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GOD A REWARDER.

A

SERMON,

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AT THE

TABERNACLE IN SALEM,

LORD'S DAY,

JAN. 27, 1811.

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SALEM:
PRINTED BY THOMAS C. CUSHING.
1811.

SERMON.

HEBREWS, xi. 6.

—FOR HE THAT COMETH TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS, AND THAT HE IS A REWARDER OF THEM THAT DILIGENTLY SEEK HIM.

THE God who made the heavens and the earth, is the same yesterday, to day, and forever. The character, in which he is revealed to us under the gospel, is the same with that, in which he was revealed to the patriarchs of the first ages; and in every period of the world, the true worshippers of him, have entertained essentially the same views of his perfections, of his government, and of the way of acceptance with him. This is strongly implied, in the representations made by the apostle, in the connexion of our text.

Salvation by faith, on the ground of the atonement by Christ, is the leading subject of this epistle; and, in this eleventh chapter, the apostle distinctly cites some very striking examples of the power of faith in different and distant ages. Among these examples, that of Enoch, in the antediluvian world, is particularly conspicuous. “By faith Enoch was translated, that he might not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: *for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” The argument here is, that, since Enoch

had the testimony that he pleased God, he must have had faith; because it is impossible to please God without faith: for every one who comes to God, as a true and acceptable worshipper, must at least believe, not only that he exists, but also that those who diligently seek him, will find him a rewarder.

The phrase, "he that cometh to God," evidently denotes one, who has true religion; and persons of the same character are doubtless to be understood also, by "them that diligently seek him." The plain doctrine of the text then is this: THERE CAN BE NO TRUE RELIGION, WITHOUT A BELIEF IN GOD AS A REWARDER OF THE TRULY PIOUS.—In discussing this doctrine, I propose,

I. To consider some leading particulars, implied in God's being A REWARDER of the truly pious; and then,

II. To shew why there can be no true religion, without a belief in this part of the divine character,

The proper and strict sense of *reward* is, recompence for good. Sometimes, indeed, a recompence for evil is called a reward; but this is a departure from strict precision of language. Strictly and properly, punishment is the recompence for evil, and reward the recompence for good. Reward often carries in it an acknowledgment of something due; and implies that the receiver of it has merited, or earned, and, on the score of justice, may demand, the good recompence. This, however, is not always the case. According to an acceptation of the term, neither unusual nor improper, the bestowment of any thing good, as a token of favour, is as really a reward, as the payment of a debt, or a compensation for service, in the exercise of justice.

On the score of retributive justice, men, even the best of them, have no claim upon God for a recompence of reward. They are unprofitable servants; they deserve from him nothing but evil; and, if they receive good at his hands, it must be through the me-

diation of Christ, and only in the way of mere favour. Accordingly the scriptures are clear in making this distinction; and most decisively teach us, that the reward of the righteous is to be reckoned, not of debt, but of grace. Yet, while the scriptures maintain this distinction, they amply declare, that “verily there is a reward for the righteous,” and that their “reward in heaven is great.”—Though the righteous, then, have no claim upon God, on the score of merit; yet if, in his infinite goodness, he will confer good upon them, in token of his favour, he may with strict propriety, be called a *rewarder* of them.—But what is *implied* in God’s being A REWARDER of the truly pious?

1. It is implied, that he regards them with complacency.

“There is not indeed a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not;” yet the scriptures constantly distinguish between the righteous and the wicked; and nothing is plainer, than that, in the scripture sense, the righteous are they, who, imperfect as they are, yet truly love and fear God. Reconciled to him, by faith in the Redeemer, they walk humbly with him; they diligently seek him, cordially embrace his truth, and obediently observe his commands. All who are of this character are, in the scriptural sense, righteous, or truly pious.—The scriptures also assure us, that those who are of this character, the Lord regards with complacency. They assure us that the Lord loveth the righteous, that he is ever nigh unto them, that he holds them as his treasure; that his affection towards them infinitely exceeds that of a mother towards her sucking child, and that he will have them in everlasting remembrance.

Plain as it is from the ample representations of scripture, that the truly pious are objects of divine complacency; it is no less certain that it must be so, if God is a rewarder of them. On the score of

merit, on the principle of retributive justice, they have no claim upon God; and, therefore, if he confer a reward upon them, it must be in token of his favour. But why should he confer a reward upon them, as an expression of his favour, if he do not regard them with complacency? For *Christ's sake* indeed, their sins are forgiven, and they are justified and restored to the divine favour: but we are now considering, distinctly, the reward which they are to receive, after being thus pardoned, justified and restored. Would it not, then, be palpably absurd to suppose, that God will confer a reward, as an expression of his favour, upon those in whom he has no delight?

