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# SUBSTANCE OF SERMONS

BY

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FORMERLY PRESIDENT OF NASSAU HALL, NEW JERSEY.

GIVEN IN HIS OWN WORDS.

IN ONE VOLUME.

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## EXTRACTS FROM A SERMON

*Preached at Nassau Hall, Princeton, May 28, 1761. Occasioned by the death of the Rev. Samuel Davies, A. M., late President of the College of New Jersey. By Samuel Finley, D. D., President of said College.*

"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."—*Rom. xiv. 7, 8* . . . . . 385

# SERMONS.

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## I.

### THE DIVINE AUTHORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

“Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father’s house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”—*Luke*, xvi. 27-31.

WHAT Micah said superstitiously, when he was robbed of his idols, *Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* may be truly spoken with regard to the religion of Jesus. If that be taken from us, what have we more? The generality of you owe all your hopes of a glorious immortality to this heaven-born religion, and you make it the rule of your faith and practice, confident that in so doing you please God.

But what if after all you should be mistaken? What if the religion of Jesus should be an imposture? I know you are struck with horror at the thought, and perhaps alarmed at my making so shocking a supposition. But this suspicion, horrid as it is, has probably been suggested to you at times by infernal agency; this suspicion may at times have risen in your minds in their wanton and licentious excursions, or from false alarms of a melancholy and timorous imagination: and if this suspicion has never been raised in you by the sophistical conversation of loose wits and affected rational-

ists, it has been owing to your happy retirement from the polite world, where infidelity makes extensive conquests, under the specious name of deism. Since therefore you are subject to an assault from such a suspicion, when you may not be armed ready to repel it, let me this day start it from its ambush, that I may try the force of a few arguments upon it, and furnish you with weapons to conquer it.

Let me also tell you, that *that* faith in the Christian religion which proceeds from insufficient or bad principles, is but little better than infidelity. If you believe the Christian religion to be divine, because you hardly care whether it be true or false, being utterly unconcerned about religion in any shape, and therefore never examining the matter; if you believe it true, because you have been educated in it; because your parents or ministers have told you so; or because it is the religion of your country; if these are the only grounds of your faith, it is not such a faith as constitutes you true Christians; for upon the very same grounds you would have been Mahometans in Turkey, disciples of Confucius in China, or worshipers of the devil among the Indians, if it had been your unhappy lot to be born in those countries; for a Mahometan, or a Chinese, or an Indian, can assign these grounds for his faith. Surely, I need not tell you, that the grounds of a mistaken belief in an imposture, are not a sufficient foundation for a saving faith in a divine revelation.

My text is a parabolical dialogue between Abraham and one of his wretched posterity, once rioting in the luxuries of high life, but now tormented in infernal flames. We read of his brethren in his father's house. Among these probably his estate was divided upon his decease; from whence we may infer that he had no children; for had he had any, it would have been more natural to represent him as solicitous for their reformation by a messenger from the dead, than for that of his brothers. He seems, therefore, like some of our unhappy modern rakes, just to have come to his estate, and to have abandoned himself to such a course of debaucheries as soon shattered his constitution, and brought him down to the grave, and alas! to hell, in the bloom of life, when they were far from his thoughts. May this be a warning to all of his age and circumstances.

Whether, from some remaining affection to his brethren, or (which is more likely) from a fear that they who had



shared with him in sin would increase his torment, should they descend to him in the infernal prison, he is solicitous that Lazarus might be sent as an apostle from the dead to warn them. His petition is to this purpose: "Since no request in my own favour can be granted; since I cannot obtain the poor favour of a drop of water to cool my tongue, let me at least make one request in behalf of those that are yet in the land of hope, and not beyond the reach of mercy. In my father's house I have five brethren, gay, thoughtless, young creatures, who are now rioting in those riches I was forced to leave, who interred my mouldering corpse in state, little apprehensive of the doom of my immortal part; who are now treading the same enchanting paths of pleasure I walked in; and will, unless reclaimed, soon descend, like me, thoughtless and unprepared, into those doleful regions: I therefore pray, that thou wouldst send Lazarus to alarm them in their wild career, with an account of my dreadful doom, and inform them of the reality and importance of everlasting happiness and misery, that they may reform, and so avoid this place of torment whence I can never escape."

Abraham's answer may be thus paraphrased: "If thy brethren perish, it will not be for want of means; they enjoy the sacred scriptures of the Old Testament, written by *Moses and the prophets*; and these are sufficient to inform them of the necessary truths to regulate their practice, and particularly to warn them of everlasting punishment! Let them, therefore, hear and regard, study and obey, those writings; for they need no further means for their salvation."

To this the wretched creature replies, "Nay, father Abraham, these means will not avail; I enjoyed them all; and here I am, a lost soul; and I am afraid they will have as little effect upon them as they had upon me. These means are common and familiar, and therefore disregarded. But if one arose from the dead, if an apostle from the invisible world was sent to them, to declare as an eye-witness the great things he has seen, surely they will repent. The novelty and the terror of the apparition would alarm them. Their senses would be struck with so unusual a messenger, and they would be convinced of the reality of eternal things; therefore I must renew my request; send Lazarus to them in all the pomp of heavenly splendor; Lazarus whom they once knew in so abject a condition, and

whom they will therefore the more regard, when they see him appear in all his present glory."

Thus the miserable creature pleads, but, alas! he pleads in vain.

Abraham continues inexorable, and gives a very good reason for his denial: "If they pay no regard to the writings of *Moses and the prophets*, the standing revelation God has left in his church, it would be to no purpose to give them another; they would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead: the same disposition that renders them deaf to such messengers as *Moses and the prophets*, would also render them impersuasive by a messenger from the dead. Such a one might strike them with a panic, but it would soon be over, and then they would return to their usual round of pleasures; they would presently think the apparition was the creature of their own imagination, or some unaccountable illusion of their senses. If one arose from the dead, he could but declare the same things substantially with *Moses and the prophets*; and he could not speak with greater authority, or give better credentials than they; and therefore they who are not benefited by these standing means must be given up as desperate; and God, for very good reasons, will not multiply new revelations to them."

This answer of Abraham was exemplified when another Lazarus was raised from the dead in the very sight of the Jews, and Christ burst the bands of death, and gave them incontestable evidences of his resurrection; and yet after all they were not persuaded, but persisted in invincible infidelity.

This parable was spoken before any part of the New Testament was written, and added to the sacred canon; and if it might be then asserted, that the standing revelation of God's will was sufficient, and that it was needless to demand further, then much more may it be asserted now, when the canon of the Scriptures is completed, and we have received so much additional light from the New Testament. We have not only *Moses and the prophets*, but we have also Christ, who is a messenger from the dead, and his apostles; and therefore, surely, "if we do not hear them, neither will we be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." The gospel is the last effort of the grace of God with a guilty world; and if this has no effect upon us, our disease is incurable that refuses to be healed.

I cannot insist upon all the important truths contained in this copious text, but only design,

I. To show the sufficiency of the standing revelation of God's will in the Scriptures, to bring men to repentance; and,

II. To expose the vanity and unreasonableness of the objections against this revelation, and of demanding another.

I. I am to show the sufficiency of the standing revelation in the Scriptures, to bring men to repentance.

If the Scriptures give us sufficient instructions in matters of faith, and sufficient directions in matters of practice, if they are attended with sufficient evidences for our faith, and produce sufficient excitements to influence our practice, then they contain a sufficient revelation; for it is for these purposes we need a revelation, and a revelation that answers these purposes has the directest tendency to make us truly religious, and bring us to a happy immortality. But that the revelation in the Scriptures (particularly in the New Testament, which I shall more immediately consider as being the immediate foundation of Christianity) is sufficient for these purposes, will be evident from an induction of particulars.

1. The Scriptures give us sufficient instructions what we should believe, or are a sufficient rule of faith.

Religion cannot subsist without right notions of God and divine things; and entire ignorance or mistakes in its fundamental articles must be destructive of its nature; and therefore a divine revelation must be a collection of rays of light, a system of divine knowledge; and such we find the Christian revelation to be, as contained in the sacred writings.

In the Scriptures we have the clearest and most majestic account of the nature and perfections of the Deity, and of his being the Creator, Ruler, and Benefactor of the universe; to whom, therefore, all reasonable beings are under infinite obligations. In the Scriptures we have an account of the present state of human nature, as degenerate, and a more rational and easy account of its apostasy, than could ever be given by the light of nature. In the Scriptures, too, we have the welcome account of a method of recovery from the ruins of our apostasy, through the mediation of the Son of God; there we have the assurance which we could find nowhere else, that God is reconcilable, and willing to pardon

penitents upon the account of the obedience and sufferings of Christ. There all our anxious inquiries, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord; or bow myself before the most high God?* are satisfactorily answered; and there the agonizing conscience can obtain relief, which might have sought in vain among all the other religions in the world.

In the Scriptures also, eternity and the invisible worlds are laid open to our view, and "life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel." There we are assured of the state of future rewards and punishments, according to our conduct in this state of probation; and the nature, perfection, and duration of the happiness and misery are described with as much accuracy as are necessary to engage us to seek the one and shun the other.

2. The Holy Scriptures give us complete directions in matters of practice, or are a sufficient rule of life. A divine revelation must not be calculated merely to amuse us, and gratify our curiosity with sublime and refined notions and speculations, but adapted to direct and regulate our practice, and render us better as well as wiser.

Accordingly, the sacred writings give us a complete system of practical religion and morality. There, not only all the duties of natural religion are inculcated, but several important duties, as love to our enemies, humility, &c., are clearly discovered, which the feeble light of reason in the heathen moralists did either not perceive at all, or but very faintly. In short, there we are informed of our duties towards God, towards our neighbors, and towards ourselves. The Scriptures are full of particular injunctions and directions to particular duties, lest we should not be sagacious enough to infer them from general rules; and sometimes all these duties are summed up in some short maxim or general rule, which we may easily remember, and always carry about with us. Such a noble summary is that which Christ has given us of the whole moral law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c., and thy neighbor as thyself;" or that all-comprehending rule of our conduct towards one another: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye the same unto them." And by whom was this vast treasure of knowledge laid up to enrich the world? by whom were these matchless writings composed, which furnish us with a system of religion and morality so much more plain, so much more

perfect, than all the famous sages of antiquity could frame? Why, to our astonishment, they were composed by a company of fishermen, or persons not much superior; by persons generally without any liberal education; persons who had not devoted their lives to intellectual improvement; persons of no extraordinary natural parts, and who had never traveled, like the ancient philosophers, to gather up fragments of knowledge in different countries, but who lived in Judea, a country where learning was but little cultivated, in comparison of Greece and Rome. These were the most accomplished teachers of mankind that ever appeared in the world. And can this be accounted for, without acknowledging their inspiration from heaven? If human reason could have made such discoveries, surely it would have made them by those in whom it was improved to the greatest perfection, and not by a company of ignorant mechanics.

3. The Scriptures are attended with sufficient evidences of their truth and divinity.

It is certain that as God can accept no worship than rational from reasonable creatures, he cannot require us to believe a revelation to be divine without sufficient reason; and therefore when he gives us a revelation, he will attest it with such evidences as will be a sufficient foundation of our belief.

Accordingly, the Scriptures are attested with all the evidence, intrinsic and extrinsic, which we can reasonably desire, and with all the evidences the nature of the thing will admit.

As for intrinsic evidences, many might be mentioned; but I must at present confine myself in proper limits. I shall resume the one I have already hinted at, namely, that the religion of the Bible has the directest tendency to promote true piety and solid virtue in the world: it is such a religion as becomes a God to reveal; such a religion as we might expect from him in case he instituted any; a religion intended and adapted to regulate self-love, and to diffuse the love of God and man through the world; the only generous principles and vigorous springs of a suitable conduct towards God, towards one another, and towards ourselves; a religion productive of every humane, social, and divine virtue, and directly calculated to banish all sin out of the world; to transform impiety into devotion; injustice and oppression into equity and universal benevolence; and

sensuality into sobriety—a religion infinitely preferable to any that has been contrived by the wisest and best of mortals. And whence do ye think could this godlike religion proceed? Does not its nature prove its origin divine? Does it not evidently bear the lineaments of its heavenly Parent? can you once imagine that such a pure, such a holy, such a perfect system, could be the contrivance of wicked, infernal spirits, of selfish, artful priests, or politicians, or of a parcel of daring impostors, or wild enthusiasts? If you can believe this, you may also believe that light is the product of darkness, virtue of vice, good of evil.

Another intrinsic evidence is that of prophecy. Those future events which are contingent, or which shall be accomplished by causes that do not now exist or appear, cannot be certainly foreknown or foretold by man, as we find by our own experience. Such objects fall within the compass of omniscience only; and therefore when short-sighted mortals are enabled to predict such events many years, and even ages, before they happen, it is a certain evidence that they are let into the secrets of heaven, and that God communicates to them a knowledge which cannot be acquired by the most sagacious human mind; and this is an evidence that the persons thus divinely taught are the messengers of God, to declare his will to the world.

Now there are numberless instances of such prophecies in the sacred writings. Thus a prophet foretold the destruction of Jeroboam's altar by the good Josiah, many ages before. 1 Kings, xiii. 2. Cyrus was foretold by name as the restorer of the Jews from Babylon, to rebuild their temple and city, about a hundred years before he was born. Isaiah, xlv. 1, &c. But the most remarkable prophecies of the Old Testament are those relating to the Messiah; which are so numerous and full, that they might serve for materials of his history. Gen. xlix. 10; Hag. ii. 7; Mal. iii. 2; Dan. ix. 24, &c.

The history of the life of Jesus and his apostles is one continued series of miracles. Sight was restored to the blind, the deaf were enabled to hear, the lame to walk, the maimed furnished with new-created limbs, the sick healed, the rage of winds and seas controlled, yea, the dead were raised, and all this with an air of sovereignty, such as became a God.

Another extrinsic evidence of the truth of Christianity is

its extensive propagation through the world in the most unpromising circumstances.

The only religion, besides the Christian, which has had any very considerable spread in the world is that of Mahomet; but we may easily account for this, without supposing it divine, from its nature, as indulging the lusts of men; and especially from the manner of its propagation, not by the force of evidence, but by the force of arms. But the circumstances of the propagation of Christianity were quite otherwise, whether we consider its contrariety to the corruptions, prejudices, and interests of men; the easiness of detecting it, had it been false; the violent opposition it met with from all the powers of the earth; the instruments of its propagation; or the measures they took for that purpose. Christianity was directly contrary to the corruptions, prejudices, and interests of mankind. It grants no indulgence to the corrupt propensions of a degenerate world, but requires that universal holiness of heart and life which, as we find by daily observation, is so ungrateful to them, and which is the principal reason that the religion of Jesus meets with so much contempt and opposition in every age.

When Christianity was first propagated, all nations had been educated in some other religion: the Jews were attached to Moses, and the Gentiles to their various systems of heathenism, and were all of them very zealous for their own religion; but Christianity proposed a new scheme, and could not take place without antiquating or exploring all other religions; and therefore it was contrary to the inveterate prejudices of all mankind, and could never have been so generally received, if it had not brought with it the most evident credentials. There was a powerful party in every nation, and they would exert themselves to prevent the spread of an innovation so dangerous to their interest, which we find by all histories of those times they actually did. And yet the despised religion of Jesus triumphed over their opposition, and maintained its credit in spite of all their endeavors to detect it as an imposture; and this proves that it was not an imposture; for, in the next place, it was easy to have detected Christianity as an imposture, nay, it was impossible it should not have been detected, if it had been such; for the great facts upon which the evidence of it rested were said to be obvious and public, done

before thousands and in all countries. Thousands must know whether Christ had fed many with provisions only sufficient for a few; whether Lazarus was raised from the dead; whether the Apostles spoke with tongues to the various nations among whom they endeavored to propagate their religion. These things and many others, upon which the evidence of Christianity depends, were public in their own nature; and therefore, if they had not been matters of fact, the cheat must have been unavoidably detected.

Further,—Christianity met with the most strenuous opposition from all the powers of the earth. The Jews were implacable enemies, and as they lived on the spot where its miraculous attestations were said to be given, it was in their power to have crushed it in its birth, had it not been attended with such invincible evidence. All the power of the Roman empire was also exerted for its extirpation; and its propagators could expect no profit or pleasure by it, but were assured, from daily experience and from the predictions of their Master, that they should meet with shame, persecution, and death itself; and in the next world they could expect nothing but eternal damnation if they were impostors; and yet, in spite of all these discouragements they persisted in their testimonies, though they might have secured their lives and helped their fortunes by retracting it:—nay, their testimony prevailed, in spite of all opposition; multitudes in all nations then known embraced the faith, though they expected tortures and death for it; and in a few centuries the Roman empire submitted to the religion of a crucified Jesus.

And who were those mighty heroes that then triumphed over the world?

Why, to our surprise, the instruments of the propagation of Christianity were a company of poor mechanics, publicans, tentmakers, and fishermen, from the despised nation of the Jews!

And by what strange powers or arts did they make these extensive conquests?

The measures they took were a plain declaration of their religion; and they wrought miracles for its confirmation. They did not use the power of the sword, or secular terrors, or bribery; they were without learning, without the arts of reasoning and persuasion; and without all the usual artifice of seducers to gain credit to their imposture.



Here I cannot but take particular notice of that matchless simplicity that appears in the history of Christ and his apostles. The evangelists write in that artless, calm, and unguarded manner, which is natural to persons confident of the undeniable truth of what they assert; they do not write with that scrupulous caution which would argue any fear that they might be confuted. They simply relate the naked facts, and leave them to stand upon their own evidence. They relate the most amazing, the most moving things, with the most cool serenity—without any passionate exclamations and warm reflections. For example, they relate the most astonishing miracles, as the resurrection of Lazarus, in the most simple, and, as it were, careless manner, without breaking out and celebrating the divine power of Christ. In the same manner they relate the most tragical circumstances of his condemnation and death, calmly mentioning matter of fact, without any invectives against the Jews, without any high eulogies upon Christ's innocence, without any rapturous celebration of his grace in suffering all these things for sinners, and without any tender lamentations over their deceased Master. It is impossible for a heart so deeply impressed with such things, as theirs undoubtedly were, to retain this dispassionate serenity, unless laid under supernatural restraints; and there appears very good reasons for this restraint upon them, viz., that the gospel history might carry intrinsic evidences of its simplicity and artless impartiality; and that it might appear adapted to convince the judgments of men, and not merely to raise their passions. In this respect, the gospel history is distinguished from all histories in the world: and can we think so plain, so undisguised, so artless a composure, the contrivance of designing impostors? Would not a consciousness that they might be detected keep them more upon their guard, and make them more ready to anticipate and confine objections, and take every artifice to recommend their cause, and prepossess the reader in its favor?

Thus I have hinted at a few things among the many that might be mentioned to prove the divinity of the religion of Jesus, and its sufficiency to bring men to repentance and salvation. And if it be so, why should it be rejected, or another sought? This reminds me that I promised,

II. To expose the vanity and unreasonableness of the objections against the Christian religion, or of demanding

another, &c. What can our ingenious infidels offer against what has been said? It must be something very weighty indeed to preponderate all this evidence. A laugh, or a sneer, a pert witticism, declaiming against priestcraft and the prejudices of education, artful evasions, and shallow sophisms, the usual arguments of our pretended freethinkers, these will not suffice to banter us out of our joyful confidence of the divinity of Jesus; and I may add, these will not suffice to indemnify them. Nothing will be sufficient for this, but demonstration. It lies upon them to prove the Christian religion to be certainly false; otherwise, unless they are hardened to a prodigy, they must be racked with anxious fears lest they should find it true to their cost, and lest that dismal threatening should stand against them: "He that believeth not, shall be damned." What mighty objections, then, have they to offer? Will they say that the Christian religion contains mysterious doctrines which they cannot comprehend, which seem to them unaccountable—as that of the trinity, the incarnation, and satisfaction of Christ, &c.? But will they advance their understanding to be the universal standard of truth? Will they pretend to comprehend the infinite God in their finite minds? then let them go, and measure the heavens with a span, and comprehend the ocean in the hollow of their hand. Will they pretend to understand the divine nature, when they cannot understand their own? when they cannot account for or explain the union betwixt their own souls and bodies? Will they reject mysteries in Christianity when they must own them in every thing else? Let them first solve all the phenomena in nature; let them give us a rational theory of the infinite divisibility of a piece of finite matter; let them account for the seemingly magical operation of the loadstone; the circulation of the blood upwards as well as downwards, contrary to all the laws of motion; let them tell us, how spirits can receive ideas from material organs; how they hear and see, &c. Let them give us intelligible theories of these things, and then they may, with something of a better grace, set up for critics upon God and his ways; but, while they are mysteries to themselves, while every particle of matter baffles their understandings, it is the most impious intellectual pride to reject Christianity upon the account of its mysteries, and to set up themselves as the supreme judges of truth.

Will they object the wicked lives of its professors against the holiness and good tendency of Christianity itself? But it is Christianity as taught by Christ and his apostles, and continued in the Bible, that I am proving to be divine? You know that it is the latter, and consequently the poor appearance it makes in the former sense, is no argument against its purity and divinity in this. Again, are the bad lives of professors taught and enjoined by genuine Christianity, and agreeable to it? No; they are quite contrary to it, and subversive of it; and it is so far from encouraging such professors, that it pronounces them miserable hypocrites; and their doom will be more severe than that of heathens. Further: are there not some of the professors of Christianity who live habitually according to it? who give us the best patterns of piety and virtue that ever were exhibited to the world? This is sufficient to vindicate the religion they profess, and it is highly injurious to involve such promiscuously in the odium and contempt due to barefaced hypocrites. Or will they change the note, and instead of pleading that Christianity leads to licentiousness, object that it bears too hard upon the pleasures of mankind, and lays them under too severe restraints? Or that its penalties are excessive and cruel? But does it rob mankind of any pleasures worthy the rational nature, worthy the pursuit of creatures formed for immortality, and consistent with the good of the whole?

Will they object that miracles are not a sufficient evidence of the truth and divinity of a revelation, because infernal spirits may also work miracles, as in the case of the magicians of Egypt, to confirm an imposture? But it is known that our freethinkers expunge and laugh at the existence and power of evil spirits in other cases, and therefore must not be allowed to admit them here to serve their turn. However, we grant there are infernal spirits, and that they can perform many things above human power, which appear to us miraculous, and yet the evidence in favor of Christianity taken from miracles stands unshaken; for,

(1.) Can we suppose that these malignant and wicked spirits, whose business it is to seduce men to sin and ruin, would be willing to exert their power to work miracles to confirm so holy a religion, a religion so contrary to their designs, and so subversive of their kingdom and interest?

Or if we should suppose them willing, yet, (2.) Can we think that God, who has them all at his control, would suffer them to counterfeit the great seal of heaven, and annex it to an imposture? that is, to work such miracles as could not be distinguished from those wrought by him to attest an imposture? Would he permit them to impose upon mankind in a manner that could not be detected? This would be to deliver the world to their management, and suffer them to lead them blindfold to hell in unavoidable delusion: for miracles are such dazzling and pompous evidences, that the general run of mankind could not resist them, even though they were wrought to attest a religion that might be demonstrated by a long train of sublime reasoning to be false. God may, indeed, suffer the devil to mimic the miracles wrought by his immediate hand, as in the case of Jannes and Jambres; but then, as in that case, too, he will take care to excel them, and give some distinguishing marks of his almighty agency, which all mankind may easily discriminate from the utmost exertion of infernal power. But though Satan should be willing, and God should permit him, to work miracles, yet, (3.) Can we suppose that all the united powers of hell are able to work such astonishing miracles as were wrought for the confirmation of the Christian religion? Can we suppose that they can control the laws of nature at pleasure, and that with an air of sovereignty, and professing themselves the lords of the universe, as we know Christ did? If they could exert a creating power to form new limbs for the maimed, or to multiply five loaves and two fishes into a sufficient quantity of food for five thousand, and leave a greater quantity of fragments when that were done than the whole provision at first, then they might create the world, and support all the creatures in it. If they could animate the dead and remand the separate soul back to its former habitation and reunite it with the body, then I see not why they might not have given life at first. But to suppose this, would be to dethrone the King of heaven, and renounce his providence entirely. We therefore rest assured that the miracles related in Scripture were wrought by the finger of God.

But our freethinkers will urge, How do we at this distance know that such miracles were actually wrought? they are only related in Scripture history; but to prove

the truth of Scripture from arguments that suppose the Scripture true, is a ridiculous method of reasoning, and only a begging of the question. But (1.) the reality of those miracles were granted by the enemies of Christianity in their writings against it; but they had no answer to make, but this sorry one, that they were wrought by the power of magic. They never durst deny that they were wrought; for they knew all the world could prove it. Indeed, an honorable testimony concerning them could not be expected from infidels; for it would be utterly inconsistent that they should own these miracles sufficient attestations of Christianity and yet continue infidels. But,

(2.) As these miracles were of so public a nature, and as so many were concerned to detect them, that they would unavoidably have been detected when related in words, if they had not been done, so, for the same reasons, they could not but have been detected when related in writing; and this we know they never were. If these miracles had not been matters of undoubted fact, they could not have been inserted at first in the gospel-history; for then many thousands in various countries were alive to confute them; and they could not have been introduced into it afterwards, for all the world would see that it was then too late, and that if there had been such things, they should have heard of them before; for they were more necessary for the first propagation of Christianity than for its support when received.

But it may be objected, How can we at this distance know that these histories are genuine? May they not have been corrupted and many additions made to them by designing men in ages since? And why is it not also asked, how do we know that there were such men as Alexander, Julius Cæsar, or King William the Third? How do we know but their histories are all romance and fable? How do we know there were any generations of mankind before ourselves? In short, How can we know any thing, but what we have seen with our eyes? We may as well make difficulties of all these things, and so destroy all human testimony, as scruple the genuineness of the sacred writings; for never were any writings conveyed down with so good evidence of their being genuine and uncorrupted as these. Upon their first publication they were put into all hands, they were scattered into all nations, translated into various

languages, and all perused them, either to be taught by them, or to cavil at them. And ever since, they have been quoted by thousands of authors, appealed to by all parties of Christians, as the supreme judge of controversies; and not only the enemies of Christianity have carefully watched them to detect any alterations which pious fraud might attempt to make, but one sect of Christians has kept a watchful eye over the other, lest they should alter any thing in favor of their own cause. And it is matter of astonishment as well as conviction that all the various copies and translations of the Scriptures in different nations and libraries are substantially the same, and differ only in matters of small moment; so that from the worst copy or translation in the world, one might easily learn the substance of Christianity.

Thus I have answered as many objections as the bounds of a sermon would admit; and I think they are the principal ones which lie against my subject in the view I have considered it. And as I have not designedly selected the weakest, in order to an easy triumph, you may look upon the answers that have been given as a ground of rational presumption, that other objections may be answered with equal ease. Indeed, if they could not, it would not invalidate the positive arguments in favor of Christianity; for when we have sufficient positive evidence of a thing, we do not reject it because it is attended with some difficulties which we cannot solve.

My time will allow me to make but two or three short reflections upon the whole.

1. If the religion of Jesus be attended with such full evidence, and be sufficient to conduct men to everlasting felicity, then how helpless are they that have enjoyed it all their life without profit: who either reject it as false, or have not felt its power to reform their hearts and lives? It is the last remedy provided for a guilty world; and if this fails, their disease is incurable, and they are not to expect better means.

2. If the religion of Jesus be true, then woe unto the wicked of all sorts: woe to infidels, both practical and speculative, for all the curses of it are in full force against them, and I need not tell you how dreadful they are.

3. If the religion of Jesus be true, then I congratulate such of you, whose hearts and lives are habitually conformed

to it, and who have ventured your everlasting all upon it. You build upon a sure foundation, and your hope shall never make you ashamed.

Finally, let us all strive to become rational and practical believers of this heaven-born religion. Let our understandings be more rationally and thoroughly convinced of its truth; and our hearts and lives be more and more conformed to its purity; and ere long we shall receive those glorious rewards it insures to all its sincere disciples; which may God grant to us all for Jesus' sake, AMEN!



## II.

### THE METHOD OF SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—*John*, iii. 16.

MY text is a part of the most important evening conversation that ever was held; I mean that between Christ and Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews. Our Lord first instructs him in the doctrine of regeneration, that grand constituent of a Christian, and pre-requisite to our admission in the kingdom of heaven; and then he proceeds to inform him of the gospel method of salvation, which contains these two grand articles: the death of Christ, as the great foundation of blessedness; and faith in him, as the great qualification upon the part of the sinner. He presents this important doctrine to us in various forms, with a very significant repetition. *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of man be lifted up; that is, hung on high on a cross, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Then follows my text, which expresses the same doctrine with great force. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, gave him up to death, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* He goes on to mention a wonder. This earth is a rebellious province of Jehovah's dominions, and, therefore, if his Son should ever visit it,

one would think it would be as an angry judge, or as the executioner of his Father's vengeance. But, oh, astonishing! *God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.* Hence the terms of life and death are thus fixed: *He that believeth in him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of God.* Sure the heavenly rivers of pleasure flow in these verses. Never, methinks, was there so much gospel expressed in so few words. Here take the gospel in miniature, and bind it to your hearts for ever. These verses alone, methinks, are a sufficient remedy for a dying world.

I. My text implies, that without Christ you are all in a perishing condition.

This holds true of you in particular, because it holds true of the world universally: for the world was undoubtedly in a perishing condition without Christ; and none but he could relieve it, otherwise God would never have given his only begotten Son to save it. God is not ostentatious or prodigal of his gifts, especially of so inestimable a gift as his Son, whom he loves infinitely more than the whole creation. So great, so dear a person, would not have been sent upon a mission which could have been discharged by any other being. Thousands of rams must bleed in sacrifice, or ten thousands of rivers of oil must flow; our first-born must die for our transgressions, and the fruit of our body for the sin of our souls; or Gabriel, or some of the upper ranks of angels, must leave their thrones, and hang upon a cross, if such methods of salvation had been sufficient. All this would have been nothing in comparison of the only begotten Son of God leaving his native heaven, and all its glories, assuming our degraded nature, spending thirty-three long and tedious years in poverty, disgrace, and persecution, dying as a malefactor and a slave in the midst of ignominy and torture, and lying a mangled, breathless corpse in the grave. We may be sure there was the highest degree of necessity for it, otherwise God would not have given up his dear Son to such a horrid scene of suffering.

