

Sermons of Ralph Erskine



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“This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy: behold, this is the law of the house” Ezekiel 43:12.

It is most suitable and necessary that, these who have been making a solemn profession of their being of the household of faith, who have been eating and drinking in God’s house as fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, should know the order and law of the house; and, therefore, I lay before you a short sum of it, very emphatically here expressed, — “This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy: behold, this is the law of the house.”

In the beginning of this chapter we have an account of the glory of God filling the temple, (particularly verse 5), and then a promise of God’s continuing his presence in his church, (verses 7, 8), to the purging them from their idolatry, corruption, and defilement, which here they are put in mind of, for their conviction and humiliation. From verse 10, and downward, we have Israel exhorted to faith and repentance; “Shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquity.” The temple was a token of God’s kindness, and symbol of presence, as well as a type of Christ the true temple, and of the New Testament church. And, when he enjoins to show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed, we may remark, that the way wherein a gracious God shames people for their sin is to shew them his kindness and gracious presence: thus he puts them out of countenance, and sets them a blushing, “That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God,” (Ezek. 16:63). — Again, “If they be ashamed of all that they have done, then shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and all the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms

thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the laws thereof; and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them,” (verse 11). When his kindness makes them ashamed of their sin, then he shows them more and more of his kindness, and grants them more and more of his gracious presence. In the close of verse 11, “Write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.” Here remark that the privileges of God’s house and people do not supersede their duty, but bind them more sweetly and strictly thereunto; and, therefore, obedience is here enjoined, and thereupon here is the rule laid down, “This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy: behold, this is the law of the house.”

In which words we may notice the four following particulars:

1. What is the matter of the law of God’s house, namely, Holiness; that all the inhabitants be holy, for “Holiness becometh God’s house for ever.”
2. The degree of that holiness which becometh his house, viz., that it be Most Holy; the perfection of holiness is required.
3. Notice the extent thereof, “From the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about.” Formerly only the sanctuary was most holy, but now, in the gospel times, to which this prophecy hath a reference, the whole mount of the house shall be so, and the whole limit thereof; all the courts, all the chambers, and every part of the house shall be as the most holy place.
4. The double assurance given us concerning this ordinance of God’s house, “This is the law of the house;” and, again, “Behold, this is the law of the house.”

By the most holy in the text, we are to understand, either the privilege of the house of God in the gospel times, namely, that all believers in Christ have access unto the holy of holies, and boldness to enter into the holiest, (Heb. 10:19); they being all spiritual priests, a royal priesthood, they have access not in the

virtue of the blood of bulls and goats, but in the virtue of the blood of Jesus, and with this advantage also, above the high priest under the law, that wherever we are, we have access through Christ to the Father: or by the most holy, we are to understand the duty of the church of God, or children of his house, that they be most holy; and indeed the former privilege lays the strongest foundation for, and brings them under the strictest obligation to the duty. According to the view we have here of the most holy, accordingly we are to understand what is to be meant by the law of the house.

If by most holy, we understand the privilege of access to the most holy place; then by “the law of the house,” we are to understand the law of grace, the law of faith, the gospel, or God’s act of grace towards us, expressed in the promise.

Again, if by the most holy, we understand the equality of the church, and the duty of all the children of the house, that they be most holy; then, by “the law of the house,” we are to understand the precept of the moral law as a rule of holiness, duty, and obedience toward God. Both these, I suppose, may be included; and the former as the means of the latter. Gospel privileges making way for gospel holiness, according to the order of the covenant of grace, in opposition to that of works, where Do, and Live, made duty go before the privilege: whereas here, Live, and Do, makes the privilege the foundation of duty, and the strong basis on which all gospel holiness stands.

By the top of the mountain, and the whole limit thereof round about, we are to understand the universality of this holiness, and the extent both of that privilege of admission to the holy place, and of that obligation upon the privileged to be a holy people.

Observe: “That universal holiness is so much the established law of God’s house, that the whole family, being privileged with access to the most holy place, are thereupon under the strongest obligation to be the most holy people.”

The proof of this doctrine I refer to the prosecution of it in the following method, as the Lord may assist: —

I. I would speak a little of the house of God.

II. Hint at the nature of that holiness that is peculiar to the house of God.

III. Show that this is the law of the house; and why it is said to be so, again and again.

IV. Touch at the extent of this holiness required by the law of God's house, "upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about."

V. Consider a little the privilege of access to the most holy place.

VI. Show that this privilege obliges the whole to be the most holy people. And then,

VII. Make application of the whole in several uses.

I. I am first to speak a little of "the house of God." The church is the house of God; "If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. 3:5). And it is so called on several accounts:

1. God is the builder of it; "He that built all things is God," (Heb. 3:4). The church is as glorious a piece of work as the building of heaven and earth; yea, more glorious. It is the work of glorious Omnipotence, to make life out of death; he makes these that were dead in sins to be living stones, (1 Pet. 2:5). "What shall one answer the messengers of the nations? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it," [or, betake themselves to it,] (Isa. 14:32).

2. Because God is the repairer of it; it is he that repairs the waste places, and the desolations of many generations, (Isa. 41:4). And this is also a glorious work: "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he will appear in his glory," (Psa. 102:16). It is too glorious for a creature; he that is God as well as man hath the honour of it ascribed to him; "He, even he, shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory," (Zech. 11:13). He may raise up instruments, but he himself is the principal agent. Saints may weep for Zion, but the Lord must rebuild and repair it.