That God's being a rewarder of the righteous does imply, that he regards them with complacency, is farther evident, from the reward itself which he proposes to confer. What then is this reward? It is nothing less, than immortal felicity and glory, in his celestial presence and kingdom. This, certainly, is what is constantly held out in the scriptures as the reward of the truly pious. But what higher evidence than this, could possibly be given, that they are indeed objects of his high complacency? Would he admit to his presence, where there is fulness of joy, and to his right hand, where there are pleasures forevermore, those in whom he did not delight? Besides, is it not from the manifestations of his love to them, that the felicity and glory of the righteous, in his presence and kingdom, is, in great part, to result? Could they be happy there—could they enjoy the promised reward—if he did not delight in them?

On the whole, it is too evident for contradiction or doubt, that, if God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, he must regard them with complacency.

2. God's being a rewarder of the truly pious implies, that he is disposed to let his complacency in them be known.

The father of a family may have particular complacency, in such of his children as are more dutiful than the rest; the preceptor of a school may have particular complacency, in such of his pupils as acquit themselves well; the sovereign of a nation may have particular complacency, in the most loyal and deserving of his subjects: and yet, for certain reasons, neither of them may deem it proper, to make his particular complacency known. But should the father, the preceptor, and the sovereign, respectively confer rewards, in the several cases, a disposition to let their complacency be known would be decisively evinced. Nor less decisively is the same disposition implied, in God's being a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Though the word of God is replete with evidence, that he loves the righteous; yet the individual objects of his complacency are not, in the present state, distinctly declared. "The righteous, and the wise, and their works," says the royal Preacher, "are in the hand of God; and no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." By the conditions of the present life, or by the dispensations of providence towards men in this world, it is not made distinctly to appear, that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, or that he regards them as objects of his special love. It is not his intention, however, that his love to them should forever be concealed, or held under a veil. If he is a rewarder of the righteous, he certainly is disposed to let his regard to them clearly appear; and when the promised reward shall be conferred, his special and everlasting love to them, both collectively and individually, will be made known.

3. God's being a rewarder of the truly pious implies, that he will eventually make a visible and public distinction, between them and the wicked.

Does God love the righteous? And is he disposed to let his love to them be known? Then, beyond

question, there must eventually be made, between them and the wicked, a public and visible distinction: for without such a distinction, how can his love to them be made manifest?—In this world, as already noticed, the righteous and the wicked are not visibly and publicly distinguished, by any decisive marks of divine approbation, or disapprobation; and therefore it is, that, *here*, there is no clear exhibition of the character of God, as a rewarder. And should a distinction never be made, this part of the divine character could never be clearly displayed.

Reward, indeed, necessarily implies distinction. If the father of a family confers a reward, on his more dutiful children, he makes a distinction between them and the rest of his children. If the preceptor of a school confers a reward, on such of his pupils as acquit themselves well, he makes a distinction between them and the rest of his pupils. If the sovereign of a nation confers a reward, on the most loyal and deserving of his subjects, he makes a distinction between them and the rest of his subjects. For should the father, the preceptor, or the sovereign, make no distinction, but confer upon the bad the same favours which he confers upon the good, the very essence of reward would be utterly lost. Nor is it less clear, that, in conferring a reward upon the righteous, God must make a distinction between them and the wicked: for, should he confer upon the wicked the same favours which he does upon the righteous, his love to the righteous could not appear, nor could he, in any proper sense, be considered as a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Moreover, immortal life and glory, in his presence and kingdom, is the reward which God has promised to the righteous. Let it then be distinctly noted, that, should immortal life and glory be conferred on the wicked, as well as on the righteous, the very idea of reward would be utterly precluded. Nothing can be a reward, which is conferred, without

distinction, upon all. If, then, the immortal felicities of heaven are to be conferred upon the righteous, as their gracious reward; it follows of necessity, that, from those felicities, the wicked must be excluded; and therefore that, between the righteous and the wicked, a distinction must be made, as visible and public, as it will be momentous and durable.

Accordingly the scriptures throughout most decisively declare, that such a distinction will be made. A few, out of the many passages to this effect, may here suffice. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."* "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright; and their inheritance shall be forever.—But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume, into smoke shall they consume away."† "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Wōunto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."‡ "For them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name, a book of remembrance was written before him. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then ye shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."§ "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."|| "When the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divid-

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* Psalm i. 5. † Ps. xxxvii. 18—20. ‡ Isa. iii. 10, 11.

§ Mal. iii. 16—18. || John v. 28, 29.

eth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Then shall he say also unto them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.* “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also the Gentile.”† “Verily there is a reward for the righteous:”‡—but “is not destruction to the wicked, and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity!”§ Verily, in shewing himself the rewarder of the righteous, God will make, between them and the wicked, a distinction the most public and conspicuous. But

II. We are to consider, why there can be no true religion, without a belief in this part of the divine character.—“*He that cometh unto God must believe that—he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” But why is it so?

