

left in darkness; and he shows the reasonableness of God's demand in asking only for what had been bestowed upon them.

After showing the people that they had the necessary influences to lead them to a life of trust in God, he proceeds to lay down three graces that should characterize the lives of men so privileged, —justice, mercy, and humility.

The first requirement here laid down is *justice*. We must first know the truth, by having it revealed to us by the Holy Spirit; then we are to build upon this basis, the superstructure of a good and holy life. It is not enough to *know* the truth, but we must also *give evidences* that we have it in our possession. We are to be "living epistles, known and read of all men," by giving a practical demonstration of the presence of God's Spirit within our hearts. This we may do by fulfilling our duty to God and to our fellow-man. It is in reference to the latter, however, that the prophet seems to use the term justice; although he does not exclude its application to the former. A man may have a form of Godliness, or gain a reputation for piety, by attending to the outward forms of religion. But the prophet tries the lives of men in another way,—by enquiring whether they are free from fraud and violence, whether they act justly and kindly towards one another.

As the name of God is more glorious than all things else, so the worship of him ought to be regarded as more important than those duties by which we prove our love to men. But the Prophet desires to point out how men are to give evidence of the sincerity of their religion, how they might prove that they feared God and kept his commandments; consequently our duty to man is placed before our duty to God.

Independent of the command of God to lead a holy life, the importance of doing so will become apparent when we remember that *men* judge of the state of the heart from our outward actions. Men may, and do pass judgment upon our lives though they cannot read our hearts. Nor can we blame them for doing so; though they may at times be a little severe in their criticisms. Our Lord draws an illustration from the tree, and lays down the broad and general principle that the tree shall be known by its fruit. "By their fruit ye shall know them." "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles." A man's conversation is simply an index to the nature of his thoughts and feelings. "For of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." We may take it as a settled principle of a man's life, that if he does not bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, the Spirit of God is not dwelling within him. One simple question must decide the matter. What fruit does a man bring forth? Does he repent? Does he believe with his whole heart on the Lord Jesus Christ? Does he live a just life? Does he overcome the world and the flesh? If these fruits are wanting, it is needless for us to talk of him having the Spirit of Christ reigning within him. It is useless to say