3. Because God is the dweller therein: he dwells there where he sets up his ordinances, though he confines not himself to places:

“In all places where I record my name I will come to thee, and bless thee,” (Exod. 20:24). God is known by his ordinances, as we are known by our names; “The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it,” (Psa. 132:13,14).

4. Because God is the governor thereof: He alone gives laws of everlasting consequence, to destruction or salvation: “There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy,” (Jam. 4:12). The Lord is our Lawgiver. Popes and patrons may usurp a government of the church; but the Lord alone is the God of conscience, and the government is on his shoulders.

Question: Who are the Members of this house of God?

Answer: The church is either visible or invisible. To the visible church on earth, belong all that have a visible and credible profession; and it is meet for us to judge that they are saints, as the apostle speaks to the Philippians, (1:7). But we may be deceived; we know not the heart; therefore it concerns every professor to examine himself. The invisible church is known to God only; “Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knows them that are his,” (2 Tim. 2:19). Well, but how shall I know myself to be one of them? Why, it follows, “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.” To be of the household of God, is not to be a member of the Presbyterianial government, nor a communicating member of such a congregation; but to be a member of Christ.

Question: What sort of a house is the church unto God?

Answer: As it is,

1. His dwelling-house; of which already; so,

2. It is his pleasure-house; for, “The Lord taketh pleasure in his people.” O wonderful!

3. It is his treasure-house; for, “The Lord’s portion is his people, and Jacob the lot of his inheritance;” though he cannot be enriched therewith, yet he reckons them his riches, his jewels, which he will make up at the last day.

4. The church also is his magazine-house; built for an armoury, whereon hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. God's church is his castle; and, "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Again,

5. It is his vessel-house, wherein all the vessels of mercy are hung; and Christ is the nail fastened in a sure place, on which they hang, (Isa. 22:23, 24). Weak and strong are there.

6. It is also his banqueting-house, (Song 2:4), where he and they feed together; he feeds among the lilies, till the day break: and he sups with them, and they with him, (Rev. 3:20).

II. The next thing proposed, was, To hint at the nature of that holiness that is peculiar to the house of God. Holiness in the ordinary sense wherein it is attributed to the church and children of God, may be viewed,

1. In its definition. And, I think, it may be thus defined, "A full renovation of our natures, into the image of God, through Jesus Christ, by the holy Spirit." It is called a new birth, a new creation, a new creature: "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature," (2 Cor. 5:17). "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works," (Eph. 2:11). It is the image of God, who is holiness itself. It is a grace; yea, the conjunction and constellation of all the graces. It is a duty, and the sum and substance of all duty.

2. We may view it in its spring; it is neither natural nor acquired. It is not to be taken up by the strength of reason, nor the power of freewill, nor by the force of conviction and resolution from within or without: nay, "He that hath wrought us to the self same thing is God." It is not to be ascribed to the virtue of ordinances, nor the worth of instruments, but to the powerful efficiency of the Holy Spirit of God; the sanctifying Spirit. Art, nature, education, can do nothing here; it is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of God, (1 Cor. 6:11).

3. We may view it in the subject of it, and that is the believer in Christ, his whole man? "The very God of peace sanctify you

wholly; spirit, soul, and body,” (1 Thess. 5:23). If ye ask, Where is the seat of holiness, in the head, or the heart, or the conscience; in the inward or outward man? We reply, The seat of holiness is not in any one of them, but in all of them: it is a leaven that leavens the whole lump. The holy man hath a sanctified enlightened understanding, to discern spiritual things, which before he understood not: a sanctified will, inclining to spiritual things, which before he hated; a sanctified memory, to mind heavenly things, which before was only earthly; a sanctified conscience, awakened to check for sin, and excite to duty; a sanctified lip, to speak of God, and to speak to him, and for him; a sanctified life, to glorify God.

4. We may view it in the parts of it, which are two; a ceasing to do evil, and a learning to do good. The former is the privative, and the latter the positive part of it. — There is the privative part of holiness, which is called mortification: that is, a heart purged from the love of every sin, and a life purged from the practice of every sin; sin is left in the heart, but is not loved nor liked; nay, it is hated and disliked; it may remain, but it cannot reign where holiness is. — There is the positive part of holiness, which is called vivification, or a living unto God, by a life of dependence on him, and a life of obedience to him. The man not only ceases to do evil, but he learns to do well. It is, in short, a walking with God, a walking in Christ, and a walking in the Spirit. — After this hint of the nature of holiness, I proceed,

III. To the third thing, which was, To show that this is the law of the house; and why it is here ingeminate [repeated] and doubled, with a “Behold, this is the law of the house.” For clearing this head, you would consider three things: 1. What law it is that is called the law of the house. 2. How holiness is the law of the house. 3. [Why is it ingeminate and doubled?] The reason why this is redoubled.

1. What law it is that is called “the law of the house.” For the clearing of this, ye would consider three laws that the house of God hath always had some concern in.