I. Without this belief, there can be no true acknowledgment of the divine perfections.

God regards the righteous with complacency. This truth, as we have seen, is clearly implied in his being their rewarder; nor does it less clearly result from his moral perfections. “The Lord loveth the

* Mat. xxv. 31—46. † Rom. ii. 5—7. ‡ Ps. lviii. 2. § Job xxxi. 3.

righteous,"—because he himself is righteous. A holy being must love those who are holy.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”* But why is this an evidence? Because he who has a special love for the holy brethren, must be formed to the love of holiness; and must, therefore, himself be holy. For the same reason, they who are born of God supremely love Him. Being “renewed after his image, in righteousness and true holiness,” they love Him, who is infinitely holy, with supreme complacency.—But if holy creatures love God, on account of his holiness; He also loves them, on account of their holiness. Though the best of saints, in this world, are imperfect; yet for all that is holy in them, God regards them with complacency. For Christ’s sake, he forgives their imperfections, and, in Christ, he loves them, as those in whom his image is restored. He loves them for all their evangelical repentance, faith, love, and newness of life. Accordingly Jesus Christ says, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”† This is because both the Father and the Son are holy. The seraphim before the throne “cry, one unto another, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;”—and holy he certainly must be, if he loves and will reward the truly pious.

Nor is it, on the other hand, less evidently certain that, without a belief in him as a rewarder of the righteous, there can be no true acknowledgment of his moral perfections. If it be not believed, that he does love the righteous, or that he has a special complacency in them, how can he be regarded as a holy God? Must it not involve a most palpable contradiction to suppose, that a God of infinite holiness has not a special complacency in his holy creatures?—or does not, as the scripture emphatically expresses it, love the righteous, but hate the

* 1 John iii. 14. † John xiv. 23.

workers of iniquity? Unquestionably, to suppose that God has no more complacency in the righteous, than he has in the wicked, and is no more disposed to reward the one, than the other, is, in effect, to suppose that, he has no more delight in holiness than in sin, and, therefore, that he cannot himself be holy.

Between virtue and vice, holiness and sin, there is a wide and essential difference; an absolute and eternal contrariety. This difference, this contrariety, however, it must be supposed that God will utterly disregard; if it be not believed, that he is a rewarder of the truly pious. But what is this again, but to strip him at once of his moral perfections? It is to make him indifferent to moral good and evil; it is to make him unholy and unjust.

It deserves, moreover, to be distinctly considered, that, in his word which he has given to mankind, God has most clearly declared the difference between holiness and sin, and between the righteous and the wicked, with correspondent expressions of love and hatred, complacency and abhorrence; and has, in the most unequivocal and solemn manner, pronounced promises of glorious reward to the one class, and threatenings of terrible punishment to the other. If then we do not believe, that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; we must suppose, that he will utterly disregard his word—the law which he has given, the declarations of his own feelings which he has made, and both the promises and the threatenings which he has uttered: and, therefore, that he cannot be a God either of equity or of truth.

In a word, if God is a being of infinite holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, he must be a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and, hence, without a belief in him as such a rewarder, there certainly can be no true acknowledgment of his moral perfections.

2. Without a belief that God is a rewarder of the truly pious, there can be no right affections, or feelings of heart towards him.

There can be no right feelings of heart towards God, without just views of his moral character. If he is not truly regarded as a Being of infinite holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, there can be no foundation for those holy affections towards him, which the scriptures represent as belonging to the pious soul. Do men regard God as a Being, who has no more delight in holiness than in sin; no more love for the righteous than for the wicked? And do they, then, truly love him? Certainly not. But if they love the character which they ascribe to God; it is not, however, the true character of the Holy One of Israel which they love; nor can their love be holy. They form in their vain imaginations a false, an unholy character; and their love is selfish and unholy. But thus it must necessarily be with those, who do not believe in God as a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. They do not truly acknowledge God's moral perfections; they do not contemplate him as a holy God; and therefore cannot have any right feelings of heart towards him. They cannot regard him with the feelings of holy fear, of holy repentance, of holy confidence, of holy submission, of holy joy, or of holy devotion. They cannot, in a word, truly "come unto him." Hence,

3. Without a belief in God as a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, there can be no true compliance with any of his requirements.

