Moreover, when Christ became incarnate, he did not leave the angels; they accompanied and attended him in his state of humiliation; and much less in a wilderness, and still less can heaven be so called; to which may be added, that the angels in heaven are distinguished from the ninety nine as well as from the one lost sheep in (^{421D}Luke 15:7,10) nor can elect men be designed by them, who are already called by grace, whether they be in heaven or on earth; for though they in heaven are the spirits of just men made perfect, and are in a state that need no repentance, yet it cannot be said of them, that they went not astray, as in (^{481B}Matthew 18:13) for all God's people have been like sheep going astray, and were as such considered when Christ was here on earth, and bore their sins; and especially those could never be said to be left in a wilderness: nor the saints on earth: for though they are just persons, being justified by the righteousness of Christ, yet they daily need repentance; nor can it be said of them that they went not astray; nor are they left by Christ in the wilderness of this world; nor can there be more joy in heaven over one repenting sinner, than over these; but the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees, that murmured at our Lord's receiving sinners, are meant. These were sheep, at least were in sheep's clothing; they were nominal professors, and belonged to the Jewish fold, or national church state; their number was ninety nine, to one; which is not to be taken strictly, as though only one in a hundred of them were saved; but it shows, that the greater part of the Jews were of this sort. The dividing of an

hundred after this manner, into ninety nine and one, was usual with the Jews; so in their traditions ^{f447}, concerning distributing filberts to the poor,

“R. Simeon says, if “ninety nine” say “divide”, and “one” says spoil, or scatter, they hearken to him, because he speaks according to the constitution; but of a vine and date, it is not so: if “ninety and nine” say spoil, and “one” says divide, they hearken to him, for he speaks according to the constitution.”

And elsewhere ^{f448} they say,

““ninety and nine” die by an (evil) eye, and “one” by the hand of heaven; R. Chanina and Samuel, both of them say, “ninety and nine” die by cold, and “one” by the hand of heaven — R. Samuel bar Nachman, in the name of R. Jonathan says, “ninety and nine” die by heat, and “one” by the hand of heaven; and the Rabbans say, “ninety and nine” die by transgression, and “one” by the hand of heaven. Says R. Eleazar, “ninety and nine” die by bitterness, and “one” by the hand of heaven.”

And in another place ^{f449} it is said,

““ninety and nine” die by an evil eye, and “one” by the way of the earth;”

in the common way: once more it is said ^{f450},

“of the “hundred” cries which a woman cries, when she sits upon the stool (in travail), “ninety and nine” are death, and “one” for life.”

And this way of speaking also prevailed in other eastern nations, as in Arabia; in the Alcoran of Mahomet ^{f451} there is such an expression as this;

“this my brother had “ninety nine sheep”, and I had only “one” ewe.”

The “one lost sheep” in this parable, though it may include all the elect of God, and be accommodated to a single elect sinner, yet chiefly respects the chosen of God among the Jews; which were very few, a remnant according to the election of grace: and which lay among the profane part of them, the publicans and sinners; Who are particularly pointed out here, as appears from the context: these are called “sheep”, even before conversion; not

because they had the agreeable properties of sheep, for they were all the reverse; nor could some things be said of them before as after, as, that they heard the voice of Christ, and followed him; nor because they were unprejudiced against, and predisposed to receive the Gospel: but they are so called by anticipation, because they would be so; or rather in virtue of electing grace, by which they were chosen, and separated from others, and made the care and charge of Christ the great shepherd, and were the sheep of his hand: these are represented as going astray from the shepherd, and from the fold, and out of the right way; and who being like sheep, stupid and insensible of their danger, wander about, and never return of themselves till they are returned to, and by the great shepherd and bishop of souls. And in their unregenerate estate they are lost sheep, not irretrievably and eternally lost, as the world's goats; for though they are lost in Adam, yet not in Christ; and though lost in themselves, so as there is no possibility of ever recovering and saving themselves; yet as they were preserved in Christ, they are recovered and saved by him; who is the owner and proprietor of the whole flock, of all the "hundred" sheep, of the whole body of the Jewish nation; who were his by creation, and by being chosen from, and above all other people; and were distinguished by peculiar favours, had the "Shekinah", and presence of God among them, and his worship, word, and ordinances. Christ was peculiarly promised to them, and was born of them; and was a minister of the circumcision, being sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: though the "ninety and nine" were not his sheep in the most peculiar sense, or in such sense as the "one" lost sheep, which were his by his Father's gift, as all the elect are; hence he knows them, calls them, and receives them, and keeps them, and highly values them: he had them, they were put into his hands, he took the care and charge of there, he undertook to bring them in, to feed them, to die for them, and save them; and they are his by purchase, and he asserts his right to them, by calling them by his grace, and will distinguish them as his own, at the last day: and now, because of the different interest Christ has in the ninety and nine, and the one, different regards are had to them; the ninety and nine, the self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees,

he leaves in the wilderness, in a state of unregeneracy; so called, because in those that are in such a state, nothing is sown or planted, what grows there is natural; there is no seed of grace, no plants of pleasure, no ingrafted word, no fruits of righteousness, nothing but thorns and briers, of sins and corruptions: and also because of the want of provisions; no bread

of life, nor water of life; no sincere milk of the word, no breasts of consolation; nothing but husks, and bread of deceit: and it is like a wilderness, because of solitariness; such as are in this state, are alone, without God, and Christ, and the blessed Spirit; they are aliens from the people of God, and converse with none but wicked men, comparable to savage beasts of the desert: moreover, it may be so called, because of the various perplexing cross ways in it; the ways of sin are many, and crooked, and dark; and indeed, such are the religious ways of unregenerate men: to which may be added, that it bears this name, because of the danger of it; for such as are in it are exposed to beasts of prey; particularly to Satan, the red dragon, and roaring lion; and to pits, gins, and snares, to hellfire, destruction, and misery. Christ's "leaving" persons in such a state, supposes they were in it, antecedent to their being left: man was originally placed in a garden, sinning against God, he forfeited his happy situation, and was drove out from it; and wandering from God he fell into this wilderness state. Christ does not lead any into it, but leaves them in it; which is done in consequence of his Father's act of preterition, or passing them by when he chose others; and this he does, when he does not call them by his grace, as he does others; does not manure, till, and cultivate them as he does his own husbandry and vines; makes no provision of food and pasture for them; leaves them to themselves, and without the enjoyment of himself; to follow their own ways, without a guide, and to beasts of prey without a guard. Now the persons he thus leaves are such whom the Father has left out in his choice and covenant; and who left Christ, rejected and despised him; and were persons that made great pretensions to religion, were righteous in their own eyes, and in their own account never were astray, nor needed repentance. On the other hand, the one lost sheep, the chosen of God among publicans and sinners, a special regard is had to them: Christ

goes after that which is lost until he find it; not after all mankind; for though they are all lost, yet they are not all redeemed by Christ; nor are they made sensible of their lost condition; nor effectually called by grace; nor brought home: nor does he go after the ninety nine, for Christ came not to call the righteous; though these were lost, and irretrievably too, yet they were not sensible of their condition: but God's elect among the Jews are the persons here said to be lost; to show their common condition with the rest of mankind; to express the love of Christ towards them the more; and to magnify the riches of his grace in their salvation: these he went after in redemption, he came forth from his Father, and came down from heaven

for their sakes; he died to gather them together, and represented them all in his sufferings and death; he bore all their sins, and made reconciliation for them, and procured the full pardon of them; he satisfied the law and justice of God, wrought out an everlasting righteousness, and obtained eternal redemption, and a complete salvation for them: and he went after them in the effectual calling; before conversion an elect sinner is without Christ, and goes astray from him; nor does he ever come to Christ till Christ comes after him, and lays hold upon him; he sends his ministers after such, and his Spirit into them, and comes himself, and takes possession of them. To find his lost sheep by redeeming grace he came into this world, a world of wickedness, sorrow, and trouble, of cruelty, and barbarity; and the reason of his coming here was, because his sheep were here; he came after them, and on their account: and to find them by effectual calling, he still comes into the world by his word and Spirit; God's elect are in the world, Christ sends his Gospel into it, and by his Spirit and grace comes and separates them from the men of it. In (~~4082~~ Matthew 18:12) he is said to go "into the mountains" after his lost sheep; which, with respect to redemption, may denote the difficulties that lay in the way of it; such as his incarnation, obedience, sufferings and death, and the many enemies he had to grapple with and subdue; and with respect to calling grace, may express the state and condition God's elect are in by nature, being on the mountains of sin, of Sinai, of the law, and of their own righteousness. Now Christ goes after them "till he finds" them; which denotes continuance, his indefatigable industry and diligence, his resolution and courage, and his success. The reasons why he thus goes after them are not their number, for they are the fewest of all; nor their nature, which is no better than others, nor any previous dispositions, or good characters, for those designed here were publicans and sinners; nor any future improvements and service by them, for they were the base and foolish things of this world; nor because near at hand, and so easily looked up, for they were afar off; but because of his love to them, and the relation between them as shepherd and sheep; and because of his Father's will, and his own obligation by covenant; and because of his own interest and glory.

Ver. 5. *And when he hath found it*, etc.] In a sad plight and condition: so Christ finds his sheep in a most desolate one, in a pit, in the mire and clay of nature; in the paw of the roaring lion, Satan; helpless, hopeless, wretched, miserable, and naked; and not only starving, famishing, and dying, but even dead in trespasses and sins: and finding them with respect

to redemption, designs his procuring eternal salvation for them; and with regard to calling, his laying hold upon them by his Spirit and grace, and bringing them to a sense of themselves, and to the knowledge of himself. There are several things which Christ does to his sheep when he has found them, which are not here expressed, but understood: finding them dead in sin he speaks life into them; he calls them by name, and asserts his property in them; he takes them out of the pit of nature; he rescues them out of the hands of Satan; he washes them from their filthiness, and heals all their diseases; he feeds and refreshes them; he covers them with his robe of righteousness; he beautifies and adorns them, and brings them home in the manner after described:

he layeth it on his shoulders; he does not put them on their own legs to go alone; nor does he lead them, and much less drive them before him; but he takes them up in his arms, and lays them on his shoulders: which shows the passiveness of men in conversion, and their weakness and impotency to any thing that is spiritually good of themselves; they cannot think a good thought, nor do a good action, and still less begin and carry on the work of grace in their hearts; as also the strength of Christ in bearing and carrying them, as he does, through all afflictions, temptations, and difficulties, safe to glory; and likewise his great love and affection for them; he loved them before the world began, and he showed it in dying for them, and manifests it to them, when he calls them by grace; and this also expresses the safety of his sheep; for being on him, they are in no danger from the law and justice of God; nor from Satan, or any other enemy; nor of a final and total falling away: and moreover this signifies the spiritual ease and rest which such have in Christ: the manner in which Christ the shepherd carries them, having found them, and laid them on his shoulders, is

rejoicing: not upbraiding them with going astray; nor complaining of, or groaning under the burden; but rejoicing in a kind of triumph, and carrying them as a trophy of victory, and a spoil obtained.