(1). There is a law from which the house is delivered; that is, the law of works, or the covenant of works; this is the law they are delivered from; “Ye are not under the law, but under grace,” (Rom. 6:14). They are not under it, to be either justified or condemned; they are neither under the command of it, to be justified by their obedience; nor under the threatening of it, to be condemned for their disobedience. Their title to eternal life stands upon Christ’s doing and obedience; therefore they have nothing to do with the Do and Live of that covenant; their security from eternal death, stands upon Christ’s dying and suffering; therefore they have nothing; to do with the penalty of that covenant, “If thou doest not, thou shalt die.” Christ has delivered them from the curse of this law, being made a curse for them. The law of works required holiness, indeed, in perfection; but in such a form, and under such a penalty, that, if there were no other law but this, we sinners and breakers of the law, would be irrecoverably lost. By this law, holiness is lost, because the law is violated; and therefore, by the deeds thereof, no flesh can be justified in God’s sight: for sinners to be justified by works, or by the law, is a contradiction; the law can never justify a breaker of it, unless he hath a perfect righteousness from another quarter and source than himself: Therefore,

(2). As there is a law from which the house is delivered, viz., the law of works; so there is a law by which the house is recovered and relieved, namely, the law of faith, or the covenant of grace. Of both these laws, which are clearly distinguished by the apostle, you read, “Where is boasting then? it is excluded; By what law? of works? nay, but by the law of faith,” (Rom. 3:27). This law of faith is nothing else but the covenant of grace and the doctrine of the gospel. In a word, it is the promise, (Gal. 3:21). And it is called a law, both in opposition to the covenant of works, to show that believers are not under the law of works, but the law of grace; and also to show, that the free promises of the gospel are a law that God makes to himself in the behalf of sinners, or an act of the parliament of heaven. Acts of grace require no condition on the sinner’s part, but only of the Surety,

whose blood and righteousness is the condition of all the promises of God; which, therefore, are said to be Yea and Amen in Christ, to the glory of God. And it is called a law of faith, because the gospel, properly, is not a law to be obeyed; but a law to be believed. It is not a law of commands, to be fulfilled by us; but a law of promises, to be fulfilled upon us, in a way of free grace; and therefore, here nothing is to be wrought or expected by works, but all things to be expected by grace, or believed upon the faithfulness of a promising God; “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,” (Rom. 4:5). — This law of faith is so much the law of God’s house, that this is the very law that erects the house; it stands upon the law of faith; I mean, upon the free promise of God, which is the object and ground of faith. All the privileges and immunities of the house are owing to the law of faith. — By the law of faith, or gospel promise, sinners are warranted to come into the most holy place, and so they come to be made the most holy people. — In this law, holiness is promised; by it, holiness is wrought. In this law of faith, faith itself is promised, or grace and strength to believe; “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power,” (Psa. 110:3). “When I am lifted up, I will draw all men after me,” (John 12:32). This absolute promise is indefinitely dispensed to sinners, that they may look into and rely upon this conquering power drawing grace of God. By this law of faith, I say, the house is delivered. Again,

(3). There is a law by which the house is governed; namely, the law of love: I mean, the moral law, as it is a rule of life and holiness, not a rule of acceptance, (this were to make it a covenant of works) but a rule of obedience, in the hand of Christ. This is the law, which, by Moses, is reduced to ten words, ten commandments; and I call it a law of love, because our Lord Jesus reduced it into two words; namely, love to God, and love to our neighbour: And the apostle reduced it to one word, viz., Love; “The end of the commandment is love,” (1 Tim. 1:5). And again, “Love is the fulfilling of the law,” by which the house is

governed. It may be called a law of love, because, as love is the cord, by which God draws his household to obedience; so love is the motive that engages them to obey it: they obey, not from slavish fear, like these that are under the yoke of the law, as a covenant: but love, which casts out fear. Christ's yoke is easy, because it is a loving yoke; not driving by violence, but drawing them kindly by the cord of love in every duty: not requiring rigorously, under pain of death and damnation, but constraining sweetly with delight to do the will of God. It is not a grievous law requiring obedience, but giving no strength, and seeking brick without straw; but a gracious law, lined with love and grace, promising strength to obey, working in them both to will and to do. Hence his commandments are not grievous; duties are not gravamenous [an accusation that weighs most heavily against the accused]; ordinances are not a heavy burden; but rather like a chariot paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem. This is the law by which the house is governed pleasantly and peaceably; for he that hath the government upon his shoulders, is the Prince of peace.

The consideration of these three laws, may clear your view about the law of the house; the law, from which the house is delivered, is the law of works, or covenant of works; the law, by which the house is delivered and recovered, is the law of faith, or covenant of grace; and the law, by which the house is governed, is the law of love, or moral law, as a rule in the hand of a loving Jesus. Now, by the violation of the first of these, holiness was lost; by the publication of the second, holiness is restored: and by the promulgation of the third, holiness is required and established as a rule for directing the household in the way of holiness. This leads me,

2. To the second question here, viz., How holiness is the law of the house? For clearing this, it is necessary to remember, that the threefold law that I have mentioned, is fitly presented to us in the word of God. For by the first, we are convinced of our unholiness; "By the law is the knowledge of sin." By the second, we are enlightened to see where holiness is to be had, namely, in the holy

covenant of the holy Jesus, whom God hath given to be the covenant of the people, as the gospel declares: By the third, we are directed in the way of holiness. The first is not the law of the house; for they are delivered from it; only God makes use of it as a means subservient to bring sinners to Christ, or to bring them to his house where the only law is the two last; the law of faith, and the law of love. Now, the spiritual house of Christ is a holy building, where holy faith and holy obedience, comprehend all the holiness of the house; and because it is to be built up in the most holy faith, therefore the law of faith, or covenant of grace, is the law of the house, discovering the object and the ground of faith; and, because it is to be built up in a most holy obedience, therefore the law of love, or moral law as a rule, is the law of the house, directing and binding them to this obedience; in the former, holiness is promised; in the latter, holiness is enjoined.

(1). As to the law of faith, or the gospel, holiness is to be considered as the privilege of the house, as a promised privilege; and by this law of faith it is viewed as a purchased privilege, as a privilege freely continued.