This, then, was the true state of the world, and consequently yours without Christ; it was hopeless and desperate in every view. In that situation there would not have been so much goodness in the world as to try the efficacy of sacrifices, prayers, tears, reformation, and repentance,



or they would have been tried in vain. It would have been inconsistent with the honor of the divine perfections and government, to admit sacrifices, prayers, tears, repentance, and reformation, as a sufficient atonement.

What a melancholy view of the world have we now before us! We know the state of mankind only under the gracious government of a Mediator; and we but seldom realize what our miserable condition would have been, had this gracious administration never been set up. But exclude a Saviour in your thoughts for a moment, and then take a view of the world—helpless! hopeless!—under the righteous displeasure of God, and despairing of relief!—the very suburbs of hell! the range of malignant devils! the region of guilt, misery, and despair!—the mouth of the infernal pit!—the gate of hell! This would have been the condition of our world had it not been for that Jesus who redeemed it; and yet in this very world he is neglected and despised.

But you will ask me, “How comes it that the world was in such an undone, helpless, hopeless condition without Christ? or what are the reasons of all this?”

The true account of this will appear from these two considerations: that all mankind are sinners; and that no other method but the mediation of Christ could render the salvation of sinners consistent with the honor of the divine perfections and government, with the public good, and even with the nature of things.

All mankind are sinners. This is too evident to need proof. They are sinners, rebels against the greatest and best of beings, against their Maker, their liberal Benefactor, and their rightful Sovereign, to whom they are under stronger and more endearing obligations than they can be under to any creature, or even to the entire system of creatures; sinners, rebels in every part of our globe; none righteous, no, not one; all sinners, without exception; sinners from age to age for thousands of years. Thousands, millions, innumerable multitudes of sinners. What an obnoxious race is this! There appears no difficulty in the way of justice to punish such creatures. But what seeming insuperable difficulties appear in the way of salvation! Let me mention a few of them, to recommend that blessed Saviour who has removed them all.

If such sinners be saved, how shall the holiness and jus-

tice of God be displayed? How shall he give an honorable view of himself to all worlds, as a being of perfect purity, and an enemy to all moral evil?

If such sinners be saved, how shall the honor of the divine government and law be secured? How shall the dignity of a law appear, if a race of rebels may trifle with it with impunity? How can the sinner be saved, and yet the evil of sin be displayed, and all other beings be deterred from it for ever? How can sin be discouraged by pardoning it? Its evil displayed by letting the criminal escape punishment? These are such difficulties, that nothing but divine wisdom could surmount them.

These difficulties lie in the way of a mere pardon and exemption from punishment; but salvation includes more than this. When sinners are saved, they are not only pardoned, but received into high favor, made the children, the friends, the courtiers of the King of heaven. How can the sinner be not only delivered from punishment, but also advanced to a state of perfect happiness? Not only escape the displeasure of his offended sovereign, but be received into full favor, and advanced to the highest honor and dignity; how can this be done without casting a cloud over the purity and justice of the Lord of all, without sinking his law and government into contempt? how can sinners, I say, be saved without the salvation being attended with these bad consequences?

To save men at random, without considering the consequences, to distribute happiness to private persons with an undistinguishing hand, this would be at once inconsistent with the character of the Supreme Magistrate of the universe, and with the public good. Private persons are at liberty to forgive private offences; nay, it is their duty to forgive; and they can hardly offend by way of excess in the generous virtues of mercy and compassion. But the case is otherwise with a magistrate; he is obliged to consult the dignity of his government and the interest of the public; and he may easily carry his lenity to a very dangerous extreme, and by his tenderness to criminals do an extensive injury to the state. This is particularly the case with regard to the great God, the universal Supreme Magistrate of all worlds. And this ought to be seriously considered by those men of loose principles among us, who look upon God only under the fond character of a father,

or a being of infinite mercy; and thence conclude that they have little to fear from him for all their audacious iniquities. There is no absolute necessity that sinners should be saved; justice may be suffered to take place upon them. But there is the most absolute necessity that the Ruler of the world should both be, and appear to be, holy and just. There is the most absolute necessity that he should support the dignity of his government, and guard it from contempt, that he should strike all worlds with a proper horror of sin, and represent it in its genuine, infernal colors, and so consult the good of the whole rather than a part.

And must we then give up ourselves and all our race as lost beyond recovery? There are seemingly insuperable difficulties in the way; and we have seen that neither men nor angels can prescribe any relief; which leads me to add,

II. My text implies, that through Jesus Christ a way is opened for your salvation. He, and he only, was found equal to the undertaking; and before him all these mountains become a plain; all these difficulties vanish; and now God can be just, can secure the dignity of his character, as the ruler of the world, and answer all the ends of government, and yet justify and save the sinner that believeth in Jesus. This is plainly implied in this glorious epitome of the gospel: *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Without this gift all was lost; but now, whosoever believeth in him may be saved; saved in a most honorable way. Was it necessary that the holiness and justice of God should be displayed in the salvation of sinners? See how bright they shine in a suffering Saviour! Now, it appears that such is the holiness and justice of God, that he will not let even his own Son escape unpunished, when he stands in the low place of sinners. Could the execution of everlasting punishment upon the hateful criminals themselves ever give so bright a display of these attributes? It were impossible. Again,

Was it a difficulty to save sinners, and yet maintain the rights of the divine government, and the honor of the law? See how this difficulty is removed by the obedience and death of Christ! Now it appears that the rights of the divine government are so sacred and inviolable, that they must be maintained, though the darling Son of God should fall a sacrifice to justice; and that not one offence

against this government can be pardoned, without his making a full atonement. Further,

Was it a difficulty how sinners might be saved, and yet the evil of sin be displayed in all its horrors? Go to the cross of Christ; there, ye fools, that make a mock of sin, there learn its malignity, and its hatefulness to the great God. There you may see it so great an evil, that when it is but imputed to the man that is God's fellow, as the surety of sinners, it cannot escape punishment. What an enormous evil must that be, which cannot be connived at even in the favorite of Heaven, the only begotten Son of God! Surely nothing besides could give so striking a display of its malignity!

Now, since all obstructions are removed on God's part, that lay in the way of our salvation, why should we not all be saved together? What is there to hinder our crowding into heaven promiscuously? Or, what is there requisite on our part, in order to make us partakers of this salvation? Here it is proper to pass on to the next truth inferred from the text, namely:

III. That the grand pre-requisite to your being saved in this way, is faith in Jesus Christ. Though the obstructions on God's part are removed by the death of Christ, yet there is one remaining in the sinner, which cannot be removed without his consent; and which, while it remains, renders his salvation impossible in the nature of things; that is, the depravity and corruption of his nature. Till this is cured, he cannot relish those fruitions and employments in which the happiness of heaven consists, and consequently be happy there. Therefore there is a necessity in the very nature of things, that he should be made holy, in order to be saved; nay, his salvation itself consists in holiness. Now, faith is the root of all holiness in a sinner. Without a firm realizing belief of the great truths of the gospel, it is impossible a sinner should be sanctified by their influence; and without a particular faith in Jesus Christ, he cannot derive from him those sanctifying influences by which alone he can be made holy, and which are conveyed through Jesus Christ, and through him alone.

Here, then, a most interesting inquiry presents itself: "What is it to believe in Jesus Christ? or, what is that faith which is the grand pre-requisite to salvation?" If you are capable of attention to the most interesting affair

in all the world, attend to this with the utmost seriousness and solemnity.

(1.) Faith pre-supposes a deep sense of our undone, helpless condition. I told you before, this is the condition of the world without Christ; and you must be sensible at heart that this is your condition in particular, before you can believe in him as your Saviour. He came to be a Saviour in a desperate case, when no relief could possibly be had from any other quarter, and you cannot receive him under that character till you feel yourselves in such a case; therefore, in order to your believing, all your pleas and excuses for your sins must be silenced, all your high conceit for your own goodness must be mortified, all your dependence upon your own righteousness, upon the merit of your prayers, your repentance, and good works, must be cast down, and you must feel that indeed you lie at mercy, that God may justly reject you for ever, and that all you can do can bring him under no obligation to save you.

I wish and pray you may this day see yourselves in this true, though mortifying light. It is the want of this sense of things that keeps such crowds of persons unbelievers among us. It is the want of this that causes the Lord Jesus to be so little esteemed, so little sought for, so little desired among us. In short, it is the want of this that is the great occasion of so many perishing from under the gospel, and, as it were, from between the hands of a Saviour. It is this, alas! that causes them to perish, like the impenitent thief on the cross, with a Saviour by his side.

(2.) Faith implies the enlightening of the understanding to discover the suitableness of Jesus Christ as a Saviour, and the excellency of the way of salvation through him. In short, the Lord Jesus, and the way of salvation through him, appear perfectly suitable, all-sufficient, and all-glorious; and, in consequence of this,

(3.) The sinner is enabled to embrace this Saviour with all his heart, and to give a voluntary, cheerful consent to this glorious scheme of salvation. Now all his former unwillingness and reluctance are subdued, and his heart no more draws back from the terms of the gospel, but he complies with them, and that not merely out of constraint and necessity, but out of free choice, and with the greatest pleasure and delight.

(4.) Faith in Jesus Christ implies an humble trust or

dependence upon him alone for the pardon of sin, acceptance with God, and every blessing. As I told you before, the sinner's self-confidence is mortified; he gives up all hopes of acceptance upon the footing of his own righteousness; he is filled with self-despair, and yet he does not despair absolutely; he does not give up himself as lost, but has cheerful hopes of becoming a child of God, and being for ever happy, guilty and unworthy as he is: and what are these hopes founded upon? Why, upon the mere free grace and mercy of God, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. On this he ventures a guilty, unworthy, helpless soul, and finds it a firm immovable foundation, while every other ground of dependence proves but a quicksand.

I shall only add, this faith may also be known by its inseparable effects; which are such as follow: Faith purifies the heart, and is a lively principle of inward holiness; faith is always productive of good works, and leads to universal obedience; faith overcomes the world and all its temptations; faith realizes eternal things, and brings them near; and hence it is defined by the apostle, *The substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.*

IV. My text implies, that every one, without exception, whatever his former character has been, that is enabled to believe in Jesus Christ, shall certainly be saved.

The number or aggravations of sin do not alter the case; and the reason is, the sinner is not received into favor, in whole or in part, upon the account of any thing personal, but solely and entirely upon the account of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Now, this righteousness is perfectly equal to all the demands of the law; and therefore, when this righteousness is made over to the sinner as his by imputation, the law has no more demands upon him for great sins than for small, for many than for few; because all demands are fully satisfied by the obedience of Jesus Christ to the law.

This encouraging truth has the most abundant support from the Holy Scriptures. Observe the agreeable indefinite *whosoever* so often repeated. "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Whosoever he be, however vile, however guilty, however unworthy, if he does but believe, he shall not perish, but have everlasting life. What an agreeable assurance is this from the lips of

him who has the final states of men at his disposal! The same blessed lips has also declared, *Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.* He has given you more than bare words to establish you in the belief of this truth; upon this principle he has acted, choosing some of the most abandoned sinners to make them examples, not of his justice as we might expect, but of his mercy, for the encouragement of others. You may see what monsters of sin he chose to make the monuments of his grace in Corinth. *Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* What a dismal catalogue is this! It is no wonder such a crew should not inherit the kingdom of heaven; they are fit only for the infernal prison; and yet, astonishing! it follows, *such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God.* 1 Cor. vi. 9-11. Here is a door wide enough for you all, if you will but enter in by faith. Come, then, enter in, you that have hitherto claimed a horrid precedence in sin, that have been ringleaders in vice, come now, take the lead, and show others the way to Jesus Christ; harlots, publicans, thieves, and murderers, if such be among you, there is salvation even for you, if you will but believe. O! how astonishing is the love of God discovered in this way; a consideration which introduces the last inference from my text, namely,

V. That the constitution of this method of salvation, or the mission of a Saviour into our world, is a most striking and astonishing display of the love of God: *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, &c.*

View the scheme all through, and you will discover love, infinite love, infinite love in every part of it. Consider the world sunk in sin, not only without merit, but most deserving of everlasting punishment, and what but love could move God to have mercy upon such a world? Consider the Saviour provided, not an angel, not the highest creature, but his Son, his only begotten Son; and what but love could move him to appoint such a Saviour? Consider the blessings conferred through this Saviour, deliverance from perdition, and the enjoyment of everlasting life, and what but

the love of God could confer such blessings? Consider the condition upon which these blessings are offered—faith, that humble, self-emptied grace, so suitable to the circumstances of a poor sinner, that brings nothing but receives all: and what but divine love could make such a gracious appointment? *It is by faith, that it may be by grace.*

And now, my brethren, to draw towards a conclusion, I would hold a treaty with you this day about the reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. I have this day set life and death before you; I have opened to you the method of salvation through Jesus Christ; the only method in which you can be saved; the only method that could afford a gleam of hope to such a sinner as I in my late approach to the eternal world.\* And now I would bring the matter home, and propose it to you all to consent to be saved in this method, or, in other words, to believe in the only begotten Son of God; this proposal I seriously make to you; and let heaven and earth, and your own consciences, witness that it is made to you; I also insist for a determinate answer this day; the matter will not admit of a delay, and the duty is so plain, that there is no need of time to deliberate.

I hope you now see good reasons why I should exhort you to believe, and also perceive my design in it; I therefore renew the proposal to you, that you should this day, as guilty, unworthy, self-despairing sinners, accept of the only begotten Son of God as your Saviour, and fall in with the gospel method of salvation; and I once more demand your answer. I would by no means, if possible, leave the pulpit this day till I have effectually recommended the blessed Jesus, my Lord and Master, to your acceptance. I am strongly bound by the vows and resolutions of a sick-bed to recommend him to you; and now I would endeavor to perform my vows. I would have us all this day, before we part, consent to God's covenant, that we may go away justified to our houses. To this I persuade and exhort you, in the name and by the authority of the great God, by the death of Jesus Christ for sinners, by your own most urgent and absolute necessity, by the immense blessings proposed in the gospel, and by the heavy curse denounced against unbelievers.

\* This sermon was preached a little after recovery from a severe fit of sickness.



All the blessings of the gospel—pardon of sin, sanctifying grace, eternal life, and whatever you can want, shall become yours this day, if you but believe in the Son of God; then let desolation overrun our land, let public and private calamities crowd upon you, and make you so many Jobs for poverty and affliction, still your main interest is secure; the storms and waves of trouble can only bear you to heaven, and hasten your passage to the harbor of eternal rest. Let devils accuse you before God, let conscience indict you and bring you in guilty, let the fiery law make its demands upon you, you have a righteousness in Jesus Christ that is sufficient to answer all demands, and, having received it by faith, you may plead it as your own in law. Happy souls! rejoice in hope of the glory of God, for your hope will never make you ashamed!

But I expect, as usual, some of you will refuse to comply with this proposal. This, alas! has been the usual fate of the blessed gospel in all ages and in all countries; as some have received it, so some have rejected it. Be it known to you from the living God, that if any of you continue in unbelief, you shut the door of mercy against yourselves, and exclude yourselves from eternal life. Whatever splendid appearances of virtue, whatever amiable qualities, whatever seeming good works you have, the express sentence of the gospel lies in full force against you, *He that believeth not shall be damned.* Mark, xvi. 16. - *He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of God.* John, iii. 18. *He that believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him.* John, iii. 36. This is your doom repeatedly pronounced by him whom you must own to be the best friend of human nature; and if he condemn, who can justify you?

Be it known to you, that you will not only perish, but you will perish with peculiar aggravations; you will fall with no common ruin; you will envy the lot of heathens who perished without the law: for, O! you incur the peculiarly enormous guilt of rejecting the gospel, and putting contempt upon the Son of God. This is a horrid exploit of wickedness, and this God resents above all the other crimes of which human nature is capable. Hence Christ is come for judgment as well as for mercy upon this world, and he is set for the fall as well as the rising again of many in Israel. You now enjoy the light of the gospel, which

has conducted many through this dark world to eternal day; but remember also, *this is the condemnation*; that is, it is the occasion of the most aggravated condemnation, *that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.*

And now does not this move you? Are you not alarmed at the thought of perishing; of perishing by the hand of a Saviour rejected and despised; perishing under the stain of his profaned blood; perishing not only under the curse of the law, but under that of the gospel, which is vastly heavier? O! are you hardy enough to venture upon such a doom? This doom is unavoidable if you refuse to comply with the proposal now made to you.

I must now conclude the treaty; but for my own acquittance, I must take witness that I have endeavored to discharge my commission, whatever reception you give it. I call heaven and earth, and your own consciences to witness, that life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, have been offered to you on this day; and if you reject it, remember it; remember it whenever you see this place; remember it whenever you see my face, or one another; remember it, that you may witness for me at the supreme tribunal, that I am clear of your blood. Alas! you will remember it among a thousand painful reflections millions of ages hence, when the remembrance of it will rend your hearts like a vulture. Many sermons forgotten upon earth are remembered in hell, and haunt the guilty mind for ever. O that you would believe, and so prevent this dreadful effect from the present sermon!



### III.

#### SINNERS ENTREATED TO BE RECONCILED TO GOD.

"We then are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."—2 Cor v. 20.

THE proper notion of an ambassador is that of a person sent by a king to transact affairs in his name, and according

to his instructions, with foreign states, or part of his subjects, to whom he does not think proper to go himself and treat with them in his own person. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is not personally present in our world to manage the treaty of peace himself, but he has appointed first his apostles, and then the ministers of the gospel through every age, to carry it on in his name. Suppose him here in person treating with you about your reconciliation to God, and what regard you would pay to a proposal made by him in person, with all his divine royalties about him, that you should now show to the treaty I am to negotiate with you in his name and stead.

The next sentence in my text binds you still more strongly to this; *as though God did beseech you by us*. As if he had said, "God the Father also concurs in this treaty of peace, as well as Christ the great Peacemaker; and as we discharge an embassy for Christ, so we do also for God; and you are to regard our beseeching and exhorting, as though the great God did in person beseech and exhort you by us." How astonishing, how Godlike, how unprecedented and inimitable is this condescension! Let heaven and earth admire and adore! It is by us, indeed, by us poor fellow-mortals, that he beseeches: but, O! let not this tempt you to disregard him or his entreaty: though he employs such mean ambassadors, yet consider his dignity who sends us, and then you cannot disregard his message even from our mouth. The apostle, having thus prepared the way, proceeds to the actual exercise of his office as an ambassador for Christ: *We pray you, says, he in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God*. As if he had said, "If Christ were now present in person among you, this is what he would propose to you, and urge upon you, that you would be reconciled to God: but him the heavens must receive till the time of the restitution of all things; but he has left us his poor servants to officiate in his place as well as we can, and we would prosecute the same design, we would urge upon you what he would urge, were he to speak; therefore we pray you, in his stead, be ye reconciled to God: we earnestly pray you to be reconciled; that is the utmost which such feeble worms as we can do: we can only pray and beg, but your compliance is not within the command of our power; the compliance belongs to you; and remember, if you refuse, you take it upon yourselves, and answer the consequence."

“But if your business only lies with the enemies of God,” (you may be ready to say,) “you have no concern with me in this discourse; for, God forbid that I should be an enemy to him. I have indeed been guilty of a great many sins, but I had no bad design in them, and never had the least enmity against my Maker; so far from it that I shudder at the very thought!” This is the first obstacle that I meet with in discharging my embassy; the embassy itself is looked upon as needless by the persons concerned, like an attempt to reconcile those that are good friends already. You plead “not guilty” to the charge, and allege that you have always loved God; but if this be the case, whence is it that you have afforded him so few of your affectionate and warm thoughts? Do not your tenderest thoughts dwell upon the objects of your love? But has not your mind been shy of him who gave you your power of thinking? Have not you lived stupidly thoughtless of him for days and weeks together? Nay, have not serious thoughts of him been unwelcome, and made you uneasy? And have you not turned every way to avoid them?

Again, if you are reconciled to God, whence is it that you are secretly, or perhaps openly, disaffected to his image, I mean the purity and strictness of his law, and the lineaments of holiness that appear upon the unfashionable few? If you loved God, you would of course love every thing that bears any resemblance to him. But are you not conscious that it is otherwise with you; that you murmur and cavil at the restraints of God’s law, and would much rather abjure it, be free from it, and live as you list? Again, if you do but reflect upon the daily sensations of your own minds, must you not be conscious that you love other persons and things more than God? that you love pleasure, honor, riches, your relations and friends, more than the glorious and ever blessed God? Look into your own hearts, and you will find it so: you will find that this, and that, and a thousand things in this world, engross more of your thoughts, your cares, desires, joys, sorrows, hopes, and fears, than God, or any of his concerns. Is it not therefore evident, even to your own conviction, that you do not love God at all? and what is this but to be his enemy? To be indifferent towards him, as though he were an insignificant being, neither good nor evil, a mere cipher; to feel neither love nor hatred towards him, but to neglect him, as

if you had no concern with him one way or other: what a horrible disposition is this towards him, who is supremely and infinitely glorious and amiable, your Creator, your Sovereign, and Benefactor; who therefore deserves and demands your highest love; or, in the words of his own law, *that you should love him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*

From what can such indifferency towards him proceed but from disaffection and enmity? It is in this way that the enmity of men towards God most generally discovers itself. They feel, perhaps, no positive workings of hatred towards him, unless when their innate corruption, like an exasperated serpent, is irritated by conviction from his law: but they feel an apathy, a listlessness, an indifferency towards him; and because they feel no more, they flatter themselves they are far from hating him: especially as they may have very honorable speculative thoughts of him floating on the surface of their minds. But alas! this very thing, this indifferency, or listless neutrality, is the very core of their enmity; and if they are thus indifferent to him now, while enjoying so many blessings from his hand, and while he delays their punishment, how will their enmity swell and rise to all the rage of a devil against him when he puts forth his vindictive hand and touches them, and so gives occasion to it to discover its venom! My soul shudders to think what horrid insurrections and direct rebellion this temper will produce when once irritated, and all restraints are taken off; which will be the doom of sinners in the eternal world; and then they will have no more of the love of God in them than the most malignant devil in hell! If therefore you generally feel an indifferency towards God, be assured you are not reconciled to him, but are his enemies in your hearts.

Ye rebels against the King of heaven! ye enemies against my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ! (I cannot flatter you with a softer name,) hear me; and attend to the proposal I make to you, not in my own name, but in the name and stead of your rightful Sovereign, and that is, that you will this day be reconciled to God. That you may know what I mean, I will more particularly explain this overture to you.

If you would be reconciled to God, you must be deeply sensible of the guilt, the wickedness, the baseness, the in-

expressible malignity of your enmity and rebellion against him. You must return to your rightful Sovereign as convicted, self-condemned, penitent, broken-hearted rebels, confounded and ashamed of your conduct, loathing yourselves because you have loathed the Supreme Excellence, mourning over your unnatural disaffection, your base ingratitude, your horrid rebellion against so good a King. And what do you say to this article of the treaty of peace? Is it a hard thing for such causeless enemies to fall upon the knee, and to mourn and weep as prostrate penitents at the feet of their injured Maker? Is it a hard thing for one that has all his life been guilty of the blackest crimes upon earth, or even in hell, I mean enmity against God, to confess "I have sinned," and to feel his own confession? to feel it, I say; for if he does not feel it, his confession is but an empty compliment that increases his guilt.

Again, if you would be reconciled to God, you must heartily consent to be reconciled to him in Christ; that is, you must come in upon the footing of that act of grace which is published in the gospel through Christ, and expecting no favor at all upon the footing of your own goodness. The merit of what you call your good actions, of your repentance, your prayers, your acts of charity and justice, must all pass for nothing, in this respect; you must depend only and entirely upon the merit of Christ's obedience and sufferings as the ground of your acceptance with God; and hope for forgiveness and favor from his mere mercy bestowed upon you, only for the sake of Christ, or on account of what he has done and suffered in the stead of sinners. It does not consist with the dignity and perfections of the King of heaven to receive rebels into favor upon any other footing. I would have you consent to every article of the overture as I go along; and therefore here again I make a pause to ask you, What do you think of this article? Are you willing to comply with it, willing to come into favor with God, as convicted, self-condemned rebels, upon an act of grace procured by the righteousness of Christ alone? Can it be a mortification to you to renounce what you have not, and to own yourselves guilty, and utterly unworthy, when you are really such? O! may I not expect your compliance with this term of reconciliation?

Again, if you would be reconciled to God, you must engage yourselves in his service for the future, and devote

yourselves to do his will. His law must be the rule of your temper and practice: whatever he commands, you must honestly endeavor to perform, without exception of any one duty as disagreeable and laborious; and whatever he forbids, you must, for that reason, abstain from, however pleasing, advantageous, or fashionable. You must no longer look upon yourselves as your own, but as bought with a price, and therefore bound to glorify God with your souls and your bodies, which are his. O! can you make any difficulty of complying with this term? If not, you will return home this day reconciled to God; a happiness you have never yet enjoyed for one moment.

Finally, if you would be reconciled to God, you must break off all friendship with his enemies; your friendship with the world, I mean your attachment to its fashions and customs, and your fondness for its rebellious inhabitants, who continue enemies to God; your love of guilty pleasures, and every form of sin, however pleasing or gainful you might imagine it to be. As long as you are resolved to love the world, to keep up your society with your old companions in sin, to retain your old pleasures and evil practices; as long, I say, as you are resolved upon this course, farewell all hope of your reconciliation to God: it is absolutely impossible. And do any of you hesitate at this article? Is sin so noble a thing in itself, and so happy in its consequences, as that you should be so loth to part with it? Is it so sweet a thing to you to sin against God, that you know not how to forbear? Alas! will you rather be an implacable enemy to the God that made you, than break your league with his enemies and your own? Do you love your sins so well, and are you so obliged to them, that you will lay down your life, your eternal life, for their sakes.

I might multiply particulars, but these are the principal articles of that treaty of peace I am negotiating with you, and a consent to these includes a compliance to all the rest. And are you determined to comply? Does the heaven-born purpose now rise in your minds, "I am determined I will be an enemy to God no longer; but this very day I will be reconciled to God on his own terms!" Is this your fixed purpose? or is there any occasion to pray and persuade you?

I well know, and it is fit you should know, that you are not able of yourselves to consent to these terms, but that it

is the work of the power of God alone to reconcile you to himself; and all my persuasions and entreaties will never make you either able or willing. You will then ask me, perhaps, "Why do I propose the terms to you, or use any persuasives or entreaties with you?" I answer, because you never will be sensible of your inability till you make an honest trial, and because you never will look and pray for the aid of the blessed Spirit till you are deeply sensible of your own insufficiency; and further, because, if the blessed Spirit should ever effectually work upon you, it will be by enlightening your understandings to see the reasonableness of the terms, and the force of the persuasives; and in this way, agreeably to your reasonable natures, sweetly constraining your obstinate wills to yield yourselves to God; therefore the terms must be proposed to you, and persuasives used, if I would be subservient to this divine agent, and furnish him with materials with which to work; and I have some little hope that he will, as it were, catch my feeble words from my lips before they vanish into air, and bear them home to your hearts with a power which you will not be able to resist. Therefore, notwithstanding your utter impotence, I must pray, entreat, and persuade you to be reconciled to God. I pray you, in the name of the great God your heavenly Father, and of Jesus Christ your Redeemer. In the name of God I pray you; the name of the greatest and best of beings; that name which angels love and adore, and which strikes terror through the hardest devil in the infernal regions; the name of your Father; the immediate Father of your spirits, and the Author of your mortal frames; the name of your Preserver and Benefactor, in whom you live, and move, and have your being; the name of your Supreme Judge, who will ascend the tribunal, and acquit or condemn you, as he finds you friends or foes; the name of that God, rich in goodness, who has replenished heaven with an infinite plenitude of happiness in which he will allow you to share after all your hostility and rebellion, if you consent to the overture of reconciliation; in the God of terrible majesty and justice, who has prepared the dungeon of hell as a prison for his enemies, where he holds in chains the mighty powers of darkness, and thousands of our race, who persisted in that enmity to him of which you are now guilty, and with whom you must have your everlasting portion, if, like them, you continue hardened and in-



corrigible in your rebellion; in the name of that compassionate God, who sent his dear Son to satisfy divine justice for you by his death, and the precepts of the law by his life, and thus to remove all obstructions out of the way of your reconciliation on the part of God; in this great, this endearing and tremendous name, I pray you be reconciled to God.

I pray you, both in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, the true friend of publicans and sinners, in his name, and for his sake, who assumed our degraded nature, that he might dignify and save it; who lived a life of labor, poverty, and persecution upon earth, that you might enjoy a life of everlasting happiness and glory in heaven; who died upon a torturing cross, that you might sit upon heavenly thrones; who was imprisoned in the gloomy grave, that you might enjoy a glorious resurrection; who fell a victim to divine justice, that you might be set free from its dreadful arrest; who felt trouble and agony of soul, that you might enjoy the smiles, the pleasures of Divine Love; who, in short, has discovered more ardent and extensive love for you than all the friends in the world can do; in his name, and for his sake, I pray you to be reconciled to God. And is this dear name a trifle in your esteem? Will you not do any thing so reasonable and so necessary, and conducive to your happiness for his sake—for his sake who has done and suffered so much for you? Alas! has the name of Jesus no more influence among the creatures he bought with his blood! It is hard indeed if I beg in vain, when I beg for the sake of Christ, the Friend, the Saviour of perishing souls. But if you have no regard for him, you certainly have for yourselves; therefore, for your own sakes, for the sake of your precious immortal souls, for the sake of your own everlasting happiness, I pray you to be reconciled to God. If you refuse, you degrade the honor of your nature, and commence incarnate devils. For what is the grand constituent of a devil, but enmity against God? You become the refuse of creation, fit for no apartment of the universe but the prison of hell. While you are unreconciled to God you can do nothing at all to please him. He that searches the heart knows that even your good actions do not proceed from love to him, and therefore he abhors them. Ten thousand prayers and acts of devotion and morality, as you have no principles of real holiness, are so many prov-

ocations to a righteous God. While you refuse to be reconciled, you are accessory to, and patronize all the rebellion of men and devils; for if you have a right to continue in your rebellion, why may not others? Why may not every man upon earth? Why may not every miserable ghost in the infernal regions? And are you for raising a universal mutiny and rebellion against the throne of the Most High? O the inexpressible horror of the thought! If you refuse to be reconciled, you will soon weary out the mercy and patience of God towards you, and he will come forth against you in all the terrors of an Almighty enemy. He will give death a commission to seize you, and drag you to his flaming tribunal. He will break off the treaty, and never make one offer of reconciliation more; he will strip you of all the enjoyments he was pleased to lend you, while you were under a reprieve, and the treaty was not come to a final issue; and will leave you nothing but bare being, and an extensive capacity of misery, which will be filled up to the uttermost from the vials of his indignation. He will reprove you, and set your sins in order before you, and tear you in pieces, and there shall be none to deliver. He will meet you as a lion, "and as a bear bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of your hearts." He hath for a long time held his peace, and endured your rebellion; but ere long he will go forth as a mighty man; he will stir up jealousy like a man of war; he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. Ah! he will ease him of his adversaries, and avenge him of his enemies. He will give orders to the executioners of his justice: *These mine enemies, that would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me.* And now if you will not submit to peace, prepare to meet your God, O sinners; gird up your loins like men; put on the terror of your rage, and go forth to meet your Almighty adversary, who will soon meet you in the field, and try your strength. Call the legions of hell to your aid, and strengthen the confederacy with all your fellow-sinners upon earth; put briars and thorns around you to inclose from his reach. Prepare the dry stubble to oppose devouring flame. Associate yourselves, but ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves; but alas! ye shall be broken to pieces.