Ver. 6. *And when he cometh home*, etc.] The house, or home, to which Christ comes and brings thither his lost sheep on his shoulders when found, is either the church of God, which is Christ's house and home, and into which he himself comes; it is his by gift and purchase, and which he has built, and here comes and dwells as a son over it, as king in it, and as priest and prophet there, and as the master of it; and hither he brings his people when he has called them by his grace, where they have a good fold and

green pastures, and where they delight to be; or else heaven is this home, which is an house of God's building, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; and which is Christ's Father's house, and his own house and home, and also the saints' house and home, whither they are all brought by Christ; for they cannot go there alone, and of themselves; they are brought by the power of divine grace as trophies of it, as to their own home; and such that Christ takes into his arms, and on his shoulders, he never drops them till he has brought them safe to heaven:

he calleth together his friends and neighbours: the friends of Christ are the saints, so called, because of their share in his friendship to them; shown by his becoming a surety for them; by his assuming their nature, and dying in their room and stead; by his paying their debts, and redeeming their persons; by his intercession for them, and preparing a place for them in his Father's house; by supplying all their wants, and by his kind and comfortable visits to them; by his free and familiar converses with them, and by unfolding his secrets, and giving wholesome advice and counsel to them: as also on account of their bearing and showing friendship to him; as by their great affection to his person; by their attachment to his cause and interest; by their strict regard to his Gospel, and the truths of it; and by their diligent observance of his commands and ordinances; and by their regard to his people, and disregard to his enemies: and these are also Christ's "neighbours", they dwell near to each other; he dwells in them, and they in him; they love each other as themselves, and perform every office cheerfully in love to one another: moreover, the angels may be meant by the friends and neighbours of Christ, as may be collected from (^{<2150>}Luke 15:10) these are his "friends" whom he has shown himself friendly to, in the confirmation of them in the state in which they were created; in the choice of them to eternal happiness; and in being an head of protection to them, as well as of eminence over them: and these are friendly to him; as they were at his incarnation, and when tempted in the wilderness, and when in agony in the garden, and at his resurrection and ascension; and will attend him at his second coming: and they are friendly to his; are ministering spirits to them, rejoice at their conversion, encamp about them in life, and at death carry their departed souls to heaven: and these are likewise his "neighbours": their habitation is in heaven where he is, and they always behold the face of his Father there, and will come along with him when he appears a second time. Now saints are called together to hear what great things Christ has done for poor sinners when he brings them to

Zion; and angels are also made acquainted with their conversion; and both saints and angels will be called together, when the sheep of Christ shall be brought home to glory.

Saying unto them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost: the joy of Christ, and his friends, is mutual on this occasion; Christ rejoices himself, and his friends with him: he rejoiced in his people from everlasting; they were the objects of his Father's love, and of his own; and he took delight in them, as he saw them in the glass of his Father's purposes, as they were chosen in him, and given to him; and this joy in them still continued, notwithstanding their fall in Adam, and their own actual sins and transgressions; but whereas they were lost in the fall, and by their own sins, there were some new expressions of joy upon Christ's finding them in redemption: it was with the utmost pleasure he engaged in that work; and with the greatest readiness did he come into the world to do it; and he went through it with great delight; he was, as it were, straitened until it was accomplished; the consideration of it made him easy under the apprehensions of what he was to endure, and supported him under his most dolorous sufferings; his rising again from the dead as the presentative of his people, filled him with gladness, and he ascended to heaven in a triumph: but yet still these persons, though redeemed, are in a lost estate with respect to themselves; wherefore in conversion there are fresh breakings forth of joy in Christ; for that is the day of his open espousals to them, and so the day of the gladness of his heart; when he sees of the travail of his soul with satisfaction; and large expressions of love are made to him; and his people are brought to some conformity to him; and communion with him, but still they are not yet at home; wherefore with joy he brings them into his church, which is his house, and their home, where he rejoices over them to do them good; and will express still more joy in the new Jerusalem church state, and still more when he shall have brought them to glory, and have presented them to himself, and to his Father, which will be done with exceeding joy. Christ's friends and neighbours, his saints and people, also rejoice at the conversion of a sinner; because the glory of the Father, Son, and Spirit, is displayed therein; and because Satan has lost his prey, and Christ has got a new subject; and because of the grace of God bestowed upon the sinner, and the addition that is made to their number; particularly this is matter of joy to the ministers of the Gospel: and angels also rejoice at it, because of the glory of God that is advanced thereby.

Ver. 7. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be heaven,* etc.] In the church below, and among the members of it; which is sometimes called heaven, especially in the book of the Revelations; or in heaven above, and among the angels there; (see ^{<2150>}Luke 15:10)

Over one sinner that repenteth; for the joy in heaven, is not over sinners as such; for as such, they are not grateful to God, nor to Christ, nor to the angels, nor to saints; only sinners delight in each other, as such; but as repenting sinners, who are truly so: and these are not such, who only legally and outwardly repent; nor all that declare a sense of sin; or that are externally sorry for it; or are terrified about it, and shed tears on account of it; or that cease from grosser sins of life, and outwardly reform: but such who repent in an evangelical way; who are turned to God, and are instructed by his Spirit; who believe in Christ, and have views, at least hopes, of pardon through his blood; and have the love of God and Christ shed abroad in their hearts; from whence arise a true sight and sense of sin, a godly sorrow for it, an hearty loathing of it, shame on account of it, an ingenuous confession, and a real forsaking of it. Now the reason why there is joy in heaven over such persons is, because, without such a repentance, they must perish; and by this they appear to be openly in a state of grace; and become proper subjects of the ordinances of Christ; and this repentance is unto life and salvation; or these are inseparably connected with it; and this joy is abundantly

more, than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance; by whom are meant, either such who are really righteous persons; not naturally and of themselves, nor legally by the deeds of the law, but by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them: and who need no repentance to be added to their righteousness, it being perfect of itself; nor the grace and principle of repentance, because they have it, and it cannot be lost; or change of life and manners, which is not to be seen in such: and the more joy over repenting sinners, than over these is, because the salvation of the one is before certain to them, and the other is unexpected: but to this sense it may be objected, that saints, even righteous persons, need frequent conversions, and the continual exercise of the grace of repentance; nor does it seem feasible, that there should be more joy over a repenting sinner, than over one, whose life, through grace, is a series of righteousness: rather therefore, such who seem to be just, or are so in their own opinion, are here meant; for only such sort of righteous persons and repenting sinners, are opposed to each other, as in (^{<403>}Matthew 9:13) moreover, the

occasion and scope of the parable, determines this to be the sense; the Scribes and Pharisees, that murmured at Christ's receiving sinners, are the ninety and nine just persons, who were only outwardly righteous before men, and trusted in themselves that they were righteous, perfectly righteous, and without sin, and so stood in no need of repentance for it; now there is more joy in heaven over one repenting sinner, than over all these: hence learn, that a self-righteous person, is an impenitent one; that a repenting sinner is more regarded in heaven than a self-righteous man: our Lord here seems to have regard to a conceit of the Jews, who distinguish between penitents that were allowed to be righteous, and such who never were guilty of any notorious crime, and so were perfectly righteous, and needed no repentance, and were preferred to penitent sinners: some of them say^{f452}, that

“the prophets did not prophesy (good things and comforts), but **hbwçt yl [bl**, “to penitents”; but as for **µyrwmg µyqydx**, “the perfect righteous”, to them belongs that, “eye hath not seen”, O God, “besides thee”. — -But R. Abhu says, the place in which “penitents” stand, the “perfect righteous” do not stand.”

Though Maimonides seems^{f453} to understand this, as if it gave the preference to penitents; his words are these:

“let not a penitent man imagine that he is afar off from the excellency, or degree of the righteous, because of the sins and iniquities he has committed, the thing is not so; but he is beloved and desired before the Creator, as if he had never sinned; for his reward is great; for lo, he hath tasted the taste of sin, and hath separated from it, and hath subdued his evil imagination: the wise men say, the place where “penitents” stand, the “perfect righteous” cannot stand; which is as if it was said, their degree of excellency is greater, than those who never sinned, because they have subdued their imagination more than they.”

However, these instances, with others that might be produced, show that the Jews had a notion of some men being perfectly righteous and without sin; which they oppose to penitent sinners, and which our Lord here designs, and seems to describe in their own language, and serves to confirm the sense given; (see Gill on “~~s1223~~ Hebrews 12:23”).

Ver. 8. *Either what woman, having ten pieces of silver,* etc.] Or “drachmas”: a “drachma” was the fourth part of a shekel, and of the same value with a Roman penny; and was worth of our money, seven pence half penny; so that the ten pieces amounted to six shilling's, and three pence: the Ethiopic version renders it “ten rings”: this parable is delivered, with the same view as the former; the scope and design of them are alike, being occasioned by the same circumstance, only the passiveness of a sinner in conversion is here more fully signified; who can contribute no more to the first act of conversion, which is purely God's work, than a lost piece of silver to its being found: by the “ten pieces or silver” are designed, all the Jews, or the whole body of that people; as they were before signified, by the hundred sheep; they having been God's peculiar treasure, though they were now in general become reprobate silver: and by the “woman” the proprietor of them, is meant Christ; and in what sense he was the owner of them, has been shown on (~~2154~~ Luke 15:4). The “nine” pieces design the Scribes and Pharisees; and the one lost piece, expressed in the next clause,

if she lose one piece, intends the elect among the Jews, and who chiefly consisted of publicans and sinners; and the regard had to these, is signified by the following expressions,

doth not light a candle: by which is meant, not the light of nature or reason in man: for though this is called a candle, and is of Christ's lighting, yet that by which he looks up his lost people, for this is become very dim: and though by it men may know there is a God, and the difference between moral good and evil, by it they cannot come at the knowledge of things spiritual; as of God in Christ, of the sin of nature, and of the plague of the heart; nor of the way of salvation by Christ, nor of the work of the Spirit, and the nature and need of it; nor of the Scriptures of truth, and of the doctrines of the Gospel, nor of the things of another world: neither is the law of Moses intended; for though there was light by it into the knowledge of sin, yet not clear; and though the ceremonial law was a shadow of Christ, and did give some instructions about him, and the doctrines of the Gospel, and blessings of grace, yet but very obscure hints: but by this candle is meant, the Gospel itself; which, like a candle, is lighted up in the evening of the world; and may be removed, as it sometimes is, from place to place; and where it is set, and blessed, it gives light, and is useful both to work and walk by; it does not always burn alike clear, or is always held forth in the same purity: and it will give the greatest light at last, as a candle does, even at the end of the world: now Christ is the lighter of this,

