

***"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;
and quicken thou me in thy way."***

Psalm 119:37

So strongly does the man of God deprecate temptation to self-indulgence, that he prays to be kept at the greatest possible distance from it. That his *heart* may not be *inclined to it*: he desires that *his eyes may be turned away from beholding it*. Keeping the eye is a grand means of "keeping the heart." (Num. xv. 39. Job, xxxi. 1.) Satan has so infused his poison into all the objects around us, that all furnish fuel for temptation: and the heart--naturally inclined to evil, and hankering after vanity--is stolen away in a moment. *Vanity* includes "all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." All is sin, "because it is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John, ii. 16.) Of all that belongs to earth--"the preacher, the son of David"--standing on the vantage-ground, and having taken within his view the widest horizon of this world's excellency, has pronounced his judgment--"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities! all is vanity." (Eccles. i. 1, 2; also ii. 11, xii. 8.) We have just mentioned "the lusts of other things choking" *many a promising profession*. Our Lord's solemn caution to his own disciples implies their injury to *a sincere profession*--"Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and care of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares." (Luke, xxi. 34.) Some, indeed, seem to walk, as if they were proof against temptation. They venture to the very edge of the precipice, under a vain assurance that no danger is to be apprehended. But such a confidence is upon the brink of a grievous fall. (Prov. xvi. 18.) The tender-hearted child of God, trusting in the promise, that "Sin shall not have dominion over him" (Rom. vi. 14), knows that he can only enjoy the security of it, while he is shrinking from every occasion of sin. He "hates even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude, 23); and, remembering how often his outward senses have ministered to the workings of his weak and treacherous heart (see Prov. xxiii. 33; Josh. vii. 21), he continues in prayer--"*Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity!*"

Probably the recollection of the circumstance of his own sin (2 Sam. xi. 2), would to the end of his life remind David of his special need of this prayer. Yet who that is conscious of his own weakness and corruption, will find the prayer unsuitable to his circumstances of daily temptation? But we must watch as well as pray. For as watchfulness without prayer is presumption, so prayer without watchfulness is self-delusion. To pray that "*our eyes*" may be "*turned from vanity*," without "making a covenant with our eyes" (Job, xxxi. 1), that they should not *behold* it, is like "taking fire in our bosoms," and expecting "not to be burnt" (Prov. vi. 27, 28), because we have prayed that we might not be burnt. If we pray not to be "led into temptation," we must "watch that we enter not into it." (Comp. Matt. vi. 13; with xxvi. 41.) The sincerity of our prayer will be proved by the watchfully avoiding the circumstances and occasions of temptation. The fear of sin will manifest itself by a fear of temptation to sin. "The knife will be put to the throat, if we be given to appetite." (Prov. xxiii. 2.) We shall be afraid of the wine sparkling in the glass. (Verses 31, 32.)

But where is the harm of *beholding vanity*, if we do not follow it? When Eve *beheld* the

forbidden fruit, perhaps she did not think of taking it: and when she took it, she did not think of eating it: but the beginning of sin "is as the letting out of water," whose progress once opened, beats down all before it. (Gen. iii. 6; with Prov. xvii. 14.) And who, after our "beguiled mother," has not found the eye an inlet to sin?¹ When Bunyan's pilgrims were obliged to pass through Vanity Fair, beset on every side with temptations and allurements, they stopped their eyes and ears, and quickening their pace, cried--"*Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity!*" A striking reproof to us, who too often loiter and gaze, until we begin to covet those vanities, to which, as Christians, we "are dead!" (See Col. iii. 2, 3.)

Is it asked--What will most effectually "*turn my eyes from vanity?*" Not the seclusion of contemplative retirement--not the relinquishment of our lawful connexion with the world; but the transcendent beauty of Jesus unveiled to our eyes, and fixing our hearts. This will "*turn our eyes from vanity*" in its most glittering forms. The sight of the "pearl of great price" (Matt. xiii. 46) dims the lustre of the "goodliest pearls" of earth; at once deadens us to the enticements of the world, and urges us forward in the pursuit of the prize. And is not this our object? It is not enough, that through special mercy I am preserved from temptations. I want to be *quickened* to more life, energy, delight, and devotedness *in the way of my God*. The secret of Christian progress is simplicity and diligence. "*This one thing I do,--forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before; I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*" (Philip. iii. 13, 14.) The Spirit leaves no wish in the heart for *beholding vanity*. The world with all its flowery paths, is a dreary wilderness; and Christ and heaven are the only objects of desire--"He that shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions or rocks; bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure. "*Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.*" (Isa. xxxiii. 15-17.) Precious promises to those, that flee from temptation, and desire to walk in the ways of God!

¹ Lot's wife, Gen. xix. 26; Shechem, xxxiv. 2; Potiphar's wife, xxxix. 7; Achan, Josh. vii. 21; Samson, Judg. xvi. 1. Even the man after God's own heart, 2 Sam. xi. 2. Comp. Prov. vi. 25; Matt. v. 28; 2 Pet. ii. 14.