But, O! I must drop this ironical challenge, and seriously pray you to make peace with him whom you cannot resist:

then all your past rebellion will be forgiven ; you shall be the favorites of your Sovereign and happy for ever ; and earth and heaven will rejoice at the conclusion of this blessed peace ; and my now sad heart will share in the joy. Therefore, for your own sakes, I pray you to be reconciled to God.



#### IV.

### THE NATURE AND UNIVERSALITY OF SPIRITUAL DEATH.

“ Who were dead in trespasses and sins, . . . even when we were dead in sins.”  
*Ephes. ii. 1, 5.*

THERE is a kind of death which we all expect to feel, that carries terror in the sound, and all its circumstances are shocking to nature. The ghastly countenance, the convulsive agonies, the expiring groan, the coffin, the grave, the devouring worm, the stupor, the insensibility, the universal inactivity, these strike a damp to the spirit, and we turn pale at the thought. With such objects as these in view, courage fails, levity looks serious, presumption is dashed, the cheerful passions sink, and all is solemn, all is melancholy. The most stupid and hardy sinner cannot but be moved to see these things exemplified in others ; and when he cannot avoid the prospect, he is shocked to think that he himself must feel them.

But there is another kind of death, little regarded indeed, little feared, little lamented, which is infinitely more terrible—the death, not of the body, but of the soul : a death which does not stupefy the limbs, but the faculties of the mind : a death which does not separate the soul and body, and consign the latter to the grave, but that separates the soul from God, excludes it from the joys of his presence, and delivers it over to everlasting misery : a tremendous death indeed ! “ A death unto death.” And this is the death meant in my text, *dead in trespasses and sins.*

To explain the context and show you the connection I shall make two short remarks.

The one is, That the apostle had observed in the nineteenth and twentieth verses of the foregoing chapter, that

the same Almighty power of God, that raised Christ from the dead, is exerted to enable a sinner to believe. *We believe*, says he, *according to the working, or energy, of his Almighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.* The one as well as the other is an exploit of Omnipotence. The exceeding greatness of his mighty power is exerted towards us who believe, as well as it was upon the dead body of Christ to restore it to life, after it had been torn and mangled upon the cross, and lain three days and three nights in the grave. What strong language is this! what a forcible illustration! Methinks this passage alone is sufficient to confound all the vanity and self-sufficiency of mortals, and entirely destroy the proud fiction of a self-sprung faith produced by the efforts of degenerate nature. In my text the apostle assigns the reason of this: the same exertion of the same power is necessary in the one case and the other; because as the body of Christ was dead, and had no principle of life in it, so, says he, *ye were dead in trespasses and sins*, and therefore could no more quicken yourselves than a dead body can restore itself to life. *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us; that God, who raised the entombed Redeemer to life again, that same Almighty God, by a like exertion of the same power, hath quickened us, even when we were dead in sins—dead, senseless, inactive, and incapable of animating ourselves.*

The other remark is, that the apostle, having pronounced the Ephesians dead in sin, while unconverted, in the first verse, passes the same sentence upon himself, and the whole body of the Jews, notwithstanding their high privileges, in the fifth verse. The sense and connection may be discovered in the following paraphrase: "You Ephesians were very lately heathens, and, while you were in that state, you were spiritually dead, and all your actions were dead works. In time past ye walked in trespasses and sins; nor were you singular in your course; though it be infinitely pernicious, yet it is the common course of this world, and it is also agreeable to the temper and instigation of that gloomy prince who has a peculiar power in the region of the air, that malignant spirit who works with dreadful efficacy in the numerous children of disobedience; but this was not the case of you heathens alone: we also, who are Jews, notwithstanding our many religious advantages, and even I myself, notwithstanding my high privileges and unblemishable life

as a Pharisee, we also, I say, had our conversation in times past among the children of disobedience; we all, as well as they, walked in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires and inclinations of our sensual flesh, and of our depraved minds; for these were tainted with spiritual wickedness, independent of our animal passions and appetites; but when we were all dead in sins, when Jews and Gentiles were equally dead to God, then, even then, God who is rich in mercy, had pity upon us; *he quickened us*; he inspired us with a new and spiritual life by his own Almighty power, which raised the dead body of Christ from the grave. *He quickened us together with Christ*: we received our life by virtue of our union with him as our vital head, who was raised to an immortal life, that he might quicken dead souls by those influences of his Spirit, which he purchased by his death; and therefore by grace are ye saved. It is the purest, richest, freest grace that ever such dead souls as we were made alive to God, and not suffered to remain dead for ever."

This is the obvious meaning and connection of these verses; and we now proceed to consider the text, *dead in trespasses and sins*. A dismal, mortifying character! "This one place," says Beza, "like a thunderbolt, dashes all mankind down to the dust, great and proud as they are; for it pronounces their nature not only hurt but dead by sin, and therefore liable to wrath."

Death is a state of insensibility and inactivity, and a dead man is incapable of restoring himself to life; therefore the condition of an unconverted sinner must have some resemblance to such a state, in order to support the bold metaphor here used by the apostle. The metaphor, however, must be understood with several limitations or exceptions; for it is certain there is a wide difference between the spiritual death of the soul, and the natural death of the body, particularly in this respect, that death puts an entire end to all the powers, actions, and sensations of our animal nature universally, with regard to all objects of every kind; but a soul dead in sin is only partially dead, that is, it is dead only with regard to a certain kind of sensations and exercises, but in the mean time it may be all life and activity about other things. It is alive, sensible, and vigorous about earthly objects and pursuits; these raise its passions and engage its thoughts. It has also a dreadful power and faculty of sinning. It can

likewise exercise its intellectual powers, and make considerable improvements in science. A sinner dead in trespasses and sins may be a living treasury of knowledge, a universal scholar, a profound philosopher, and even a great divine, as far as mere speculative knowledge can render him such; nay, he is capable of many sensations and impressions from religious objects, and of performing all the external duties of religion. He is able to read, to hear, to meditate upon divine things; nay, he may be an instructor of others, and preach perhaps with extensive popularity; he may have a form of godliness, and obtain a name to live among men; he is in some measure able, and it is his duty to attend upon the means God has instituted for quickening him with spiritual life, and God deals with him as with a rational creature, by laws, sanctions, promises, exhortations, and invitations. But, notwithstanding all these concessions, it is a melancholy truth that an unregenerate sinner is dead. Though he can commit sin with greediness, though he is capable of animal actions and secular pursuits, nay, though he can employ his mind even about intellectual and spiritual things, and is capable of performing the external duties of religion, yet there is something in religion with regard to which he is entirely dead: there is a kind of spiritual life of which he is entirely destitute: he is habitually insensible with regard to things divine and eternal: he has no activity, no vigor in the pure, spiritual, and vital exercises of religion: he is destitute of those sacred affections, that joy, that love, that desire, that hope, that fear, that sorrow, which are, as it were, the innate passions of the man. In short, he is so inactive, so listless, so insensible in these respects, that death, which puts an end to all action and sensation, is a proper emblem of his state: and this is the meaning of the apostle in my text. He is also utterly unable to quicken himself. He may, indeed, use means of some sort; but to implant a vital principle in his soul, to give himself vivid sensations of divine things, and make himself alive towards God; this is entirely beyond his utmost ability; this is as peculiarly the work of Almighty power as the resurrection of the dead body from the grave.

As to this death, it is brought upon him by, and consists in, *trespasses and sins*. The innate depravity and corruption of the heart, and the habits of sin contracted and confirmed by repeated indulgences of inbred corruption, these

are the poisonous, deadly things that have slain the soul; these have entirely indisposed and disabled it for living religion. *Trespases and sins* are the grave, the corrupt effluvia, the malignant damps, the rottenness of a dead soul: it lies dead, senseless, inactive, buried in *trespases and sins*.

I have no scruple at all to pronounce, not only from the authority of an apostle, but from the evidence of the thing, that I, and all around me, yea, and all the sons of men, have been dead; in the spiritual sense, utterly dead. Multitudes among us, yea, the generality, are dead still; hence the stupor, the carelessness, about eternal things, the thoughtless neglect of God, the insensibility under his providential dispensations, the impenitence, the presumption that so much prevail.

If you would know my design in choosing this subject, it is partly for the conviction of sinners, that they may be alarmed with their deplorable condition, which is the first step towards their being quickened; partly to rouse the children of grace to seek more life from their vital head; and partly to display the rich grace of God in quickening such dead sinners, and bestowing upon them a spiritual and immortal life; if I may but answer these ends, it will be an unspeakable blessing to us all. And oh, that divine grace may honor this humble attempt of a poor creature, at best but half alive, with success! I hope, my brethren, you will hear seriously, for it is really a most serious subject. You have seen that the metaphorical expression in my text is intended to represent the stupidity, inactivity, and impotence of unregenerate sinners about divine things. This truth I might confirm by argument and Scripture authority; but I think it may be a better method for popular conviction to prove and illustrate it from plain instances of the temper and conduct of sinners about the concerns of religion. And,

I. Consider the excellency of the divine Being, the sum total, the great original of all perfections. How infinitely worthy is he of the adoration of all his creatures! how deserving of their most intense thoughts and most ardent affections! if happiness has charms that draw all the world after it, here is an unbounded ocean of happiness; here is the only complete portion for an immortal mind. Men are affected with created excellencies. Whence is it, then,

that they are so stupidly unaffected with the supreme original excellencies of Jehovah? Here, turn your eyes inward upon yourselves, and inquire, are you not conscious that, though you have passions for other objects, and are easily moved by them, yet, with regard to the perfections of the supreme and best of beings, your hearts are habitually senseless and unaffected? In other cases you can love what appears amiable, you revere what is great and majestic, you eagerly desire and pursue what is valuable, and tends to your happiness; and all this you do freely, spontaneously, vigorously, by the innate inclination and tendency of your nature, without reluctance, without compulsion, nay, without persuasion; but, as to God and all his perfections, you are strangely insensible, backward, and averse. Where is there one being that has any confessed excellency in the compass of human knowledge, that does not engage more of the thoughts and affections of mankind than the glorious and ever-blessed God? The sun, moon, and stars have had more worshipers than the uncreated fountain of light from which they derive their lustre. Kings and ministers of state have more punctual homage and frequent applications made to them than the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Search all the world over and you will find but very little motions of heart towards God; little love, little desire, little searching after him. You will often, indeed, see him honored with the compliment of a bended knee, and a few heartless words, under the name of a prayer; but where is the heart, where are the thoughts, where the affections? These run wild through the world, and are scattered among a thousand other objects. "Lord! what is this that has seized the souls of thine own offspring, that are thus utterly disordered towards thee!" The reason is, they are dead, *dead in trespasses and sins*. Yes, sinners, this is the melancholy reason why you are so thoughtless, so unconcerned, so senseless about the God that made you; you are dead. The carelessness and indisposition of the soul towards the supreme Excellence will appear yet more evident and astonishing, if we consider,

II. The august and endearing relations the great and blessed God sustains to us, and the many ways he has taken to make dutiful and grateful impressions upon our hearts. What tender endearments are there contained in



the relation of a Father! It is but a little while since we came from his creating hand, and yet we have forgotten him. It seems unnatural for his own offspring to inquire, "Where is God my maker?" They show no fondness for him, no affectionate veneration, and no humble confidence; their hearts are dead towards him, as though there were no such being, or no such near relation subsisting between them. In childhood a rattle, or a straw, or any trifle, is more thought of than their heavenly Father: in riper years their vain pleasures and secular pursuits command more of their affections than their divine original and only happiness.

But this relation of a Father is not the only relation our God sustains to you; he is your supreme king, to whom you owe allegiance; your lawgiver, whose will is the rule of your conduct; and your judge, who will call you to an account, and reward or punish you according to your works: but how unnatural is it to men to revere the most high God under these august characters! Where is there a king upon earth, however weak or tyrannical, but is more regarded by his subjects than the King of heaven by the generality of men? Were ever such excellent laws contemned and violated? Did ever criminals treat their judge with so much neglect and contempt? And are these souls alive to God who thus treat him? No. Alas! "they are dead in trespasses and sins."

God is also our guardian and deliverer; and from how many dangers has he preserved us! from how many calamities has he delivered us! Dangers, distresses, and deaths crowd upon us, and surround us in every age and every place: the air, the earth, the sea, and every element, are pregnant with numberless principles of pain and death, ready to seize and destroy us; sickness and death swarm around us; nay, they lie in ambush in our own constitutions and are perpetually undermining our lives, and yet our divine guardian preserves us for months and years unhurt, untouched; or, if he suffers the calamity to fall, or death to threaten, he flies to our deliverance: how many salvations of this kind has he wrought for us! salvations from accidents, from sickness, from pain, from sorrow, from death; salvations in infancy, in youth, and in mature years! These things we cannot deny without the most stupid ignorance and atheistical disbelief of divine Provi-

dence. But though God be infinitely superior to us, and it is nothing to him what becomes of us, though we have rebelled against him, and deserve his vengeance, yet ten thousand deliverances from his hands have little or no effect upon the hearts of men: all these cannot bring them to think of him, or love him as much as they do a friend, or a common benefactor of their own species. And does such stupid ingratitude discover any spiritual life in them? No: they are dead in this respect, though they are all alive to those passions that terminate upon created objects. Further, God is the benefactor of mankind, not only in delivering them from dangers and calamities, but in bestowing unnumbered positive blessings upon them. Sinful and miserable as this world is, it is a treasury rich in blessings, a storehouse full of provisions, a dwelling well furnished for the accommodation of mortals, and all by the care, and at the expense of that gracious God who first made and still preserves it what it is. "Lord, whence is it then that the inhabitants forget and neglect thee, as though they were not at all obliged to thee? Oh! whence is it that they love thy gifts, and yet disregard the giver? that they think less of thee than an earthly father or friend, or a human benefactor?" Surely, if they had any life, any sensation in this respect, they would not be capable of such conduct; but they are dead, dead to all the generous sensations of gratitude to God: and as a dead corpse feels no gratitude to those that perform the last friendly office, and cover it with earth, so a dead soul stands unmoved under all the profusion of blessings which Heaven pours upon it.

The blessings I have mentioned, which are confined to the present state, are great, and deserve our wonder and thanksgiving; but what are these in comparison of God's gift of his Son, and the blessings he has purchased! You can no more find love equal to this among creatures, than you can find among them the infinite power that formed the universe out of nothing. This will stand upon record to all eternity, as the unprecedented, unparalleled, inimitable love of God. And it appears the more illustrious when we consider that this unspeakable gift was given to sinners, to rebels, to enemies, that were so far from deserving it, that, on the other hand, it is a miracle of mercy that they are not all groaning for ever under the tremendous weight of his justice. Oh! that I could say something be-

coming this love; something that might do honor to it! but, alas! the language of mortals was formed for lower subjects. This love passes all description and all knowledge.

Consider also, what rich blessings Christ has purchased for us; purchased, not with such corruptible things as silver and gold, but with his own most precious blood: the price recommends and endears the blessings, though they are so great in themselves as to need no recommendation. What can be greater or more suitable blessings to persons in our circumstances, than pardon for the guilty, redemption for slaves, righteousness and justification for the condemned, sanctification for the unholy, rest for the weary, comfort for the mourners, everlasting happiness for the heirs of hell, and, to sum up all, grace and glory, and every good thing, and all the unsearchable riches of Christ for the wretched and miserable, the poor, the blind and naked! These are blessings indeed, and, in comparison of them, the riches of the world are impoverished, and vanish to nothing; and all these blessings are published, offered freely, indefinitely offered to you, to me, to the greatest sinner on earth, in the gospel; and we are allowed—allowed did I say? we are invited with the utmost importunity, entreated with the most compassionate tenderness and condescension, and commanded by the highest authority, upon pain of eternal damnation, to accept the blessings presented to us! And what reception does all this love meet with in our world? I tremble to think of it. It is plain these things are proposed to a world dead in sin; for they are all still, all unmoved, all senseless under such a revelation of infinite grace; mankind know not what it is to be moved, melted, transported with the love of a crucified Saviour, till divine grace visits their hearts, and forms them into new creatures. They feel no eager solicitude, nay, not so much as a willingness to receive these blessings, till they become willing by Almighty power; and judge ye, my brethren, whether they are not dead souls that are proof even against the love of God in Christ, that are not moved and melted by the agonies of his cross, that are careless about such inestimable blessings as these? Has that soul any spiritual life in it that can sit senseless under the cross of Jesus, that can forget him, neglect him, dishonor him, after all his love and all his

sufferings; that loves him less than an earthly friend, and seeks him with less eagerness than gold and silver? Oh, look round the world, and what do you see but a general neglect of the blessed Jesus, and all the blessings of his gospel? How cold, how untoward, how reluctant, how averse are the hearts of men towards him? how hard to persuade them to think of him and love him? Astonishing, and most lamentable, that ever such perverseness and stupidity should seize the soul of man! Methinks I could here take up a lamentation over human nature, and fall on my knees with this prayer for my fellow-men, "Father of spirits and Lord of life, quicken, oh, quicken these dead souls!" Oh, sirs, while we see death all around us, and feel it benumbing our own souls, who can help the most bitter wailing and lamentation! who can restrain himself from crying to the great Author of life for a happy resurrection! While the valley of dry bones lies before me, while the carnage, the charnel-house of immortal souls strikes my sight all around me, far and wide, how can I forbear crying, *Come from the four winds, oh, breathe, breathe upon these slain, that they may live!*

I have materials sufficient for a discourse of some hours; but at present I must abruptly drop the subject: however, I cannot dismiss you without making a few reflections. And—I. What a strange affecting view does this subject give us of this assembly! I doubt not but I may accommodate the text to some of you with this agreeable addition, "You hath he quickened, you who were once dead in trespasses and sins." Though the vital pulse beats faint and irregular, and your spiritual life is but very low, yet, blessed be God, you are not entirely dead: you have some living sensations, some lively and vigorous exercises in religion. On the other hand, I doubt not that some of you not only were, but still are, *dead in trespasses and sins*. It is not to be expected in our world, at least not before the millennium, that we shall see such a mixed company together, and all living souls. Here, then, is the difference between you; some of you are spiritually alive, and some of you are spiritually dead: here the living and the dead are blended together in the same assembly, on the same seat, and united in the nearest relations: here sits a dead soul, there another, and there another, and a few living souls are scattered here and there among them: here is a

dead parent and a living child, or a dead child and a living parent: here life and death are united in the bonds of conjugal love, and dwell under the same roof. Should I trace the distinction beyond this assembly into the world, we shall find a family here and there that have a little life; perhaps one, perhaps two, discover some vital symptoms; but, oh, what crowds of dead families! all dead together, and no endeavors used to bring one another to life; a death-like silence about eternal things; a deadly stupor and insensibility reign among them; they breathe out no desires and prayers after God, nor does the vital pulse of love beat in their hearts towards him; but, on the contrary, their souls are putrefying in sin, which is very emphatically called *corruption* by the sacred writers; they are overrun and devoured by their lusts, as worms insult and destroy the dead body. Call to them, they will not awake; thunder the terrors of the Lord in their ears, they will not hear; offer them all the blessings of the gospel, they will not stretch out the hand of faith to receive them; lay the word of God, the bread of life before them, they have no appetite for it. In short, the plain symptoms of death are upon them: the animal is alive, but, alas! the spirit is dead towards God. And what an affecting, melancholy view does this give of this assembly, and of the world in general! *O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people!* Weep not for the afflicted, weep not over ghastly corpses dissolving into their original dust, but, oh! weep for dead souls. Should God now strike all those persons dead in this assembly, whose souls are *dead in trespasses and sins*, should he lay them all in pale corpses before us, like Ananias and Sapphira at the apostle's feet, what numbers of you would never return from this house more, and what lamentations would there be among the surviving few! One would lose a husband or a wife, another a son or a daughter, another a father or a mother; alas! would not some whole families be swept off together, all blended in one promiscuous death! Such a sight as this would strike terror into the hardest heart among you. But what is this to a company of rational spirits slain and dead in trespasses and sins? How deplorable and inexpressibly melancholy a sight this! Therefore,

II. *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, that Christ may give thee light.* This call is directed to you, dead sinners, which is a sufficient warrant for me to exhort and persuade you. The principle of reason is still alive in you; you are also sensible of your own interest, and feel the workings of self-love. It is God alone that can quicken you, but he effects this by a power that does not exclude, but attends rational instructions and persuasions to your understanding. Therefore, though I am sure you will continue dead still if left to yourselves, yet with some trembling hopes that his power may accompany my feeble words and impregnate them with life, I call upon, I entreat, I charge you sinners to rouse yourselves out of your dead sleep, and seek to obtain spiritual life. Now, while my voice sounds in your ears, now, this moment, waft up this prayer, "Lord, pity a dead soul, a soul that has been dead for ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, or more, and lain corrupting in sin, and say unto me, 'Live:' from this moment let me live unto thee." Let this prayer be still upon your hearts; keep your souls always in a supplicating posture, and who knows but that He who raised Lazarus from the grave may give you a spiritual resurrection to a more important life? But if you willfully continue your security, expect in a little time to suffer the second death; the mortification will become incurable; and then, though you will be still dead to God, yet you will be "tremblingly alive all over" to the sensations of pain and torture. Oh, that I could gain but this one request of you, which your own interest so strongly enforces! but, alas! it has been so often refused, that to expect to prevail is to hope against hope.

III. Let the children of God be sensible of their great happiness in being made spiritually alive. Life is a principle, a capacity necessary for enjoyments of any kind. Without animal life you would be as incapable of animal pleasures as a stone or a clod; and without spiritual life you can no more enjoy the happiness of heaven than a beast or a devil. This, therefore, is a preparative, a previous qualification, and a sure pledge and earnest of everlasting life. How highly then are you distinguished, and what cause have you for gratitude and praise!

IV. Let us all be sensible of this important truth, that it is entirely by grace we are saved. This is the inference the apostle expressly makes from this doctrine: and he is

so full of it, that he throws it into a parenthesis, (verse 5th,) though it breaks the connection of his discourse; and as soon as he has room he assumes it again, (verse 8th,) and repeats it over and over, in various forms, in the compass of a few verses. *By grace ye are saved—By grace ye are saved through faith—it is the gift of God;—not of yourselves—not of works,* (verse 9th.) This, you see, is an inference that seemed of great importance to the apostle; and what can more naturally follow from the premises? If we were once dead in sin, certainly it is owing to the freest grace that we have been quickened; therefore, when we survey the change, let us cry, “*Grace, grace unto it.*”



## V.

## THE NATURE AND PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.”  
—*Ephes. ii. 4, 5.*

IT is not my usual method to weary your attention by a long confinement to one subject; and our religion furnishes us with such a boundless variety of important topics, that a minister who makes them his study will find no temptation to cloy you with repetitions, but rather finds it difficult to speak so concisely on one subject as to leave room for others of equal importance; however, the subject of my last discourse was so copious and interesting, that I cannot dismiss it without a supplement. I there showed you some of the symptoms of spiritual death; but I would not leave you dead as I found you; and, therefore, I intend now to consider the counterpart of that subject, and show you the nature and symptoms of spiritual life.

I doubt not but a number of you have been made alive to God by his quickening spirit; but many, I fear, still continue *dead in trespasses and sins*; and, while such are around me, I cannot help imagining my situation something like that of the prophet in the midst of the valley full of dry bones, spread far and wide around him; and should

I be asked, *Can these dry bones, can these dead souls, live?* I must answer with him,—*O Lord God, thou knowest.* “Lord, I see no symptoms of returning life in them, no tendency towards it. I know nothing is impossible to thee; I firmly believe that thou canst inspire them with life, dry and dead as they are; if they are left to themselves they will continue dead to all eternity; for, O Lord, the experiment has been repeatedly tried; thy servant has over and over made those quickening applications to them, which thy word prescribes; but all in vain: they still continue dead towards thee, and lie putrefying more and more in trespasses and sins; however, at thy command, I would attempt the most unpromising undertaking; I would proclaim even unto dry bones and dead souls, *O ye dry bones, O ye dead souls, hear the word of the Lord.* I would also cry aloud for the animating breath of the Holy Spirit, *Come from the four winds and breathe, breathe upon these slain that they may live.*

Ye dead sinners, I would make one attempt more in the name of the Lord to bring you to life; and if I have the least hope of success, it is entirely owing to the encouraging peradventure that the quickening spirit of Christ may work upon your hearts while I am addressing myself to your ears. And, O sirs, let us all keep our souls in a praying posture, throughout this discourse. If one of you should fall into a swoon or an apoplexy, how would all about you bestir themselves to bring you to life again! And, alas! shall dead souls lie so thick among us, in every assembly, in every family, and shall no means be used for their recovery? Did Martha and Mary apply to Jesus with all the arts of importunity in behalf of their sick and deceased brother, and are there not some of you that have dead relations, dead friends and neighbors, I mean dead in the worst sense, *dead in trespasses and sins?* and will you not apply to Jesus, the Lord of life, and follow him with your importunate cries till he come and call them to life? Now let parents turn intercessors for their children, children for their parents, friend for friend, neighbor for neighbor, yea, enemy for enemy. Oh! should we all take this method, we might soon expect to see the valley of dry bones full of living souls, *an exceeding great army.*

In praying for this great and glorious event, you do not pray for an impossibility. Thousands, as dead as they,



have obtained a joyful resurrection by the power of God. Here in my text you have an instance of a crowd of Jews and Gentiles that had lain dead in sin together, and even St. Paul among them, who were recovered to life, and are now enjoying an immortal life in the heavenly regions; and, blessed be God, this spiritual life is not entirely extinct among us. Among the multitudes of dead souls that we everywhere meet with, we find here and there a soul that has very different symptoms: once, indeed, it was like the rest; but now, while they are quite senseless of divine things, and have no vital aspirations after God, this soul cannot be content with the richest affluence of created enjoyments; it pants and breathes after God; it feeds upon his word; it feels an almighty energy in eternal things, and receives vital sensations from them. It discovers life and vigor in devotion, and serves the living God with pleasure, though it is also subject to fits of languishment, and at times seems just expiring, and to lose all sensation. And whence is this vast difference? Why is this soul so different from what it once was, and what thousands around still are? Why can it not, like them, and like itself formerly, lie dead and senseless in sin, without any vital impressions or experiences from God or divine things? The reason is, the happy reason, my brethren, is, this is a living soul: "God, out of the great love wherewith he loved it, hath quickened it together with Christ," and hence it is alive to him. My present design is to explain the nature and properties of this divine life, and to show you the manner in which it is usually begun in the soul: I shall open with the consideration of the last particular.

Here you must observe, that, though spiritual life is instantaneously infused, yet God prepares the soul for its reception by a course of previous operations. He spent six days in the creation of the world, though he might have spoken it into being in an instant. Thus he usually creates the soul anew after a gradual process of preparatory actions. My present design is to trace these steps to their grand result, that we may know whether ever divine grace has carried you through this gracious process.

The way by which divine grace prepares a sinner for spiritual life, is by working upon all the principles of the rational life, and exciting him to exert them to the utmost to obtain it. Here it is proper for you to recollect what I

observed in my last discourse, that even a sinner, dead in trespasses and sins is alive, and capable of action in other respects: he can not only perform the actions, and feel the sensations of animal life, but he can also exercise his intellectual powers about intellectual objects, and even about divine things: he is capable of thinking of these, and of receiving some impressions from them: he is also capable of attending upon the ordinances of the gospel, and performing the external duties of religion. These things a sinner may do, and yet be dead in sin. Indeed, he will not exercise his natural powers above these things while left to himself: he has the power, but then he has no disposition to employ it: he is indeed capable of meditating upon spiritual things, but what does this avail when he will not turn his mind to such objects? or if he does, he considers them as mere speculations, and not as the most interesting and important realities. How few, or how superficial and unaffecting are a sinner's thoughts of them! Heaven and hell are objects that may strike the passions, and raise the joys and fears of a natural man, but in general he is little or nothing impressed with them. The more I know of mankind, I have the lower opinion of what they will do in religion when left to themselves. They have a natural power, and we have seen all possible means used with them to excite them to put it forth; but, alas! all is vain, and nothing will be done to the purpose till God stir them up to exert their natural abilities; and this he performs as a preparative for spiritual life. He brings the sinner to exert all his active powers in seeking this divine principle; nature does her utmost, and all outward means are tried before a supernatural principle is implanted.

The evangelist John has given us the history of the resurrection of the dead body of Lazarus after it had been four days in the grave; and I would now give you the history of a more glorious resurrection, the resurrection of a soul that had lain dead for months and years, and yet is at last quickened by the same almighty power with a divine and immortal life.

Should I exemplify it by a particular instance, I might fix upon this or that person in this assembly, and remind you, and inform others, of the process of this work in your souls. And O! how happy are such of you, that you may be produced as instances in this case!