and from him it has all its light, who is the maker of it; he keeps it light, and by it he looks up and finds out his elect ones; though this is not a direction to him, who perfectly knows who they are, and where they be, but is rather a light to them, that they may know and find him:

and sweep the house: which phrase sometimes designs outward reformation, as in (^{<01244}Matthew 12:44) and sometimes God's judgments upon a people, as in (^{<23423}Isaiah 14:23) but here the preaching of the Gospel, and the power that goes along with it, to the effectual calling of the elect: the "house" in which Christ's lost piece of silver, or his chosen ones were, may design the nation of the Jews, who are often called the house of Israel; this was a house of God's building and choosing, and where he dwelt; and among these people for a long time, God's elect lay, though all of them were not so; and about this time the Lord was about to break up house keeping with them; yet as there were some few among them, that were to be looked up and called, therefore this house must be swept, as it was by the ministry of John the Baptist, by Christ himself, and by his apostles: and this suggests, what must be the state and condition of God's elect, being in this house, before it was swept, and they found out; they were out of sight, in great obscurity and darkness, with a deal of rubbish and dirt upon them, and pollution in them; and impotent to that which is good, and to their own recovery, and yet capable of being recovered: and this phrase hints at the power and efficacy of divine grace, that goes along with the word, in looking up and finding lost sinners; in enlightening their dark minds, quickening them, being dead in sin, taking away their stony hearts, regenerating them, enstamping the divine image upon them, removing every thing from them they trusted in, and working faith in them, to look to, and believe in Christ: and as in sweeping of an house, a great stir is made, a dust raised, and things are moved out of their place; so by the preaching of the Gospel, an uproar is made in the sinner himself; in his conscience, which is filled with a horrible sight of sin; which is very loathsome, and causes uneasy reflections, fills with shame and confusion, and greatly burdens and distresses, and with the terrors of the law, and with dreadful apprehensions of hell and damnation; in his will there is a reluctancy to part with sinful lusts and pleasures, with sinful companions, and with his own righteousness, and to be saved by Christ alone, and to serve him, and bear his cross: and in his understanding, things appear in a different light than they before did: and great stir and opposition is made by Satan, to hinder the preaching of the Gospel, as

much as in him lies, and persons from coming to hear it; and if they do, he endeavours to hinder, by catching it from them, or diverting them from that; by insinuating, it is either too soon or too late, to mind religion; or that sin is either so great that it cannot be forgiven, or so trivial, that a few prayers, tears, alms deeds, etc. will make amends for it; by distressing them about their election, or about the willingness of Christ to save them; or by stirring up others to dissuade and discourage them. Moreover, when the Gospel is preached in purity and with power, and souls are converted, there is a great stir and uproar in the world, and among the men of it; because the doctrines of it are foolishness, and strange things to them; and oppose their sense of things, and strip them of what is valuable; and men are hereby distinguished from them, and taken from among them: and there is also a stir and an uproar made by it, among carnal professors of religion, as there was at this time among the Scribes and Pharisees; and all this bustle is made, for the sake of a single piece of money:

and seek diligently till she find it? not only a light is set up, an hand of power put forth in using the besom, but a quick sharp eye looks out for the piece of silver: this diligent seeking and finding, are to be understood not of the grace of Christ in redemption; nor of his restoring backsliders; but of his converting sinners, through the preaching of the Gospel, both in his own person, and by his ministers, his Spirit making their ministrations effectual: the diligence, care, and circumspection of Christ, to find out lost sinners, while the Gospel is preaching, are here signified: it is not the preacher that looks out for them, though he that is a faithful minister of the word performs his office diligently and carefully, and he desires nothing more earnestly than the conversion of sinners; but then he knows not who are, and who are not the elect of God, and is ignorant of what Christ is doing, whilst he is preaching: Christ's eye is upon his lost piece; he perfectly knows the persons of the elect, as they are his Father's choice, and his gift to him; he knew them in the counsel of peace, and covenant of grace, in the fall of Adam, and their natural estate; he knows the places where they all are, and the time when they are to be converted; and distinguishes them amidst all the filth that attends them, and the crowd among which they are; and he continues seeking, till he finds them; which shows the perpetuity of the Gospel ministry the indefatigableness of Christ, and his sure and certain success: the reasons of all this care and diligence, are his love to them, his propriety in them, his Father's will, and his own

engagement; and because they must be for ever lost, did he not seek after them.

Ver. 9. *And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends*, etc.] (See Gill on “⁴²⁵⁶Luke 15:6”) a parable somewhat like to this, the Jews ^{f454} have on those words in (³⁰⁰⁴Proverbs 2:4) “If thou seekest her as silver”, etc.

“it is like to a man that has lost a “shekel”, (a piece of money,) or beryl rings, within his house; he lights up many lamps and many candles, until he lights on them; and lo, these things much more: for if a man for the things of the temporary life of this world, lights many lamps and candles, until he lights upon them and finds them; the words of the law, since they are the life of this world, and the life of the world to come, shouldest thou not search after them as for hidden treasure?”

Ver. 10. *Likewise I say unto you*, etc.] As before, in (⁴²⁵⁷Luke 15:7)

there is joy in the presence of the angels of God; who are the friends and neighbours of Christ: (see Gill on “⁴²⁵⁶Luke 15:6”),

over one sinner that repenteth; which they have knowledge of, either by immediate revelation from God, or by observation in the church where they attend: the reason of this joy is, because there is one rescued out of the hands of Satan and his angels, between whom and them, there is an implacable enmity; and because another subject is added to Christ's kingdom, and by which it is enlarged, the prosperity of which they greatly desire; and because another heir is born in that family, to which they belong, and they have another social worshipper with them: and this joy is said to be “in the presence of” them; and so may design the joy of others, as of Father, Son, and Spirit, which is in their sight and knowledge; and also the joy there is among themselves.

Ver. 11. *And he said*, etc.] The Syriac and Persic versions read “and Jesus said again”; he added another parable to the two former, at the same time, of the same import, with the same view, and on the same occasion; setting forth the different characters of the Scribes and Pharisees, and of the publicans and sinners; and what little reason the one had to murmur, at his conversation with the other:

a certain man had two sons; by “the certain man” is meant, God the Father: God indeed is not a man, nor is he to be represented by any human

image; but inasmuch as man is the image of God, God is sometimes compared to man, and is called a man of war, an husbandman, etc. which no ways contradict his being a spirit; and true it is, that the second person only assumed human nature; and therefore, whenever a divine person is spoken of as man, Christ is commonly intended: but though the Father never appeared in an human form, yet he seems here to be designed; because the character of a Father, and having sons, more properly belong to him; and the reception of sinners, and the forgiveness of them for Christ's sake, agree with him: and besides, Christ is distinguished from the Father in this parable; and he and his blessings of grace, are signified by other things: by the "two sons" are meant, not angels and men, as that angels are the elder, and men the younger son; for though angels are called the sons of God, and may be said to be elder than men, with respect to creation; and good angels may be said to have been ever with God, and always serving him, and never sinned against him; yet they are never called the brethren of men, nor men their brethren; and besides, are never angry at the return and reception of repenting sinners; for this would be to represent them just the reverse of what they are said to be, in the preceding verse: nor are the Jews and Gentiles here intended, which is the more received and general sense of the parable: those who go this way, suppose the Jews to be the elder brother; and indeed they were so, with respect to external privileges; and were with God, being his household and family; all he had were theirs, that was external; and the character of the elder brother throughout the parable, agrees with the far greater part of that nation; and it is certain, that they did resent the calling of the Gentiles: and these suppose the Gentiles to be the younger brother, who indeed were brought into a church state, later than the Jews; and might be said to be afar off in a far country, and to have spent their substance in idolatry and wickedness; to have been in the utmost distress, and in the most deplorable condition: but to this sense it may be objected, that the Gospel was not as yet preached to the Gentiles; nor were they brought to repentance; nor were they openly received into the divine favour; nor as yet had the Jews murmured at, and resented the kindness of God to them: rather standing and fallen professors may be designed: since the former are very apt to carry it toward the latter, in like manner as the elder brother is represented in this parable, as carrying himself towards the younger: but the true sense, and which the context and occasion of the parable at once determine, is, that by the elder son are meant, the Scribes and Pharisees, and self-righteous persons, among the Jews; and by the younger, the publicans and

sinners among the same people; as it is easy to observe, the same are meant by the two sons in the parable in (⁴²¹³Matthew 21:28-32). Now these are called the sons of God because the Jews in general were so by national adoption; and the self-righteous Pharisees looked upon themselves as the children of God, and favourites of heaven, in a special sense; and God's elect among them, even those that lay among publicans and sinners, were truly so; and that before conversion; for they were not only predestinated to the adoption of children, but were really taken into the relation of children, in the covenant of grace; and as such were given to Christ, and considered by him, when he assumed their nature, and died for them; and are so antecedent to the spirit of adoption, who is sent to witness their sonship to them; and which is consistent with their being children of wrath, as the descendants of Adam, and their being the children of God openly and manifestatively, by faith in Christ Jesus.

Ver. 12. *And the younger of them said to his father,* etc.] God's chosen ones among the publicans and sinners, are fitly signified by the younger son, since man, as a sinner, is younger than man as righteous; and since there are instances of God's choice of the younger, before the elder, as Jacob before Esau, etc. and the characters and conduct of young men agree with God's elect, in a state of nature; who are imprudent and ignorant, without any knowledge of divine and spiritual things, and of themselves, their state and condition, and of Christ, and salvation by him; and yet are conceited of themselves, and fancy themselves very wise and knowing, and capable of acting for themselves, independent, and without any assistance or advice; do not care to be under restraints, withdraw from all yokes, and break all bands asunder; and so become children of disobedience, prone to every vice, and servants and slaves to every lust; by which they are deceived, and in which they take a great deal of imaginary pleasure; and are often envious and spiteful, and live in malice, hateful, and hating one another: the request made by this younger son, is "to his Father"; to God, who was his Father by creation, by providential care, and by national adoption, and by special grace; though as yet he knew it not, nor could he call him so in faith: many call God Father, who should not, and many that should, do not: the request follows;

father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me: this portion may be considered, as internal or external; as internal, and such who think the Gentiles are meant by the younger son understand it of the light of nature, and of natural gifts and talents. The ancients generally interpret it, of man's

free will: it may intend natural knowledge in general, to which there is in man a natural desire, and in which he is self-sufficient: or rather as external, such as the outward blessings of food, raiment, health, etc. the honours, pleasures, and riches of the world: the good things of this world belonged to men by right of creation, and according the laws and dues of it, but have been all forfeited by the sin of man; and yet this is a portion, which in the apprehension of men, of right belongs to them; and which suits their nature, which is carnal and worldly:

and he divided unto them his living; natural gifts, external privileges, and worldly good things; which of all men in the earth, the Jewish nation shared; (see ^{<19516>}Psalm 115:16, 106:15).