Where there are no right affections towards God, certainly there can be no true obedience. "The Lord looketh on the heart." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On

these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”* With “the *first* and great commandment,” as already we have seen, there can be no true compliance, without a belief in God as a rewarder—without a belief in his moral perfections. But “the second is like unto” the first. It requires the same temper of heart, the same holy affection. If, in obedience to the first, we enthrone God as the sovereign of all our affections; we shall of course, in obedience to the second, love our neighbour as ourselves: for we shall love both our neighbour and ourselves, with an affection sacredly subordinate to our love to God; and, therefore, only in such manner and measure, as shall be compatible with a supreme regard to his glory. But, if we have not that love to God which is the fulfilling of the first command, we cannot have that love to our neighbour which is the fulfilling of the second. If holy love to God do not reign in our hearts, subjecting and consecrating all other affections, we shall have no love to our neighbour, which is not partial, selfish and unholy. “On these two commandments, however, hang all the law and the prophets,” all the divine requirements; and, therefore, if holy love to God and our neighbour be absent, there can be no true obedience.

The gospel indeed requires, that we should repent; that with genuine contrition of heart, we should turn from all sin unto God. But how can we do this, if we have no true love to God, nor any just views of his moral perfections. The gospel also requires, that we should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, for the purposes of pardon, of justification with God, of deliverance from wrath to come, and of eternal life and glory. But how can we have true faith in Christ, who is the express image of the Father, if we neither truly love God, nor acknowledge his infinite holiness, justice, goodness, and truth? “He that hath the Son hath the Father al-

* Mat. xxii. 37—40.

fo." Besides, how can we believe in Christ, for pardon and justification through the merits of his death, if we regard God as indifferent to holiness and sin? If such be his character, atonement, forgiveness and justification can be but mere names. Or how can we believe in Christ, for deliverance from wrath to come, or for eternal life and glory, if we do not believe in God as a rewarder of the righteous? If he is not; there can be no wrath to come for those who do not believe, nor eternal life and glory, *as a reward*, for those who do.

We might proceed to a view, in detail, of all the divine requirements; but we have advanced far enough to have it obvious, that, without a belief in God as a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, there can be no true obedience to a single precept, either of his law or of his gospel.

The result then is plain. If, without a belief in God, as a rewarder of the truly pious, there can be no true acknowledgment of his moral perfections—no right affections or feelings of heart towards him—and no true compliance with any of his requirements; then, surely, without this belief, there can be no true religion. So clearly true it is, that, "without faith, it is impossible to please God."

IMPROVEMENT.

1. The doctrine of future punishment is a fundamental article of true religion.

There can be no true religion without a belief in God as a rewarder. Reward implies distinction. But is there any such distinction, as must be implied in God's being a rewarder of the righteous, to be seen in the present world?

Let it not here be said, that virtue is its own reward; and therefore, that the righteous are, even in this world, more happy than the wicked: for this is not at all to the point. If virtue is its own reward, that is one thing; if God is a rewarder of the virtu-

ous, that is another. If the righteous are really more happy than the wicked, that, again, is one thing; and if there is such a distinction in the condition of these two classes of men, as to make it openly and clearly manifest that God is a rewarder of the righteous, that is another. This last is precisely the point of our present inquiry. But is there any such distinction to be seen in this world? Does not "one event happen to all, to the good, to the clean and to the unclean?" Does not God "send rain upon the unjust, as well upon the just?" And is not the general aspect of his providence as favourable to the wicked as it is to the righteous? Nay, if there is any observable difference, is it not rather in favour of the wicked—so much so indeed, that many of the righteous, in different ages, besides Job and David and Jeremiah,* have on this account been greatly perplexed; while the wicked have been ready to exult over them with the impious taunt, "Where is your God?" Surely then, to pretend that the present is a state of retribution, or that the righteous receive their reward and the wicked their punishment in this world, in any such manner and degree, as to make it manifest, that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, is to go directly in the face of the experience and observation of all ages. Nor is it less repugnant to the representations of inspired truth.

Not only do the scriptures testify, that neither love nor hatred is to be known by the conditions of men in the present world; but they also constantly refer us to the day of judgment, and to a future state, both for the reward of the righteous, and for the punishment of the wicked. "Great," said the Redeemer to his suffering disciples, "Great is your reward."—Where?—Not on earth; but "in heaven." It is not in this world, but in that which is to come, that "God hath laid up, for them that love him, what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,

* Job xxi. 7. Ps. lxxiii. 2—14. Jer. xii. 1, 3.

nor the heart of man conceived." It is not during their continuance in the present probationary scene, but at the great and final day, that "the Lord, the righteous judge, will confer, on all them that love his appearing, the crown of glory which shall never fade away." Then, and not till then, will he appear before the universe, as the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and he is, therefore, "not ashamed to be called their God, because he has prepared for them a city."—Nor less explicit and full are the scriptures, in referring us to futurity for the punishment of the wicked. It is "unto the day of judgment," that "the Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust to be punished." It is at that momentous day, that the sentence is to be pronounced upon them, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

On the whole, the future reward of the righteous and the future punishment of the wicked rest, as articles of religious belief, on the same general basis. They equally result from the moral perfections of God; they are declared, with equal clearness, in his word; they reciprocally and necessarily imply each other; and to affirm, or to deny either of them, is virtually to affirm, or to deny them both. They must stand or fall together. Hence, as the doctrine of the future reward of the righteous is a fundamental article of true religion; the correlative doctrine of future punishment is equally fundamental.