You lay for ten, twenty, thirty years, or more, dead in trespasses and sins: you did not breathe and pant like a living soul after God and holiness; you had little more sense of the burden of sin than a corpse of the pressure of a mountain; you had no appetite for the living bread that came down from heaven; you spread the contagion of sin around you by your conversation and example, like the stench and corrupt effluvia of a rotten carcass; God did not cast you away as irrecoverably dead, but stirred and agitated you within, and struggled long with the principles of death to subdue them: and if it was your happy lot to live under a faithful ministry, the living oracles that contained the seeds of the divine life were applied to you with care and solicitude. The terrors of the Lord were thundered in your ears to awaken you. The experiment of a Saviour's dying love, and the rich grace of the gospel, were repeatedly tried upon you: now you were carried within hearing of the heavenly music, and within sight of the glories of paradise, to try if these would charm you; now you were, as it were, held over the flames of hell, that they might, by their pungent pains, scorch and startle you into life. Providence also concurred with these applications, and tried to recover you by mercies and judgments, sickness and health, losses and possessions, disappointments and successes, threatenings and deliverances. But, O! reflect with shame and sorrow how long all these quickening applications were in vain; you still lay in a dead sleep, or, if at times you seemed to move, and gave us hopes you were coming to life again, you soon relapsed, and grew as senseless as ever. And alas! are there not some of you in this condition to this very moment? O deplorable sight! May the hour come, and O that this may be the hour, in which such dead souls *shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live.* John, v. 25.

But as to such of you in whom I would exemplify this history of a spiritual resurrection when your case was thus deplorable, and seemingly helpless, the happy hour, the time of love came when you must live. When all these applications had been unsuccessful, the all-quickening spirit of God determined to exert more of his energy, and work more effectually upon you. Perhaps a verse in your Bible, a sentence in a sermon, an alarming Providence, the conversation of a pious friend, or something that unexpectedly

occurred to your own thoughts, first struck your minds with unusual force; you found you could not harden yourselves against it as you were wont to do; it was attended with a power you never before had felt, and which you could not resist: this made you thoughtful and pensive, and turned your minds to objects that you were wont to neglect; this made you stand and pause, and think of the state of your neglected souls; you began to fear matters were wrong with you; "What will become of me when I leave this world? Where shall I reside for ever? Am I prepared for the eternal world? How have I spent my life?" The great God, whom you were wont to neglect, appeared to you as a Being that demanded your regard; you saw that he was indeed a venerable, awful, majestic Being, with whom you had the most important concern: in short, you saw that such a life as you had led would never bring you to heaven: you saw that you must make religion more your business than you had ever done, and thereupon you altered your former course: you broke off from several of your vices, you deserted your extravagant company, and you began to frequent the throne of grace, to study religion, and to attend upon its institutions; and this you did with some degree of earnestness and solicitude.

When you were thus reformed, you began to flatter yourselves that you had escaped out of your dangerous condition, and secured the divine favor: now you began to view yourselves with secret self-applause as true Christians; but all this time the reformation was only outward, and there was no new principle of a divine supernatural life implanted in your hearts: you had no clear heart-affecting views of the intrinsic evil, and odious nature of sin, considered in itself, nor of the entire universal corruption of your nature, and the necessity, not only of adorning your outer man by an external reformation, but an inward change of heart by the almighty power of God: you were under the government of a self-righteous spirit; your own good works were the ground of your hopes, and you had no relish for the mortifying doctrine of salvation through the mere mercy of God, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ: though your education taught you to acknowledge Christ as the only Saviour, and ascribe all hopes to his death, yet in reality he was of very little importance in your religion; he had but little place in your heart and affections, even

when you urged his name as your only plea at the throne of grace: in short, you had not the spirit of the gospel, nor any spiritual life within you. And this is all the religion with which multitudes are contented: with this they obtain a name that they live: but in the sight of God, and in reality, they are dead; and had you been suffered to rest here, according to your own desire, you would have been dead still. But God, who is rich (O how inconceivably rich!) in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved you, resolved to carry on his work in you; and therefore, while you were flattering yourselves, and elated with a proud conceit of a happy change in your condition, he surprised you with a very different view of your own case; he opened your eyes farther, and then you saw, you felt those things of which till then you had but little sense or apprehension—such as the corruption of your hearts, the awful strictness of the divine law, your utter inability to yield perfect obedience, and the necessity of an inward change of the inclinations and relishes of your soul. Alas! you found yourselves quite helpless, and all your efforts feeble and ineffectual; then you perceived yourselves really dead in sin, and that you must continue so to all eternity, unless quickened by a power infinitely superior to your own; not that you lay slothful and inactive at this time; no, never did you exert yourselves so vigorously in all your life, never did you besiege the throne of grace with such eager attention, or make such a vigorous resistance against sin and temptation; all your natural powers were exerted to the highest pitch, for now you saw your case required it: but you found all your most vigorous endeavors insufficient, and you were sensible that, without the assistance of a superior power, the work of religion could never be effected.

Now you were reduced very low indeed. While you imagined you could render yourselves safe by a reformation in your own power, you were not much alarmed at your condition, though you saw it bad. But O! to feel yourselves dead in sin, and that you cannot help yourselves; to see yourselves in a state of condemnation, liable to execution every moment, and yet to find all your endeavors utterly insufficient to relieve you; to be obliged, after all you had done, to lie at mercy and confess that you were as deserving of everlasting punishment as ever the most notorious criminal was of the stroke of public justice; this

was a state of extreme dejection, terror, and anxiety indeed. The proud, self-confident creature was never thoroughly mortified and humbled till now, when he is slain by the law, and entirely cut off from all hopes from himself. Now you were ready to cry, "I am cut off: my strength and my hope are perished from the Lord;" but, blessed be God, he did not leave you in this condition. These preparations were like the taking away the stone from the sepulchre of Lazarus, which was a prelude to that almighty voice which called him from the dead. Now you appear to me like dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, in one stage of the operation. After there had been a noise, and shaking among them, and the bones had come together, bone to his bone, *I beheld*, says he, *and lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them.* But now the important crisis is come, when he who stood over the grave of Lazarus, and pronounced the life-restoring mandate, *Lazarus, come forth*; when he who breathed into Adam the breath of life, and made him a living soul; I say, now the crisis is come, when he will implant the principles of life in your souls; suddenly you feel the amazing change, and find you are acting from principles entirely new to you; for now your hearts that were wont to reluctate, and start back from God, rise to him with the strongest aspirations; now the way of salvation through Christ, which you could never relish before, appears all amiable and glorious, and captivates your whole souls. Holiness has lovely and powerful charms, which captivate you to the most willing obedience, notwithstanding your former disgust to it; and, though once you were enamored with sin, or disliked it only because you could not indulge it with impunity, it now appears to you a mass of corruption and deformity, an abominable thing, which you hate above all other things on earth or in hell. At this juncture you are animated with a new life in every faculty of your souls, and hereupon you felt the instincts, the appetites, the sympathies and antipathies of a new life, a divine life, justly styled by the apostle *the life of God*—the life of God in the soul of man. The pulse of sacred passions began to beat towards spiritual objects; the vital warmth of love spread itself through your whole frame; you breathed out your desires and prayers before God; like a new-born infant you began to cry after him, and at times you have

learned to lisp his name with filial endearment, and cry *Abba, Father*; you hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and as every kind of life must have its proper nourishment, so your spiritual life fed upon Christ, the living bread, and the sincere milk of his word. You also felt a new set of sensations; divine things now made deep and tender impressions upon you; the great realities of religion and eternity now affected you in a manner unknown before; you likewise found your souls actuated with life and vigor in the service of God, and in the duties you owed to mankind. This strange alteration, no doubt, filled you with surprise and amazement, something like that of Adam when he found himself start into life out of his eternal non-existence. With these new sensations every thing appeared to you in a quite different light, and you could not but wonder that you had never perceived them in that manner before.

Thus, my dear brethren, when you were even dead in sin, God quickened you together with Christ. It is true, the principle of life might be weak at first; nay, it may be weak still, and at times may languish, and seem just expiring in the agonies of death, but, blessed be the quickening spirit of Christ, since the happy hour of your resurrection you have never been, and you never will be to all eternity, what you once were, *dead in trespasses and sins*.

And is it so indeed? Then from this moment begin to rejoice and bless the Lord, who raised you to spiritual life. O let the hearts he has quickened beat with his love; let the lips he has opened, when quivering in death, speak his praise, and devote that life to him which he has given you, and which he still supports! Consider what a divine and noble life he has given you. It is a capacity and aptitude for the most exalted and divine services and enjoyments. Now you have a relish for the supreme good as your happiness, the only proper food for your immortal souls, and he will not suffer you to hunger and thirst in vain, but will satisfy the appetites he has implanted in your nature. O how happy are you in this single gift of spiritual life! this is a life that cannot perish, even in the ruins of the world. What though you must ere long yield your mortal bodies and animal life to death and rottenness? Your most important life is immortal, and subject to no such dissolution; and therefore be courageous in the name of the Lord, and

bid defiance to all the calamities of life, and all the terrors of death; for *your life is hid with Christ in God: and when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory.* Col. iii. 3, 4.

I would willingly go on in this strain, and leave the pulpit with a relish of these delightful truths upon my spirit; but, alas! I must turn my address to another set of persons in the assembly; but "where is the Lord God of Elijah?" who restored the Shunamite's son to life by means of that prophet? I am going to call to the dead, and I know they will not hear, unless he attend my feeble voice with his almighty power. I would pray over you like Elijah over the dead child, *O Lord God, let this sinner's life come into him again.* Are not the living and the dead promiscuously blended in this assembly? Here is a dead soul, there another, and there another, all over the house; and here and there a few living souls thinly scattered among them. Have you ever been carried through such a preparatory process as I have described? or if you are uncertain about this, as some may be who are animated with spiritual life, inquire, have you the feelings, the appetites and aversions, the pleasing and the painful sensations of living souls? Methinks conscience breaks its silence in some of you, whether you will or not, and cries, "O no; there is not a spark of life in this breast." Well, my poor deceased friends, (for so I may call you,) I hope you will seriously attend to what I am going seriously to say to you. I have no bad design upon you, but only to restore you to life. And though your case is really discouraging, yet I hope it is not quite desperate. The principles of nature, reason, self-love, joy, and fear are still alive in you, and you are capable of some application to divine things. And, as I told you, it is upon the principles of nature that God is wont to work, to prepare the soul for the infusion of a supernatural life. And these I would now work upon, in hopes you are not proof against considerations of the greatest weight and energy, I earnestly beg you would lay to heart such things as these.

Can you content yourselves with an animal life, the life of beasts, with that superfluity, reason, just to render you a more ingenious and self-tormenting kind of brutes; more artful in gratifying your sordid appetites, and yet still uneasy for want of an unknown something; a care that the



brutal world, being destitute of reason, are unmolested with? O! have you no ambition to be animated with a divine immortal life, the life of God?

Can you be contented with a mere temporal life, when your souls must exist for ever? That infinite world beyond the grave is replenished with nothing but the terrors of death to you, if you are destitute of spiritual life. And O! can you bear the thought of residing among its grim and ghastly terrors for ever?

Are you contented to be cut off from God, as a mortified member of the body, and to be banished for ever from all the joys of his presence? You cannot be admitted to heaven without spiritual life. Hell is the sepulchre for dead souls, and thither you must be sent, if you still continue dead. And does not this thought affect you? Consider also, now is the only time in which you can be restored to life. And O! will you let it pass by without improvement?

Shall all the means that have been used for your revival be in vain? Or the stirrings of the spirit, the alarms of your own consciences, the blessings and chastisements of Providence, the persuasions, tears, and lamentations of your living friends, O! shall all these be in vain? Can you bear the thought? Surely no. Therefore, O heave and struggle to burst the chains of death. Cry mightily to God to quicken you. Use all the means of vivification, and avoid every deadly and contagious thing. I know not, my brethren, how this thought will affect us at parting to-day, that we have left behind us many a dead soul. But suppose we should leave as many bodies here behind us as there are dead souls among us; suppose every sinner destitute of spiritual life should now be struck dead before us, O how would this floor be overlaid with dead corpses! How few of us would escape! What bitter lamentations and tears would be among us! One would lose a husband or a wife, another a friend or a neighbor. And have we hearts to mourn, and tears to shed over such an event as this, and have we no compassion for dead souls? Is there none to mourn over them? Sinners, if you will continue dead, there are some here to-day who part with you with this wish, *O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.* And O that our mourning may

reach the ears of the Lord of life, and that you might be quickened from your death in trespasses and sins! Amen and Amen.



## VI.

### POOR AND CONTRITE SPIRITS THE OBJECTS OF THE DIVINE FAVOR.

“To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.—*Isaiah*, lxvi. 2.

As we consist of animal bodies as well as immortal souls, and are endowed with corporeal senses as well as rational powers, God, who has wisely adapted our religion to our make, requires bodily as well as spiritual worship; and commands us not only to exercise the inward powers of our minds in proper acts of devotion, but also to express our inward devotion in suitable external actions, and to attend upon him in the sensible outward ordinances which he has appointed. Thus it is under the gospel; but it was more remarkably so under the law, which, compared with the pure and spiritual worship of the gospel, was a system of carnal ordinances, and required a great deal of external pomp and grandeur, and bodily services. Thus a costly and magnificent structure was erected, by divine direction, in the wilderness, called the tabernacle, because built in the form of a tent, and movable from place to place; and afterwards a most stately temple was built by Solomon with immense cost, where the divine worship should be stately celebrated, and where all the males of Israel should solemnly meet for that purpose three times in the year.

The externals were not intended to exclude the internal worship of the spirit, but to express and assist it. And these ceremonials were not to be put in the place of morals, but observed as helps to the practice of them, and to prefigure the great Messiah. Even under the Mosaic dispensation, God had the greatest regard to holiness of heart and life; and the strictest observer of ceremonies could not be accepted without them.

But it is natural to degenerate mankind to invert the

order of things, to place a part, the easiest and meanest part of religion, for the whole of it, to rest in the externals of religion as sufficient, without regarding the heart, and to depend upon a phariſaical ſtrictneſs in ceremonial obſervances, as an excuſe or atonement for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. This was the unhappy error of the Jews in Iſaiah's time; and this the Lord would correct in the firſt verſe of this chapter. The Jews gloried in their having the houſe of God among them, and were ever truſting in vain words, ſaying, *the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are theſe.* They filled their altars with coſtly ſacrifices; and in theſe they truſted to make atonement for ſin, and ſecure the divine favor.

As to their ſacrifices, God let them know, that while they had no regard to their morals, but choſe their own ways, and their ſouls delighted in their abominations, while they preſented them in a formal manner, without the fire of divine love, their ſacrifices were ſo far from procuring his acceptance, that they were odious to him.

To remove this ſuperſtitious confidence in the temple, the Lord informs them that he had no need of it; that, large and magnificent as it was, it was not fit to contain him; and that, in conſecrating it to him, they ſhould not proudly think that they had given him any thing to which he had no prior right. "Thus ſaith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, where I reign conſpicuous in the viſible majeſty and grandeur of a God; and though the earth is not adorned with ſuch illuſtrious diſplays of my immediate preſence, though it does not ſhine in all the glory of my royal palace on high, yet it is a little province in my imenſe empire, and ſubject to my authority; it is my footſtool. If, then, heaven is my throne, and earth is my footſtool; if the whole creation is my kingdom, where is the houſe that ye build unto me? where is your temple which appears ſo ſtately in your eyes? Can you vainly imagine that my preſence can be confined to you in the narrow bounds of a temple, when the heaven of heavens cannot contain me? Where is the place of my reſt?"

Theſe are ſuch majeſtic ſtrains of language as are worthy a God. Thus it becomes him to advance himſelf above the whole creation, and to aſſert his abſolute property in, and independency upon, the univerſe. Had he only turned to

us the bright side of his throne, that dazzles with insufferable splendor; had he only displayed his majesty unalloyed with grace and condescension in such language as this, it would have overwhelmed us, and cast us into the most abject despondency, as the outcasts of his providence beneath his notice. We should be ready in hopeless anxiety to say, "Is all this earth, which to us appears so vast, is it all but the humble footstool of God? hardly worth to bear his feet? What, then, am I? An atom of an atom-world, a trifling individual of a trifling race. The vast affairs of heaven and earth lie upon his hand, and he is employed in the concerns of the wide universe, and can he find leisure to concern himself with me, and my little interests? It seems daring and presumptuous to hope for such condescension. And shall I then despair of the gracious regard of my Maker?"

No, desponding creature! Mean and unworthy as thou art, hear the voice of divine condescension, as well as of majesty: *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.* Though God dwelleth not in temples made with hands, though he pours contempt upon princes, and scorns them in all their haughty glory and affected majesty, yet there are persons whom his gracious eye will regard. The high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, and dwelleth in the high and holy place, he will look down through all the shining ranks of angels upon—whom? Not on the proud, the haughty, and presumptuous, but upon him *that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at his word.* To this man will he look from the throne of his majesty, however low, however mean he may be. This man can never be lost or overlooked among the multitude of creatures, but the eyes of the Lord will discover him in the greatest crowd, his eyes will graciously fix upon this man, this particular man, though there were but one such in the compass of the creation, or though he were banished into the remotest corner of the universe.

This, my brethren, is a matter of universal concern. It is the interest of each of us to know whether we are thus graciously regarded by that God on whom our very being and all our happiness entirely depend. And how shall we know this? In no other way than by discovering whether we have the characters of that happy man to whom he

condescends to look. Let us inquire into the import of each of the characters.

I. It is the poor man to whom the majesty of heaven condescends to look.

This does not principally refer to those that are poor in this world; for, though it be very common that "the poor of this world are chosen to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," yet this is not a universal rule; for many, alas! that are poor in this world are not rich towards God, nor rich in good works, and therefore shall famish through eternity in remediless want and wretchedness. But the poor here signifies such as Christ characterizes more fully by the *poor in spirit*. And this character implies the following ingredients:

(1.) The poor man to whom Jehovah looks is deeply sensible of his own insufficiency, and that nothing but the enjoyment of God can make him happy. He feels himself to be, what he really is, a poor, impotent, dependent creature, that can neither live, nor move, nor exist without God.

This sense of his dependence upon God is attended with a sense of the inability of all earthly enjoyments to make him happy, and fill the vast capacities of his soul, which were formed for the enjoyment of an infinite good. He has a relish for the blessings of this life, but it is attended with a sense of their insufficiency, and does not exclude a stronger relish for the superior pleasure of religion.

If he enjoys no great share of the comforts of this life, he does not labor, nor so much as wish for them as his supreme happiness: he is well assured they can never answer this end in their greatest affluence. It is for God, it is for the living God, that his soul most eagerly thirsts.

If he enjoys an affluence of earthly blessings, he still retains a sense of his need of the enjoyment of God. To be discontent and dissatisfied is the common fate of the rich as well as the poor; they are still craving an unknown something to complete their bliss. The soul, being formed for the fruition of the Supreme Good, secretly languishes and pines away in the midst of other enjoyments, without knowing its cure. It is the enjoyment of God only that can satisfy its unbounded desires. But the poor in spirit know where their cure lies. They do not ask with uncertainty, *Who will show us any good?* but they petition

centre in this, as the grand constituent of their happiness, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.*

(2.) This spiritual poverty implies deep humility and self-abasement.

The poor man on whom the God of heaven condescends to look is mean in his own apprehensions; he accounts himself not a being of mighty importance. He has no high esteem of his own good qualities, but is little in his own eyes. After he has done all, he counts himself an unprofitable servant.

He that is poor in spirit has also a humbling sense of his own sinfulness. His memory is quick to recollect his past sins, and he is very sharp-sighted to discover the remaining corruptions of his heart, and the imperfections of his best duties. He sincerely doubts whether there be a saint on earth so exceeding corrupt; and, though he may be convinced that the Lord has begun a work of grace in him, and consequently, that he is in a better state than such as are under the prevailing dominion of sin, yet he really questions whether there be such a depraved creature in the world as he sees he has been. Self-abasement is pleasing to him; his humility is not forced; he does not think it a great thing for him to sink thus low. He makes no proud boasts of his good heart, or good life, but falls in the dust before God, and casts all his dependence upon his free grace:—which leads me to observe,

(3.) That he who is poor in spirit is sensible of his need of the influences of divine grace to sanctify, and enrich him with the graces of the Spirit.

Hence, like a poor man that cannot subsist upon his stock, he depends entirely upon the grace of God to work all his works in him, and to enable him to work out his salvation with fear and trembling.

(4.) He is deeply sensible of the absolute necessity of the righteousness of Christ for his justification.

He pleads his righteousness only, and trusts in it alone. The rich scorn to be obliged; but the poor, that cannot subsist of themselves, will cheerfully receive. So the self-righteous will not submit to the righteousness of God, but the poor in spirit will cheerfully receive it.

(5.) And lastly, the man that is poor in spirit is an importunate beggar at the throne of grace.

Prayer is the natural language of spiritual poverty. *The*

*poor*, saith Solomon, *useth entreaties*; whereas they that are rich in their own conceit can live without prayer, or content themselves with the careless formal performance of it. This spiritual poverty is greater riches than the treasures of the universe. May God thus impoverish us all; may he strip us of all our imaginary grandeur and riches, and reduce us to beggars at his door! But it is time to consider the other character of the happy man upon whom the Lord of heaven will graciously look; and that is,

II. Contrition of spirit. *To this man will I look, that is of a contrite spirit.*

The word *contrite* signifies one that is beaten or bruised with hard blows or a heavy burden. And it belongs to the mourning penitent, whose heart is broken and wounded for sin. Sin is an intolerable burden, that crushes and bruises him, and he feels himself sore under it. His stony heart, which could not be repressed, but rather repelled the blow, is taken away; and now he has a heart of flesh, easily bruised and wounded. He is easily susceptible of sorrow for sin, is humbled under a sense of his imperfections, and is really pained and distressed because he can serve his God no better, but daily sins against him. Let us,

III. Consider the remaining character of the happy man to whom the Lord will look. *Him that trembleth at my word.*

This character implies a tender sense of the great things of the word, and a heart easily impressed with them, as the most important realities. To one that trembles at the divine word, the threatenings of it do not appear vain terrors, nor great swelling words of vanity, but the most tremendous realities. It reaches and pierces his heart as a sharp two-edged sword; it carries power along with it, and he feels that it is the word of God, and not of men, even when it is spoken by feeble mortals. Thus he not only trembles at the terror, but at the authority of the word;—which leads me to observe, farther, that he trembles with filial veneration of the majesty of God speaking in his word. He considers it as his voice who spake a<sup>n</sup> things into being, and whose glory is such, that a deep solemnity must seize those that are admitted to hear him speak. How opposite is this to the temper of multitudes who regard the word of God no more than (with horror I express it) the word of a child or a fool. They will have their own way,

let him say what he will. They persist in sin, in defiance of his threatenings. They sit as careless and stupid under his word, as though it were some old, dull, trifling story. It seldom makes any impression upon their stony hearts. These are the brave, undaunted men of the world, who harden themselves against the fear of futurity. But, unhappy creatures! the God of heaven disdains to give them a gracious look, while he fixes his eyes upon the man that "is contrite, and that trembles at his word." But let such of you as are poor and contrite in spirit, and that tremble at the word of the Lord, enter deeply into the meaning of this expression, that the Lord looks to you. He does not look on you as a careless spectator, not concerning himself with you, or caring what will become of you, but he looks upon you as a father, a friend, a benefactor; his looks are efficacious for your good.

He looks upon you with acceptance. He looks upon you as the objects of his everlasting love, and purchased by the blood of his son, and he is well pleased for his righteousness' sake. Again, he looks to you so as to take particular notice of you. He sees all the workings of your heart towards him. This, indeed, might make you tremble, if he looked upon you with the eyes of a judge; for O how many abominations must he see in you! But be of good cheer; he looks upon you with the eyes of a friend, and with that love which covers a multitude of sins.

To conclude, let us view the perfection and condescension of God as illustrated by this subject. Consider, ye poor in spirit, who he is that stoops to look upon such little things as you. It is he whose throne is in the highest heaven, surrounded with myriads of angels and archangels; it is he who is exalted above the blessing and praise of all the celestial armies, and who cannot without condescension behold the things that are done in heaven; it is he that looks down upon such worms as you.

He manages all the affairs of the universe; he takes care of every individual in his vast family; he provides for all his creatures, and yet he is at leisure to regard you. He takes as particular notice of you as if you were his only creatures. What perfection is this! what an infinite grasp of thought! what unbounded power! and what condescension too! I shall add but this one natural reflection; if it be so great a happiness to have the great God for our por-



tion, then what is it to be out of his favor? to be disregarded by him? Methinks a universal tremor may seize this assembly at the very supposition. And is there a creature in the universe in this wretched condition? Methinks all the creation besides must pity him. Where is the wretched being to be found? Must we descend to hell to find him? No, alas! there are many such on this earth! nay, I must come nearer you still, there are many such probably in this assembly. All among you are such who are not poor and contrite in spirit, and do not tremble at the word of the Lord. And art thou not one of the miserable number, O man? What! disregarded by the God that made thee! not favored with one look of love by the author of all happiness! He looks on thee indeed, but it is with eyes of indignation, marking thee out for vengeance; and canst thou be easy in such a case? wilt thou not labor to impoverish thyself, and have thy heart broken, that thou mayest become the objects of his gracious regard?

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## VII.

### THE NATURE AND DANGER OF MAKING LIGHT OF CHRIST AND HIS SALVATION.

“But they made light of it.”—*Matt.* xxii. 5.

THIS parable represents the great God under the majestic idea of a king.

He is represented as making a marriage feast for his son; that is, God in the gospel offers his Son Jesus Christ as a Saviour to the guilty sons of men, and, upon their acceptance of him, the most intimate endearing union and the tenderest mutual affection take place between Christ and them; which may very properly be represented by the marriage relation. And God has provided for them a rich variety of blessings—pardon, holiness, and everlasting felicity, which may be signified by a royal nuptial feast.

*Verse 2.*

These blessings were first offered to the Jews, who were bidden to the wedding by Moses and the prophets, whose

great business it was to prepare them to receive the Messiah. *Verse 3.* The servants that were sent to call them, that were thus bidden, were the apostles and seventy disciples, whom Christ sent out to preach that the gospel kingdom was just at hand. When the Jews rejected this call, he sent forth other servants, namely, the apostles, after his ascension, who were to be more urgent in their invitations, and to tell them that, in consequence of Christ's death, all things were now ready. It is seldom that invitations to a royal feast are rejected; but, alas! the Jews rejected the invitations of the gospel, and would not accept of its important blessings. They made light of Christ, and his blessings; they were careless to them, and turned their attention to other things. These things were not peculiar to the Jews, but belong to us sinners of the Gentiles in these ends of the earth. Christ is still proposed to us; to the same blessings we are invited; and I have the honor, my dear brethren, of appearing among you as a servant of the heavenly King, sent out to urge you to embrace the offer. I doubt not but sundry of you have complied; and you are enriched and made for ever.

But, alas! must I not entertain a godly jealousy over some of you? Have you not made light of Christ and salvation, to which you have been invited for so many years successively?

Your case is really lamentable, as I hope you will see before I have done; and I most sincerely compassionate you from my heart. I now rise up in this solemn place with the design to address you with the most awful seriousness, and the most compassionate concern; and did you know how much your happiness may depend upon it, and how anxious I am lest I should fail in the attempt, I am sure you could not but pray for me, and pity me. If ever you regard a man in the most serious temper and address, I beg you would now regard what I am going to say to you.

You cannot receive benefit from this, or indeed any other subject, till you apply it to yourselves. And therefore, in order to reform you of the sin of making light of Christ and the gospel, I must first inquire who are guilty of it. For this purpose let us consider,—

What it is to make light of Christ and the invitations of the gospel.

I can think of no plainer way to discover this than to inquire, how we treat those things that we highly esteem; and also, by way of contrast, how we treat those things which we make light of; and hence we may discover whether Christ and the gospel may be ranked among the things we esteem, or those we disregard.

I. Men are apt to remember and affectionately think of the things that they highly esteem; but as for those which they disregard, they can easily forget them, and live from day to day without a single thought about them. Now, do you often affectionately remember the Lord Jesus, and do your thoughts affectionately go after him? Do they pay him early visits in the morning? Do they make frequent excursions to him through the day, and do you lie down with him in your hearts at night? Is not the contrary evident as to many of you? Can you not live from day to day thoughtless of Jesus and your everlasting salvation? Recollect, now, how many affectionate thoughts have you had of these things through the week past, or in this sacred morning. And can you indeed highly esteem those things which you hardly ever think of? Follow your own hearts, sirs; observe which way they most naturally and freely run, and then judge whether you make light of the gospel or not. Alas! we cannot persuade men to one hour's serious consideration, what they should do for an interest in Christ; we cannot persuade them so much as to afford him only their thoughts, which are such cheap things; and yet they will not be convinced that they make light of Christ. And here lies the infatuation of sin: it blinds and befools men, so that they do not know what they think of, what they love, or what they intend; much less do they know the habitual bent of their souls. They often imagine themselves free from those sins to which they are most enslaved, and particularly they think themselves innocent of the crime of making light of the gospel, when this is the very crime that is likely to destroy them for ever.

II. The things that men value, if of such a nature as to admit of publication, will be the frequent subjects of their discourse; the thoughts will command the tongue, and furnish materials for conversation. But those things that they forget and disregard they will not talk of. Do not they, therefore, make light of Christ and salvation, who

have no delight in conversing about them, and hardly ever mention the name of Christ but in a trifling or profane manner? And do not such make light of the gospel? and is not this the character of many of you?

III. We take the utmost pains and labor to secure the things we value, and cannot be easy while our property in them is uncertain; but those things that we seldom think of, we care but little whether they be ours or not.

Therefore, have not such of you made light of Christ and salvation, who have lived twenty or thirty years uncertain whether you have an interest in him, and yet have been easy and contented, and take no method to be resolved? Are all that hear me this day determined on this important question, "What shall become of me when I die?" Are you all certain, upon good grounds, and after a thorough trial, that you shall be saved? O that you were; but, alas! you are not. And do you think you would bear this uncertainty about it, if you did not make light of salvation? No; you would carefully examine yourselves; you would diligently peruse the Scriptures, to find out the marks of those that shall be saved; you would anxiously consult those that could direct you, and particularly pious ministers, who would think it the greatest favor you could do them to devolve such an office upon them.