Ver. 13. *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together,* etc.] That his father had divided to him, all his goods and substance: as soon as a man has any internal substance, any considerable degree of natural knowledge, he immediately sets out from God, and employs it against him, in reasoning against him, against his being, his works, his providence, his purposes, his revelation, and will; as soon as a man has the exercise of his reason, as soon as he can think and speak, nay, as soon as he is born, he goes astray from God, speaking lies; and as soon as a wicked man has of this world, what his carnal heart desires, he is for living independent of God, and his providence; he is for gathering together all for himself, in order to spend it on his lusts, and at a distance from his father, the father of his mercies, of whom he is not mindful; and to whom he says, depart from me, having no regard to his worship and service, to his honour and glory, to his cause and interest:

and took his journey into a far country; which sets forth the state of alienation a sinner is in, while unconverted; he is afar off from God, from God the Father; from the presence of God, and communion with him: from the knowledge of God, and desire after it; from love to him, or fear of him; and from the life of God, or a living soberly, righteously, and godly; and from Christ, from the knowledge of him, from faith in him, love to him, fellowship with him, and subjection to his ordinances; and from the Spirit of God, and every thing that is spiritual; and from all that is good, from the law of God, and from the righteousness of it, and from righteous men:

and there wasted his substance in riotous living; his internal substance, his knowledge and understanding, even in natural things, and became brutish, and even like the beasts that perish; and his worldly substance in rioting

and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness, with harlots, as in (~~450~~ Luke 15:30) whereby he was brought to a piece of bread, and to the want of it,

Ver. 14. *And when he had spent all*, etc.] Sin strips a man of all that is good and valuable; of the image of God, of the knowledge of divine things, of natural holiness, of moral righteousness, and of strength to perform moral good; hence man is in a wretched and miserable condition, he is poor, and blind, and naked: and if man has spent all, and sin has stripped him of all, where is his free will? there is no good thing in man, but what comes from the grace of God; nor has he any thing to recommend him to God, or to offer to his creditor, to compound his debts with; nor can he prepare himself for conversion, or any good work:

there arose a mighty famine in that land; sin brings men into a starving and famishing condition; for in the far country, the land of sin, there is a famine of the word: though the Gospel is preached, it is only food to spiritual persons; unregenerate men have no desire to it, but neglect and despise it; and if they attend it, it has no place in them: they that are in this land, are aliens from the ordinances of God, the breasts of consolation, the goodness and fatness of his house; they are in a pit, wherein is no water; their taste is vitiated to every thing that is spiritually good; they live on bread of deceit, and labour after that which satisfies not; wherefore they look like skeletons, and are as the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision:

and he began to be in want; or was in want: when the above is the case, the sinner may be truly said to be in want; an unregenerate man is in want of every thing that is good; of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and holiness, of righteousness or clothing, of food, and of all the necessaries of life: and he may be said to “begin” to be in want, because man was not originally so, but was possessed of a natural fulness; and because sin is the beginning of want, as soon as one takes place, the other does: moreover, this man now began to see and feel himself to be in want, though as yet he was not rightly and truly sensible of his wants, at least of the way to redress them.

Ver. 15. *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country*, etc.] Not to any one of the saints, for they are not citizens of the far country, but of the church of God below, and of heaven above; besides, carnal men do not like the company of such citizens: nor is the devil intended, for though he dwells in this country, he is more than a citizen, than an inhabitant; he is

king and governor, the prince of the world, and the god of it; nor is it feasible, that a man under conviction, and beginning to be sensible of his want, should go and join himself to the devil: but an unregenerate, “pharisaical”, legal preacher, is designed; a man may be a preacher, and yet in the far country of sin and unregeneracy; there may be large gifts, where there is no grace; and a man may have a form of religion and godliness, and know nothing of the power of it; and a great stir and bluster may be made about good works, as were by the Pharisees, when few or none are done: now it is common for persons under legal convictions, to seek after such a preacher, and such a ministry, and to such an one this man “went”; he went not out of the land of sin, nor to his father's house, but to one in the same country, where the famine was, and he was starving: “he went”; it was his own choice, he took his own way; he went and told him his case, how he had spent all he had, and in what manner, and what condition he now was in; and he asked his advice and assistance: and he “joined himself” to him; he sat under his ministry, and became a member with him, and stuck close to him, as the word signifies; and was a stickler for him, and his principles:

and he sent him into his field to feed swine; he did not give him the least bit of bread to satisfy his hunger; nor did he say one word to him of Christ, the bread of life; nor did he advise him to go to his father's house, where there was bread enough, and to spare: but he “sent him, into his fields”; to work, to cleanse his heart, to reform his life, to fulfil the law, to perform the conditions of the covenant, to make his peace with God, and get an interest in his love and favour; and go through a round of duties continually, and all would be well: he sent him to “feed swine” there; to converse with self-righteous persons, who may be compared to swine, because of their selfishness; doing all they do for themselves, and not for God and his glory; because they prefer dung before pearls, their own righteousness before Christ, the pearl of great price; and live upon the husks of their own duties and never look upwards to heaven, as this creature does not, but always downwards on the earth; and though they were outwardly reformed, yet inwardly filthy, and often return to wallowing in the mire again: he sent him there also to gratify the selfish principles of nature; to please himself with his wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and other excellencies he fancied he had attained unto. In short, the expression shows the base employment of a self-justitiary amidst all his pretensions to religion and virtue: for feeding of swine was very disagreeable to the Jews, and with them scandalous; to whom the eating of

swine's flesh was forbidden by the law of God, and the breeding of swine by their traditions; and this is said to be done in a country, out of Judea.

Ver 16. *And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks*, etc.]

abwrj, the fruit of the “Charub” tree, as the Syriac version interprets it; and which the Jews ^{f455} say is **hmhb I kam**, “the food of beasts”: though, according to what is elsewhere said of it, it should be the food of men also. It is said ^{f456} of R. Simeon ben Jochai, and his son, that they hid themselves in a cave for fear of the king, and a miracle was wrought for them, **abwrj whl yrbya**, a “Charub” tree was created for them, and a fountain of water; the one, as the gloss observes, was to eat the fruit of, and the other to drink of: but be they what they will, by them are meant, not worldly riches and honours, and carnal lusts and pleasures; though these are the principal things of the far country, of this world, or an unregenerate estate; and are greatly desired by carnal minds, and are but swine's meat, very mean food, yea, pernicious, empty, unsatisfying, and perishing; but these were the things this man had been desirous of, and lived upon before, and had ran through them, and had spent all his substance in the pursuit and enjoyment of them; and now he felt the gripes of a natural conscience for them, and found himself in want of something else: wherefore by these “husks” are meant works of righteousness done by men; which are like husks, external things, done only before men; empty things that have nothing within them; mere trash, and not food; and which can give no satisfaction; mere sordid food, fit only to be cast to dogs or swine; of an ill savour, hard to eat, and difficult digestion, and which affords no real nourishment; these this man greatly desired to fill his belly with: he found himself empty, and in want; as yet he had no thought of, at least not any desire after the bread in his father's house; but would fain have satisfied himself with his own doings, and have quieted his mind and conscience with a few external performances, a negative holiness, a legal repentance, and outward reformation: he laboured hard to make his own righteousness do; which was but striving to fill his belly with the east wind; and is what can never satisfy, because it is not answerable to the law and justice of God; and was no other than

that the swine did eat, self-righteous persons, like himself; for such an one was now the publican and sinner become, though he did not continue so. Christ's lambs and sheep do not eat such food, nor will, nor can they, only swinish, selfish persons; this is suitable to their nature, they eat it, and live

upon it; which shows them to be unrenewed, and that their taste is not changed.

And no man gave unto him: not the husks, though this is the sense of the Arabic version, which renders it, “neither did he obtain them”; and so it seems to be ours and others: but these were at hand, which he might have taken himself, and did; nor is it reasonable to think he should wait to have them given him by another; or that he should be restrained from them; but it is to be understood of bread, or proper food, and that no man gave that unto him: and the words, as Calvin observes, may be read causally, “for no man gave to him”; and so are a reason why he craved husks, because no man gave him any bread: the citizen, or legal preacher, to whom he joined himself, gave him none; nor the swine, the self-righteous persons, to whom he was sent, and with whom he conversed, gave him none; he had nothing under the ministry, nor in conversation, that was proper food to him; there were nothing but these husks that presented, and he tried to satisfy himself with them; and indeed none but Christ can give the true bread, the bread of life, to those that are hungry, and in want.

Ver. 17. *And when he came to himself,* etc.] An unregenerate man, whether while a voluptuous man, or a self-righteous man, is not himself; he is beside himself; and is no other than a madman. The man that pursues his worldly lusts and pleasures, promises himself liberty, while he is a slave; he ruins himself, his soul, body, and estate, and chooses to do it rather than part with his lusts; he takes delight in doing mischief himself, and in seeing it done by others; he proclaims his folly publicly, declares his sin, and glories in it; all which a man in his right mind would never do. The self-righteous person trusts in his own heart, which is the greatest madness and folly in the world; he compasses himself about with sparks of his own kindling, and sacrifices to his own net; he dresses himself in his rags, and pleases and prides himself with them, when a robe of righteousness, and garments of salvation, are provided; which no man in his senses would ever do. But when the Spirit of God comes to work upon a sinner's heart in conversion, he brings him to himself; which a man may be said to be, when he is brought to true evangelical repentance for sin; and that is, when he has a true sense of it, as committed against God, and a godly sorrow for it, and makes an hearty and ingenuous acknowledgment of it, and forsakes it; and when he is brought to a sense of the insufficiency of his own righteousness, and is made willing to part with it, and desires to be found in Christ, and in his righteousness alone, which he is encouraged to lay hold

on, and receive by faith, trust to, and rejoice in; when he has his spiritual senses exercised on Christ, and to discern between good and evil; and is brought to the feet of Jesus, as to submit to his righteousness, so to serve him; when he is all this, then, like the man in the Gospel, he is clothed, and in his right mind:

he said, how many hired servants of my father's; who, according to some, were the Scribes and Pharisees, men of a servile disposition, and of mercenary views; and were, by profession, the servants of God, and had plenty of bread, because they had all the external means and ordinances: but these are designed by the elder brother in the parable; and besides, this man had endeavoured to live as they did in this far country. It may be queried, whether the ministers of the Gospel are not intended, since these are the servants of the most high God; are labourers hired by him, and are worthy of their hire, and abound with Gospel provisions for the service of others. But to this it may be objected, the desire of this man to be made as one of them, (²¹⁹Luke 15:19) which petition expresses his humility; whereas to be a servant, in this sense, is to have the highest place and office in his father's house. Rather therefore the meanest of the saints, and household of God, are here meant, who have the least degree of evangelical light, whose faith is weak, and their consolation small; and who, though they are sons, yet by reason of that legality and mercenariness that appear in their frames and services, differ little from servants: and yet these, in comparison of him, who was in a hungry and starving condition,

have bread enough, and to spare; as the doctrines, promises, and ordinances of the Gospel, the fulness of grace that is in Christ, and Christ himself the bread of life; which are more than enough for them, and sufficient for the whole family in heaven, and in earth; and even the meanest and weakest believer may be said to have enough and to spare, because he has an interest in all these; though by reason of the weakness of his faith, it is but now and then he has a full and comfortable meal; but this is infinitely better than to be starving, as this man was:

and I perish with hunger. The Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions add, "here"; in this far country, in the citizen's fields, among his swine, and their husks: all mankind are in a lost and perishing condition; for having sinned against God, they have exposed themselves to the curses of the law, and are destitute of a justifying righteousness, and are in the way, to ruin and destruction; but all are not sensible of it, being ignorant of God, and

his righteousness, of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of the insufficiency of their own righteousness; but some are sensible of it, and in their own apprehensions are ready to perish: these see sin in its true light, without a view of pardon; an angry God without a smile; injured justice without a righteousness; and a broken law without a satisfaction for the violation of it; and such was this man's case. The Jewish writers ^{f457} say,