2. A denial of future punishment is virtually a denial of the probationary state.

What do we properly understand by the state of probation?—Is it not a state of trial, with reference to futurity? Is it not a state in which, under various divine dispensations, mankind are acting for future retributions? Are forming as "vessels of mercy prepared unto glory," or as "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?" Is not this the plain scriptural representation of the state of mankind, in the

present world? Do not the scriptures constantly inculcate, that "every one of us must give an account of himself to God;" that "every work will be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;" and that every man will be adjudged and recompensed "according to the deeds done in the body?" But all this, if there be no future punishment for the wicked, is false and deceptive. If, in the future world, the righteous and the wicked are all to be placed in the same state, whatever that state may be; then the present can be, in no proper sense, a state of probation: men are not in this world on trial with reference to futurity; they are not to be recompensed hereafter according to the deeds done in the body; and their happiness, or misery, in another world, does not depend on their obeying, or not obeying the gospel in this.

What then? Why then the present state is only a vast scene of confusion, where mankind may live as they list, and fare as they can, without any thing to dread, or any thing to hope for hereafter, on account of what they do, or neglect to do here; neither the calamities which they suffer, nor the blessings which they enjoy, in this life, have any aspect to the future; if they obey the gospel and walk humbly with God, it is well, if not, it is equally well, as it regards their condition in the world to come! The promises and the threatenings of the Bible are vain, and entitled to no regard; the judgment of the great day is but a stupendous mockery; and the future condition of men may be happy or miserable, as blind fate, or fond caprice may determine! Yes; if there be no future punishment for the wicked, the notion of a probationary state is a dream.

3. A denial of future punishment goes to a denial of the wisdom, the goodness, and the equity of divine providence.

Under the general notion of divine providence, we properly comprise all the various conditions and circumstances of mankind; their prosperity and their adversity, their privileges and their privations, their joys and their sorrows. That the dispensations of providence are exceedingly different, towards the different individuals, as well as families and nations of mankind, is manifest to all; nor is it less manifest, that the diversified conditions and circumstances of men, are not according to their respective characters. This has been seen and acknowledged in all ages, by Pagans, Jews, and Christians. But how is this to be reconciled with wisdom, goodness, or equity? It is by viewing the present world in connexion with the future. Considering the present as only a state of trial, and the various dispensations of providence here, as having all of them a reference to future retributions; reflecting men have rested in the belief, that, when the recompences of the future world shall be awarded, with exact regard to the circumstances of the present, all the darkness, which surrounds the divine throne, will be dispelled, and all the ways of God towards men will be clearly and gloriously vindicated. The Psalmist of Israel was greatly perplexed, respecting the prosperity of the wicked, until he went into the sanctuary of God, and there learned their end.

But by a denial of future punishment, and, consequently, of future reward, this method of vindicating divine providence is utterly set aside; and we are at once thrown back to contemplate the scenes of the present world, without any regard to the future. But into what "a horror of great darkness" are we thus thrown!—Viewing the conditions and circumstances of men here, without any respect to rewards or punishments hereafter, what can we see of wisdom, of goodness, or of equity, in all this mighty maze? What is there of wisdom, of goodness, or of equity, in the unequal

distributions of prosperity and adversity, privileges and privations, comforts and sufferings? What, in the depressions of the good, and the elevations of the bad? What, in giving the gospel, and the various instituted means of religious instruction, warning, and encouragement to some, and withholding them from others, or even, indeed, in giving them to any? What, in fine, in any of the dispensations of God to men? If there be no punishment for the wicked, nor reward for the righteous; if, in allotting the conditions of the future world, there is to be no respect to the characters or circumstances of the present; then the present moral world can be regarded only as a vast chaos, "without form and void," and the providence by which it is governed, as utterly destitute of wisdom, of goodness, and of equity!

4. A denial of future punishment is virtually a denial of the gospel.

The grand declaration of the gospel is, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." But, if there be no future punishment for the wicked, this declaration is false: for whether men believe or not, they will not be damned. And if unbelievers will not be damned, for their unbelief; then believers will not be saved for their faith: for be their state what it may hereafter, it would be the same, even if they did not believe.—This is not all.