(2). As to the law of love, or moral law, holiness is to be considered as the duty of the house; for, holiness is the matter of the law; holiness is the end of it; holiness is the sum of it; it forbids nothing but unholiness, it requires nothing but holiness; “As he that has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy,” (1 Pet. 1:15). The law of love must be a holy law; for, as all unholiness is comprised in enmity to God and man, so all holiness is comprised in love to God and man.

3. The third question here was, Why is it ingeminate and doubled? “This is the law of the house; Behold, this is the law of the house:” Why is it twice proclaimed in the text?

(1). It imports, That this law of the house, respecting holiness, is an indispensable law: therefore it is notified; and again notified with a behold, that none may pretend ignorance. The moral law, materially considered, is eternally binding.

(2). It imports, That ye are deaf and dull of hearing; or,

“Hearing, we do not hear; but, like the deaf adder, stop our ear at the voice of the charmer:” and at the best are ready to forget that this is the law of the house. Therefore we are assured of it again and again.

(3). It imports, That there is danger in neglecting this advertisement; and, in being remiss and slack in the study of holiness, it endangers the house; for, though the household of faith are all well entitled to heaven, and well secured from hell, yet the law of the house hath a sanction suitable to the children of the family; “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes,” (Psa. 89:30-32). The rod of God is terrible, even to his children.

(4). It may import, That this is the beginning and end of true religion: therefore, that this is the law of the house, is both at the beginning and the end of the text. Here is the preface, “This is the law of the house;” here is the conclusion of the whole matter, “Behold, this is the law of the house.” This boundary is set round about the house of God; and, “Holiness to the Lord,” must be the motto of the house, from the top to the bottom thereof. This leads,

IV. To the Fourth thing proposed, namely, The extent of this law of holiness: “Upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy.” — I think, in general, this speaks out the universality of that holiness God calls for in his house. — It should be universal subjectively, the whole heart and all the faculties of the soul should be engaged in the study of holiness; we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. — It should be universal objectively, with respect to all the commands of God; “Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments,” without exception, without limitation. It should be universal intensively, with the utmost intenseness of soul; “Following the Lord with full purpose of mind. I said, I will take heed to my way. I have sworn, and I will perform it, That I will keep thy righteous judgments.” And it must be universal extensively, with respect to

all times and seasons, companies and occasions, places and circumstances. The law of the house binds to holiness universal in all these respects.

But, more particularly, the extent of this holiness in the house of God, as here expressed, "Upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about," seems to me to import an universality respecting everything that relates to the house of God, the church of God: the expression suits the Old Testament dispensation, while the material temple stood upon the top of the mountain; but the gospel meaning thereof, as it respects the New Testament church, seems to be, that everything about God's house, from the top to the bottom, shall be most holy, as becomes the spiritual temple of God. It says,

1. That all the officers shall be most holy; ministers, elders, deacons, all that bear any vessels in God's house; "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord," (Isa. 52:11). And hence, when God comes to purge and purify his church, he is said particularly to purify the sons of Levi, (Mal. 3:3). Surely we, whose office is to go to the top of the mount, ought to have holy feet to tread such a holy place, that it may be said of us, "How beautiful, on the mountains, are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace!" Alas, many officers in God's house among us, that have most of the beauty of holiness about them, God is fast taking them away. He seems to be taking away the gold and silver, and leaving the dross; and, when he is taking down such as were props and pillars in the house, what shall we think but that the house is like to fall about our ears, and heavy judgments at the door, when the righteous are taken away from the evil to come. But,

2. It says that all the members of the house shall be most holy, all the children of the family; "Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; and they shall call them the most holy people, the redeemed of the Lord," (Isa. 62:11). Every inhabitant of the house, every believer, every member of Christ, every professor of Christ, every one that nameth the name of

Christ must depart from iniquity. It says that not only ministers should be holy, but people should be holy; not only the top of the mount, but the whole limit thereof round about. All that enter within the walls of Zion must be holy, otherwise they are not indwellers, like children, but only incomers, like dogs that shall be banished out with disgrace, and never admitted to the higher house.

3. It says that all the courts and judicatories of the house should be most holy; Synods most holy, and General Assemblies of the house most holy; “Upon the top of the mount, the whole limit thereof round about.” When these courts and judicatories of the house, or Assemblies of the Church, whether inferior or superior ones are most holy, and purged with the spirit of judgment, and spirit of burning, then they are entitled to Heaven’s protection; “The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place in Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night,” (Isa. 4:4, 5). But when, in days of degeneracy, corruption, and defection, like ours, they become most unholy, then they are exposed to ruin and desolation.

4. It says, That all the acts and statutes of the house are to be most holy. And indeed the acts of Assemblies and Judicatories of the church are to be regarded only according to their holiness and agreeableness to the holy word of God; “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,” (Isa. 8:20). Acts issued even from the top of the mountain, if they be not according to the law of the house, are to be rejected, opposed, and protested against, as the commandments of men, and not the commandments of God; “In controversy they shall stand in judgment, and they shall judge it according to my judgments; and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies” (Ezek. 44:23,24). And indeed, it is but a dismal time, when the children of Zion are obliged to plead with their mother, and even protest against her acts and statutes.