“a sinner is like to a son that runs away from his father, and turns his back upon him, who yet afterwards repents, and has a mind to return to his father's house:”

so it was now with the publicans and sinners, signified by this man.

Ver. 18. *I will arise*, etc.] This is the resolution which at last, through divine grace, he came into: he determines to quit the country, and his companions; he had left his harlots, and his old course of living before, but was in the same country still; for this a man may do, and yet remain unregenerate: but he is now for leaving the country itself, and his new acquaintance; he is now determined to drop his legal preacher, to be gone out of his fields, and from under his ministry, and to leave his swine and husks;

and go to my father: not to his old companions in debauchery and sin; nor to his elder brother, the Pharisees; he had made trial of both these to his cost already; nor to his father's servants, but to his father himself; to which he was moved and encouraged, from his being ready to perish, from the fulness of bread in his father's house and from the relation he stood in to him; notwithstanding, all that had passed, he was his father, and a kind and merciful one: this shows, that he knew him as his father, having now the Spirit of adoption sent down into him; and the way unto him, which lies through Christ the mediator:

and will say unto him, father; or, “my father”, as the Syriac and Persic versions read:

I have sinned against heaven; by preferring earthly things to heavenly ones; and have sinned openly in the face of the heavens, who were witnesses against him; and against God, who dwells in heaven. It was usual with the Jews to call God, **יְהוָה**, “heaven”; (see Gill on “⁴¹²⁵Matthew 21:25”). They have this very phrase;

“there is a man, (say ^{f458} they), who sins against earth, and he does not **μυμϸβ aj h**, “sin against heaven”; against heaven, and he does not sin against earth: but he that speaks with an ill tongue sins against heaven and earth, as it is said, (⁻¹⁹⁷³⁹ Psalm 73:9) “they set their mouth against the heavens and their tongue walketh through the earth.””

And so the sense is, that he had sinned against God himself, and not merely against men, and human laws. All sin is a transgression of the law of God; and the thought of sin being committed against a God of infinite holiness, justice, goodness, grace, and mercy, is cutting to a sensible sinner: and this being the case, this man determined to go to God his Father, and him only, for the pardon of his sin, against whom it was committed. It is added,

and before thee; for he was now convinced of his omniscience. Sin may be committed against a man, and not before him, or he not know it; but whatever is committed against God, is before him, it is in his sight, he knows it: he is God omniscient, though sinners take no notice of this perfection of his, but go on in sin, as if it was not seen, known, and observed by God. But when God works powerfully and effectually upon the heart of a sinner, he convinces him of his omniscience, as this man was convinced: hence he determined to go to God, and acknowledge his sin before him; and that it was committed before him, and was in his sight; and that he could not be justified in his sight by any righteousness of his own; and therefore humbly desires pardon at his hands. This man's sense of sin and sorrow for it, and confession of it, appear very right and genuine, which he determined to express; they appear to be the convictions of the Spirit of God: it was not a sense of sin, and sorrow for it, as done before men, but God; and the concern was not so much for the mischief that comes by sin, as for the evil that was in it; and this did not drive him to despair, as in the cases of Cain and Judas, but brought him home to his father; and his confession appears to be hearty, sincere, and without excuse.

Ver. 19. *And am no more worthy to be called thy son*, etc.] As all the Jews were; not only by creation, and providential care, as all men are; but by national adoption: and however worthy this man might think himself to be called a Son of God before, and value himself upon it; he now sees, and was ready to own his unworthiness to be called so in any sense; and much more to be called and accounted a Son of God by special adoption;

make me as one of thy hired servants; this is said not from a servile spirit, but to express the mean thoughts he had of himself, and the great desire he had to be fed from his father's table, in the meanest way; and what an happiness and honour it would be to him, could he be the meanest in his family, a doorkeeper in his house; which was more eligible to him, than to dwell in the tents of sin, or continue in this hungry and starving condition.

Ver. 20. *And he arose*, etc.] This shows that his resolution to arise was not of nature, but of grace, by its being put into execution; for it was made and executed, not in his own strength, but in another's. He did not confer with flesh and blood; nor listen to discouragements which might present; as the distance of the way, the danger in it, the cold reception, if not rejection, he might expect from his father: but he arose immediately; he arose and stood upon his feet, in obedience to the heavenly call, being assisted by divine grace; he arose, and quitted the far country, the citizen, swine, and husks, and denied both sinful and righteous self;

and came to his father; his own father; “the father of himself”, as in the Greek text, who was so before he came to him; a sense of which he had, and was what encouraged him the rather to go to him: and this coming to him denotes a progression towards him; for as yet he was not come to him, but was at some distance, as the next clause expresses; and means not so much attendance on ordinances, as some inward secret desires after God:

but when he was yet a great way off. This is not to be understood of his state of alienation from God, which is before signified by his being in a far country; but the distance he observed, as conscious of his vileness, and unworthiness; and the humility he expressed on a view of himself; and a sense he had of his need of divine grace: and which is grateful to God; he looks to such that are of an humble, and of a contrite spirit, and dwells among them, and gives more grace to them:

his father saw him; he saw him when in the far country, spending his substance with harlots, and in riotous living; he saw him when among the swine and husks; he saw him when he came to himself, and all the motions and determinations of his heart; he saw him in his progress towards him, and looked upon him with an eye of love, pity, and compassion, as it follows,

and had compassion: God is full of compassion, and pities him, as a father does his children; yea, as a woman's heart of compassion yearns after the

son of her womb: he had compassion on him, and his heart of pity moved towards him, he being as one grieved in spirit for his sins, and wounded with a sense of them, and wanting a view of pardon, as starving and famishing, and as naked, and without clothing.

And ran; to him, which shows the quick notice God takes of the first motions of his own grace in the hearts of sensible sinners; the speedy relief he gives to distressed ones; and this points out his preventing grace and goodness.

And fell on his neck; expressive of the strength of his affection to him, (^{<0454>}Genesis 45:14 ^{<4037>}46:29, ^{<4037>}Acts 20:37) and of his great condescension and grace to fall on that neck which had been like an iron sinew, so stiff and rebellious; though now, through divine grace, was made flexible and pliable, and subject to him, and willing to bear the yoke, and to do whatever he would have him; and this was grateful to his father:

and kissed him; as a token of love; and as owning the relation he stood in to him; as a sign of reconciliation and friendship; and was an admission of him to great nearness to his person; and an application and manifestation of great love indeed to him; and a strong incentive of love in the son to him again; (see ^{<0449>}1 John 4:19).

Ver. 21. *And the son said unto him, father,* etc.] Or “my father”, as the Syriac version reads; and the Persic version adds, “pardon me”: sin lay heavy on him, and he wanted a view and application of pardoning grace, though he seems to be prevented making this request by the kiss he received from his father:

I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight; this is what he determined to say, and was allowed to say, having a deep sense of his sin and vileness, and which was increased by the love and kindness his father had shown him. The phrase is Jewish; (see Gill on ^{<0258>}“Luke 15:18”) to which may be added, what is elsewhere said ^{f459},

“what is the sense of that passage, (^{<0124>}Psalm 12:4) “who have said, with our tongues we will prevail?” etc. it designs all the transgressions a man sins against earth; and if $\mu\upsilon\mu\sigma\beta \ \hat{\text{y}}\text{aj} \ \text{w}\text{j}$, “they sin against heaven”, and earth; what is the sense of that in (^{<0730>}Psalm 73:9)?”

and am no more worthy to be called thy son: so much he was suffered to say, which fully expresses his sense of his vileness and unworthiness: but he was not allowed to say, “make me as one of thy hired servants”; because this could not be granted; for a son is always a son, and cannot become a servant; (see ^{<4016>}Galatians 4:6,7).

Ver. 22. *But the father said to his servants*, etc.] The word “but”, with which those words begin, is expressive of much grace, as it often is; (see ^{<4611>}1 Corinthians 6:11 ^{<4014>}Ephesians 2:4 ^{<5013>}1 Timothy 1:13 ^{<5104>}Titus 3:4) and signifies, that though the son had behaved so badly, and was now so sensible of it himself, as that he desired to be a hired servant, being unworthy to be called a son; but the “father”, against whom he had sinned, would hear nothing of it: but

said to his servants; not the angels, but the ministers of the Gospel; who are the servants of the most high God; and whose business it is to set forth, in the ministry of the word, the righteousness of Christ, and the everlasting love of God; and to direct souls to a life and conversation becoming the Gospel of Christ; and to set before them the rich provisions of the Gospel for their nourishment, joy, and comfort. These servants, the father of the son ordered, not to take him away from his presence, as one whose person he could not endure in his sight; nor to terrify and affright him with the curse and condemnation of the law, and fill his mind with wrath and terror; nor even to chastise and correct him for his former course of living, and to upbraid him with it; but to confer upon him all the honour, and high favours, and blessings that could be expressed in the following language:

bring forth the best robe; out of the wardrobe, that it is in. The Vulgate Latin version adds “quickly”; which increases the father's regard to him and shows that he was in haste to have his son appear in a better condition: the Arabic version adds it in the next clause, “and put it on him quickly”; which expresses the same thing; and the Ethiopic version renders it, “hasten ye, bring”, etc. By the “best robe” is meant, not water baptism; nor an holy life and conversation; nor any particular grace, as faith, or hope, or charity; or the whole of sanctification; nor Adam's robe of innocence; but the righteousness of Christ which is often compared to a robe, or garment, (^{<2310>}Isaiah 61:10 ^{<3304>}Zechariah 3:4 ^{<6608>}Revelation 19:8) because it is not any thing in believers, but what is unto them, and upon them, and is put there by an act of God's grace in imputation; and is what covers their naked souls, and hides their sins from the avenging eye of divine justice; protects