The gospel presents an atonement for sin, as the ground of pardon and salvation. But, if God is not a rewarder of the righteous and punisher of the wicked, the doctrine of atonement is utterly preposterous: for upon this hypothesis, he can have no such abhorrence of sin, or complacency in holiness, as to require an atonement for the one, or to confer a reward for the other. What, then, can be more preposterous, than for the deniers of future punishment to talk of an atonement for sin, or of being

pardoned and saved, by the merits of the Redeemer? We are not ignorant, indeed, of their quibbles and declamations upon this point; quibbles and declamations, by which they delude the unwary, but which are completely refuted even by themselves. For, while they talk of an atonement, and of being saved by the merits of the Redeemer, they will also tell you that sinners are punished, as much as they deserve, in this world; at least, that God is not such a Being as to punish his creatures in another world, for what they do in this; and in effect, that sin is too trifling a matter to be seriously noticed by the infinite Jehovah. This, to be sure, is perfectly consistent with the denial of future punishment; but most palpably inconsistent with every correct idea of atonement, or of salvation, by the merits of the Redeemer.

If sin is so small a thing, if God is not such a Being as to punish his creatures, in another world, for what they do in this; what can be more absurd than to suppose, that the Son of God should die for the redemption of sinners, or to think of being saved by the merits of his death?—Saved!—from what? From future punishment? No: for future punishment they do not deserve, and God would not inflict!—From the small punishment really due for their sins? No:—for this they receive in the present world.—The wrath of God indeed, whether present, or to come, must not even be mentioned; lest we provoke a profane sneer!—Saved, then, from what? From their sins? No: for, though they live in sin all their days, it is of little consequence with God; and as soon as they leave this world, a sight of his glory will purge them at once! From what, then, are men to be saved by the merits of Christ? This question we must leave, for the deniers of future punishment to answer.

It is further to be observed, however, that the whole gospel evidently proceeds on the ground, that

mankind, in this world, are on probation for retributions of reward and punishment in the world to come. But if there is to be no future punishment, this ground has no reality; and the whole gospel which proceeds upon it is fallacious.

So plain it is, that to deny future punishment is virtually to deny the gospel. It is to deny its fundamental principles, its promises and its threatenings, and, generally, its doctrines and declarations.

5. A denial of future punishment goes to a denial of the moral perfections of God.

If there is to be no *future* punishment, but, in the world to come, mankind are all to be placed in the same state; then God is neither the punisher of the wicked, nor the rewarder of the righteous; the present is in no proper sense a state of probation; this dark and confused scene of things is under a providence, if providence it may be called, in which there is neither wisdom, nor goodness, nor equity; and the gospel and all which God has represented in his word, respecting the present state in connexion with the future, is essentially false. But if so—if God is not a rewarder of the righteous, nor a punisher of the wicked; if he governs the world without wisdom, without goodness, and without equity; and if, in his word, his representations are false and delusive; then, surely, he cannot be a God of holiness, justice, goodness, or truth.

Will it be said, that God loves his creatures, and will make them all happy; and must, therefore, be acknowledged to be good? God loves his creatures! In what sense? Is it in the sense of complacency? And is his complacency in them of such a nature, as to make no essential distinction between the righteous and the wicked, the holy and the unholy? This is the very thing, which, so far from proving him good, would prove him to be devoid of moral goodness.—Yet it is affirmed, God loves his creatures. Why? Because they are *his* creatures. So does

the vilest man on earth love his *children*, because they are *his* children; so also does the most savage beast of the forest love her *offspring*, because they are *her* offspring: and there is as much holiness, as much moral goodness, in the natural affection of wicked men for their children, or even of brutes for their offspring, as in the love, which, according to the deniers of future punishment, God has for his creatures. It is utterly in vain to pretend, that God is good in a truly moral sense, because he loves his creatures; so long as it is denied, either directly or indirectly, that he delights in holiness and abhors iniquity; and is, therefore, a rewarder of the righteous and a punisher of the wicked.

But how is it known, that God loves his creatures, and will make them happy? Is it from his providence? Is it from his word? It has already been shewn that, if there be no future punishment, his providence is unrighteous, and his word is false; and, therefore, neither from the one, nor from the other, can any favourable conclusions be drawn. If, under the providence of God, there is happiness, it is no less certain that there is misery; and, in the word of God, it is not more clearly declared, that he loves mankind, than that, from his judgment seat, the wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment." Indeed, upon the principle now opposed, the notion that God loves his creatures, and will make them happy, is a mere assumption; a dogma without proof and without warrant. Nay, we may go further, and say, that, if God is not a rewarder of the righteous and a punisher of the wicked, all hope of true and permanent happiness under his government, either in time, or in eternity, must be utterly groundless and delusive.