5. It says, That all the forms and ordinances of the house be

most holy; I mean, the form of doctrine, the form of worship, the form of discipline, the form of government, that they be according to the scripture-pattern; as it was said to Moses concerning the form of the tabernacle, “Look that thou make it after the pattern that was showed thee in the mount,” (Exod. 25:40 compared with Acts 7:44, Heb. 8:5). The doctrine, sound and lively; worship, pure and spiritual; discipline, pure and impartial; and government, beautiful and orderly, is the outward glory of the church: and God hath said, “Upon all the glory there shall be a defence,” (Isa. 4:5) But in so far as the fences are taken away, in as far is the glory departed from Israel, and the ark of God taken by the Philistines, within or without the house. The holiness of doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the house, comprehending the top of the mount, and the whole limit thereof, ought to be defended, and contended for, that it be not spoiled, corrupted, and defaced by these who make themselves famous for lifting up hammers and axes upon the carved work; and the rather, that the Church of Scotland, particularly, has been so often in our Reformation-days, solemnly sworn, by National Covenant, to the defence thereof, against all anti-Christian, unscriptural, and unholy forms and orders whatsoever.

6. It says, That all the chambers and rooms of the house should be most holy; I mean, all the ordinances of the house, whether public or private, or secret; which are like so many chambers and rooms of the house to be kept clean and most holy; for, “He will be sanctified of all them that come nigh him,” (Lev. 10:3). The outer rooms and public chambers of solemn ordinances, words, and sacraments; the more private chambers of spiritual conference and family worship; and the secret chambers of retired devotion, the chamber of meditation, the chamber of prayer, shall all be most holy, and occupied in the most holy manner. Not only all the public rooms, but all the secret closets of the house shall be most holy, not only the top of the mount, but the whole limit thereof round about; whatever part of the house we enter, is to be most holy, in the exercise of faith, love, and all the holy graces of the Spirit, and in spiritual endeavours, through grace, to get all that

are about the house made holy, and all things that are within the house, and without the house, and round about the house, the top of the mount, the whole limit thereof round about; this is the law of the house. The Lord knows how little it is observed now!

V. The next thing proposed, was, To touch a little at the privilege of access to the most holy place. This being a special part of the gospel that lies in the text, hid under this Old Testament phrase; I would open it up in these two or three remarks.

Remark 1. “That access to the most holy place, is nothing else but access to the most holy God, and therefore, it is the most glorious privilege that a sinner can be advanced unto.” The sanctuary, or holy of holies in the Old Testament temple, was a symbol and type of the gracious presence of God; and to come to that, was to come to God: and the holy of holies is in the New Testament, called a throne of grace, (Heb. 4:16). And what is it to come to the throne of grace, or mercy-seat, but just to come to a merciful God, a gracious God in Christ? Therefore it is there said, “Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Where will we find mercy or grace, but with a merciful and gracious God? This is then the most holy place to which there is access.

Remark 2. “That access to the most holy place is by the blood of Jesus.” The priests, under the law, went into the holy place with blood of bulls, and goats; but Christ, our High Priest, having entered, by his own blood, into the holy place, (Heb. 9:12), “We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,” (Heb. 10:19), that is, in the faith of his blood; a justice satisfying blood, and sin expiating blood; even we guilty sinners have freedom to come to a just and holy God, and boldness to expect grace and glory, as the purchase of that blood; even that blood which is God glorifying, sinner sanctifying, heaven purchasing.

Remark 3. “That access to the most holy place is the privilege

of the whole church.” The whole family, all within the house, have access either proclaimed or obtained: All within the visible church though but in the outer-court, have access proclaimed; “Whosoever will, let him come.” And all within the church invisible, viz., Believers being in the inner court, have access obtained, and daily admission to the holy place. Only the high priest under the law had access to the holy place, and that once a year only; but now all believers, being a royal priesthood, and made kings and priests unto their God, have access, not once a year, (Heb. 9:7), nor once a month; but, perhaps, once a week, once a day; yea, several times a day; perhaps, twenty times in one communion-day; even as oft as they get grace to act faith upon a God in Christ. This privilege of the whole church is here represented by the top of the mount, and the whole limit thereof round about, having the privilege of the holy place.

Remark 4. “The privilege of access to the most holy place, is not only now extended to all persons within the house, but also everywhere, in all places where the church or children of God are.” Not only the top of the mount, but the whole limit round about, is the most holy place. Under the law, only the sanctuary was the most holy, but under the gospel the whole mountain shall be so, and the whole limit thereof round about; in as much as, wherever the believer is, in public or in secret, there he hath access to the most holy place, the most holy God; according to what our Lord said to the woman of Samaria, “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father; but the true worshippers everywhere shall worship him in spirit and in truth,” (John 4:21). The holy place was formerly hid in a corner of the temple; for, the holy God hid himself in a corner as it were, under the dark dispensation, but now the holy place, the holy God, is everywhere to be seen and enjoyed in Christ. The veil of the temple is rent in twain, by the death of Christ; and the holy of holies is exposed, that whosoever will, may come and see, come and partake, come, and enjoy God through Jesus Christ through whom the door of access is opened to us Gentiles, as well as it was to the Jews;

“Through him we have both access, by one Spirit, unto the Father,” (Eph. 2:8). The most holy place is not now confined to the top of the mountain, where the temple stood, but extended to the whole mountain, and the whole limit thereof round about. This is the law of the house, the privilege of the house, according to the law of faith or covenant of grace, wherein the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men. O, has it so appeared unto you this day as that you find that you have got access to the most holy place! Then surely you are obliged to be the most holy people. Hence,