them from all injuries, and saves them from wrath to come; as well as beautifies and adorns them, and renders them acceptable in the sight of God; and keeps them warm and alive; and gives them a right and title to eternal life. This is as in the Greek text “the first robe”; and so it is rendered by the Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions; because it was first in God's designation and counsel, and in Christ the head of his people, in whom they are blessed with all spiritual blessings before the foundation of the world, and so with this blessing; and it was also provided and secured in the everlasting covenant of grace, long before Adam's robe of innocence and righteousness was made and wore by him: the reference is not to the first that should be come at in the wardrobe; or to that which the son wore before he went into the far country; but to the **tyl j**, “Talith”, which was the first and uppermost garment wore by the Jews, and answers to the Greek word **στολη**, “the stole”, here used: so the Babylonish garment is called, **atlymdaljxya**,^{f460} which the gloss interprets a “Talith”, made of pure wool. The Ethiopic version renders the phrase, “fragrant garments”; and such are Christ's garments of salvation, and robe of righteousness; (see ^{<19518>}Psalm 45:8) the Persic version renders it, “the splendid robe”; and the Syriac, as ours, the “chief”, or “best robe”; and such is Christ's righteousness: it is a better righteousness, not only than that of a self-righteous Pharisee; but better than the outward conversation garment of a real good man, which, at best, is imperfect; or than the inward sanctification of the Spirit of God, which, though pure, is not yet perfect: it is better than the robe of innocence wore by Adam in his sinless state; for that was but a natural righteousness, and the righteousness of a creature, and was loseable, as the event has shown; and had he kept it, would not have given him a title to eternal life: yea, it is better than the righteousness of the angels heaven; for what is said of Adam's, may be said of theirs, that it is natural, the righteousness of a creature; and had it not been for confirming grace, a loseable one: but Christ's righteousness is pure and perfect; the righteousness of God, and an everlasting one: and when the servants of God, the ministers of the Gospel, are ordered to bring it out,

and put it on him: this is done, not by the imputation of it to men, for that is the Father's act; nor by application of it to them, that is the Spirit's work; but by a declaration of it, setting it forth in a ministerial way before them; declaring it to be a justifying one, and encouraging their faith to lay hold upon it as such:

and put a ring on his hand; on one of the fingers of his hand: by which is intended not the grace of faith; that is, rather the hand on which the ring is put; and though this grace is both precious and ornamental, as will be allowed, yet it does not unite to Christ, this must be denied; it being a grace which flows from union, as all grace does; and by which souls have communion with Christ: nor are good works designed; such indeed who are called by grace, are to be set to work from a right principle, to a right end; and true grace does show itself by works; and good works are the seal and token of grace to the world; but then, as before, these are rather meant by the hand; since that is the instrument of action: nor is the seal and earnest of the Spirit meant by the ring. The Spirit of God is certainly the seal of grace, and the earnest of glory; and to have this is a high favour, and a precious benefit indeed, and what will never be taken away; but as faith, so not the Spirit is the bond of union between God and his people, but the fruit of it: by the “ring” is meant the everlasting love of God; and which, as a ring, is round, and has neither beginning nor end; it does not begin with the obedience of his people, nor with their love to him; nor with their conversion; nor with the mission, sufferings, and death of Christ; but was from all eternity; nor will it have any end, nor can there be any separation from it: this is the bond of union, that can never be dissolved; and this being manifested to the soul, is a token of freedom; it sets a man free from the bondage of corruption, and from the slavery of Satan, and introduces into the liberty of the children of God: it is a mark of great honour, a sign of riches, both of grace and glory; it is a declaration of sonship, and heirship; and is a seal and pledge of everlasting happiness: now the putting on of this ring does not design the shedding abroad of this love in the heart by the Spirit of God; but the declaration of it by his servants in a ministerial way; setting it forth in its nature and effects, to the great joy and comfort of souls; when believers receive it by the hand of faith, and which constrains them, and makes them active, and puts them upon doing good works to the glory of God.

And shoes on his feet: by feet are meant the outward walk and conversation; which in persons called by grace should be different from what it was before, and from that of others: it should not be loose and naked, as those that walk barefoot, but should be upright, straight, and regular; not carnal and earthly, but spiritual and heavenly; and should be with prudence, care, and circumspection, and worthy of their calling, and as becomes the Gospel of Christ: and by “the shoes” may be meant, the

preparation of the Gospel of peace, (~~4065~~Ephesians 6:15). The Gospel is as shoes to the feet; it beautifies and adorns, (~~2001~~Song of Solomon 7:1) it keeps the feet tight and straight, the conversation regular and upright; preserves from slipping and failing; strengthens and makes more fit for walking; directs, guides, and influences in walking, and protects from the stones, thorns, and scorpions of the world's reproaches; and the doctrines of it are shoes that will never wear out: and to walk according to the Gospel of Christ, is what Gospel ministers direct and exhort unto, and may be meant by their putting on those shoes; they pressing a good life and conversation from, and by the doctrines of grace. A person with all these things on him was reckoned, among the Jews, as one thoroughly dressed: a canon of theirs, relating to the defilement of leprosy, runs thus ^{f461};

“a man of Israel that goes into a house infected with the plague of leprosy, *wydyb wytw[bj w wyl grb wyl dnsw wydgbob ɔwbl* ,
 “clothed with garments, and his sandals on his feet, and his rings on his hands”, lo, that man is immediately defiled.”

Ver. 23. *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it*, etc.] By which Christ is designed, in allusion to the calves offered in sacrifice, which were offered for sin offerings, and for peace offerings, and for burnt offerings; and were one of the sacrifices on the day of atonement: so Christ has offered up himself in soul and body, freely and voluntarily, in the room and stead of his people, an offering and sacrifice to God, of a sweet smelling savour; which is well pleasing to him, and effectual to the purposes for which it was offered, and therefore will never be repeated; and has hereby satisfied law and justice, procured peace and reconciliation, and made full atonement and expiation for all their sins and transgressions: or else in allusion to the feasts and liberal entertainments of friends, when the fatted calf made a considerable part, (~~1087~~Genesis 18:7,8 ~~0323~~1 Samuel 28:24,25 ~~3004~~Amos 6:4 ~~3042~~Malachi 4:2) Christ is the best provision that can be set before a believer, or he can feed upon; yea, the best that God can give, or saints desire: he is true and real food, spiritual, savoury, satisfying, and durable; what both gives and preserves life; nourishes, strengthens, refreshes, delights, and fattens. Now by “bringing it hither”, is meant preaching Christ; opening the Scriptures concerning him; setting him before believers, as their only proper food, both in the ministry of the word, and in the Lord's supper: and “killing” him does not design either the slaying of him in purpose, promise, and type, from the foundation of the world; nor the actual crucifixion of him by the Jews; but the setting him

forth in the Gospel in a ministerial way, as crucified and slain, for saints by faith to feed and live upon:

and let us eat and be merry: for as the Jews^{f462} say,

“there is no mirth without eating and drinking:”

this is a mutual invitation or encouragement to eat of the fatted calf: the parties called upon to eat of it are the Father, the servants, and the returned son. The Father, to whom the salvation of his people, by the death of Christ, is as a feast; his heart was set upon this from everlasting; and he was infinitely well pleased with Christ, as the surety of his people from all eternity; his eye was upon him as such throughout the several dispensations before his coming; he sent him forth with great pleasure in the fulness of time; and not only did not spare him, but it even pleased him to bruise him; and he accepted of his sacrifice with delight; and takes pleasure in seeing his people feed upon their crucified Saviour; and this is expressive of that communion which God admits his people to with himself, and which, as it is signified by walking and talking, and sitting and dwelling, so by eating together; and is in consequence of union to him; and is only enjoyed by true believers; and is the greatest blessing on earth, and what is next to heaven. The servants, the ministers of the Gospel, they are among the “us”, who are to eat; and it is but reasonable they should, and it is even necessary that they do eat, and live upon a crucified Christ themselves, whose business it is to set him forth as such to others: and especially the returned son makes a principal guest at this entertainment; for whom it is made, and for whose sake chiefly the invitation to eat is given: by which is meant not corporeal eating, but eating by faith; which supposes food to eat, of which there is plenty in the Gospel provision; a principle of life infused, for a dead man cannot eat; and spiritual hunger and thirst, otherwise there will be no appetite; and the grace of faith; which is the hand that takes, and the mouth that receives, and eats spiritual food: and believers have full and free liberty to eat of it; nor should they object their own unworthiness, but consider the suitability of the food unto them; that it is on purpose prepared for them; that they are in their Father's house, and at his table; and the invitation to eat is hearty and cordial; and both the Father and Christ give this food, and bid welcome to it; and there is a necessity of eating it, for without this there can be no living in a spiritual sense: it is hereby that life is supported and maintained; without this the saints must be starving; it is this which preserves from hunger, and satisfies it, and nourishes up unto eternal life.

The manner of eating, or the circumstance attending it, is “mirth”, both in Father, son, and servants; and as corporeal, so spiritual eating should be with joy, and with a merry heart, (²⁰⁰⁷Ecclesiastes 9:7) and indeed is the most proper means of stirring and increasing spiritual joy and pleasure; see the note on the latter part of the following verse, (see Gill on “²⁰⁵⁴Luke 15:24”).