O, sirs, if the gospel should pierce your hearts indeed, you could but cry out, with the convicted Jews, *Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?*

IV. The things that men highly esteem, deeply and tenderly affect them, and excite some motions in their hearts; but what they make light of makes no impression upon them.

And if you did not make light of the gospel, what workings would there be in your hearts about it? what solemn, tender, and vigorous passions would it raise in you to hear such things about the world to come! what sorrow would burst from your hearts at the discovery of your sins! what fear and astonishment would seize you at the consideration of your misery! what transports of joy and gratitude would you feel at the glad tidings of salvation by the blood of Christ! what strong efficacious purposes would be raised in your minds at the discovery of your duty! O what hearers should we have, were it not for this one sin, the making light of the gospel! Whereas, now, we

talk to them till they grow quite tired of this dull old tale, and this foolishness of preaching. Alas! little would one think, from the air of carelessness, levity, and inattention that appears among them, that they were hearing such weighty truths, or have any concern in them.

V. Our estimate of things may be discovered by the diligence and earnestness of our endeavors about them. Those things which we highly value, we think no pains too great to obtain; but what we think lightly of, we use no endeavors about, or we use them in a languid, careless manner.

And do not they make light of Christ and salvation who do not exert themselves in earnest to obtain them, and think a great deal of every little thing they do in religion? They are still ready to cry out, "What need of so much pains? we hope to be saved without so much trouble." They love and esteem the world, and therefore for the world they will labor and toil all day, and seem never to think they can do too much; but for the God that made them, for the Lord that bought them, and for their everlasting salvation, they seem afraid of taking too much pains. Let us preach to them as long as we will, we cannot bring them to desire and pursue after holiness. Follow them to their houses, and you will hardly ever find them reading a chapter in their bibles, or calling upon God with their families, so much as once a day. Follow them into their retirements, and you will hear no penitent confessions of sin, no earnest cries for mercy. They will not allow to God that one day in seven which he has appropriated to his own immediate service, but they will steal and prostitute some even of those sacred hours for idleness, or worldly conversation, or business.

VI. That which we highly value we think we cannot buy too dear; and we are ready to part with every thing that comes in competition with it. The merchant that found one pearl of great price, sold all that he had to purchase it; but those things that we make light of, we will not part with things of value for them.

Now, when Christ and the blessings of the gospel come in competition with the world and sinful pleasures, you may know which you most highly esteem, by considering which you are most ready to part with. You are called to part with every thing that is inconsistent with an interest in Christ, and yet many of you will not do it. You are

called to resign all to his will, to let go those profits and pleasures, which you must either part with, or part with Christ; and yet your hearts cling to these; you grasp them eagerly, and nothing can tear them from you. And does not this bring the matter to an issue, and plainly show that you make light of Christ in comparison of these things?

VII. That which men highly esteem they will so diligently pursue that you may see their regard for it in their endeavors after it, if it be a matter within their reach.

You may therefore see that many make light of the gospel by the little knowledge they have of it, after all the means of instruction with which they have been favored. Alas! where is their improvement in holiness? How little do they know of their own hearts, of God and Christ, and the world to come, and what they must do to be saved! Ask them about these things, and you will find them stupidly ignorant. When men that can learn the hardest trade in a few years; when men of bright parts, and, perhaps, considerable learning, after living so many years, are still mere novices in matters of religion, and do not so much as know the terms of life according to the gospel, is it not plain that they care but little about these things, and that they make light of the Son of God, and all his inestimable immortal blessings?

Thus I have offered you sufficient matter of conviction in this affair. And what is the result? does not conscience smite some of you by this time, and say, "I am the man that have made light of Christ and his gospel?" If not, upon what evidence are you acquitted? Some of you, I doubt not, can say, in the integrity of your hearts, "Alas! I am too careless about this important affair, but God knows I am often deeply concerned about it; God knows that if ever I was in earnest about any thing in my life, it has been about my everlasting state; and there is nothing in all the world that habitually lies so near my heart." But are not some of you whom conscience does not accuse of this crime of too much carelessness about the gospel, not because you are innocent, but because you make so light of it, that you will make no thorough search into it? and does not this alone prove you guilty? I beseech such to consider the folly of their conduct. Do you think to excuse your crime, by being careless whether you are

guilty of it or not? Can you avoid the precipice by shutting your eyes? If you discover your sin now, it may be of unspeakable service, but if you now shut your eyes you must see it hereafter, when it will be too late; when your conviction will be your punishment. I beseech you also to consider the dreadful evil of your conduct of making light of a Saviour. And here I shall offer such arguments to expose its aggravations as I am sure cannot fail to convince and astonish you, if you act like men of reason and understanding.

I. Consider you make light of him who did not make light of you, when you deserved his final neglect of you. Christ was so far from making light of you, that he left his native heaven, became a man of sorrows, and died in the most exquisite agonies, that a way might be opened for the salvation of your miserable soul; and can you make light of him after all his regard to you? What miracles of love and mercy has he shown towards you! and can you neglect him after all? Angels, who are less concerned in these things than we, cannot but pry into them with delightful wonder; and shall sinners, who have the most intimate personal concern in them, make light of them?

II. Consider you make light of matters of the greatest excellency and importance in the world. Oh, sirs, you know not what it is that you slight; had you known these things you would not have ventured to make light of them for ten thousand worlds. Had you been but one day in heaven, and seen and felt the happiness there! or had you been one hour under the agonies of hell, you could never have trifled with salvation.

“O Lord, that men did but know what everlasting glory and everlasting torments are! would they then hear us as they do? would they read and think of these things as they do? I profess I have been ready to wonder when I have heard such weighty things delivered, how people can forbear crying out in the congregation, and much more do I wonder how they can rest, till they have gone to their ministers and learned what they shall do to be saved, that this great business should be put out of doubt. Oh that heaven and hell should work no more upon men! Oh that eternity should work no more! Oh how can you forbear when you are alone to think with yourselves what it

is to be everlastingly in joy or torment! I wonder that such thoughts do not break your sleep, and that they do not crowd into your minds when you are about your labor! I wonder how you can almost do any thing less! How can you have any quietness in your minds, how can you eat, or drink, or rest, till you have got some ground of everlasting consolations? Truly, sirs, when I think of the weight of the matter, I wonder at the best saints upon earth, that they are no better, and do no more in so weighty a case. I wonder at those whom the world accounts more holy than needs, and scorns for making too much ado, that they can put off Christ and their souls with so little; that their thoughts are not more serious in preparation for their last account. I wonder that they are not a thousand times more strict in their lives, and more laborious and unwearyed for the crown than they are."

III. Consider whose salvation it is you make light of. It is your own. And do you not care what becomes of your own selves? Is it nothing to you whether you be saved or damned for ever? If you slight Christ and love sin, you virtually love death. You may as well say, "I will live, and yet neither eat nor drink," as say, "I will go to heaven, and yet make light of Christ." And you may as well say this in words as by your practice.

IV. Consider your sin is aggravated by professing to believe that gospel which you make light of. For a professed infidel that does not believe the Scripture revelation concerning Christ and a future state of rewards and punishments, for such a one to be careless about these things would not be so strange; but for you that make these things your creed, and a part of your religion, for you that call yourselves Christians, and have been baptized into this faith; for you I say to make light of them, how astonishing! how utterly inexcusable! What! believe that you shall live for ever in the most perfect happiness or exquisite misery, and yet take no pains to obtain the one, and escape the other? Either say plainly "I am no Christian, I do not believe these things;" or else let your hearts be affected with your belief, and let it influence and govern your lives.

V. Consider what those things are which engross your affections, and which tempt you to neglect Christ and your salvation. Have you found out a better friend, or a more



substantial and lasting happiness than his salvation? Oh! what trifles and vanities, what dreams and shadows are men pursuing, while they neglect the important realities of the eternal world! If crowns and kingdoms, if all the riches, glories, and pleasures of the world were insured to you as a reward for making light of Christ, you would even then make the most foolish bargain possible; for what are these in the scale to eternal joy or eternal tempest? *and what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul!* Alas! what does the richest, the highest, the most voluptuous sinner, what does he do, but lay up treasures of wrath against the day of wrath? Oh, how will the unhappy creatures torture themselves for ever with the most cutting reflections for selling their Saviour and their souls for such trifles!

VI. Your making light of Christ and salvation is a certain evidence that you have no interest in them. Christ will not throw himself and his blessings away upon those that do not value them. "Those who honor him he will honor; but they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed." There is a day coming, when you will feel you cannot do without him; when you will feel yourselves perishing for want of a Saviour; and then you may go and look for a Saviour where you will; then you may shift for yourselves as you can; he will have nothing to do with you; the Saviour of sinners will cast you off forever.

VII. And lastly, the time is hastening when you will not think so slightly of Christ and salvation. Oh, sirs, when God shall commission death to tear your guilty souls out of your bodies, when devils shall drag you away to the place of torment, when you find yourselves condemned to everlasting fire by that Saviour whom you now neglect, what would you then give for a Saviour? When divine justice brings in its heavy charges against you, and you have nothing to answer, how will you then cry, "Oh, if I had chosen Jesus for my Saviour, he would have answered all." When you see that the world has deserted you, that your companions in sin have deceived themselves and you, and all your merry days are over for ever, would you not then give ten thousand worlds for Christ? And will you not now think him worthy of your esteem and earnest pursuit?

And now, dear immortal souls, I have discovered the

nature and danger of this common but unsuspected and unlamented sin, making light of Christ. I have delivered my message, and now I must leave it with you, imploring the blessing of God upon it. I cannot follow you home to your houses to see what effect it has upon you, or to make application of it to each of you in particular; but, O may your consciences undertake this office. Whenever you spend another prayerless, thoughtless day, whenever you give yourselves up to sinful pleasures, or an over-eager pursuit of the world, may your conscience become your preacher, and sting you with this expostulation: "Alas! is this the effect of all I have heard? Do I make light of Christ and the concerns of religion? Oh, what will be the end of such a conduct!"

I cannot but fear, after all, that some of you, as usual, will continue careless and impenitent. Well, when you are suffering the punishment of this sin in hell, remember that you were warned, and acquit me for being accessory to your ruin. And when we all appear before the supreme Judge, and I am called to give an account of my ministry: when I am asked, "Did you warn these creatures of their danger? Did you lay before them their guilt in making light of these things?" you will allow me to answer, "Yes, Lord, I warned them in the best manner I could, but they would not believe me; they would not regard what I said, though enforced by the authority of thy awful name, and confirmed by thine own word." O sirs, must I give in this accusation against any of you? No, rather have mercy upon yourselves, and have mercy upon me, that I may give an account of you with joy and not with grief.

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## VIII.

### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PRESENT HOLINESS AND FUTURE FELICITY.

"Follow holiness; without which no man shall see the Lord."—*Heb. xii. 14.*

As the human soul was originally designed for the enjoyment of no less a portion than the ever-blessed God, it was formed with a strong innate tendency towards happi-

ness. It has not only an eager fondness for existence, but for some good to render its existence happy. And the privation of being itself is not more terrible than the privation of all its blessings. It is true, in the present degeneracy of human nature, this vehement desire is miserably perverted and misplaced; man seeks his supreme happiness in sinful, or at least in created enjoyments, forgetful of the uncreated fountain of bliss; but yet still he seeks happiness; still his innate *impetus* is predominant, and though he mistakes the means, yet he still retains a general aim at the end. Hence he ransacks this lower world in quest of felicity; climbs in search of it the slippery ascent of honor; hunts for it in the treasures of gold and silver; or plunges for it in the foul streams of sensual pleasures. But since all the sordid satisfaction resulting from these things is not adequate to the unbounded cravings of the mind, and since the satisfaction is transitory and perishing, or we may be wrenched from it by the inexorable hand of death, the mind breaks through the limits of the present enjoyments, and even of the lower creation, and ranges through the unknown scenes of futurity in quest of some untried good. Hope makes excursions into the dark duration between the present now and the grave, and roves through the regions of immensity after some complete felicity to supply the defects of sublunary enjoyments. Hence, though men, till their spirits are refined by regenerating grace, have no relish for celestial joys, but pant for the poor pleasures of time and sense, yet as they cannot avoid the unwelcome consciousness that death will ere long rend them from these sordid and momentary enjoyments, are constrained to indulge the hope of bliss in a future state; and they promise themselves happiness in another world, when they can no longer enjoy any in this. And as reason and revelation unitedly assure them that this felicity cannot then consist in sensual indulgences, they generally expect it will be of a more refined and spiritual nature, and flow more immediate from the Father of spirits.

He must indeed be miserable that abandons all hope of this blessedness. The Christian religion affords him no other prospect but that of eternal, intolerable misery in the regions of darkness and despair; and if he flies to infidelity as a refuge, it can afford him no comfort but the shocking prospect of annihilation.

Now, if men were pressed into heaven by an unavoidable fatality,—if happiness was promiscuously promised to them without distinction of characters,—then they might indulge a blind, unexamined hope, and never perplex themselves with anxious inquiries about it. And he might justly be deemed a malignant disturber of the repose of mankind that would attempt to shock their hope, and frighten them with causeless scruples.

But if the light of nature intimates, and the voice of Scripture proclaims aloud, that this eternal felicity is reserved only for persons of particular characters; and that multitudes who entertained pleasing hopes of it, are confounded with an eternal disappointment, and shall suffer an endless duration in the most terrible miseries, we ought each of us to take the alarm, and examine the grounds of our hope, that, if they appear sufficient, we may allow ourselves a rational satisfaction in them; and, if they are found delusive, we may abandon them and seek for a hope which will bear the test now while it may be obtained. And, however disagreeable the task be to give our fellow-creatures even profitable uneasiness, yet he must appear to the impartial a friend to the best interests of mankind, who points out the evidences and foundation of a rational and Scriptural hope, and exposes the various mistakes to which we are subject in so important a case.

And if, when we look around us, we find persons full of the hopes of heaven, who can give no Scriptural evidences of them to themselves or others; if we find many indulging this pleasing delusion, whose practices are mentioned by God himself as the certain marks of perishing sinners; and if persons are so tenacious of these hopes, that they will retain them to their everlasting ruin, unless the most convictive methods are taken to undeceive them; then it is high time for those to whom the care of souls is intrusted, to use the greatest plainness for this purpose.

This is my chief design at present, and to this my text naturally leads me. It contains these doctrines:

First, That without holiness here, it is impossible for us to enjoy heavenly happiness in the future world.

Secondly, That this consideration should induce us to use the most earnest endeavors to obtain the heavenly happiness. Pursue holiness, because *without it no man can see the Lord.*

Hence I am naturally led,

I. To explain the nature of that *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*

II. To show what endeavors should be used to attain it. And,

III. To urge you to use them by the consideration of the absolute necessity of holiness.

I. I am to explain the nature of holiness. And I shall give you a brief definition of it, and then mention some of those dispositions and practices which naturally flow from it. The most intelligible description of holiness, as it is inherent in us, may be this: "It is a conformity in heart and practice to the revealed will of God." As the Supreme Being is the standard of all perfection, his holiness in particular is the standard of ours. Then we are holy when his image is stamped upon our hearts and reflected in our lives; so the Apostle defines it, *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* Hence holiness may be defined, "A conformity to God in his moral perfections." But, as we cannot have a distinct knowledge of these perfections but as they are manifested by the revealed will of God, I choose to define holiness, as above, "A conformity to his revealed will." Now his revealed will comprises both the law and the gospel; the law informs us of the duty which we, as creatures, owe to God as a being of supreme excellency, as our Creator and benefactor, and to men as our fellow-creatures; and the gospel informs us of the duty which as sinners we owe to God, as reconcilable through a Mediator.

From this definition of holiness it appears, on the one hand, that it is absolutely necessary to see the Lord; for, unless our dispositions are conformed to him, we cannot be happy in the enjoyment of him; and, on the other hand, that they who are made thus holy, are prepared for the vision and fruition of his face, as they can relish the divinest pleasure.

But as a concise definition of holiness may give an auditory but very imperfect ideas of it, I shall expatiate upon the dispositions and practices in which it consists, or which naturally result from it; and they are such as follow:

1. A delight in God for his holiness. Self-love may prompt us to love him for his goodness to us; and so many unregenerate men may have a selfish love to God on this

account. But to love God because he is infinitely holy, because he bears an infinite detestation to all sin, and will not indulge his creatures in the neglect of the least instance of holiness, but commands them to be holy as he is holy, this is a disposition connatural to a renewed soul only, and argues a conformity to his image. Here I would make a remark, which may God deeply impress on your hearts, and which for that purpose I shall subjoin to each particular, that holiness in fallen man is supernatural; I mean, we are not born with it, we give no discoveries of it, till we have experienced a great change. Thus we find it in the present case: we have no natural love to God because of his infinite purity and hatred to all sin; nay, we would love him more did he give us greater indulgences; and I am afraid the love of some persons is founded upon a mistake; they love him because they imagine he does not hate sin, nor them for it, so much as he really does; because they think he will bring them to heaven at last, let them live as they list. It is no wonder they love such a soft, easy, passive being as this imaginary Deity; but did they see the lustre of that holiness of God which dazzles the celestial armies; did they but know the terrors of his justice, and his implacable indignation against sin, their innate enmity would show its poison, and their hearts would rise against God in all those horrible blasphemies with which awakened sinners are so frequently shocked.

But to a regenerate mind, how strong, how transporting are the charms of holiness! Such a mind joins the anthem of seraphs with the divinest complacency, and anticipates the song of glorified saints. *Who would not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy!* The perfections of God lose their lustre, or sink into objects of terror or contempt, if this glorious attribute be abstracted. Without holiness, power becomes tyranny; omniscience, craft; justice, revenge and cruelty; and even the amiable attribute of goodness loses its charms and degenerates into a blind, promiscuous prodigality, or foolish, undiscerning fondness: but when these perfections are clothed in the beauties of holiness, how godlike, how majestic, how lovely and attractive do they appear! and with what complacence does a mind fashioned after the divine image acquiesce in them! A selfish sinner has nothing in view but his own happiness; and if this be obtained, he has no anxiety about

the illustration of the divine purity; but it recommends happiness itself to a sanctified soul, that it cannot be communicated in a way inconsistent with the beauty of holiness.

2. Holiness consists in a hearty complacence in the law of God, because of its purity. The law is the transcript of the moral perfections of God; and if we love the original we shall love the copy. Accordingly, it is natural to a renewed mind to love the divine law, because it is perfectly holy; because it makes no allowance for the least sin, and requires every duty that it becomes us to perform towards God.

But is this our natural disposition? Is this the disposition of the generality? Do they not, on the contrary, secretly find fault with the law, because it is so strict? And their common objection against that holiness of life which it enjoins, is that they cannot bear to be so precise. And, if they love the law at all, as they profess to do, it is upon supposition that it is not so strict as it really is, but grants them greater indulgences.

Hence it appears that, if we are made holy at all, it must be by a supernatural change; and, when that is effected, what a strange and happy alteration does the sinner perceive? with what pleasure does he resign himself a willing subject to that law to which he was once so averse? And when he fails, (as alas! he does in many things,) how is he humbled? he does not lay the fault upon the law as requiring impossibilities, but lays the whole fault upon himself as a corrupt sinner.

3. Holiness consists in a hearty complacence in the gospel method of salvation, because it tends to illustrate the moral perfections of the Deity, and to discover the beauties of holiness.

The gospel informs us of two grand pre-requisites to the salvation of the fallen sons of men, namely, the satisfaction of divine justice by the obedience and passion of Christ, that God might be reconciled to them consistently with his perfections; and the sanctification of sinners by the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, that they might be capable of enjoying God, and that he might maintain intimate communion with them without any stain to his holiness. These two grand articles contain the substance of the gospel, and our acquiescence in them is the substance of that evangelical obedi-

ence which it requires of us, and which is essential to holiness in a fallen creature.

Now, it is evident that, without either of these, the moral perfections of the Deity, particularly his holiness, could not be illustrated, or even secured in the salvation of a sinner. Had he received an apostate race into favor, who had conspired in the most unnatural rebellion against him, without any satisfaction, his holiness would have been eclipsed; it would not have appeared that he had so invincible an abhorrence of sin, so zealous a regard for the vindication of his own holy law; or to his veracity, which had threatened condign punishment to offenders. But by the satisfaction of Christ, his holiness is illustrated in the most conspicuous manner; now it appears, that God would upon no terms save a sinner but that of adequate satisfaction, and that no other was sufficient but the suffering of his coequal Son, otherwise he would not have appointed him to sustain the character of Mediator; and now it appears that his hatred of sin is such that he would not let it pass unpunished even in his own Son, when only imputed to him. In like manner, if sinners, while unholy, were admitted into communion with God in heaven, it would obscure the glory of his holiness, and it would not then appear that such was the purity of his nature, that he could have no fellowship with sin. But now it is evident that even the blood of Immanuel cannot purchase heaven to be enjoyed by a sinner while unholy, but that every one that arrives at heaven must first be sanctified. An unholy sinner can be no more saved, while such, by the gospel than by the law; but here lies the difference, that the gospel makes provision for his sanctification, which is gradually carried on here, and perfected at death, before his admission into the heavenly glory.

Now it is the genius of true holiness to acquiesce in both these articles. A sanctified soul places all its dependence on the righteousness of Christ for acceptance. So a holy person rejoices that the way of holiness is the appointed way to heaven. He is not forced to be holy merely by the servile consideration that he must be so or perish, and so unwillingly submits to the necessity which he cannot avoid, when in the mean time, were it put to his choice, he would choose to reserve some sins, and neglect some painful duties. So far from this, that he delights in the gospel con-



stitution, because it requires universal holiness, and heaven would be less agreeable, were he to carry even the least sin there.

This is solid, rational religion, fit to be depended upon, in opposition to the antinomian licentiousness, the freaks of enthusiasm, and the irrational flights of passion and imagination on the one hand; and in opposition to formality, mere morality, and the self-sprung religion of nature on the other. And is it not evident we are destitute of this by nature? Men naturally are averse to this gospel method of salvation; they will not submit to the righteousness of God, but fix their dependence, in part at least, upon their own merit. Their proud hearts cannot bear the thought that all their performances must go for nothing in their justification. They are also averse to the way of holiness; hence they either abandon the expectation of heaven, and since they cannot obtain it in their sinful ways, desperately conclude to go on in sin, come what will; how many either give up their hopes of heaven rather than part with sin, or vainly hold them, while their dispositions and practices prove them groundless.

4. Holiness consists in an habitual delight in all the duties of holiness towards God and man, and an earnest desire for communion with God in them. This is the natural result of all the foregoing particulars. If we love God for his holiness, we shall delight in that service in which our conformity to him consists; if we love his law, we shall delight in that obedience which it enjoins; and if we take complacency in the evangelical method of salvation, we shall take delight in that holiness, without which we cannot enjoy it.

This consideration also shows us that holiness in us must be supernatural; surely, you must be changed, or you can have no relish for the enjoyment of heavenly happiness.

Thus I have, as plainly as I could, described the nature and properties of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; and they who are possessed of it may lift up their heads with joy, assured that God has begun a good work in them, and that he will carry it on; and, on the other hand, they that are destitute of it may be assured, that, unless they are made new creatures, they cannot see the Lord. I come,

II. To show you the endeavors we should use to obtain this holiness. And they are such as these :

1. Endeavor to know whether you are holy or not, by close examination. It is hard, indeed, for some to know positively that they are holy, as they are perplexed with appearances of realities, and the fears of counterfeits; but it is then easy for many to conclude negatively that they are not holy, as they have not the likeness of it. To determine this point is of great use to our successful seeking after holiness. That an unregenerate sinner should attend on the means of grace with other aims than one that has reason to believe himself sanctified, is evident. The anxieties, sorrows, desires, and endeavors of the one should run in a very different channel from those of the other. The one should look upon himself as a guilty and condemned sinner; the other should allow himself the pleasure of a justified state: the one should pursue after the implantation; the other after the increase of holiness: the one should indulge a seasonable concern about his lost condition; the other repose an humble confidence in God as reconciled to him: the one should look upon the threatenings of God as his doom; the other embrace the promises as his portion. Hence it follows that, while we are mistaken about our state, we cannot use endeavors after holiness in a proper manner. We act like a physician that applies medicines at random, without knowing the disease. Let us be impartial, and proceed according to evidence. If we find those marks of holiness in heart and life which have been mentioned, let not an excessive scrupulosity frighten us from drawing the happy conclusion: and if we find them not, let us exercise so much wholesome severity against ourselves, as honestly to conclude we are unholy sinners, and must be renewed before we can see the Lord. The conclusion, no doubt, will give you painful anxiety: but if you were my dearest friend, I could not form a kinder wish for you, than that you might be incessantly distressed with it till you are born again.

2. Awake, arise, and betake yourself in earnest to all the means of grace. Your life, your eternal life, is concerned, and therefore it calls for all the ardor and earnestness you are capable of exerting. Accustom yourself to meditation, converse with yourselves in retirement, and live no longer strangers at home. Read the Word of God

and other good books, with diligence, attention, and self-application. Attend on the public ministrations of the gospel, not as a trifler, but as one that sees his eternal all concerned. Shun the tents of sin, the rendezvous of sinners, and associate with those that have experienced the change you want, and can give you proper directions. Prostrate yourself before the God of heaven, confess your sin, implore his mercy, cry to him night and day, and give him no rest, till the importunity prevail, and you take the kingdom of heaven by violence.

But after all, acknowledge that it is God that must work in you both to will and to do, and when you have done all these things you are but unprofitable servants. I do not prescribe these directions, as though these means could effect holiness in you; no, they can no more do it than a pen can write without a hand. It is the Holy Spirit's province alone to sanctify a degenerate sinner, but he is wont to do it while we are waiting upon him in the use of these means, though our best endeavors give us no title to his grace; but he may justly leave us, after all, in that state of condemnation and corruption into which we have voluntarily brought ourselves. I go on:

III. And lastly, to urge you to the use of these means, from the consideration mentioned in the text, the absolute necessity of holiness to the enjoyment of heavenly happiness.

Here I would show that holiness is absolutely necessary, and that the consideration of its necessity may strongly enforce the pursuit of it. The necessity of holiness appears from the unchangeable appointment of Heaven, and the nature of things.

1. The unchangeable appointment of God excludes all the unholy from the kingdom of heaven; Rev. xxi. 27: *“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.”* It is most astonishing that many who profess to believe the divine authority of the Scriptures, will yet indulge vain hopes of heaven, in opposition to the plainest declarations of eternal truth. But though there were no positive constitution excluding the unholy from heaven, yet,

2. The very nature of things excludes sinners from heaven; that is, it is impossible, in the nature of things,

that while they are unholy, they could receive happiness from the employments and entertainments of the heavenly world. If these consisted in the affluence of those things which sinners delight in here; if its enjoyments were earthly riches, pleasures, and honors; if its employments were the amusements of the present life, then they might be happy there, as far as their sordid natures are capable of happiness. But these trifles have no place in heaven. The felicity of that state consists in the contemplation of the divine perfections, and their displays in the works of creation, providence, and redemption; hence it is described by seeing the Lord; and a state of knowledge, (1 Cor. xiii. 10-12;) and a complacency in God as a portion, and in perpetual serving and praising the Lord; and hence adoration is generally mentioned as the employment of the hosts of heaven. These are the entertainments of heaven, and they that cannot find supreme happiness in these, cannot find it in heaven. But it is evident these things could afford no satisfaction to an unholy person. He would pine away at the heavenly feast, for want of appetite for the entertainment; a holy God would be an object of horror rather than delight to him, and his service would be a weariness as it is now. Hence it appears, that if we do not place our supreme delight in these things, we cannot be happy hereafter: for there will be no change of dispositions in a future state, but only the perfection of those predominant in us here, whether good or evil. Either heaven must be changed, or the sinner, before he can be happy there.

We see, then, that holiness is absolutely necessary; and what a great inducement should this consideration be to pursue it; if we do not see the Lord we shall never see good. We are cut off at death from all earthly enjoyments, and can no longer make experiments to satisfy our unbounded desires with them; and we have no God to supply their room. We are banished from all the joys of Heaven, and how vast, how unconceivably vast, is the loss! We are doomed to the regions of darkness for ever, to bear the vengeance of eternal fire, to feel the lashes of a guilty conscience, and to spend an eternity in a horrid intimacy with infernal ghosts; and will we not then rather follow holiness, than incur so dreadful a doom? By the terrors of the Lord, then, be persuaded to break off your sins by

righteousness, and follow holiness, *without which no man shall see the Lord.*

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## IX.

### THE DIVINE MERCY TO MOURNING PENITENTS.

“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus ; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke : turn thou me, and I shall be turned ; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented ; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh : I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear son ? is he a pleasant child ? for since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still : therefore my bowels are troubled for him : I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.”—*Jer.* xxxi. 18–20.

IN these words, the mourning language of a penitent child, sensible of ingratitude, and at once desirous and ashamed to return, and the tender language of a compassionate father, at once chastising, pitying, and pardoning are sweetly blended : and the images are so lively and moving, that, if they were regarded only as poetical descriptions founded upon fiction, they would be irresistibly striking. But when we consider them as the most important realities, as descriptive of that ingenuous repentance which we must all feel, and of that gracious acceptance we must all obtain from God before we can be happy, what almighty energy should they have upon us ! How may our hearts dissolve within us at the sound of such pathetic complaints, and such gracious encouragements ! Hard indeed is that heart that can hear these penitential strains, without being melted into the like tender relentings ; and inveterate is that melancholy, incurable is that despondency, that can listen to such expressions of fatherly compassion and love, without being cheered and animated.

This whole chapter had a primary reference to the Jews, and such of the Israelites as might mingle with them in their return from the Babylonian captivity. As they were enslaved to foreigners, and removed from their native land for their sin, so they could not be restored but upon their repentance.