VI. The Sixth head proposed was, To show that this privilege of access to the most holy place obliges the whole household of God that are thus privileged to be the most holy people. This grace of God that hath appeared to all men does not, cannot lead to licentiousness, but teaches to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, (Titus 2:11, 12). This privilege of access to the most holy place, brings us not only under greater obligations to holiness than Pagans that are far from the most holy place; not only under greater obligations to holiness than professors, who only are admitted to the outer court, and not to the most holy place; and not only under greater obligations to holiness than Jews, who were only admitted by their high priest to the holy place in the material temple; but also it lays us under greater obligations to holiness than Adam in a state of innocency, suppose we were as innocent as he was before the fall, and that the covenant of works were on the field, promising life to our perfect obedience; for, when you are admitted to the most holy place, then you see everlasting righteousness, and perfect obedience wrought to your hand, and eternal life purchased to your hand; and therefore are obliged by the law of love and gratitude, to serve the God that hath saved you, and not to work hard for your life. And which of these are the strongest ties to love and obedience, namely, to find God saying, Do, and do perfectly, and you shall have eternal life for your pains? Or, to find God giving you life, salvation, righteousness, and all in

Christ; and, from the faith thereof, kindling love in your soul, and constraining you to serve him in gratitude? If this be the strongest obligation to holiness, then believers in Christ are under stronger obligations to holiness, than ever Adam was in a state of innocency.

Access to the most holy place obliges us to be the most holy people, both effectively and argumentatively.

1. Effectively and powerfully; for, when one hath access to the most holy place, then he sees the glory of God; and, beholding this glory, he is “changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord,” (2 Cor. 3:18). Thus, what the law teaches perceptively, the gospel teaches effectively. It is said of these that are mounted to the upper story of the house of God, to heaven, They are like him, because they see him as he is. Being come to the most holy place, they see the most holy God, and are made like him in holiness. This privilege is commenced in the lower house; the more that believers see the most holy God in the most holy place, or the glory of God in the face of Christ, the more they are like unto him. When they come boldly to the throne of grace, or to the holy of holies, then they obtain mercy, and find grace to help them, and grace to strengthen them in all the duties of holiness. All their holiness comes from that most holy place to which they have access. And thus it obliges them to holiness, sweetly, powerfully, necessarily, and effectively.

2. Argumentatively; it obliges them to be the most holy people, for access to the most holy place furnishes them with an argument drawn from equity; What! “shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein!” (Rom. 6:2). Have we, by access to God, got a dead stroke given to the tyrant sin, and shall we return to slavery? God forbid. Access to the most holy place furnishes with an argument drawn from gratitude; “Shall I thus requite the Lord, O foolish and unwise? Is not he my Father that hath bought me?” (Deut. 32:6). Has he allowed me access to him, and shall I spurn at such bowels, and spit on the face of such love? At the most holy place the man sees that there is mercy with God that he

may be feared and obeyed, and so is encouraged to duty; and there he sees that it is God that worketh in him both to will and to do: there he sees that the law he is under is not a law of works, but a law of love, where all the commands are love commands; “If ye love me, keep my commandments;” and the threatenings, love-threatenings, not of vindictive wrath, but of fatherly displeasure. The law-threatening of hell and vindictive wrath works wrath and enmity, which is the height of disobedience, while the man fears that God will damn him, he flees from God as an enemy; but gospel-threatenings, if we may so call them, work upon love, and inflame it, while the believer fears, in a filial manner, saying, “O! shall I incur my Father’s displeasure, and provoke him to hide his face, and deny me that gracious presence of his which is even a heaven upon earth to me?” — At the most holy place the believer sees God clothed with a garment of salvation, compassed with love and grace, and riding, as it were, in the chariot of a free, gracious promise; not a promise of life upon our doing, but a promise of grace to do, and of glory to crown our doing: and of grace and glory both, as the reward of Christ’s doing all. — In a word, when we have access to the most holy place, we see the place encircled with blood, the mercy-seat sprinkled with blood, and that by this blood the infinite justice of God is fully satisfied, and that we have to do with him as a reconciled God and friend, and therefore our obligation is not under the authority of an angry Judge, but the authority of a loving Father, testifying his everlasting love to us by drawing with loving-kindness; and shall we not kindly run when thus kindly drawn? — Why, then, this privilege of access to the most holy place lays us under the strictest and strongest obligation to be the most holy people. “And, behold, this is the law of the house;” the bond of love is the strongest bond.

VII. I come now to the application of the subject.

This leads me to an Use of Examination, for trying whether or not ye be such members of the house of God as have been privileged with access to the invisible part of the house, the most

holy place; and what effect this has wrought upon you to make you holy, as the Lord your God is holy.

First, have you been admitted to the most holy place? Have you got boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus at this occasion, or formerly? If so, then I will tell you,

1. You have lost all boldness and confidence in the flesh, (Phil. 3:3); all confidence in yourself, all confidence in your own righteousness and worthiness; nothing keeps you in countenance before God but your view of the worthiness and righteousness of Jesus. Again,

2. What way got you into the holy place, or into the presence of the most holy God. Surely it is not without blood. Can you say that you was carried into the holiest, as it were, in a chariot paved with love, and the covering thereof was purple? Can you say, I saw something like a rainbow about the throne of grace, and not only a purple covering over my head, but also a purple pavement under my feet; a pleasant pavement, laid partly with the white marble of the love of God, and partly with the red marble of the blood of Christ; and, upon this pavement, laid before me in the gospel, my heart went forward to the most holy place; and I saw that the most holy God was a reconciled God in Christ, a well-pleased God in Christ.

3. Have you seen that the holy of holies is nothing else but a throne of grace, having grace above it, and grace beneath it, and grace round about it; and that, therefore, the most holy place is a place meet for you to come to, meet for you to rest in; for you, unworthy you, that cannot be saved any other way but by grace, free grace, venting through that blood of Jesus?