Ver. 24. *For this my son was dead*, etc.] These words contain the reasons of the above entertainment, and of all that spiritual joy and mirth; in which the father acknowledges the returning penitent as his son; though he had behaved so wickedly before, and though he judged himself unworthy of the relation; and this he did, by sending the Spirit of adoption into his heart, to witness his sonship to him; and takes notice of his past state and condition, to show the great reason there was for joy, at his present one: for before he was “dead”, dead in Adam, in whom all died; dead in law, being under a sentence of condemnation and death; and dead in trespasses and sins, which is a spiritual or moral death: in which all mankind by nature are: and which lies in a separation from God, Father, Son, and Spirit; in an alienation from the life of God; in a deformation of the image of God; in a loss of original righteousness; in the darkness of the understanding; in the inordinateness of the affections; in the pollution of the mind and conscience; in the stubbornness of the will; and in an impotency to that which is spiritually good; and in a privation of spiritual sense and motion: this had been the case, but now it was otherwise:

and is alive again: the Spirit of life from Christ had entered into him, and Christ was formed in his heart; and a principle of life was infused into him; a divine image was enstamped upon his soul; the understanding was enlightened in divine things; the affections were set upon them; the will was subjected to God, to his will and law, and to Christ and his righteousness, and the way of salvation by him, and to his commands and ordinances; and principles of grace and holiness were wrought in him, to do as well as to will; a spiritual sense of things were given him; a spiritual sight, hearing, tasting, and feeling, and savouring; he lived a life of holiness from Christ, of faith upon him, and of communion with him, and to his glory: and he came to be so, not of himself, nor by any creature; for no man can quicken himself, nor can any creature do it for him; it was entirely owing to the power and grace of God: and great reason here was for joy and mirth, as there is for every one that is quickened by the Spirit of God; for such shall

never enter into condemnation, nor die again, but shall live and reign with Christ for ever:

he was lost; lost in Adam, and in himself; so he was when in the far country, and when among the swine and husks; so as that he knew not where he was, nor what a condition he was in; nor did he know how to get out of it, nor could he help himself; nor could any other creature; though not irretrievably and irrecoverably lost; not to the love of God, his knowledge of him, care and provision for him in Christ, in his counsel and covenant: hence the following mercy,

and is found; not only by Christ, in redemption, but by the Spirit of Christ in the effectual calling; when he was brought and came to himself, and saw his lost state and condition by nature; and when he was directed and brought home to his Father's house, and entertained with all the provisions of it; and such have reason to rejoice and be glad, for they shall be found in Christ at death and at judgment, and shall be with him to all eternity:

and they began to be merry: all parties. The Father expressed his joy, and the gladness of his heart, upon the return of his son to him; he exhorted to be merry on this account, (^{15:23}Luke 15:23) and enforces it with reasons in this verse, taken from the relation he stood in to him, and the wonderful change that had passed upon him, and the finding of him; and he rejoices himself at his conversion, in the exercise of that grace which he himself implanted, and in the performance of duty by his assistance: not that any new joy arises in God's heart at such a time; for he always rejoiced in the persons of his elect, as they were the objects of his love, as chosen in Christ, and given to him, and as interested in the covenant of grace; and he rejoiced in the accomplishment of their salvation, by his Son: but in conversion, there are new expressions of joy; he rejoices over them to do them good, and rejoices in the good he does them; and this is the open beginning of his joy, and but the beginning of it; for it will continue, it is not all over, not all expressed, but will be in the fullest manner hereafter, to all eternity: the returned son began to be merry, as he had good reason for it; as that he was come back from the far country, where a mighty famine had been: and from the citizen of that country, his fields, and swine; that he was come to his father, and his father's house, where was bread enough and to spare; an house well furnished with all suitable provisions; a family made up of saints, where ministers of the Gospel are stewards, and angels guards, and where Christ is Son, priest, and master; and that he was

received here, and owned as a son; not only was one secretly, but was owned as such openly; and was not only called so by the servants, but by the father himself; and that after he had behaved so vilely, and in his own conscience knew he was unworthy of the relation; and that he was received immediately, as soon as ever he came, and that in the most tender manner; and was entertained in the most free, generous, and sumptuous way; though he went away from his father of himself, and had spent his substance in a scandalous manner; and was in a most filthy, ragged, and piteous condition; and that he should be clothed with the best robe, the robe of Christ's righteousness; and so had nothing to fear from law and justice; nor was he in any danger of wrath to come because of his sins; nor had he any reason to doubt of his right and admission to the heavenly glory; and that he had the ring of love on the hand of faith, and could believe his interest in it, which is better than life, and will continue for ever; and that his feet were shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; that he understood the Gospel, and was brought to a submission to Gospel ordinances, and had his conversation agreeably to it; and that the fatted calf was killed, and set before him to eat of, and feed upon: and now he began to live and fare sumptuously, and to have spiritual joy and pleasure, which he never knew before; and this was but the beginning of joy to him: spiritual joy is not all over at once, it continues and increases; nor is it full and perfect in this life, but in heaven it will be complete, and without interruption; the servants also, the ministers of the Gospel, began to be merry on this occasion; who express their joy at the conversion of sinners, because of the glory of Father, Son, and Spirit, concerned in it; because of the grace bestowed then on sinners themselves; and because the interest of Christ is strengthened, and his churches increased, and Satan's kingdom weakened; and because their own ministry is blessed; and which strengthens their hands and hearts, and encourages them to go on in their work: and this is but the beginning of their joy; for they continue to rejoice at the growth of grace in believers, and when they are in a thriving and flourishing condition; when they walk becoming the Gospel of Christ, and live in peace among themselves; and persevere in faith and holiness to the end; and these will be their joy and crown of rejoicing, at the coming of Christ Jesus.

Ver. 25. *Now his elder son was in the field*, etc.] By “the elder son” is meant, not angels, as has been observed on (^{<Q151>}Luke 15:11) nor truly converted persons, of some standing in the church; for though these may

be said to be elder than young converts, and are more solid and settled, yet they are not ignorant of spiritual mirth; nor of the Gospel sound; nor are they angry at the conversion of sinners; nor will they ever speak in such commendation of themselves; or say that they never had a kid, much less a fatted calf, as this elder brother does: nor the Jews in general, in distinction from the Gentiles, as has been remarked in the above place: the Scribes and Pharisees in particular are meant, in opposition to the publicans and sinners: now these are said to be “in the field”; in the world, which is comparable to an uncultivated field; being overrun with the briers and thorns of sin, and sinful men; where beasts of prey inhabit, and who are fitly signified by lions, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword; and out of which the garden of the church is taken and separated, and fenced by distinguishing grace: now this elder brother, the Scribe and Pharisee, notwithstanding all his sobriety and morality, was in a state of nature and unregeneracy, in the same condition he came into the world; and was under the influence of the god of the world; and was taken up with the things of the world, the honours, riches, and profits of it; and though he was in the Jewish church state, yet was in the field of the world; the ceremonies of that state, were the rudiments of the world; and the sanctuary in it, was a worldly sanctuary; and the chief men in it, were the princes of the world: and this elder son was in the field at work, working for life: to work is right, when men work from a principle of grace, in the name, faith, and strength of Christ, to the glory of God and religion, and their own and others good; and ascribe all they do to the grace of God, and acknowledge their own unworthiness; but to work, in order to obtain righteousness, life, and salvation, proceeds from wretched ignorance, and is an instance of the pride and vanity of human nature; and is not only a vain and fruitless attempt, but a piece of wickedness, it being a denial of Christ, as God's salvation: now while the younger son, the publicans and sinners, were received and entertained in the house and kingdom of God their Father, the elder son, the Scribe and Pharisee, were without in the field, labouring to obtain life by doing;

and as he came and drew nigh to the house. The Ethiopic version reads, “to the border of the city”: he “came” out of the field, the world; not that he was come out from the world, and had left the company of the men of it, or parted with the sins and lusts of it; but he came from his labour, having done his day's work, and the task of duty he had set himself; and was now going for his hire, for what he imagined he had merited: and

drew nigh to the house; for he did not go in, (~~2153~~Luke 15:28) he only made some advances to it, and took some steps towards entrance into it; namely, into a visible church; he came to hear the word, as the Scribes and Pharisees did; and to attend on ordinances, particularly at the administration of the ordinance of baptism, and seemed desirous of submitting to it in John's time; but never came to Christ in a spiritual way; nor entered into the kingdom of heaven, the Gospel dispensation; and did all that could be, to hinder others, especially publicans and sinners;

he heard music and dancing. The Syriac; Persic, and Ethiopic versions, leave out “dancing”: the former only reads, “the voice of the singing of many”, and the next, “the voice of singing”; and the last, “pipes and songs”; by “music” is meant not the instrumental music used in the Old Testament church; nor vocal singing in the new; but the preaching of the Gospel by the ministers of it, the servants, in (~~2152~~Luke 15:22,23) setting forth the love of God, the righteousness of Christ, peace, pardon, and salvation by him; in which, as in music, there is a distinction of sounds, the voice of Christ in the Gospel, and the several doctrines of it, are distinctly pronounced, discerned, and understood: and there is also, as in music, an harmony and agreement; the Gospel does not give an uncertain sound, nor contradict itself; it is not yea and nay: and, like music, it is delightful and charming; it is a sound of love in all the three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit; of free grace, and rich mercy; of liberty, reconciliation, forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life: and as music, has a powerful and attractive virtue in it; so the Gospel is mighty and efficacious in the hand of the Spirit of God to quicken even dead sinners, to draw them to Christ, to allure, charm, and comfort them: “dancing” may design those expressions of joy, which are delivered by young converts at hearing the Gospel, as by the three thousand, in (~~4124~~Acts 2:41) by the inhabitants of Samaria, (~~4186~~Acts 8:6,8) and by the jailor and his household, (~~4164~~Acts 16:34) and by many others: now all this the elder brother, the Scribes and Pharisees, “heard”; not so as to know the true meaning of it, as appears from the following verse; nor as to approve of it; or so as to feel the power, and enjoy the sweetness of it; nor as to practise what was heard; only externally hearing, they heard, but understood not, their eyes were blinded, and their hearts were hardened.

Ver. 26. *And he called one of the servants*, etc.] One of the ministers of the word, one of the disciples of Christ, as the Scribes and Pharisees

sometimes did: choosing rather to speak to one of the disciples, than to Christ himself, when they were offended; (see ~~41216~~ Mark 2:16)

And asked what these things meant: for self-righteous persons, as these Scribes and Pharisees were, are ignorant of the truths of the Gospel; they do not understand them, nor conceive what is meant by them they cannot take in the doctrine of God's everlasting love, that it should be so early; be towards some, and not others; that it should be independent of men's works, both in the rise and continuance of it; that it should be exercised towards sinners, and yet be no licentious doctrine: and as much at a loss are they about the doctrine of election: as that it should be eternal, personal, discriminating, irrespective of works, and yet give no liberty to sin: they know nothing of the covenant of grace, nor have any other notion but of a covenant of works; and if of any other, yet a conditional one, made with them upon their conversion; or rather, one of their own making, and which depends on their good behaviour: they are ignorant of salvation by Christ; of justification by his righteousness; of peace and pardon by his blood; of the doctrine of regeneration, and of living by faith on Christ; and of eternal life as God's free gift; and so likewise of spiritual joy, and mirth: they are strangers to themselves, their lost state and condition, and a deliverance out of it; to the kingdom of God, or an internal work of grace, the fruits of which are peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; and to the person, offices, and grace of Christ; to justification and atonement by him; to the promises of the Gospel, and to that itself which is the joyful sound; all which produce spiritual joy, delight, and pleasure in sensible souls: the rejoicing of such persons is only in themselves, and in their own works and duties; but as for true solid spiritual joy, they intermeddle not with it, nor know they what it means.