The text naturally resolves itself into three parts, as it consists of three verses. In the first verse we find the careless, resolute impenitent reduced by chastisement to a sense of his danger, and the necessity of turning to God, and yet sensible of his utter inability, and therefore crying for the attractive influences of divine grace. You hear Ephraim bemoaning his wretched condition, and pouring out importunate groans for relief, thus: *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke*, that struggles and wearies himself in vain to get free from it, and must be broken and tamed with severe usage. "Thus stubborn and unmanageable have I been; and now when I am convinced of the necessity of a return to thee, I feel my obstinate heart reluctate, like a wild ox, and I cannot come. I therefore cry to thee for the attractive influence of thy grace." *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; draw me, and I shall run after thee.* "To whom but to thee shall I return, and to whom but to thee shall I apply for strength to return? For thou only art the Lord my God, who can help me, and whom I am under infinite obligations to serve." Thus the awakened sinner prayed; and mercy listened to his cries. The attractive influences of divine grace are granted, and he is enabled to return: which introduces the second branch of the text in the 19th verse, in which the new convert is represented as reflecting upon the efficacy of converting grace, and the glorious change wrought in him by it: *Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.* The third part of the text represents the blessed God listening to the cries of his mourning child. I shall endeavor to illustrate each of these parts of the text, and thus shall be led to describe the preparative exercises, the nature and concomitants of true repentance, and the tender compassions of Heaven towards mourning penitents.

I. Let us view the returning sinner under his first spiritual concern, which is generally preparatory to evangelical repentance. And where shall we find him? And what is he doing? We shall not find him, as usual, in a thoughtless hurry about earthly things, confining all his attention to these trifles, and unmindful of the important concerns of eternity. We shall not find him merry, inconsiderate, and

vain, in a circle of jovial, careless companions; much less shall we find him intrepid and secure in a course of sin, gratifying his flesh, and indulging his lusts. In this enchanted road the crowds of hardy impenitents pass secure and cheerful down to the chambers of death, but the awakened sinner flies from it with horror; or, if his depraved heart would tempt him to walk in it, he cannot take many steps before he is shocked with the horrid apparition of impending danger. He finds the flattering paths of sin haunted with the terrible spectres of guilt, and the sword of divine vengeance gleams bright and dreadful before him, and seems lifted to give the fatal blow. You will therefore find the awakened sinner solitary and solemn in some retired corner, not deceiving himself with vain hopes of safety in his present state, but alarmed with apprehensions of danger; not planning schemes for his secular advantage, nor asking with sordid anxiety, "Who will show me any temporal good?" but solicitous about his perishing soul, and anxiously inquiring, *What shall I do to be saved?* He is no more senseless, hard-hearted, and self-applauding, as he was wont to be; but like a mourning turtle, he bewails himself in such tragical strains as these: "Unhappy creature that I am! Into what a deplorable state have I brought myself! and how long have I continued in it with the insensibility of a rock and the stupidity of a brute? Now I may mourn over my past, neglected, and unimproved days, and so many deceased friends, sent indeed by Heaven to do no good, but cruelly killed by my ungrateful neglect and continued delays as to a return to God and holiness. Here I am a guilty, obnoxious creature, uncertain of life, and unfit to die; alienated from God, and incapable (alas! I may add unwilling) to return, a slave to sin, and too feeble to break the fetters of inveterate habits; liable to the arrest of divine justice, and unable to deliver myself; exposed to the vengeance of Heaven, yet can make no atonement; destitute of an interest in Christ, and uncertain whether I shall ever obtain it. Unhappy creature! Pity me, ye brute creation, that know not how to sin, and therefore cannot know the misery of my case; and have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends! and if these guilty lips may dare to pronounce thy injured name, O thou God of grace, have pity upon me! But alas! I deserve no pity, for how long have I denied it to myself! Ah! infatuated wretch! Why did

not I sooner begin to secure my unhappy soul, that has lain all this time neglected and unpitied upon the brink of ruin?"

THOU HAST CHASTISED ME. This, as spoken by Ephraim, had a particular reference to the Babylonish captivity; but we may naturally take occasion from it to speak of those calamities in general, whether outward or inward, that are made the means of alarming the secure sinner.

Sometimes God awakens the sinner to bethink himself, by stripping him of his earthly supports and comforts, his estate, or his relatives, which drew away his heart from eternal things, and thus brings him to see the necessity of turning to God, the fountain of bliss, upon the failure of the streams. Thus he dealt with profligate Manasseh. He was taken *in thorns, and in fetters, and carried to Babylon; and when he was in affliction he besought the Lord, and humbled himself greatly before him and prayed unto him.*

But the principal means of correction which God uses for the end of return to him is that of conscience; and, indeed, without this, all the rest are in vain. Outward afflictions are of service only as they tend to awaken the conscience from its lethargy to a faithful discharge of its trust. It is conscience that makes the sinner sensible of his misery, and scourges him to a sense of his duty. This is a chastisement the most severe that human nature can endure. The lashes of a guilty conscience are intolerable; and some, under them, have chosen strangling and death rather than life. Let not such of you as have never been tortured with its remorse, congratulate yourselves upon your happiness, for you are not innocent; and therefore conscience will not always sleep; it will not always lie torpid and inactive, like a snake benumbed with cold, in your breast. It will awaken you either to your conversion or condemnation. Either the fire of God's wrath, flaming from his law, will enliven it in this world to sting you with medicinal anguish; or the unquenchable fire of his vengeance in the lake of fire and brimstone will thaw it into life; and then it will horribly rage in your breast, and diffuse its tormenting poison through your whole frame: then it will become a never-dying worm, and prey upon your hearts for ever. But if you now suffer it to pain you with salutary remorse, and awaken you to a tender sensibility of your danger, this intestine enemy will, in the end,



become your bosom friend, will support you under every calamity, and be your faithful companion and guardian through the most dangerous paths of life. Therefore now submit to its most wholesome severities, now yield to its chastisements.

You see, my brethren, the obstinate reluctance of an awakened sinner to return to God. *I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.* Like a wild young bullock, he would range at large, and is impatient of the yoke of the law and the restraints of conscience. He loves his sin, and cannot bear to part with it. He has no relish for the exercises of devotion and ascetic mortification, and therefore will not submit to them. The way of holiness is disagreeable to his depraved heart, and he will not turn his feet to it. He loves to be stupidly easy and serene in mind, and cannot bear to be checked in his pursuit of business or pleasure by anxieties of heart, and therefore he is impatient of the honest warnings of his conscience, and uses a variety of wretched expedients to silence its clamorous remonstrances. In short, he will do any thing, he will turn to any thing, rather than to God. If his conscience will be but satisfied, he will forsake many of his sins; he will, like Herod, do many things, and walk in the whole round of outward duties. All this he will do, if his conscience will be bribed by it. But if conscience enlarges its demands, and, after he has reformed his life, requires him to make him a new heart—requires him to turn not only from the outward practice of gross vices, but from the love of all sin; and not only to turn to the observance of religious duties, but to turn to the Lord with all his heart, and surrender himself entirely to him, and make it the main business of life to serve him; if conscience, I say, carries its demands thus far, he cannot bear it—he struggles to throw off the yoke. And some are cursed with horrid success in the attempt; they are permitted to rest content in a partial reformation, or external religion, as sufficient, and so go down to the grave *with a lie in their right hand.* But the happy soul, on whom divine grace is determined to finish its work in spite of all opposition, is suffered to weary itself out in a vain resistance of the chastisements of conscience, till it is obliged to yield and submit to the yoke. And then, with Ephraim, it will cry, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned.* This is the mourning sinner's lan-

guage when convinced that he must submit and turn to God, and in the mean time finds himself utterly unable to turn. Many essays he makes to give himself to the Lord; but oh! his heart starts back, and shrinks away as though he were rushing into flames, when he is but flying to the gracious embraces of his Father. He strives, and strives to drag it along, but all in vain. And what shall he do in this extremity, but cry, *Lord, turn thou me, and I shall be turned; draw me, and I shall run after thee.* Lord, though I am sensible of the necessity of turning to thee, though I exert my feeble strength in many a languid effort to come, yet I cannot, I cannot so much as creep towards thee, though I should die on the spot. Not only thy word, but my own experience now convinces me that I cannot come unto thee unless thou draw me. Here I lie, a helpless creature, unable to go to the physician, unable to accept of pardon and life on the easy terms of the gospel, and unable to free myself from the bondage of sin; and thus I must be for ever, unless that God, from whom I have revolted draws me back to himself. Turn me, O thou that hast the hearts of all men in thy hands, and canst turn them whithersoever thou pleasest, turn me; and then, weak and reluctant as I am, I shall be turned; this backward heart will yield to the almighty attraction of grace. "Here am I, as passive clay in the hand of the potter, incapable to fashioning myself into a vessel fit for thy house; but thou canst form me as thou pleasest. This hard and stubborn heart will be pliable to thine irresistible power." Thus you see the awakened sinner is driven to earnest prayer in his exigence. Never did a drowning man call for help, or a condemned malefactor plead for pardon with more sincerity and ardor. If the sinner had neglected prayer all his life before, now he flies to it as the only expedient left; or if he formerly ran it over in a careless, unthinking manner, as an insignificant form, now he exerts all the importunity of his soul; now he prays as for his life, and cannot rest till his desires are answered.

Having viewed Ephraim under the preparatory work of legal conviction, and the dawn of evangelical repentance, let us view him,

II. As reflecting upon the surprising efficacy of grace he had sought, and which was bestowed upon him in answer to his prayer.

We left him just now crying, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned*; here we find him actually turned. *Surely, after I was turned I repented.* When the Lord exerts his power to subdue the stubbornness of the sinner, and sweetly to allure him to himself, then the sinner repents; then his heart dissolves in ingenuous, disinterested relentings. His sorrow and concern before conversion are forced and mercenary; they are occasioned only by a selfish fear of punishment, and he would willingly get rid of them; but now his grief is free and spontaneous; it flows from his heart as freely as streams from a fountain, and he takes pleasure in tender relentings before the Lord for his sin; he delights to be humble, and to feel his heart dissolve within him. A heart of flesh, soft and susceptible of impressions, is his choice, and a stony, insensible heart his greatest burden; the more penitent the more happy, and the more senseless the more miserable he finds himself.

We learn from this passage, that the true penitent is sensible of a mighty turn in his temper and inclinations. *Surely, after I was turned I repented.* His whole soul is turned from what he formerly delighted in, and turned to what he had no relish for before. Particularly his thoughts, his will and affections are turned to God; there is a heavenly bias communicated to them which draws them to holiness, like the law of gravitation in the material world. There is indeed a new turn given to his outward practice; the world may see that he is a new man. But this is not all; the first spring that turns all the wheels of the soul and actions of life is the heart, and this is first set right. The change within is as evident as that without, could our eyes penetrate the heart. In short, *if any man be in Christ, he is throughout a new creature: old things are passed away, and behold all things are become new.*

Apply this touchstone to your hearts, my brethren, and see if they will stand the test.

III. Let us notice the compassion of God towards mourning penitents.

While they are bemoaning their case, and conscious that they do not deserve one look of love from God, he is represented as attentively listening to catch the first penitential groan that breaks from their hearts. Ephraim, in the depth of his despondency, probably did hardly hope that God took any notice of his secret sorrows, which he sup-

pressed as much as possible from the public view: but God heard him—God watching to hear the first mournful cry; and he repeats all his complaints, to let him know (after the manner of men) what particular notice he had taken of them. “*I have surely heard, or hearing I have heard;*” that is, “I have attentively heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus.”

What strong consolation may this give to desponding mourners, who think themselves neglected by that God to whom they are pouring out their weeping supplications! He hears your secret groans, he courts your sighs, and puts your tears into his bottle. His eyes penetrate all the secrets of your heart, and he observes all their feeble struggles to turn to himself; and he beholds you, not as an unconcerned spectator, but with all the tender emotions of fatherly compassion. “For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still.” Many and dreadful were the threatenings denounced against the sinner while impenitent; and, had he continued impenitent, they would certainly have been executed upon him. But the primary and immediate design of the threatenings are to make men happy, and not to make them miserable; they are designed to deter them from disobedience, which is naturally productive of misery, or to reclaim them from it, which is but to restrain them in their career of ruin. And consequently these threatenings proceed from love as well as the promises of our God—from love to the person, though from hatred to sin. Thus when the primary end of the divine threatenings, namely, the deterring and reclaiming men from disobedience is not obtained, then it becomes necessary that they should be executed upon the impenitent in their dreadful extent; but when the sinner is brought to repentance, and to submit to the divine government, then all these threatenings are repealed, and they shall not hurt one hair of his head. And the sinner himself shall acknowledge that these threatenings proved necessary mercies to him, and that the denunciation of everlasting punishment was one means of bringing him to everlasting happiness, and that divine vengeance in this sense conspired with divine grace to save him.

Consider this, ye desponding penitents and allay your terrors. That God, who has written such bitter things against you in his word, earnestly and affectionately remem-

bers you still, and it was with a kind intent to you, that he thundered out these terrors of which you tremble. These acids, this bitter physic, were necessary for your recovery. These coals of fire were necessary to awaken you out of your lethargy. Therefore read the love of your Father, even in these solemn warnings. He affectionately remembers you still; he cannot put you out of his thoughts.

And can you, ye mourners in Zion, can you fear a rejection from such a tender Father? Can you dread to venture upon such abundant mercies? Is there a mourning Ephraim in this assembly? I may call you as God did Adam, *Ephraim, where art thou?* Let the word of God find you out, and force a little encouragement upon you: your heavenly Father, whose angry hand you fear, is listening to your groans, and will measure you out a mercy for every groan, a blessing for every sigh, a drop, a draught of consolation for every tear. His bowels are moving over you, and he addresses you in such language as this, "Is this my dear son? is this my pleasant child?" And as to you, ye hardy impenitents, ye abandoned profligates, ye careless formalists, ye almost Christians, can you hear these things, and not begin to relent? Do you not find your frozen hearts begin to thaw within you? Can you resist such alluring grace? Can you bear the thoughts of continuing enemies to so good, so forgiving a Father? Does not Ephraim's petition now rise in your hearts, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned?* then I congratulate you upon this happy day; you are this day become God's sons, the children of his delights. Is there a wretch so senseless, so wicked, so abandoned, as to refuse to return? Where art thou, hardy rebel? Stand forth and meet the terrors of thy doom. To thee I must change my voice, and instead of representing the tender compassions of a Father, must denounce the terrors of an angry Judge. Thy doom is declared, and fixed by the same lips that speak to penitents in such encouraging strains; by those gracious lips that never uttered a harsh censure. *Thou art treasuring up wrath in horrid affluence against the day of wrath.*—Rom. ii. 5. *God is jealous, and revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries; and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The mountains quake at him; the hills melt; the earth is burnt at his presence; yea, the world, and they that dwell therein. Who can stand before*

*his indignation? Who can endure the fierceness of his anger? —Nehem. i. 2-5. These flaming thunderbolts, sinner, are aimed at thy heart, and if thou canst harden thyself against these terrors, let me read thy doom before we part. You have it pronounced by God himself in Deuteronomy, the twenty-ninth chapter, at the nineteenth and following verses: If it come to pass that when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart—the Lord shall not spare him: but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven; and the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law. And now, sinner, if thou canst return home careless and senseless with this heavy curse upon thee, expect not a word of comfort, expect no blessing till thou art made truly penitent; for “how shall I bless whom God has not blessed?” The ministerial blessing falls upon one on thy right hand, and one on thy left, but it lights not upon thee. The curse is thy lot, and this must thou have, at the hand of God, if thou continuest hardened and insolent in sin. Consider this, all ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

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## X.

### THINGS UNSEEN TO BE PREFERRED TO THINGS SEEN.

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—2 Cor. iv. 18.

AMONG all the causes of the stupid unconcernedness of sinners about religion, and the feeble endeavors of saints to improve it, there is none more common or more effectual than their not forming a due estimate of the things of time, in comparison of those of eternity. Our present affairs engross all our thoughts and exhaust all our activity, though they are but transitory trifles; while the awful realities of the future world are hid from our eyes by the

veil of flesh and the clouds of ignorance. Did these break in upon our minds in all their almighty evidence and tremendous importance, they would annihilate the most majestic vanities of the present state, obscure the glare of earthly glory, render all its pleasures insipid, and give us a noble insensibility under all its sorrows. A realizing view of these would shock the libertine in his thoughtless career, tear off the hypocrite's mask, and inflame the devotion of languishing saints. The concern of mankind would then be how they might make a safe exit out of the world, and not how they might live happy in it. Present pleasure and pain would be swallowed up in the prospect of everlasting happiness or misery hereafter. Eternity, awful eternity, would then be our serious contemplation. The pleasures of sin would strike us with horror, if they issue in eternal pain; and our afflictions, however tedious and severe, would appear light and momentary, if they work out for us *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.

These were the views the apostle had of things, and these their effects upon him. He informs us in this chapter of his unwearied zeal to propagate the gospel amidst all the hardships and dangers that attended the painful discharge of his ministry. Though he bore about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, though he was always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, yet he fainted not; and this was the prospect that animated him, that his *light affliction, which is but for a moment, would work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. When we view his sufferings absolutely without any reference to eternity, they were very heavy and of many years' continuance; and when he represents them in this view, how moving is the relation! But when he views them in the light of eternity, and compared with their glorious issues, they sink into nothing; then scourging, stoning, imprisonment, and all the various deaths to which he was daily exposed, are but light, trifling afflictions, hardly worth naming; then a series of uninterrupted sufferings for many years are but afflictions that endure for a moment. And when he views a glorious futurity, human language cannot express the ideas he has of the happiness reserved for him; *it is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*; a noble sentiment! and expressed in the sublimest manner the language of mortals can admit of.

It is glory in opposition to affliction; a weight of glory in opposition to light affliction; a massy oppressive blessedness, which it requires all the powers of the soul, in their full extension, to support: to finish all, it is a *far more exceeding glory*. What greater idea can be grasped by the human mind, or expressed in the feeble language of mortality! Nothing but feeling that weight of glory could enlarge his conception; and nothing but the dialect of heaven could better express it. No wonder that, with this view of things, *he could reckon the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed*.

My present design, and the contents of the text, prescribes to me the following method:

I. I shall give you a comparative view of visible and invisible things, that you may see the trifling nature of the one, and the importance of the other. This I choose to do under one head, because by placing these two classes of things in an immediate opposition we may the more easily compare them, and see their infinite disparity. And,

II. I shall show you the great and happy influence a suitable impression of the superior importance of invisible to visible things would have upon us.

I. I shall give you a comparative view of visible and invisible things; and we may compare visible and invisible things, as to their intrinsic value, and as to their duration.

1. As to their intrinsic value, and in this respect the disparity is inconceivable.

This I shall illustrate in the two comprehensive instances of pleasure and pain. To shun the one and obtain the other is the natural effort of the human mind. This is its aim in all its endeavors and pursuits. The innate desire of happiness and aversion to misery are the two great springs of all human activity, and were these springs relaxed or broken, all business would stagnate, and universal torpor would seize the world. And these principles are co-existent with the soul itself, and will continue in full vigor in a future state. Nay, as the soul will then be matured, and all its powers arrived at their complete perfection, this eagerness after happiness and aversion to misery will be also more quick and vigorous. The soul in its present state of infancy, like a young child, or a man enfeebled and stupefied by sickness, is incapable of very deep sensations of



pain and pleasure; and hence an excess of joy, as well as sorrow, has sometimes dissolved its feeble union with the body. On this account we are incapable of such degrees of happiness or misery from the things of this world as beings of more lively sensations might receive from them, and much more are we incapable of the happiness or misery of the future world until we have put on immortality. We cannot see God and live. But in the future world all the powers of the soul will be mature and strong, and the body will be clothed with immortality; the union between them after the resurrection will be inseparable, and able to support the most oppressive weight of glory, or the most intolerable load of torment. Hence it follows that pleasure and pain include all that we can desire or fear in the present or future world: and therefore a comparative view of present and future pleasure and pain is sufficient to enable us to form a due estimate of visible and invisible things. By present pleasure, I mean all the happiness we can receive from present things, as from riches, honors, sensual gratifications, learning, and intellectual improvements, and all the amusements and exercises of this life. And by future pleasure, or the pleasure which results from invisible things, I mean all the fruitions and enjoyments in which heavenly happiness consists. By present pain, I intend all the uneasiness which we can receive from the things of the present life, as poverty, losses, disappointments, bereavements, sickness, and bodily pains. And by future pain, I mean all the punishments of hell—as banishment from God, and a privation of all created blessings, the agonizing reflections of a guilty conscience, the horrid company and execrations of infernal ghosts, and the torture of infernal flames.

Now let us put these in a balance, and the one will sink into nothing, and the other rise into infinite importance.

1. Visible things are not equal to the capacities of the human soul. This little spark of being, the soul, which lies obscured in this prison of flesh, gives frequent discoveries of surprising powers; its desires in particular have a kind of infinity. But all temporary objects are mean and contracted; they cannot afford it a happiness equal to its capacity, nor render it as miserable as its capacity of suffering will bear. Hence, in the greatest affluence of

temporal enjoyments, in the midst of honors, pleasures, riches, friends, &c., it still feels a painful void within, and finds an unknown something wanting to complete its happiness. Kings have been unhappy upon their thrones, and all their grandeur has been but majestic misery. So Solomon found it, who had opportunity and curiosity to make the experiment; and this is his verdict upon all earthly enjoyments, after the most impartial trial, "Vanity of vanities," saith the preacher, "vanity of vanities; all is vanity and vexation of spirit." On the other hand, the soul may possess some degree of happiness, under all the miseries it is capable of suffering from external and temporal things. But, O, when we take a survey of invisible things, we find them all great and majestic, not only equal but infinitely superior to the most enlarged powers of the human and even of the angelic nature. The objects of our contemplation will then be either the unveiled glories of the divine nature, and the naked wonders of creation, providence, and redemption, or the terrors of divine justice, the dreadful nature and aggravations of our sin, the horrors of everlasting punishment, &c. And since this is the case, how little should we regard the things that are seen, in comparison of them that are not seen? But though visible things were adequate to our present capacities, yet they are not to be compared with the things that are not seen, because,

2. The soul is at present in a state of infancy, and incapable of such degrees of pleasure or pain as it can bear in the future world. The enjoyments of this life are like the playthings of children, but the invisible realities before us are manly and great, and such as an adult soul ought to concern itself with. How foolish is it then to be chiefly governed by these puerilities, while we neglect the manly concerns of eternity, that can make our souls perfectly happy or miserable, when their powers are come to perfection!

3. All the happiness and misery of the present state, resulting from things that are seen, are intermingled with contrary ingredients. We are never so happy in this world, as to have no uneasiness; in the greatest affluence we languish for some absent good, or grieve under some incumbent evil. On the other hand, we are never so miserable as to have no ingredient of happiness. When

we labor under a thousand calamities, we may still see ourselves surrounded with, perhaps, an equal number of blessings. And where is there a wretch so miserable as to endure simple unmingled misery without one comfortable ingredient? But in the invisible world there is an eternal separation made between good and evil, pleasure and pain: and they shall never mingle more. In heaven, the rivers of pleasure flow untroubled with a drop of sorrow; in hell, there is not a drop of water to mitigate the fury of the flame. Who, then, would not prefer the things that are not seen to those that are seen? Especially if we consider,

4. The infinite disparity between them as to duration. This is the difference particularly intended in the text; *the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal*. Before we illustrate these instances of disparity, let us take a view of time and eternity, in themselves, and as compared to one another.

Time is the duration of creatures in the present state. It commenced at the creation, and near six thousand years of it are since elapsed, and how much of it yet remains we know not. But this we know, that the duration of the world itself is as nothing in comparison of eternity. Now the span of time we enjoy in life is all our time; we have no more property in the rest of it than in the years before the flood. All beside is eternity. "Eternity!" We are alarmed at the sound! Lost in the prospect! Eternity, with respect to God, is a duration without beginning as well as without end! Eternity, as it is the attribute of human nature, is a duration that had a beginning but shall never have an end. This is inalienably entailed upon us poor dying worms; and let us survey our inheritance. Eternity! it is a duration that excludes all number and computation; days, and months, and years, yea, and ages are lost in it, like drops in the ocean. Millions of millions of years, as many years as there are sands on the sea-shore, or particles of dust in the globe of the earth, and these multiplied to the highest reach of numbers, all these are nothing to eternity. They do not bear the least imaginable proportion to it; for these will come to an end, as certain as day; but eternity will never, never come to an end. It is a line without end; it is an ocean without a shore. Alas! what shall I say of it! It is an infinite un-

known something, that neither human thought can grasp nor human language describe.

Now place time in comparison with eternity, and what is it? It shrinks into nothing, and less than nothing. What, then, is that little span of time in which we have any property? Alas! it is too diminutive a point to be conceived. Indeed, properly speaking, we can call no part of time our own but the present moment, this fleeting *now*: future time is uncertain, and we may never enjoy it; the breath that we now respire may be our last; and as to our past time, it is gone, and will never be ours again. Our past days are dead and buried, though perhaps guilt, their ghost, may haunt us still. And what is a moment to eternity? The disparity is too great to admit of comparison.

Let me now resume the former particulars, implied in the transitoriness of visible and eternity of invisible things.

Visible things are perishable and may soon leave us. When we think they are ours, they often fly from our embrace. Riches may vanish into smoke and ashes by an accidental fire. We may be thrown down from the pinnacle of honor, and sink the lower into disgrace. Sensual pleasures often end in satiety and disgust, or in sickness and death. Our friends are torn from our bleeding hearts by the inexorable hand of death. In a word, what do we enjoy but we may lose? On the other hand, our miseries here are temporary; the heart receives many a wound, but it heals again. Poverty may end in riches; a clouded character may clear up, and from disgrace we may rise to honor; we may recover from sickness; and if we lose one comfort we may obtain another. But in eternity every thing is everlasting and unchangeable. Happiness and misery are both of them without end; and the subjects of both well know that this is the case. O how transporting for the saints on high to look forward through the succession of eternal ages, with an assurance that they shall be happy through them all, and that they shall feel no change but from glory to glory! On the other hand, this is the bitterest ingredient in the cup of divine displeasure in the future state, that the misery is eternal. O with what horror does that despairing cry, For ever, for ever, for ever! echo through the vaults of hell! Eternity is such an important attribute, that it gives infinite weight to things that would be insignificant, were they temporary. A small de-

gree of happiness, if it be eternal, exceeds the greatest degree that is transitory; and a small degree of misery that is everlasting is of greater importance than the greatest degree that soon comes to an end. Again, should we consider all the ingredients and causes of future happiness and misery, we should find them all everlasting. The blessed God is an inexhaustible perennial fountain of bliss; his image can never be erased from the hearts of glorified spirits; the great contemplation will always lie obvious to them; and they will always exist as the partakers and promoters of mutual bliss. On the other hand, in hell the worm of conscience dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; divine justice is immortal; malignant spirits will always exist as mutual tormentors, and their wicked habits will never be extirpated.

And now, need I offer any thing further to convince you of the superior importance of invisible and eternal to visible and temporary things? Can a rational creature be at a loss to choose in so plain a case? Can you need any argument to convince you that an eternity of the most perfect happiness is rather to be chosen than a few years of sordid unsatisfying delight? Or that the former should not be forfeited for the sake of the latter? Have you any remaining scruples, whether the little anxieties and mortifications of a pious life are more intolerable than everlasting punishment? O! it is a plain case: what, then, means an infatuated world, who lay out all their concern on temporal things, and neglect the important affairs of eternity? Let us illustrate this matter by supposition. Suppose a bird were to pick up and carry away a grain of sand or dust from the globe of this earth once in a thousand years, till it should be at length wholly carried away; the duration which this would take up appears an eternity to us. Now suppose it were put to our choice, either to be happy during this time, and miserable ever after, or to be miserable during this time, and happy ever after, which would you choose? Why, though this duration seems endless, yet he would be a fool that would not make the latter choice; for, O! behind this vast duration, there lies an eternity which exceeds it infinitely more than this duration exceeds a moment. But we have no such seemingly puzzling choice as this; the matter with us stands thus—Will you choose the little sordid pleasures of sin that may perhaps not last an hour, at most, not many years, rather than

everlasting pleasure, of the sublimest kind? Will you rather endure intolerable torment for ever, than painfully endeavor to be holy? What does your conduct, my brethren, answer to these questions? If your tongues reply, they will perhaps for your credit give a right answer; but what say your prevailing dispositions and common practice? Are you not more thoughtful for time than eternity? More concerned about visible vanities than invisible realities? If so, you make a fool's choice indeed.

But let it be further considered, that the transitoriness of invisible things may imply that we must ere long be removed from them. Though they were immortal it would be nothing to us, since we are not so in our present state. Within a few years, at most, we shall be beyond the reach of all happiness and misery from temporal things.

But when we pass out of this transitory state, we enter upon an everlasting state. Our souls will always exist; exist in a state of unchangeable, boundless happiness or misery. It is but a little while since we came into being out of a state of eternal non-existence; but we shall never relapse into that state again. These little sparks of being shall never be extinguished! they will survive the ruins of the world, and kindle into immortality. When millions of millions of ages are past, we shall still be in existence; and O! in what unknown region! In that of endless bliss, or of interminable misery! Be this the most anxious inquiry of our lives.

Seeing, then, we must soon leave this world, and all its joys and sorrows, and seeing we must enter on an unchangeable everlasting state of happiness or misery, be it our chief concern to end our present pilgrimage well. It matters but little whether we be easy or not during this night of existence, if so be we awake in eternal day. It is but a trifle, hardly worth a thought, whether we be happy or miserable here, if we be happy for ever hereafter. What, then, mean the bustle and noise of mankind about the things of time? O, sirs, eternity, awful, all-important eternity, is the only thing that deserves a thought. I come now, to show the great and happy influence a suitable impression of the superior importance of invisible to visible things would have upon us. This I might exemplify in a variety of instances with respect to saints and sinners. When we are tempted to any unlawful pleasures, how

would we shrink away with horror from the pursuit, had we a due sense of the misery incurred, and the happiness forfeited by it.

When we find our hearts excessively eager after things below, had we a suitable view of eternal things, all these things would shrink into trifles hardly worth a thought, much less our principal concern.