4. Have you seen, in that holy place, that the promises of God are all Yea and Amen in Christ: that they are the New Testament in his blood; and that, therefore, every promise is sure, being dipped in blood, sealed with blood, with justice-satisfying blood; and, that, therefore, justice requires, as well as mercy, that they be accomplished?

Secondly, what sanctifying effect hath this access to the most holy place had upon you? Do you find yourself more sweetly bound to universal holiness? Why, say you, I find myself under an obligation to be a most holy person: because I think I have been admitted, in some respect, to the most holy place, but I tremble to think of what you are now to say, because I find the lamentable want of holiness, and cannot think you will give me a mark that will argue my being holy; and therefore fear my access to the holy place, that sometimes I thought I had, to be but delusion. I must tell you,

1. If you have been in the most holy place, and got some holy impressions there, then you will see yourself to be most vile: when Job was let in to the most holy place, then he cries out, “Behold I am vile,” (Job 40:4). It is a sight of the holy God that makes us to see ourselves to be unholy creatures. You that value yourselves as good and holy, you have never seen a holy God in the face; but thou that hatest thyself, and loatest thyself as an unholy creature, saying, “Truth, Lord, I am a dog: so foolish I am, and ignorant; I am as a beast before thee; thou art a holy person.”

2. Try your holiness by a question or two; What is your desire? Is it, O, to be holy! O to be like unto Christ! What is your hope? Do you love to think of getting to heaven, because there you will be like him, by seeing him as he is? What is your delight and love? Can you say you love the law, because it is a holy law, and because it is a law of love? What is your lamentation? Is it, oh! unholy sinner that I am? “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” What is your how long? Is it, “O how long shall I sojourn in Mesech, and dwell in the tents of Kedar.” What is your regard to the law of the House? Are you grieved to see that it is violate by yourself and others? What is your regard to the members of the house? Do you love the saints, because they are holy? Some choose a drinking club and cabal before the company of the godly that lay them under a restraint; but is your delight with the saints, the excellent ones of

the earth? Again, what is your regard to the Lord of the house? Can you say from the bottom of your soul, that, however unholy you are, yet you love him because he is holy, and can rejoice in him as a holy God that hates sin? This is a sweet mark that you have been in the holy place, and got the print of God's holiness stamped on your soul. A hypocrite may love God because he is good and merciful, but I do not think he can love him, because he is a holy God that hates sin. Is that the language of thy soul, "O give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness?" In a word, what is thy resolution through grace? Is it, that you will endeavour, in his strength, to glorify God by a holy walk, and yet are you feared to rest on your resolutions, and therefore turn your resolutions to prayers, saying, "Lord, let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, the Son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself, and henceforth we will not go back?" After trial, see your duty.

My last use, therefore, shall be by way of exhortation. 1. To these who are without the house. 2. To those who have been admitted into the holy place.

1. To you that are without the house, that are not members of God's family, but are unbelievers. I exhort you to come into the house of God; "For without are dogs," unholy dogs, (Rev. 22:15). Why, may some think, are you calling us to come into the house, where there are so many disorders? It is best to stay without doors: why, man, woman, when I call you to come into the house of God, it is, not only to the outer house, but to come into the most holy place, and to enter into the holiest by faith; that is, come to God in Christ. The outer house is only the visible church, and the visible glory is indeed much defaced in our day; but there is an invisible part of the house, the most holy place, that we call you to come to: not to an outward visible profession only; not to outward ordinances only; for, by your being within the walls of the house, you are seemingly come there already; but you may be visible church members, and come to ordinances and sacraments, and yet strangers to God, if you have never come in

to the most holy place by coming in to God in Christ. And, Oh! why stand you without doors, contrary to the law of the house, inviting all to come in! (Rev. 22:17). Let me tell you, while you stay without doors, you are without hope, and without God in the world; neither fellow-citizens with the saints, nor of the household of God in a spiritual sense; and the visible outward advantages you enjoy, while you are only in the outer court, will aggravate your condemnation if ye come not in. I must tell you, while you are not within the house, in a spiritual sense, you are not under the law, “the law of the house;” I mean, the law of faith and love, but under the law of works, and so under the curse; for, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” The wrath of God abides on you, while you abide in unbelief, without coming in to the Surety, and closing with his law bidding righteousness. While you come not in to the most holy place, you remain in a most unholy state and way; for, it is this holy place that makes a holy people: Christ is the true temple, the holy place, the house where God dwells; and how can you see God, if you come not to his house? How can you speak with God, if you come not to his house? How can you draw up acquaintance with him, or attain conformity to him? If you do not behold the glory of God in the face of Christ, you can never be changed into his image, from glory to glory. Without coming to Christ, you shall never have holiness; and without holiness, you shall never see God in heaven.