Ver. 27. *And he said unto him,* etc.] The Syriac, Arabic, and Persic versions, leave out the copulative “and”, and the latter reads, “they said unto him”; the servants, one or other of them:

thy brother is come; for in the relation of a brother, the younger son stood to him; being of the same nature and species, of the same nation, and both sons by national adoption: who was “come” to his father, and to his father's house; not as a righteous and worthy person in himself, but as a sinner, a sensible and penitent one; as hungry, naked, and ready to perish; and as unworthy, in his own opinion, of the least mercy and favour, and especially to be called a son:

and thy father; who was so by creation, by national adoption, and by profession:

hath killed the fatted calf, by which Christ is meant: (see Gill on “⁴⁰¹⁵³Luke 15:23”) and designs either the concern the Father had in the death of Christ; or rather, his orders to his ministering servants, to preach a crucified Christ, to the comfort of poor sinners; and in general, expresses the large and rich entertainment God makes for souls, when they are brought home to him by repentance: and the Persic version adds, “and hath made a feast”; the reason of which is given in the next clause:

because he hath received him safe and sound; or “in good health”. This is left out in the Persic version, but rightly retained in all others: the word translated “received”, signifies the recovery, or enjoyment of any thing before had, but since lost, and the taking it at the hands of another: the elect of God, signified by the younger son, were his in a peculiar sense, being chosen by him; but through the fall of Adam, and their own transgressions, were in some sense lost unto him; but in consequence of redemption by Christ, and through efficacious grace in calling, are found, received, and enjoyed again: and so the Ethiopic version reads it, “because he found him alive”; and so took him again, as he did, at the hands of his son: all the elect of God were put into the hands of Christ, as the surety of them; and being redeemed by his blood in the effectual calling, they are brought by him to the Father, and come to God by him: as they are also received by the Father from the hands of his Spirit, who convinces them of sin, causes them to believe in Christ, witnesses their adoption to them; in a view of which, they come to God, and are received by him; and even from their own hands too, for under the power of divine grace, they are made willing to give up themselves to the Lord, and do so; who kindly and graciously receives them into his arms; into his heart's love, and affection, into the open enjoyment of it; into his care and protection, into his family, and into communion with himself, and will afterwards receive them to glory: the case and condition in which he was received is,

safe and sound; there is but one word in the original; some translate it “safe”, as the Arabic version; and others “sound”, as the Syriac; and ours both: he was received “safe”, though he had been in a far country, and in a mighty famine, and almost starved: God's elect fell in Adam, as others; their nature is corrupted by sin, and they are guilty of actual transgressions, which deserve death; yet they were preserved in Christ, and being

redeemed by him, are safe; so that the law cannot lay hold on them, nor sin, nor any thing else condemn them, nor Satan destroy them: and he was received “sound”; in his right mind, being come to himself, and brought to true repentance for his sin; and willing to part with his own righteousness, and to be clothed with the best robe; and having his spiritual senses exercised, to discern between good and evil, and upon the person and grace of Christ; or he was received “sound”, being in good health, and as opposed to being sick or diseased: sins are diseases, and as all men, so God's elect, are attended with them; but being made sensible of them, they come to Christ for healing; and they are perfectly cured by him; by his stripes and wounds, all their iniquities are forgiven; so that they have no reason to say any more, they are sick: and hence the Father receives them safe and sound; and which is matter of joy, and was the occasion of all this music, dancing, and feasting.

Ver. 28. *And he was angry*, etc.] Particularly that the fatted calf was killed, (~~15:27~~ Luke 15:27,30) the preaching of a crucified Christ, and of free and full salvation by him, is highly displeasing and provoking to self-righteous persons; they are angry at it, that it should be free, that election to salvation should be of grace, that justification should be freely by the grace of God, and that pardon of sin should be according to the riches of God's grace, and salvation be by grace, and not by works; and that it should be discriminating, that God should appoint some, and not all unto salvation; that Christ should redeem some, and not all; and that all men are not called unto it, by his Spirit and grace; and that it should be full and complete, so as nothing can be added to it; and that it should be for sinners, and alone by Christ, and by him as crucified: it would be agreeable, was it taught that salvation was by Christ in a doctrinal way, by giving laws and rules to men, whereby to save themselves; or that Christ saves by example, and not by his sacrifice, in a way of satisfaction for sin. Now, though no grievous words were used, nor any thing said that might justly provoke, yet such was the pride of his heart, that he could not bear that his brother should be taken so much notice of, who had acted and lived so scandalously; and besides, his own character as a righteous person, was neglected by this doctrine; and his own righteousness laid aside, in the business of justification and salvation, which was intolerable by him:

and would not go in; into his father's house, nor to the feast, nor into the kingdom of heaven, or Gospel dispensation; the Scribes and Pharisees shut it up to themselves, and others; would neither go in themselves, nor suffer

others; they did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah, nor did they receive, but reject him; nor did they give any credit to the doctrines, nor submit to the ordinances of that dispensation:

therefore came his father out; not in a way of wrath and judgment, but in the ministry of the word; for though the Jews rejected it, it was not at once taken away from them, but was continued time after time, and for some considerable time: the Jews of old had the ministry of the word, both by angels and men; God frequently went forth to them by his prophets, and at last by his Son; and though they were angry with him, and rejected him, yet still the ministry of the word, by the disciples of Christ, were continued a good while to them; which shows the condescending goodness and grace of God, and his patience and longsuffering towards them:

and entreated him; the Persic version reads, “and said unto him, why dost thou not go in?” this regards the external call by the ministry of the word, to the outward duties of religion, to means of grace; to give credit to the doctrines, and to attend the ordinances of the Gospel.

Ver. 29. *And he answering, said to his father*, etc.] Commending himself, and reflecting on his father:

lo, these many years do I serve thee; for though he was called a son, yet differed little from a servant; he was of a servile disposition, and under a spirit of bondage; he served his father, not in the Gospel, but in the law, moral and ceremonial; in the letter of it, and not in the newness of the Spirit; externally, and not internally; from fear, and not from love; with mercenary views, and not freely; with trust in, and dependence on his service, seeking justification and eternal life by it, and not with a view to the glory of God; and this he had done “many years”; from his youth upwards, as the Pharisee in (~~4080~~) Matthew 19:20) whereas his younger brother had never served him, but his own lusts; and yet as soon as ever he was come home, before he could enter upon service, this entertainment was made for him, and which he therefore resented: moreover, he does not say I have served thee, but “I do”; denoting the continuance and constancy of his service; and intimating that his life had been, and was one continued series of obedience:

neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; which though true of the elect angels, can never be said of any of the sons of men; and which shows, that he had never been under a work of the Spirit of God, who

convinces of sin; and had never seen himself in a true light, in the glass of that law, he pretended to serve God in; that he was a stranger to the plague of his own heart, and was a self-deceiver, and the truth of grace was not in him: he could not be a good man, for so to say, is contrary to the experience of all good men; to their groans, complaints, and confessions; to their prayers, for fresh application of pardoning grace; and to the observation of all wise and good men in all ages; and most fully proves him to be, a Pharisee:

and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; some by a “kid”, or “goat”, as Theophylact, understand a persecutor, as Saul was of David, and Ahab of Elijah; and so means that God had not delivered up such an one into his hands; or took him away by death, that he might have some peace and rest, amidst his labours and service; and others understand this of the Jews, desiring Barabbas, a goat, and not Jesus, the Lamb of God; but his meaning seems to be, that he had never received any favour in proportion to the services he had done; and so charges his father with ingratitude.

Ver. 30. *But as soon as this thy son was come*, etc.] He will not own him in the relation of a brother, though the father had owned him in that of a son; and the offence he took was, that the fatted calf should be killed, or that a crucified Christ should be preached; that he should be preached at all, and much less that he should be preached to sinners; and still less that he should be preached so soon to them, as soon as ever they became sensible of their sin, as it was the will of his father it should be: for such are not to be sent away to cleanse themselves from sin by any thing they do, and then apply to Christ; or to heal themselves, and then come to him for a cure; or to get peace by doing so, and then come to him for rest; or to do any thing to fit themselves for him, for their case requires present help: now at this the self-righteous man is displeased. The elder brother would have had another method taken with this younger son: he would have had him soundly whipped with the rod of the law, for his former sins; and sent into the fields along with him to work out his salvation; and not to have a rag put upon him, or a shoe on his foot, or a morsel of bread given him, till he had earned them; but instead of this, to be received and entertained in the manner he was, and so soon, highly provoked him: for he thought such a conduct was unbecoming God, and his moral perfections; and what his brother was undeserving of; and opened a door to, licentiousness; and highly reflected on his services, as of no value and regard.

Which hath devoured thy living: given to his son; that part of his goods he had divided to him, (^{<Q1512>}Luke 15:12,13)

with harlots; in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness, in gluttony and debauchery:

thou hast killed for him the fatted calf; (see Gill on “^{<Q1513>}Luke 15:23”)

Ver. 31. *And he said to him, son*, etc.] For so he was, as before observed, by creation, national adoption, and profession:

thou art ever with me; not in such a sense as Christ the Son of God was: nor can it design the gracious presence of God, or communion with him; for this man did not walk with God; and besides, this is more frequently expressed by God's being with his people, than by their being with him; nor are good men always with God, or God with them, in this sense; sometimes the phrase designs the saints being with God, or Christ, in heaven; but here it intends only attendance on public worship, in the place where the symbol of God's presence was, the temple; and the “ever” denotes the term of the legal dispensation, which in many branches of it, as circumcision, the passover, and other ordinances and statutes, is said to be for ever.

And all that I have is thine: which must be understood with a limitation; for it cannot mean, that he had all the perfections of God, as Christ the Son of God has; nor all spiritual blessings, as the adopted sons of God have; nor indeed any of them, but all the outward ordinances of the legal dispensation, which belonged to the Jews; particularly those that are enumerated in (^{<R001>}Romans 9:4,5) as the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, the promises, their descent from the fathers, and the Messiah's descent from them; they had him in person among them, and his personal ministry, the word and ordinances of the Gospel; and had as much as they could have, or desire to have, in an external way.

Ver. 32. *It was meet that we should make merry*, etc.] Both father, son, and servants; (see Gill on “^{<Q1513>}Luke 15:23””) (see Gill on “^{<Q1514>}Luke 15:24””) and this elder brother also, because of the relation he stood in to him: and if he had had the same spiritual affection the apostle had for his brethren and kinsmen, according to the flesh, (^{<R001>}Romans 9:3 10:1) and he would have rejoiced at the conversion and return of sinners by repentance:

and be glad; as his father was, and the angels in heaven be; (see ~~<150>~~ Luke 15:10)

for this thy brother, though he would not own him as such,

was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found: (see Gill on “~~<150>~~ Luke 15:24”) and so the parable is concluded, the elder brother being silenced, and having nothing to say against such strong reasoning.