When the sinner, for the sake of a little present ease, and to avoid a little present uneasiness, stifles his conscience, refuses to examine his condition, casts the thoughts of eternity out of his mind, and thinks it too hard to attend painfully on all the means of grace, has he then a due estimate of eternal things? Alas! no; he only looks at the things that are seen. Were the mouth of hell open before him, that he might behold its torments, and had he a sight of the joys of paradise, they would harden him into a generous insensibility of all the sorrows and anxieties of this life, and his inquiry would not be, whether these things required of him are easy, but whether they are necessary to obtain eternal happiness, and avoid everlasting misery.

When we suffer any reproach or contempt on a religious account, how would a due estimate of eternal things fortify us with undaunted courage, and make us willing to climb to heaven through disgrace, rather than sink to hell with general applause!

How would a realizing view of eternal things animate us in our devotions? Were this thought impressed upon our hearts when in the secret or social duties of religion, "I am now acting for eternity," do you think we should pray, read, or hear with so much indifferency and languor? O no; it would rouse us out of our dead frames, and call forth all the vigor of our souls. With what unwearied importunity should we cry to God! with what eagerness hear the word of salvation! How powerful an influence would a view of futurity have to alarm the secure sinner that has thought little of eternity all his life, though it be the only thing worth thinking of!

How would it hasten the determination of the lingering, wavering sinner, and shock him at the thought of living one day unprepared on the brink of eternity! In a word, a suitable impression of this would quite alter the aspect of things in the world, and would turn the concern and

activity of the world into another channel. Eternity then would be the principal concern. Our inquiries would not be, Who will show us any temporal good? What shall we eat, or what shall we drink? But, What shall we do to be saved? How shall we escape the wrath to come? Let us then endeavor to impress our hearts with invisible things, and for that purpose consider, that,

We shall, ere long, be engulfed in this awful eternity, whether we think of it or not. A few days or years will launch us there; and O, the surprising scenes that will then open to us!

Without deep impressions of eternity on our hearts, and frequent thoughtfulness about it, we cannot be prepared for it. And if we are not prepared for it, O, how inconceivably miserable our case! But if prepared, how inconceivably happy!



## XI.

### CHRIST PRECIOUS TO ALL TRUE BELIEVERS.

“Unto you, therefore, which believe, He is precious.”—1 *Peter*, ii. 7.

YES, blessed be God! though a great part of the creation is disaffected to Jesus Christ; though fallen spirits, both in flesh and without flesh, both upon earth and in hell, neglect him, or profess themselves open enemies to him, yet he is precious—precious not only in himself, not only to his Father, not only to the choirs of heaven, who behold his full glory without a veil, but precious to some even in our guilty world; precious to a sort of persons of our sinful race; who make no great figure in mortal eyes, who have no idea of their own goodness; who are mean unworthy creatures in their own view, and who are generally despicable in view of others; I mean he is precious to all true believers. And though they are but few comparatively in our world; though there are, I am afraid, but few additions made to them from among us; yet, blessed be God, there are some believers even upon our guilty globe; and, I doubt not, but I am now speaking to some such. My believing brethren, (if I may venture to



claim kindred with you,) I am now entering upon a design which I know you have much at heart: and that is, to make the blessed Jesus more precious to you, and, if possible, to recommend him to the affections of the crowd that neglect him. You know, alas! you love him but little, but very little, compared to his infinite excellency and your obligations to him; and you know that multitudes love him not at all. Whatever they profess, their practice shows that their carnal minds are at enmity against him. This you often see, and the sight affects your hearts. It deeply affects you to think so much excellency should be neglected and despised, and so much love meet with such base returns of ingratitude.

*To you that believe, he is precious.*—He?—Who? Is it mammon, the god of the world? Is it pleasure, or honor? No; none of these is the darling of the believing heart. But it is he who is the uppermost in every pious heart; he who is first in the thoughts and affections; he whom every friend of his must know, even without a name; if it be said of him, he is precious, this is enough to distinguish him from all others. It is this heavenly jewel that is precious to believers.

“*To you that believe, he is precious;*” *i. e.*, he is highly valued by you. You esteem him one of infinite worth, and he has the highest place in your affections. He is dearer to your hearts than all other persons and things. “*To you that believe, he is preciousness;*” preciousness in the abstract; all preciousness, and nothing but preciousness; a precious stone without one blemish.

“*To you which believe, he is precious;*” that is to say, the value of this precious stone is, alas! unknown to the crowd. It is so far from being precious, that it is a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; a stone disallowed of men, rejected even by the builders, but you believers, ye happy few, have another estimate of it. Faith presents him to your view in a just light and directs you to form a proper estimate of him.

Is it any wonder that Jesus should be precious to believers, when he is so precious in himself, and in his offices, so precious to the angelic armies, and so precious to his Father?

1. He is precious in himself. He is Immanuel, God-man; and consequently, whatever excellences belong

either to the divine or human nature, centre in him. If wisdom, power, and goodness, divine or human, created or uncreated, can render him worthy of the highest affection, he has a just claim to it.—Whatever excellences, natural or moral, appear in any part of the vast universe, they are but faint shadows of his beauty and glory.

2. The Lord Jesus is precious in his offices. His mediatorial office is generally subdivided into three parts: namely, that of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king; and how precious is Christ in each of these!

As a prophet, how sweet are his instructions to a bewildered soul! How precious the words of his lips, which are the words of eternal life! How delightful to sit and hear him teach the way of duty and happiness, revealing the Father, and the wonders of the invisible state! How transporting to hear him declare upon what terms an offended God may be reconciled! a discovery beyond the searches of all the sages and philosophers of the heathen world! How reviving it is to listen to his gracious promises and invitations; promises and invitations to the poor, the weary, and heavy laden, the broken-hearted, and even to the chief of sinners! But this external objective instruction is not all that Christ as a prophet communicates; and, indeed, did he do no more than this, it would answer no valuable end. The mind of man, in his present fallen state, like a disordered eye, is incapable of perceiving divine things in a proper light, however clearly they are revealed; and therefore, till the perceiving faculty be rectified, all external revelation is in vain, and is only like opening a fair prospect to a blind eye. Hence this great Prophet,—carries his instructions farther, not only by proposing divine things in a clear objective light by his word, but inwardly enlightening the mind, and enabling it to perceive what is revealed by his Spirit. And how precious are these internal subjective instructions! How sweet to feel a disordered, dark mind opening to admit the shinnings of heavenly day; to perceive the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the beauties of holiness, and the majestic wonders of the eternal world! O precious Jesus! let us all this day feel thine enlightening influences, that experience may teach us how sweet they are! Come, great Prophet! come, and make thy Spirit our teacher, and then shall we be divinely wise!

Again, the Lord Jesus is precious to believers as a great High Priest. As a high priest, he made a complete atonement for sin by his propitiatory sacrifice on the cross; and he still makes intercession for the transgressors on his throne in heaven. It was his sacrifice that satisfied the demands of the law and justice of God, and rendered him reconcilable to the guilty, upon terms consistent with his honor and the rights of his government. It was by virtue of this sacrifice that he procured pardon of sin, the favor of God, freedom from hell, and eternal life for condemned obnoxious rebels. And such of you who have ever felt the pangs of a guilty conscience, and obtained relief from Jesus Christ, you can tell how precious his atoning sacrifice. How did it ease your self-tormenting conscience, and heal your broken hearts! How did it change the frowns of an angry God into smiles of love, and your trembling apprehensions of vengeance into delightful hopes of mercy!

Let us next turn our eyes upwards and view this great High Priest as our intercessor in the presence of God. There he appears as a lamb that was slain, bearing the memorials of his sacrifice, and putting the Father in remembrance of the blessings purchased for his people. Now how precious must Christ appear in the character of Intercessor! That the friendless sinner should have an all-prevailing advocate in the court of heaven to undertake his cause! That the great High Priest should offer up the grateful incense of his own merit, with the prayers of the saints! That he should not intercede occasionally, but always appear in the holy of holies as the constant ever-living intercessor, and maintain the same interest, the same importunity at all times, even when the petitions of his people languish upon their lips! What delightful reflections are these, and how warmly may they recommend the Lord Jesus to the hearts of believers! How just is the apostle's inference, *Hvaing a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith; and let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.*

Let me add, the kingly office of Christ is precious to believers. As king, he gives laws, laws perfectly wise and good, and enforced with the most important sanctions, everlasting rewards and punishments. As king, he appoints ordinances of worship. And how sweet to converse with

him in these ordinances, and to be freed from perplexity from the manner of worship which God will accept without being exposed to that question so confounding to worshippers, *who hath required this at your hands?* As king, he is head over all things to his church, and manages the whole creation, as is most subservient to her good. And how precious must he be in this august character to the feeble helpless believer! But this is not the whole exercise of the royal power of Christ. He not only makes laws and ordinances, and restrains the enemies of his people, but he exercises his power inwardly upon their hearts. He is the king of souls; he reigns in the hearts of his subjects; and how infinitely dear and precious is he in this view! To feel him subdue the rebellion within, sweetly bending the stubborn heart into willing obedience, and reducing every thought into a cheerful captivity to himself, writing his law upon the heart, making the dispositions of his subjects a transcript of his will, corresponding to it, like wax to the seal, how delightful is all this! O the pleasure of humble submission! How pleasant to lie as subjects at the feet of this mediatorial king without arrogating the sovereignty ourselves, for which we are utterly insufficient! Blessed Jesus! thus reign in our hearts! thus subdue the nations to the obedience of faith! *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty! and ride prosperously, attend with majesty, truth, meekness, and righteousness. Send the rod of thy strength out to Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies, rule us, and subdue the rebel in our hearts.*

3. He is precious to all the angels of heaven. Angels saw him, and admired and loved him in the various stages of his life, from his birth to his return to his native heaven. In every hour of difficulty they were ready to fly to his aid. He was seen of angels in his hard conflict in the garden of Gethsemane; and one of them *appeared unto him from heaven strengthening him.* With what wonder, sympathy, and readiness did this angelic assistant raise his prostrate Lord from the cold ground, wipe off his bloody sweat, and support his sinking spirit with divine encouragement! But O! ye blessed angels, ye usual spectators, and adorers of the divine glories of our Redeemer, with what astonishment and horror were you struck when you saw him expire on the cross!

But to bring his worth to the highest standard of all, I add,

4. He is infinitely precious to his Father, who thoroughly knows him, and is an infallible judge of real worth. He proclaimed more than once from the excellent glory, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. Behold,* says he, *my servant whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth.* And shall not the love of the omniscient God have weight with believers to love him too? It is the characteristic of even the meanest believer, that he is God-like. He is the partaker of the divine nature, and therefore views things, in some measure, as God does, and is affected towards them as God is, though there be an infinite difference as to the degree. He prevailingly loves what God loves, and that because God loves it. And, my hearers, what think you of Christ? Will you not think of him as believers do? If so, he will be precious to your hearts above all things for the future. Or if you disregard this standard of excellence, as being but the estimate of fallible creatures, will you not think of him as angels do? he died for you, which is more than ever he did for them, and will you not love him after all this love? Blessed Jesus! may not one congregation be got together, even upon our guilty earth, that shall in this respect be like the angels, all lovers of thee? O! why should this be impossible, while they are all so much in need of thee, all so much obliged to thee, and thou art so lovely in thyself! Why, my brethren, should not this congregation be made up of such, and such only, as are lovers of Jesus? Why should he not be precious to every one of you, rich and poor, old and young, white and black? What reason can any one of you give why you in particular should neglect him? I am sure you can give none.

If all this has no weight with you, let me ask you further, will you not agree to that estimate of Jesus which his Father has of him? How must Jehovah resent it to see a worm at his footstool daring to despise him, whom he loves so highly!

But I am shocked at my own attempt. O precious Jesus! are matters come to that pass in our world, that creatures bought with thy blood, creatures that owe all their hopes to thee, should stand in need of persuasions to love thee? What horrors attend the thought! However,

blessed be God, there are some, even among men, to whom he is precious. This world is not entirely peopled with the despisers of Christ. To as many of you as believe, he is precious, though to none else.

Would you know the reason of this? I will tell you: none but believers have eyes to see his glory, none but they are sensible of their need of him, and none but they have learned from experience how precious he is.

1. None but believers have eyes to see the glory of Christ. As the knowledge of Christ is entirely from revelation, an avowed unbeliever, who rejects that revelation, can have no right knowledge of him, and therefore must be entirely indifferent towards him, as one unknown, or must despise and abhor him as an enthusiast or impostor. But one, who is not an unbeliever in profession or speculation, may yet be destitute of that faith which constitutes a true believer, and which renders Jesus precious to the soul. True faith includes not only a speculative knowledge and belief, but a clear, affecting, realizing view, and a hearty approbation of the things known and believed concerning Jesus Christ; and such a view, such an approbation, cannot be produced by any human means, but only by the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit shining into the heart. Without such a faith as this, the mind is all dark and blind as to the glory of Jesus Christ; it can see no beauty in him, that he should be desired.

2. None but believers are properly sensible of their need of Christ. They are deeply sensible of their ignorance and the disorder of their understanding, and therefore they are sensible of their want of both the external and internal instructions of this divine Prophet. But as to others, they are puffed up with intellectual pride, and apprehend themselves in very little need of religious instruction, and therefore they think but very lightly of him. Believers feel themselves guilty, destitute of all righteousness, and incapable of making atonement for their sins, or recommending themselves to God, and therefore the satisfaction and righteousness of Jesus Christ are most precious to them, and they rejoice in him as their all-prevailing intercessor. But as to the unbelieving crowd, they have no such mortifying thoughts of themselves! they have so many excuses to make for their sins, that they bring down their guilt to a very trifling thing, hardly worthy of divine resent-

ment: and they magnify their good works to such a height, that they imagine they will nearly balance their bad, and procure them some favor at least from God, and therefore they must look upon this High Priest as needless.

3. None but believers have known by experience how precious he is. They, and only they, have known what it is to feel a bleeding heart healed by his gentle hand, and a clamorous languishing conscience pacified by his atoning blood. They, and only they, know by experience how pleasant it is to converse with him in his ordinances, and to spend an hour of devotion in some retirement, as it were in his company. They, and only they, have experienced the exertions of his royal power, conquering their mightiest sins, and sweetly subduing them to himself. These are, in some measure, matters of experience with every true believer, and therefore it is no wonder Jesus should be precious to them.

There is an interesting question, which, I doubt not, has risen in the minds of such of you as have heard what has been said with a particular application to yourselves, and keeps you in a painful suspense, with an answer to which I shall conclude: "Am I indeed a true believer?" may some of you say, "and is Christ precious to me? My satisfaction in this sweet subject is vastly abated, till this question is solved. Sometimes, I humbly think, the evidence is in my favor, and I begin to hope that he is indeed precious to my soul; but alas, my love for him soon languishes, and then my doubts and fears return, and I know not what to do, nor what to think of myself." Do not some of you, my brethren, long to have this perplexing case cleared up? O what would you not give, if you might return home this evening fully satisfied in this point? Well, I would willingly help you, for experience has taught me to sympathize with you under this difficulty. O my heart! how often hast thou been suspicious of thyself in this respect? The readiest way I can now take to clear up the matter is to answer another question, naturally resulting from my subject; and that is, "How does that high esteem which the believer has for Jesus Christ discover itself? Or, how does he show that Christ is indeed precious to him?" I answer, he shows it in various ways; particularly by his affectionate thoughts of him, which often rise in his mind, and always find welcome there. He dis-

covers that Jesus is precious to him, by hating and resisting whatever is displeasing to him, and by parting with every thing that comes in competition with him. He will let all go rather than part with Christ. Honor, reputation, ease, riches, pleasure, and even life itself, are nothing to him in comparison of Christ, and he will run the risk of all; nay, will actually lose all, if he may but win Christ. When Jesus favors him with his gracious presence, and revives him with his influence, how does he rejoice? But when his beloved withdraws himself and is gone, how does he lament his absence, and long for his return; he weeps and cries like a bereaved, deserted orphan, and moans like a loving turtle in the absence of its mate. Because Christ is precious to him, his interests are so too, and he longs to see his kingdom flourish, and all men fired with his love. Whatever has a relation to his precious Saviour is for that reason precious to him; and when he feels any thing of a contrary disposition, alas! it grieves him, and makes him abhor himself. These things are sufficient to show that the Lord Jesus has his heart, and is indeed precious to him; and is not this the very picture of some trembling, doubting souls among you? If it be, take courage. After so many vain searches, you have at length discovered the welcome secret, that Christ is indeed precious to you: and if so, you may be sure that you are precious to him. *You shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day that I make up my jewels.* If you are now satisfied, after thorough trial of the case, retain your hope, and let not every discouraging appearance renew your jealousies again; labor to be steady and firm Christians, and do not stagger through unbelief. But, alas! I fear that many of you know nothing experimentally of the exercises of a believing heart, which I have been describing, and consequently that Christ is not precious to you. If this is the case, you may be sure indeed you are hateful to him. He is angry with the wicked every day. "Those that honor him he will honor; and they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed." And what will you do if Christ should become your enemy and fight against you? If this precious stone should become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to you, over which you will fall into ruin, O how dreadful must the fall be? What must you expect but to lie down in unutterable and everlasting sorrow?



## XII.

## THE DANGER OF LUKEWARMNESS IN RELIGION.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."—*Rev.* iii. 15, 16.

THE soul of man is endowed with such active powers, that it cannot be idle; and if we look round the world, we see it all alive and busy in some pursuit or other. What vigorous action, what labor and toil, what hurry, noise, and commotion about the necessaries of life, about riches and honors! Here men are in earnest: here there is no dissimulation, no indifference about the event. They sincerely desire and eagerly strive for these transient delights, or vain embellishments of a mortal life.

And may we infer further, that creatures thus formed for action, and thus laborious and unwearied in these inferior pursuits, are proportionately vigorous and in earnest in matters of infinitely greater importance? May we conclude, that they proportion their labor and activity to the nature of things, and that they are most in earnest where they are most concerned? A stranger to our world, that could conclude nothing concerning the conduct of mankind but from the generous presumptions of his own charitable heart, might persuade himself that this is the case. But one that has been but a little while conversant with them, and taken the least notice of their temper and practice with regard to that most interesting thing, religion, must know it is quite otherwise. For look round you, and what do you see? Here and there indeed you may see a few unfashionable creatures, who act as if they looked upon religion to be the most interesting concern; and who seemed determined, let others do as they will, to make sure of salvation, whatever becomes of them in other respects; but, as to the generality, they are very indifferent about it. They will not indeed renounce all religion entirely; they will make some little profession of the religion that happens to be most modish or reputable in

their country, and they will conform to some of its institutions; but it is a matter of indifference with them, and they are but little concerned about it; or, in the language of my text, they are *lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot*.

This threatening, *I will spew thee out of my mouth*, has been long ago executed with dreadful severity upon the Laodicean church; and it is now succeeded by a mongrel race of Pagans and Mahometans; and the name of Christ is not heard amongst them. But though this church has been demolished for so many hundred years, that lukewarmness of spirit in religion which brought this judgment upon them still lives, and possesses the Christians of our age: it may therefore be expedient for us to consider Christ's friendly warning to them, that we may escape their doom.

The epistles to the seven churches in Asia are introduced with this solemn and striking preface, "I know thy works:" that is to say, your character is drawn by one that thoroughly knows you; one who inspects all your conduct, and takes notice of you when you take no notice of yourselves; one that cannot be imposed upon by an empty profession and artifice, but searches the heart and the reins. O! that this truth were deeply impressed upon our hearts: for surely we could not trifle and offend while sensible that we are under the eye of our Judge!

*I know thy works*, says he to the Laodicean church, *that thou art neither cold nor hot*. This church was in a very bad condition, and Christ reproves her with the greatest severity; and yet we do not find her charged with the practice or toleration of any gross immoralities, as some of the other churches were. She is not censured for indulging fornication among her members, or communicating with idolaters in eating things sacrificed to idols, like some of the rest. She was free from the infection of the Nicolaitans, which had spread among them. What, then, is her charge? It is a subtle, latent wickedness, that has no shocking appearance, that makes no gross blemish in the outward character of a possessor in the view of others, and may escape his own notice; it is, *Thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot*: as if our Lord had said, Thou dost not entirely renounce and openly disregard the Christian religion, and thou dost not make it a serious business, and mind it as thy grand concern. Thou hast the form of godliness, but deniest the power. All thy religion is a

dull languid thing, a mere indifferency; thine heart is not in it; it is not animated with the fervor of thy spirit. Thou hast neither the coldness of the profligate sinner, nor the sacred fire and life of the true Christian. Now such a lukewarmness is an eternal solecism in religion; it is the most absurd and inconsistent thing imaginable; more so than avowed impiety, or a profound rejection of all religion: therefore, says Christ, *I would thou wert cold or hot*—i. e. “You might be any thing more consistently than what you are. If you looked upon religion as a cheat, and openly rejected it, it would not be strange that you should be careless about it, and disregard it in practice. But to own it true, and make a profession of it, and yet be lukewarm and indifferent about it, this is the most absurd conduct that can be conceived; for, if it be true, it is certainly the most important and interesting truth in all the world, and requires the utmost exertion of all your powers.”

When Christ expresses his abhorrence of lukewarmness in the form of a wish, *I would thou wert cold or hot*, we are not to suppose his meaning to be, that coldness or fervor in religion is equally acceptable, or that coldness is at all acceptable to him; for reason and revelation concur to assure us, that the open rejection and avowed contempt of religion is an aggravated wickedness, as well as an hypocritical profession. But our Lord's design is to express in the strongest manner possible, how odious and abominable their lukewarmness was to him; as if he should say, “Your state is so bad, that you cannot change for the worse; I would rather you were any thing than what you are.” You are ready to observe, that the lukewarm professor is in reality wicked and corrupt at heart, a slave to sin, and an enemy to God, as well as the avowed sinner; and therefore they are both hateful in the sight of God, and both in a state of condemnation. But there are some aggravations peculiar to the lukewarm professor that render him peculiarly odious: as, 1. He adds the sin of a hypocritical profession to his other sins. The wickedness of irreligion, and the wickedness of falsely pretending to be religious, meet and centre in him at once. 2. To all this he adds the guilt of presumption, pride, and self-flattery, imagining he is in a safe state and in favor with God; whereas, he that makes no pretensions to religion, has no such umbrage for this conceit and delusion. Thus, the

miserable Laodiceans: "thought themselves rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing." 3. Hence it follows, that the lukewarm professor is in the most dangerous condition, as he is not liable to conviction, nor so likely to be brought to repentance. Thus publicans and harlots received the gospel more readily than the self-righteous Pharisees. 4. The honor of God and religion is more injured by the negligent, unconscientious behavior of these Laodiceans, than by the vices of those who make no pretensions to religion, with whom, therefore, its honor has no connection. On these accounts you see that lukewarmness is more aggravatedly sinful and dangerous than entire coldness about religion.

So then, says Christ, *Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.* This is their doom; as if he should say, "As lukewarm water is more disagreeable to the stomach than either cold or hot, so you, of all others, are the most abominable to me. I am quite sick of such professors, and I will cast them out of my church, and reject them for ever."

My present design is to expose the peculiar absurdity and wickedness of lukewarmness or indifference, a disease that has spread its deadly contagion far and wide among us, and calls for a speedy cure. And let me previously observe to you, that, if I do not offer you sufficient arguments to convince your own reason of the absurdity and wickedness of such a temper, then you may indulge it; but that if my arguments are sufficient, then shake off your sloth, and be fervent in spirit; and if you neglect your duty, be it at your peril.

In illustrating this point, I shall proceed upon this plain principle, *That religion is, of all things, the most important in itself, and the most interesting to us.* This we cannot deny, without openly pronouncing it an imposture. If there be a God, as religion teaches us, he is the most glorious, the most venerable, and the most lovely being; and nothing can be so important to us as his favor, and nothing so terrible as his displeasure. If Jesus Christ be such a Saviour as our religion represents, and we profess to believe, he demands our warmest love and most lively services. If eternity, if heaven and hell, and the final judgment, are realities, they are certainly the most august, the most awful, important, and interesting realities; and, in compari-

son of them, the most weighty concerns of the present life are but trifles, dreams, and shadows. If prayer and other religious exercises are our duty, certainly they require all the vigor of our souls; and nothing can be more absurd or incongruous than to perform them in a spiritless manner, as if we knew not what we were about. If there be any life within us, these are proper objects to call it forth: if our souls are endowed with active powers, here are objects that demand their utmost exertion. Here we can never be so much in earnest as the case requires. Trifle about any thing, but O, do not trifle here! Be careless and indifferent about crowns and kingdoms, about health, life, and all the world, but O be not careless and indifferent about such immense concerns as these!

But to be more particular: let us take a view of a lukewarm temper in various attitudes, or with respect to several objects, particularly towards God—towards Jesus Christ—a future state of happiness or misery—and in the duties of religion.

1. Consider who and what God is. He is the original uncreated beauty, the sum total of all natural and moral perfections, the origin of all the excellences that are scattered through this glorious universe; he is the supreme good, and the only portion of our immortal spirits. He also sustains the most majestic and endearing relations to us: our Father, our Preserver, and Benefactor, our Lawgiver, and our Judge. And is such a Being to be put off with heartless, lukewarm services? And are there not some lukewarm Laodiceans in this assembly? Jesus knows your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; and it is fit you should also know them.

2. Is lukewarmness a proper temper towards Jesus Christ! Is this a suitable return for that love which brought him down from his native paradise into our wretched world! That love which kept his mind for thirty-three painful and tedious years intent upon this one object, the salvation of sinners? That love which rendered him cheerfully patient of the shame, the curse, the tortures of crucifixion, and all the agonies of the most painful death? Blessed Jesus! is lukewarmness a proper return to thee for all this kindness? No; methinks devils cannot treat thee worse. My fellow-mortals, my fellow-sinners, who are the subjects of all this love, can you put him off with languid

devotions and faint services? May not Christ justly wish you were either cold or hot, wish you were any thing, rather than thus lukewarm towards him under a profession of friendship? Alas! my brethren, if this be your habitual temper, instead of being saved by him you may expect he will reject you with the most nauseating disgust and abhorrence. But,

3. Is lukewarmness and indifference a suitable temper with respect to a future state of happiness or misery? Is it a suitable temper with respect to a happiness far exceeding the utmost bounds of our present thoughts and wishes; a happiness beyond the grave, when all the enjoyments of this transitory life have taken an eternal flight from us; a happiness that will last as long as our immortal spirits, and never, never fade or fly from us? Or are lukewarmness and indifference a suitable temper with respect to a misery beyond expression, beyond conception dreadful; a misery inflicted by a God of almighty power and inexorable justice upon a number of obstinate, incorrigible rebels for numberless, willful, and daring provocations, inflicted on purpose to show his wrath and make his power known; a misery proceeding from the united fury of malicious, tormenting devils; a misery (who can bear up under the horror of the thought!) that shall last as long as the eternal God shall live to inflict it; as long as sin shall continue to deserve it; as long as an immortal spirit shall endure to bear it; a misery that shall never be mitigated, never intermitted, never, never, never see an end? And remember, that a state of happiness or misery is not far remote from us, but near us, just before us; the next year, the next hour, or the next moment, we may enter into it; it is a state for which we are now candidates, now upon trial; now our eternal all lies at stake: and, O sirs, does an inactive careless posture become us in such a situation? Is a state of such happiness, or such misery; is such a state just before us, a matter of indifference to us? O can you be lukewarm about such matters? was ever such prodigious stupidity seen under the canopy of heaven, or even in the regions of hell, which abound with monstrous and horrid dispositions. No; the hardest ghost below cannot make light of these things. Mortals! can you trifle about them? Well, trifle a little longer and your trifling will be over for ever. You may be indifferent about the improving

of your time; but time is not indifferent whether to pass by or not; it is determined to continue its rapid course, and hurry you into the ocean of eternity, though you should continue sleeping and dreaming through all the passage. Therefore awake, arise; exert yourselves before your doom be unchangeably fixed.

4. Let us see how this lukewarm temper agrees with the duties of religion. And as I cannot particularize them all, I shall only mention an instance or two. View a lukewarm professor in prayer; he pays to an omniscient God the compliment of a bended knee, as though he could impose upon him with such an empty pretence. When he is addressing the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth, he hardly even recollects in whose presence he is, or whom he is speaking to, but seems as if he were worshipping without an object, or pouring out empty words into the air: perhaps through the whole prayer he had not so much as one solemn affecting thought of that God whose name he so often invoked. And can there be a more shocking, impious, and daring conduct than this? What are such prayers but solemn mockeries and disguised insults? And yet, is not this the usual method in which many of you address the great God? Such sacrifices must be an *abomination to the Lord*;—and it is astonishing that he has not mingled your blood with your sacrifices, and sent you from your knees to hell—from thoughtless unmeaning prayer, to real blasphemy and torture.

The next instance I shall mention is with regard to the word of God. You own it divine, you profess it the standard of your religion, and the most excellent book in the world. Now if this be the case, it is God that speaks to you; it is God that sends you an epistle when you are reading or hearing his word. How impious and provoking then must it be to neglect it, to let it lie by you as an antiquated, useless book, or to read it in a careless, superficial manner, and hear it with an inattentive wandering mind? one would think you would tremble at his word. It reveals the only method of your salvation: it contains the only charter of all your blessings. In short, you have the nearest personal interest in it, and can you be unconcerned hearers of it? I am sure your reason and conscience must condemn such stupidity and indifference as incongruous, and outrageously wicked.