6. That religion which is founded on a denial of a future punishment, is a false religion.

If, as we have seen, the doctrine of future punishment, is a fundamental article of true religion; the

denial of this doctrine must be a fundamental error : and, therefore, a religion founded on this denial must be false.—I say *founded* on this denial : for it deserves particular notice, that those who deny future punishment make this denial not only a part of their theory, but the very foundation of their religion ; and conformably to it they shape their whole system : their notions of God, of his law and of his gospel, of holiness and of sin, of the present world and of the future. And as the foundation is false, the superstructure throughout is false.

Their views of the character of God are false. Instead of a Being of infinite holiness, justice, goodness, and truth ; they make him a being devoid of all these glorious perfections. Their views of the law of God are false. Instead of a perfect law of rectitude ; they make it a law unreasonable in its precepts, and unrighteous and cruel in its sanctions. Their views of the providence of God are false. They make it a providence without wisdom, without goodness, and without equity. Their views of holiness and of sin are false : for according to them, between holiness and sin, there is no very essential or important difference ; surely no such difference, that there should be a reward for the one, or a punishment for the other, beyond the present state. Their views of the gospel are false. Instead of a “ doctrine according to godliness,” which holds out salvation with eternal glory, to all who truly repent and believe, and damnation with everlasting infamy, to the impenitent and unbelieving ; they make it an unholy and unjust proclamation of exemption from punishment, of liberty in sin, and of eternal felicity to the wicked as well as to the righteous. Their views of the present state of mankind are false. Instead of a state of probation, with reference to future rewards and punishments ; they make it a scene of darkness and confusion, without any wise design, or benevolent end. Their views of the world to come are false. Instead of a world

of glorious, and of dreadful retribution, respectively to the righteous and to the wicked; they make it a state where all mankind, the bad* as well as the good,* shall be happy, for what reason, or by what means, we know not. Their boasted love to God and men is false; their faith is false; their hopes are false; their joys are false. And when "judgment shall be laid to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place; and their covenant with death shall be disannulled, and their agreement with hell shall not stand."†

As the whole system, in all its principles and in all its parts, is false; so it is maintained and promoted, by means of falsehood. It is maintained and promoted by forced and false constructions of the scriptures, and by deceptive and false representations of God and of man, of heaven and of hell, and of every thing pertaining to the scriptures; in a word, "by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

7. That religion which pretends to be scriptural, and yet is founded on a denial of future punishment, is worse than deism, worse than paganism.

It is worse, as it evinces greater hardness of depravity; worse, as it is more dangerous for those who embrace it; and worse, as it is more pernicious in its influence on society.

It is worse, as it evinces greater hardness of depravity.—Do the deist and the pagan set aside the evidences of revelation, and deny that the scriptures are from God? This, to be sure, is much: but is it not still more for men, who acknowledge the scriptures to be the word of God, yet boldly to set aside

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* It can avail nothing to say, that, on leaving this world, all mankind will be *good*: for not only is this said without proof, and in direct contradiction to the scriptures; but, even on the supposition of its truth, all the horrid consequences, mentioned above, relating to the probationary state, to providence, to the gospel, and the character of God, must still ensue.

† Isa, xxviii. 17, 18.

their whole design, and deny their plainest and most important truths? Do the deist and the pagan, without regard to the scriptures, frame notions of God, and of religion, according to their vain imaginations? This also is much: but is it not still more for men, with the Bible in their hands, to frame notions of God, and of religion, according to their vain imaginations, and presumptuously to palm their fallacious notions upon the ignorant and unwary, as the truths of inspiration?—The deist and the pagan, indeed, go aside from God, and do much to dishonour his holy name; but those who pretend to hold the scriptures, and yet deny future punishment, go directly in the face of God; and while they strip him of his glory, and demolish the whole system of his truth, have the audacious hardiness to call upon him to sanction the impious work!

This false religion is also more dangerous than deism or paganism, for those who embrace it. It is more dangerous, because it is more desperately affronting to God; and is, therefore, of greater turpitude and criminality. But this is not all. It is, beyond all others, a strong delusion. It pretends to higher authority, than either deism or paganism; and, in its nature, is more suited to seduce and beguile the hearts of men, and to hold them fast in its direful enchantment. Under the pretended authority of Heaven, it promises exemption from punishment, and a future state of happiness to all men, as matters of absolute certainty. This is more than deism or paganism has ventured to do; and, than this, nothing can be more seductive or dangerous, to those who love to be deceived.