Consider, O sinner, The law of the house, with reference to you that are without. — It is the law of the house, that the door be open for all comers; “Whosoever will, let him come.” — It is the law of the house, that all comers shall be welcome; “He that cometh, I will in nowise cast out.” — It is the law of the house, that all that come in shall be children of the family; “We are the children of God by faith in Christ: Without are dogs,” but within are children. — It is the law of the house, that no objection be sustained as lawful against your coming into Christ, or to the most holy place; for the law of grace is calculate, of infinite wisdom, for answering every objection: it is not lawful to object

anything against coming into the holy place. Fear of God's infinite justice is no lawful objection; for, here is a sacrifice, satisfying justice. Your great sin and guilt is no lawful objection: for, here is guilt-expiating blood. Your total want of all good in yourself, is no lawful objection; for, here is all fullness to supply you. Your unworthiness is no lawful objection; for, the worthiness of the Lamb is the only thing that is regarded in the most holy place. Your poverty is no lawful objection; for, here are the unsearchable riches of Christ, both to pay your debts, and bear your charges. Your rags and nakedness is no lawful objection; for, here is the robe of righteousness to cover you, that the shame of your nakedness may not appear. Your fear of God's having some secret purpose against you, is no lawful objection, but a horrid thought; for, The law of the house makes nothing but God's revealed will your rule. Your weakness and inability is no lawful objection; for, "Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary strength is within his holy place," to which you are called to come; and drawing power is put in the promise, such as that, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all men after me;" that you may take his help, and look to his promised power and grace. Your unholiness is no lawful objection; for, you are invited to come to the most holy place, that you may be incorporated amongst the most holy people. In a word, distance is no lawful objection; for, the most holy place is at hand; since you cannot go up to the holy of holies, the holy of holies is come down to you; it is on the top of the mountain, and the whole limit thereof round about. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men." And the question is, Do you welcome a Jesus, that is come to you in the gospel, to make you holy as well as happy forever? Can your heart say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord?" It is one good way of coming to him, to welcome his coming to you. Is there an echo in your heart? When he says, Sinner, come thou to me; does your heart say, Lord, come thou to me, for I cannot come to thee without I be drawn? When he cries, Come; and you cry, Come; ye are not far from meeting together. Well, sinner, the door is open; O tarry not till the door be shut. "Now is the

accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” Say not, tomorrow, thou fool, lest this night thy soul be required of thee, and then to all eternity you shall not have another offer. O may the arm of power accompany the offer of grace, in the evening of a communion day!

2. I would close with a word to you that have been, either now or formerly, drawn in to the most holy place. Surely it is your duty to be a most holy people; for, universal holiness is the law of the house; on the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about. I should exhort and direct you in a word.

O sirs, are you come into the sanctuary of God? O then, put off your shoes; for the place whereon your stand is holy ground! Put off your filthy shoes, for the room of the house you have entered into is a clean room, a holy place; the Lord of the house is most holy. Holiness is the name of God; he is the Holy One of Israel. Holiness is the will of God; “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” Holiness is the work of God; and, “You are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Holiness is the nature of God; and you are made partakers of the divine nature. Holiness is the glory of God; and he is glorious in holiness.

Consider, the house of God is a holy house, and the church is not God’s house, but in so far as it is holy. His word is a holy word; his ordinances are holy ordinances; his table is a holy table; and, “Holiness becometh his house for ever.”

Consider the beauty of holiness; the beauty of faces is but skin-deep, a rotting beauty; the beauty of clothes and ornaments is but a patch upon a sore, a screen to cover your nakedness; but the beauty of holiness is what makes a man all glorious within and without. All pleasure without holiness is but grief, for the pleasure of sin is what man must either repent of here, or be damned for hereafter. All profit without holiness is but loss, “For what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? But godliness is great gain.” All honour without holiness will end in shame and disgrace.

Consider the opposite of holiness, namely, sir; that sin is a

reproach to any people, much more to such a professing and privileged people as you are. The profane world, that see your works, and not your faith, if you be vile, vain, wanton, and profane in your walk, they will say, There is your religion; and thus you will bring a reproach upon your holy religion. And who, that ever was admitted to the most holy place, would not blush and be ashamed to bring it under such undeserved reproach.

Consider what regard is owing to the glory of God, the honour of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the credit of our holy religion.

Consider what is the end of God in all his great works towards you; this is the end of election; “He hath chosen you, that you should be holy;” this is the end of redemption, “That he might redeem you from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works:” It is the end of sanctification by the Spirit, that you should be holy.

What is the end and design of ordinances, but to be means of holiness? What is the end of merciful providences, but that you may fear the Lord and his goodness? What is the end of crossing and afflicting providences, but to purge away your dross, and make you partakers of his holiness? What is the end of all the graces of the Spirit, if you have the faith of Christ, or the hope of glory in him? Why, then, faith purifies the heart; and “He that hath this hope, purifies himself, even as he is pure.”

Consider what obligations you are under, beyond all persons in the world, to be the most holy people, in the midst of this unholy age.

All the direction I offer is, See that you be much in the exercise of faith, entering again and again into the most holy place; for this will, as I said, have both an operative and argumentative, both a physical and a moral influence upon your holiness. When you come to the most holy place, and see the most holy God, you will find yourself under the strongest obligation to be holy, and such bonds laid upon your heart, as will bind you sweetly and strictly to holiness, even the bond of love constraining you. In the most holy place you will see something wonderful, even your

salvation and justification, lying between two everlasting breasts, (Rom. 3:24), between the everlasting grace of God, and the everlasting righteousness of Christ; “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” And what do you think of seeing yourself lying, as it were, between these two everlasting breasts of God; and, at the same time, his everlasting arms holding and embracing you in his bosom? This is the notable sight of faith to be seen in the most holy place; and when you come to see this great sight, the warm bosom of God’s everlasting love will give you a warm heart, and will leave a strong impression of the law of love and holiness upon you. “This is the law of the house.” If you get to the top of the mountain with Moses, O how should your face shine, even when ye come down to the bottom of the mount, and go into the company of others round about the mount! Not only a communion table, but your common tables should be holiness to the Lord. In every company, in every place, let this be your motto, “Holiness to the Lord.” “This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy; behold, this is the law of the house.”