Nor less evident is it, that this false religion is more pernicious, than either deism or paganism, in its influence on society. The deist is not certain, whether his God is a rewarder of the virtuous and a punisher of the vicious, or not. The pagan believes that his god, or gods, will reward the good, and punish the bad. Both in deism and in paganism, therefore, there is something to impress a

dread of what may be hereafter, and to hold the evil propensities and passions of men in check. Not so in this false religion, which pretends to have the scriptures for its support. It impresses upon its believers no dread of what may be hereafter; and lays no restraint on their evil propensities and passions. On the contrary, as it “promises them life, though they walk in the imagination of their own hearts”; it throws off, so far as it has influence, all restraint, and gives unbounded licence to every passion and lust.

Let us not be told here, that this religion promotes love to God; and, by this love, restrains men from vice. Promotes love to God!—To what God?—To the Holy One of Israel? No: but to an imaginary being, who neither delights in holiness, nor abhors sin; at least, not to such a degree, as either to reward the one, or punish the other; and is, therefore, just “such an one,” as the vilest of the vile would have. And is the love of such a god, a love which will restrain the vicious propensities and passions of men? No: it is a love, in its nature the most depraved, and which, the more it abounds, the more it becomes a prolific source of all that is sinful and vicious.

Doubtless it may flatter the pride, or the vanity, of men of corrupt minds, to be told, that they need not the threatenings of future punishment to deter them from vice, or the promises of future reward to incite them to virtue. It may accord with their feelings and views, also, to be told, that the religion which has respect to rewards and punishments, is mercenary and servile; and much to this effect has been said, not by the deniers of future punishment only, but also, and in a better manner, by Shaftsbury and Paine, and other distinguished infidels. But it behoves those, who fondly listen to these deceptions, who laugh at the wrath of God, and make a jest of hell-fire, seriously to remember, that threatenings of punishment and promises of reward—

of punishment the most tremendous, and reward the most glorious, are constantly held out in the scriptures; not as human devices, but as means which infinite wisdom has seen fit to employ, to deter men from vice, and incite them to virtue—to save them from destruction, and raise them to glory. And the experience of ages can testify, that, generally, in proportion as men rid themselves of the fear of future punishment, and the hope of future reward, they are prepared to run with greediness into every excess of depravity.

Indeed, there can be nothing of more pernicious influence on society, than a religion, if religion it may be called, which denies the future punishment of the wicked. It gives false views of God, and of every thing relating to eternity; it levels the distinction between virtue and vice, holiness and sin; it unhinges the minds of men, in regard to all divine truth, and all moral principle; it subverts the foundations of religion and morality, and removes the most powerful restraints from the corrupt propensities and passions of depraved men. And, though in places, where this false religion is new, and where many circumstances conspire to counteract its tendency, its pernicious effects may not at once appear; yet facts, stubborn and notorious facts, most amply and lamentably testify, that where it has had for any considerable time any considerable prevalence, a most deplorable dissolution of morals and of manners has ensued. Surely, then, its prevalence ought to be deprecated, not only by the friends of true religion, but by all who wish well to society, as more dreadful than the contagion of the plague.

My brethren, is it not most deeply to be deplored, that this corrupt and pernicious religion has an establishment in this place; and is regarded with so little abhorrence, and so little concern? Is it not to be lamented, with the liveliest sensibilities, that so many of the unstable and the ignorant, the unwary and the young, are ensnared by its seductive

allurements?—Are we, then, to acknowledge the preachers of it as ministers of Christ; or a body, associated for the support of it, as a church of Christ? This surely would not be christian charity; it would be most criminal and fatal complaisance; it would be the excess of cruelty. It would be to encourage seducers in their work of seduction, to confirm the deluded in their delusions, and to give to that delusion a wide and effectual door for its pernicious spread.—No: love to God forbids; benevolence to men forbids; all that is sacred in the blood of the covenant forbids; and before this right hand be given to such a communion, may this right arm perish from its socket.—“I know, saith HE, who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and holdeth the stars in his own right hand, I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of satan.” And for christians to hesitate, or to temporize in a case so plain, and so awfully momentous, is perfidy to their divine Master and his cause, and destruction to the souls of men.

My hearers, let me entreat you all to take warning, and avoid this seductive and pernicious error. If once it seize upon your minds, it will eat as doth a canker. Remember, that “he that cometh unto God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” But as surely as there is a glorious reward for the righteous, there is also a strange punishment for the workers of iniquity. “It is indeed a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” If you would be saved by him, however, you must repent and obey his gospel. Harken then to his warning, and to his inviting voice. Let his love, that unspeakable love, which he displayed on the cross when he died for you, tenderly affect your hearts, and constrain you repentantly to turn from sin, and gratefully to lay hold on the hope set before you. O, refuse not his call; despise not his grace: for how can you escape, if you neglect his great salvation?