And now let me remind you of the observation I made when entering upon this subject, that if I should not offer sufficient matter for conviction, you might go on in your lukewarmness; but if your own reason should be fully convinced that such a temper is wicked and unreasonable, then you might indulge it at your peril. What do you say now in the issue? Ye modern Laodiceans, are you not yet struck with horror at the thought of that insipid, formal, spiritless religion you have hitherto been contented with? And do you not see the necessity of following the advice of Christ to the Laodicean church, *be zealous*, be fervent for the future, *and repent*, bitterly repent of what is past? To urge this the more, I have two considerations in reserve, of no small weight. 1. Consider the difficulties and dangers in your way. O sirs, if you knew the difficulty of the work of your salvation, and the great danger of miscarrying in it, you could not be so indifferent about it, nor could you flatter yourselves such languid endeavors will ever succeed. Consider, you have strong lusts to be subdued, a hard heart to be broken, a variety of graces which you are entirely destitute of, to be implanted and cherished, and that in an unnatural soil, where they will not grow without careful cultivation. In short, you must be made new men, quite other creatures than you now are. And, O! can this work be successfully performed while you make such faint and feeble efforts? Again, your dangers are also great and numerous; you are in danger from presumption and from despondency; from false fires and enthusiastic hearts; in danger from self-righteousness, and from open wickedness, from your own corrupt hearts, from this ensnaring world, and from the temptations of the devil: you are in great danger of sleeping on in security, without ever being thoroughly awakened; or if you should be awakened, you are in danger of resting short of vital religion; and in either of these cases you are undone for ever. In a word, dangers crowd thick around you on every hand, from every quarter; dangers, into which thousands, millions of your fellow-men have fallen and never recovered. 2. Consider how earnest and active men are in other pursuits. What labor and toil! what schemes and contrivances! what solicitude about success! what fears of disappointment! hands, heads, hearts, all busy. And all this to procure those enjoyments



which at best they cannot long retain, and which the next hour may tear from them. To acquire a name or a diadem, to obtain riches or honors, what hardships are undergone! what dangers dared! what rivers of blood shed! how many millions of lives have been lost! and how many more endangered! in short, the world is all alive, all in motion with business. On sea and land, at home and abroad, you will find men eagerly pursuing some temporal good. They grow gray-headed, and die in the attempt without reaching their end; but this disappointment does not discourage the survivors and successors; still they will continue, or renew the endeavor. Now here men act like themselves; and they show they are alive, and endowed with powers of great activity. And shall they be thus zealous and laborious in the pursuit of earthly vanities, and be quite indifferent and sluggish in the infinitely more important concerns of eternity? What, solicitous about a mortal body, but careless about an immortal soul! Eager in pursuit of joys of a few years, but careless and remiss in seeking an immortality of perfect happiness! Anxious to avoid poverty, shame, sickness, pain, and all the evils, real or imaginary, of the present life; but indifferent about a whole eternity of the most intolerable misery! O the destructive folly, the daring wickedness of such conduct! My brethren, is religion the only thing which demands the utmost exertion of all your powers, and, alas! is that the only thing in which you will be dull and inactive? Is everlasting happiness the only thing about which you will be remiss? Is eternal punishment the only misery which you are indifferent whether you escape or not? You can love the world, you can love a father, a child, or a friend; nay, you can love that abominable, hateful thing, sin; these you can love with ardor, serve with pleasure, pursue with eagerness, and with all your might; but the ever-blessed God, and the Lord Jesus your best friend, you put off with a lukewarm heart and spiritless services. O inexpressibly monstrous! Lord, what is this that has befallen thine own offspring, that they are so disaffected towards thee? Blessed Jesus, what hast thou done that thou shouldst be treated thus? O sinners! what will be the consequence of such a conduct? Will that God take you into the bosom of his love? will that Jesus save you by his blood, whom you make so light of? No, you may go and seek a heaven

where you can find it; for God will give you none. Go, shift for yourselves, or look out for a Saviour where you will; Jesus will have nothing to do with you, except to take care to inflict proper punishment upon you if you retain this lukewarm temper towards him. Hence, by way of improvement, learn,

1. The vanity and wickedness of a lukewarm religion. Though you should profess the best religion that ever came from heaven, it will not save you; nay, it condemns you with peculiar aggravations if you are lukewarm in it. This spirit of indifference diffused through it, turns it all into deadly poison. Your religious duties are all abominable to God while the vigor of your spirits is not exerted in them. Your prayers are insults, and he will answer them as such by terrible things in righteousness. And do any of you hope to be saved by such a religion? I tell you from the God of truth, it will be so far from saving you, that it will certainly ruin you for ever: continue as you are to the last, and you will be as certainly damned to all eternity, as Judas, or Beelzebub, or any ghost in hell. But, alas!

2. How common, how fashionable is this lukewarm religion? This is the prevailing epidemical sin of our age and country; and it is well if it has not the same fatal effect upon us as it had upon Laodicea. But it is our first concern to know how it is with ourselves; therefore, let this inquiry go round this congregation—Are you not such lukewarm Christians? Is there any fire and life in your devotions? Or are not all your active powers engrossed by other pursuits? Impartially make the inquiry, for infinitely more depends upon it than upon your temporal life.

3. If you have hitherto been possessed with this Laodicean spirit, I beseech you indulge it no longer. You have seen that it mars all your religion, and will end in your eternal ruin: and I hope you are not so hardened as to be proof against the energy of this consideration. Why halt you so long between two opinions? *I would you were cold or hot.* Either make thorough work of religion, or do not pretend to it. Why should you profess a religion which is but an insipid indifference with you? Such a religion is good for nothing. Therefore awake, arise, exert yourselves. Strive to enter in at the strait gate; strive

earnestly, or you are shut out for ever. Infuse heart and spirit into your religion. "Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might." Now, this moment, while my voice sounds in your ears, now begin the vigorous enterprise. Now collect all the vigor of your souls, and breathe it out in such a prayer as this, "Lord, fire this heart with thy love." Prayer is the proper introduction: for let me remind you of what I shall never forget, that God is the only author of this sacred fire; it is only he that can quicken you; therefore, ye poor careless creatures, fly to him in an agony of importunity, and never desist, never grow weary till you prevail.

4. And lastly, let the best of us lament our lukewarmness, and earnestly seek more fervor of spirit. Some of us have a little life; you enjoy some warm and vigorous moments; and O! they are divinely sweet. But reflect how soon your spirits flag, your devotion cools, and your zeal languishes. Think of this and be humble; think of this and apply for more life. You know where to apply. Christ is your life: therefore, cry to him for the communications of it. "Lord Jesus! a little more life, a little more vital heat to a languishing soul." Take this method, and *you shall run, and not be weary: you shall walk, and not be faint.*—Isaiah, xl. 31.

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### XIII.

#### THE GENERAL RESURRECTION.

"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."  
—*John*, v. 28, 29.

EVER since sin entered into the world, and death by sin, this earth has been a vast graveyard or burying-place for her children. In every age, and in every country, that sentence has been executing, *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* The earth has been arched with graves, the last lodgings of mortals, and the bottom of the ocean paved with the bones of men. Human nature was at first

confined to one pair, but how soon and how wide did it spread! How inconceivably numerous are the sons of Adam! How many different nations on our globe contain many millions of men, even in one generation! And how many generations have succeeded one another in the long run of near six thousand years! Let imagination call up this vast army: children that just light upon our globe, and then wing their flight into an unknown world; the gray-headed that have had a long journey through life; the blooming youth and the middle-aged, let them pass in review before us, from all countries and from all ages; and how vast and astonishing the multitude! But what has become of them all? Alas! they are turned into earth, their original element; they are all imprisoned in the grave, except the present generation, and we are dropping one after another in quick succession into that *place appointed for all living*. There has not been, perhaps, a moment of time for five thousand years, but what some one or other has sunk into the mansions of the dead. The greatest number of mankind beyond comparison are sleeping under ground. There lies beauty mouldering into dust. There lies the head that once wore a crown, as low and contemptible as the meanest beggar. There lie the mighty giants, the heroes and conquerors, the Samsons, the Ajaxes, the Alexanders, and the Cæsars of the world! There they lie—stupid, senseless, and inactive. There lie the wise and the learned, as helpless as the fool. There lie some that we once conversed with, some that were our friends, our companions; and there lie our fathers and mothers, our brothers and sisters. And shall they lie there always? Shall this body, this curious workmanship of Heaven, so wonderfully and fearfully made, always lie in ruins, and never be repaired? Shall the wide-extended valleys of dry bones never more live? This we know, that *it is not a thing impossible with God to raise the dead*. He that could first form our bodies out of nothing, is certainly able to form them anew, and repair the wastes of time and death. But what is his declared will in this case? On this the matter turns; and this is fully revealed in my text. *The hour is coming, when all that are in the grave, all that are dead, without exception, shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth*. And for what end shall they come forth? O! for very different purposes: *some to the*

*resurrection of life; and some to the resurrection of damnation!* And what is the ground of this distinction? Or what is the difference in character between those that shall receive so different a doom? It is this, *They that have done good shall rise to life, and they that have done evil to damnation.* It is this, and this only, that will then be the rule of distinction.

I. They that are in the grave shall hear his voice. The voice of the Son of God here probably means the sound of the archangel's trumpet, which is called his voice, because sounded by his orders and attended with his all-quickening power. This all-awakening call to the tenants of the grave we frequently find foretold in Scripture. *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.*

My brethren, realize the majesty and terror of this universal alarm. When the dead are sleeping in the silent grave; when the living are thoughtless and unapprehensive of the grand event, or intent on other pursuits; some of them asleep in the dead of night; some of them dissolved in sensual pleasures, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage: in short, when there are no more visible appearances of approaching day, than of the destruction of Sodom on that fine, clear morning in which Lot fled away; or of the deluge, when Noah entered into the ark; then, in that hour of unapprehensive security, then suddenly shall the heavens open over the astonished world; then shall the all-alarming clangor break over their heads, like a clap of thunder in a clear sky. Immediately the living turn their gazing eyes upon the amazing phenomenon: a few hear the long-expected sound with rapture, and lift up their heads with joy, while the thoughtless world are struck with the wildest horror and consternation. In the same instant the sound reaches all the mansions of the dead, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, they are raised, and the living are changed. O what a surprise will this be to the thoughtless world! Should this alarm burst over our heads this moment, into what a terror would it strike many in this assembly? Such will be the terror, such the consternation, when it actually comes to pass, sinners will be the same timorous, self-condemned creatures then as they are now. And then they will not be able to stop their ears, who are deaf to all the

gentle calls of the gospel now. Then the trump of God will constrain them to hear and fear, to whom the ministers of Christ now preach in vain. Then they must all hear, for,

II. My text tells you, *all that are in the graves*, all without exception, *shall hear his voice*. Now the voice of mercy calls, reason pleads, conscience warns, but multitudes will not hear. But this is a voice which shall, which must reach every one of the millions of mankind, and not one of them will be able to stop his ears. Infants and giants, kings and subjects, all ranks, all ages of mankind shall hear the call. The living shall start and be changed, and the dead rise at the sound.

III. *They shall come forth*. Then, my brethren, your dust and mine shall be re-animated and organized. And what a vast improvement will the frail nature of man then receive? Our bodies will then be substantially the same; but how different in qualities, in strength, in agility, in capacities for pleasure or pain, in beauty or deformity, in glory or terror, according to the moral character of the persons to whom they belong? And now when the bodies are completely formed and fit to be inhabited, the souls that once animated them, being collected from heaven and hell, re-enter and take possession of their old mansions. They are united in bonds which shall never more be dissolved; and the mouldering tabernacles are now become everlasting habitations.

O the glorious, dreadful morning of the resurrection! What scenes of unknown joy and terror will then open! Methinks we must always have it in prospect; it must even now engage our thoughts, and fill us with trembling solicitude, and make it the great object of our labor and pursuit to share in the resurrection of the just.

But for what ends do these sleeping multitudes rise? For what purposes do they come forth? My text will tell you.

IV. *They shall come forth, some to the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of damnation*. They are summoned from their graves to stand at the bar, and brought out of prison by angelic guards to pass their last trial. And as in this impartial trial they will be found to be persons of very different characters, the righteous Judge of the earth will accordingly pronounce their different doom.

See a glorious *multitude, which no man can number*, openly acquitted, *pronounced* blessed, and welcomed *into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world*. Now they enter upon a state which deserves the name of life. They are all vital, all active, all glorious, all happy. They *shine brighter than the stars in the firmament*; like the sun for ever and ever. All their faculties overflow with happiness. They mingle with the glorious company of angels; they behold that Saviour whom unseen they loved; they dwell in eternal intimacy with the Father of their spirits; they are employed with ever-new and growing delight in the exalted services of the heavenly sanctuary. They shall never more feel the least touch of sorrow, pain, or any kind of misery, but shall be as happy as their nature can adm.<sup>t</sup> through an immortal duration. What a glorious new creation is here! what illustrious creatures formed of the dust! And shall any of us join in this happy company, O shall any of us, feeble, dying, sinful creatures, share in their glory and happiness? This is a most interesting inquiry, and I would have you think of it with trembling anxiety.

The prospect would be delightful, if our charity could hope that this will be the happy end of all the sons of men. But, alas! multitudes, and we have reason to fear the far greater number, shall come forth, not to the resurrection of life, but to the resurrection of damnation! What terror is in the sound! If audacious sinners in our world make light of it, and pray for it on every trifling occasion, their infernal brethren that feel its tremendous import are not so hardy, but tremble and groan, and can trifle with it no more.

*These shall go away into everlasting punishment.* If they might be released from pain, though it were by annihilation, after they have wept away ten thousand millions of ages in extremity of pain, it would be some mitigation, some encouragement; but, alas! when as many millions of ages are passed as the stars of heaven, or the sand on the sea-shore, or the atoms of dust in this huge globe of earth, their punishment is as far from an end as when the sentence was pronounced upon them. For ever! there is no exhausting of that word; and when it is affixed to the highest degree of misery, the terror of the sound is utterly insupportable. See, sirs, what depends upon time, that

span of time we enjoy in this fleeting life. Eternity! awful, all-important eternity depend upon it. All this while conscience tears the sinner's heart with the most tormenting reflections. "O what a fair opportunity I once had for salvation, had I improved it! I was warned of the consequences of a life of sin and carelessness: I was told of the necessity of faith, repentance, and all the necessary means of salvation, and universal holiness of heart and life; but, fool that I was, I neglected all, I abused all; I refused to part with my sins; I refused to engage seriously in religion, and to seek God in earnest; and now I am lost for ever without hope. O! for one of those months, one of those weeks, or even so much as one of those days or hours I once trifled away; with what earnestness, with what solicitude would I improve it! But all my opportunities are past beyond recovery, and not a moment shall be given me for this purpose any more. O what a fool was I to sell my soul for such trifles! to set so light by heaven, and fall into hell through mere neglect and carelessness!" Ye impenitent, unthinking sinners, though you may now be able to silence or drown the clamors of your consciences, yet the time, or rather the dread eternity is coming, when they will speak in spite of you; when they will speak home, and be felt by the most hardened and remorseless heart. Therefore now regard their warnings while they may be the means of your recovery. You and I, my brethren, are concerned in the solemn transactions of the day I have been describing. You and I shall either be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, or while mouldering *in the grave, we shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth, either to the resurrection of life, or to the resurrection of damnation.* And which, my brethren, shall be our doom? Can we foreknow it at this distance of time? I proposed it to your inquiry already, whether you have any good reason to hope you shall be of that happy number who shall rise to life? and now I propose it again with this counterpart, Have you any evidences to hope you shall not be of that wretched numerous multitude who shall arise to damnation? If there be an inquiry within the compass of human knowledge that demands your solicitous thoughts, certainly it is this. Methinks you cannot enjoy one moment's ease or security while this is undetermined. And is it an answerable inquiry? Can



we know what are the present distinguishing characters of those who shall then receive so different a doom? Yes, my text determines the point; for

V. *They that have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.* These are the grounds of the distinction that shall then be made in the final states of men, doing good and doing evil. And certainly this distinction is perceivable now; to do good and to do evil are not so much alike as that it should be impossible to distinguish between them. Let us, then, see what is implied in these characters, and to whom of us they respectively belong.

1. What is it to do good? This implies, 1st, An honest endeavor to keep all God's commandments; I say, all his commandments, with regard to God, our neighbor, and ourselves, whether agreeable to our natural constitution or not, whether enjoining the performance of duty or forbidding the commission of sin, whether regarding the heart or the outward practice. I say a uniform impartial regard to all God's commandments, of whatever kind, in all circumstances, and at all times, is implied in doing good; for if we do any thing because God commands it, we will endeavor to do every thing that he commands, because where the reason of our conduct is the same, our conduct itself will be the same. I do not mean that good men in the present state perfectly keep the commandments of God in every thing, or indeed in any thing; but I mean that universal obedience is their honest endeavor. Their character is in some measure uniform and all of a piece; that is, they do not place all their religion in obedience to some commands which may be agreeable to them, as though that would make atonement for their neglect of others; but, like David, they are for having a respect, and, indeed, *have a respect to all God's commandments.* My brethren, try yourselves by this test,

2d. To do good in an acceptable manner presupposes a change of nature and a new principle. Our nature is so corrupted that nothing really and formerly good can be performed by us till it be renewed. To confirm this I shall only refer you to Eph. ii. 10, and Ezek. xxx. 26, 27, where being created in Christ Jesus to good works, and receiving a new heart of flesh, are mentioned as prerequisite to our walking in God's statutes. As for the principle

of obedience, *it is the love of God*: that is, we must obey God because we love him; we must do good because we delight to do good; otherwise it is all hypocrisy, constraint, or selfishness, and cannot be acceptable to God. Here again, my brethren, look into your hearts and examine what is the principle of your obedience, and whether ever you have been made new creatures

3d. I must add, especially as we live under the gospel, that your dependence for life must not be upon the good you do, but entirely upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ. After you have done all, you must acknowledge you are but unprofitable servants, and renounce all your works in point of merit, while you abound in them in point of practice. This is an essential characteristic of evangelical obedience, and whether ever you have been made new creatures.

I might enlarge upon this head, but time will not permit; and I hope these three characteristics may suffice to show you what is implied in doing good. Let us now proceed to the opposite character.

2. What is it to do evil? This implies such things as these: the habitual neglect of well-doing, or the performance of duties in a languid, formal manner, or without a right principle, and the willful indulgence of any one sin; the secret love of sin, though not suffered to break forth into the outward practice. Here it is evident at first sight that profane sinners, drunkards, swearers, defrauders, avowed neglecters of religion, &c., have this dismal brand upon them, that they are such as do evil. Nay, all such who are in their natural state, without regeneration, whatever their outside may be, must be ranked in this class; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, (John, iii. 6,) and they that are in the flesh cannot please God, nor be rightly subject to his law. (Rom. viii. 7, 8.) And now who is for life, and who for damnation among you? These characters are intended to make the distinction among you, and I pray you apply them for that purpose.

As for such of you, who, amidst all your lamented infirmities, are endeavoring honestly to do good, and grieved at heart that you can do no more, you also must die, you must die, and feed the worms in the dust. But you shall rise gloriously improved, rise to an immortal life, and in all the terrors and consternation of the last day you will

be secure, serene, and undisturbed. The Almighty Judge will be your friend, and that is enough. Let this thought disarm the king of terrors, and give you courage to look down into the grave, and forward to the great rising day. O what a happy immortality opens its glorious prospects beyond the ken of sight before you! and after a few struggles more in this state of warfare, and resting awhile in the bed of death, at the regions of eternal blessedness you will arrive, and take up your residence there for ever.

But are there not some here who are conscious that these favorable characters do not belong to them? that know that well-doing is not the business of their life, but that they are workers of iniquity? I tell you plainly and with all the authority the word of God can give, that if you continue such, you shall rise to damnation. That will undoubtedly be your doom, unless you are greatly changed and reformed in heart and life. And will this be no excitement to vigorous endeavors? Are you proof against the energy of such considerations? Ye careless sinners, awake out of your security, and prepare for death and judgment! this fleeting life is all the time you have for preparation, and can you trifle it away? Your all, your eternal all is set upon the single cast of life, and you must stand the hazard of the die. You can make but one experiment, and if that fail, through your sloth or mismanagement, you are irrecoverably undone for ever. Therefore by the dread authority of the great God, by the terrors of death and the great rising day, by the joys of heaven and the torments of hell, and by the value of your immortal souls, I entreat, I charge, I adjure you to awake out of your security, and improve the precious moments of life. The world is dying all around you. And can you rest easy in such a world, while unprepared for eternity? Awake to righteousness now, at the general call of the gospel, before the last trumpet give you an alarm of another kind.

## XIV.

## THE UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT.

“ And the times of this ignorance God winked at ; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent : because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”—*Acts*, xvii. 30, 31.

THE present state is the infancy of human nature ; and all the events of time, even those that make such noise, and determine the fate of kingdoms, are but the little affairs of children. But if we look forward and trace human nature to maturity, we meet with events vast, interesting, and majestic, and such as nothing but divine authority can render credible to us who are so apt to judge of things by what we see. To one of those scenes I would direct your attention this day ; I mean the solemn, tremendous, and glorious scene of the universal judgment.

You have sometimes seen a stately building in ruins ; come now and view the ruins of a demolished world. You have often seen a feeble mortal struggling in the agonies of death, and his shattered frame dissolved ; come now and view universal nature severely laboring and agonizing in her last convulsions, and her well-compacted system dissolved. You have heard of earthquakes here and there that laid Lisbon, Palermo, and a few other cities in ruins ; come now and feel the tremors and convulsions of the whole globe, that blend cities and countries, oceans and continents, mountains, plains, and valleys in one promiscuous heap. You have a thousand times beheld the moon walking in brightness, and the sun shining in his strength ; now look and see the sun turned into darkness, and the moon into blood.

It is our lot to live in an age of confusion, blood, and slaughter ; an age in which our attention is engaged by the clash of arms, the clangor of trumpets, the roar of artillery, and the dubious fate of kingdoms ; but draw off your

thoughts from these objects for an hour, and fix them on objects more solemn and interesting: come view,

“ A scene that yields  
A louder trumpet, and more dreadful fields;  
The world alarm'd, both Earth and Heaven o'erthrown,  
And gasping Nature's last tremendous groan:  
Death's ancient sceptre broke, the teeming Tomb,  
The righteous Judge, and man's eternal doom.”—*Young*.

Such a scene there certainly is before us; for St. Paul tells us, that *God hath given assurance to all men he shall judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained*; and that his resurrection, the resurrection of him who is God and man, is a demonstrative proof of it.

My text is the conclusion of St. Paul's defence or sermon before the famous court of Areopagus, in the learned and philosophical city of Athens. In this august and polite assembly he speaks with the boldness, and in the evangelical strain, of an apostle of Christ. He first inculcates upon them the great truths of natural religion, and labors faithfully, though in a very gentle and inoffensive manner, to reform them from that stupid idolatry and superstition into which even this learned and philosophical city was sunk, though a Socrates, a Plato, and the most celebrated sages and moralists of pagan antiquity had lived and taught in it. Afterwards, in the close of his discourse, he introduces the glorious peculiarities of Christianity, particularly the duty of repentance, from evangelical motives, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment.

In these dark times of ignorance which preceded the publication of the gospel, God seemed to wink or connive at the idolatry and various forms of wickedness that had overspread the world; that is, he seemed to overlook, or take no notice of them, so as either to punish them, or to give the nations explicit calls to repentance. But now, says St. Paul, the case is altered. Now the gospel is published through the world, and God therefore will no longer seem to connive at the wickedness and impenitence of mankind, but publishes his great mandate to a rebel world, explicitly and loudly *commanding all men everywhere to repent*; and he now gives them particular motives and encouragements to this duty.

One motive of the greatest weight, which was never so clearly or extensively published before, is the doctrine of

the universal judgment. And surely the prospect of a judgment must be a strong motive to sinners to repent:—this, if any thing, will rouse them from their thoughtless security, and bring them to repentance.

God has *given assurance to all men*; that is, to all that hear the gospel, that he has appointed a day for this great purpose, and that Jesus Christ, God-man, is to preside in person in this majestic solemnity. He has given assurance of this; that is sufficient ground of faith; and the assurance consists in this, that *he hath raised him from the dead*.

The resurrection of Christ gives assurance of this in several respects. It is a specimen and a pledge of a general resurrection, that grand preparative for the judgment: it is also an authentic attestation of our Lord's claims, and an incontestable proof of his divine mission; for God will never work so unprecedented a miracle in favor of an impostor; and he expressly claimed the authority of supreme Judge as delegated to him by the Father; *the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son*.

Let us now enter upon the majestic scene. But, alas! what images shall I use to represent it? Nothing that we have seen, nothing that we have heard, nothing that has ever happened on the stage of time, can furnish us with proper illustrations. All is low and groveling, all is faint and obscene that ever the sun shone upon, when compared with the grand phenomena of that day; and we are so accustomed to low and little objects, that it is impossible we should ever raise our thoughts to a suitable pitch of elevation. Ere long we shall be amazed spectators of these majestic wonders, and our eyes and our ears will be our instructors. But now it is necessary we should have such ideas of them as may affect our hearts, and prepare us for them. Let us therefore present to our view those representations which divine revelation, our only guide in this case, gives us of the person of the Judge, and the manner of his appearance; of the resurrection of the dead, and the transformation of the living; of the universal convention of all the sons of men before the supreme tribunal; of their separation to the right and left hand of the Judge, according to their characters; of the judicial process itself; of the decisive sentence; of its execution, and of the conflagration of the world.

As to the person of the Judge, the psalmist tells you,

God is judge himself. Yet Christ tells us, *the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son; and that he hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man.* It is, therefore, Christ Jesus, God-man, as I observed, who shall sustain this high character; and, for reasons already alleged, it is most fit it should be devolved upon him. Being God and man, all the advantages of divinity and humanity centre in him, and render him more fit for this office than if he were God only, or man only. This is the august Judge before whom we must stand; and the prospect may inspire us with reverence, joy, and terror.

As to the manner of his appearance, it will be such as becomes the dignity of his person and office. He will shine in all the uncreated glories of the Godhead, and in all the gentler glories of a perfect man. His attendants will add a dignity to the grand appearance, and the sympathy of nature will increase the solemnity and terror of the day. Let his own word describe him. *The Son of man shall come in his glory, and in the glory of his Father, and all the holy angels with him; and then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is the Judge before whom we must stand; and this is the manner of his appearance. Is this the supposed son of the carpenter, the despised Galilean? Is this the man of sorrows? Is this he that was arrested, condemned, was buffeted, was spit upon, was crowned with thorns, was executed as a slave and a criminal upon the cross? Yes, it is he; the very same Jesus of Nazareth. But O how changed! how deservedly exalted! Let heaven and earth congratulate his advancement.

While the Judge is descending, the parties to be judged will be summoned to appear. But where are they? They are all asleep in their dusty beds, except the then generation. And how shall they be roused from their long sleep of thousands of years? *Why, the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. The trumpet shall sound, and they that are then alive shall not pass into eternity through the beaten road of death, but at the last trumpet*

*they shall be changed, changed into immortals, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.* Now all the millions of mankind, of whatever country and nation, whether they expect this tremendous day or not, all feel a shock through their whole frames, while they are instantaneously metamorphosed in every limb, and the pulse of immortality begins to beat in every part. Now, also, the slumberers under ground begin to stir, to rouse and spring to life. Now see graves opening, tombs bursting, charnel-houses rattling, the earth heaving and all alive, while these subterranean armies are bursting their way through. What vast multitudes that had slept in a watery grave, now emerge from rivers, and seas, and oceans, and throw them into a tumult! *The dead, small and great, will arise to stand before God, and the sea shall give up the dead which were in it.*

Now the Judge is come, the judgment-seat is erected, the dead are raised. And what follows? Why, the universal convention of all the sons of men before the judgment-seat. What an august convocation, what a vast assembly is this! Now all the sons of men meet in one vast assembly. Adam beholds the long line of his posterity, and they behold their common father. Now Europeans and Asiatics, the swarthy sons of Africa and the savages of America, mingle together. Christians, Jews, Mahometans, and Pagans, the learned and the ignorant, kings and subjects, rich and poor, free and bond, form one promiscuous crowd. The extensive region of the air is very properly chosen as the place of judgment; for this globe would not be sufficient for such a multitude to stand upon. In that prodigious assembly, my brethren, you and I must mingle. And we shall not be lost in the crowd, nor escape the notice of our Judge; but his eye will be as particularly fixed on every one as though there were but one before him. Now the Judge is seated, and anxious millions stand before him waiting for their doom. As yet there is no separation made between them; but men and devils, saints and sinners, are promiscuously blended together. But see! at the order of the Judge, the crowd is all in motion; they part, they sort together according to their character, and divide to the right and left. *When all nations are gathered before the Son of man, himself has told us, he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on*



*his right hand, but the goats on the left.* And, O! what strange separations are now made! What multitudes that once ranked among the saints, and were highly esteemed for their piety by others as well as themselves, are now banished from among them, and placed with the trembling criminals upon the left hand! and how many poor, honest-hearted, desponding souls, whose foreboding fears had often placed them there, now find themselves, to their agreeable surprise, stationed on the right hand of their Judge, who smiles upon them! What connections are now broken! what hearts torn asunder! what intimate companions, what dear relations, parted for ever! neighbor from neighbor, masters from servants, friend from friend, parents from children, husband from wife. Those that lived in the same country, who sustained the same denomination, who worshiped in the same place, who lived under one roof, must now part for ever. And is there no separation likely to be made then in our families or in our congregations? Is it likely we shall all be placed in a body upon the right hand? Are all the members of our families prepared for that glorious station? Alas! are there not some families among us, who, it is to be feared, shall all be sent off to the left hand, without so much as one exception? for who are those miserable multitudes on the left hand? There, through the medium of revelation, I see the drunkard, the swearer, the whoremonger, the liar, the defrauder, and the various classes of profane profligate sinners. There I see the *families that call not upon the name of the Lord*, and whole nations that forget him. And, O! what vast multitudes, what millions of millions of millions do all these make! And do not some, alas! do not many of you belong to one or the other of these classes of sinners, whom God, and Christ, and Scripture, and conscience conspire to condemn? If so, to the left hand you must depart, among devils and trembling criminals, whose guilty minds forebode their doom before the judicial process begins. But who are those glorious immortals on the right hand? They are those who now mourn over their sins, resist and forsake them; they are those who have surrendered themselves entirely to God, through Jesus Christ, who have heartily complied with the method of salvation revealed in the gospel; who have been formed new creatures by the almighty power of God; who make it the most earnest, persevering endeavor

of their lives to work out their own salvation, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in the world. These are some of the principal lineaments of their character who shall have their safe and honorable station at the right hand of the Sovereign Judge. And is not this the prevailing character of some of you? I hope and believe it is. Through the medium of Scripture-revelation, then, I see you in that blessed station. And, O! I would make an appointment with you this day to meet you there. Yes, let me this day appoint the time and place where we shall meet after the separation and dispersion that death will make among us; and let it be at the right hand of the Judge at the last day. If I be so happy as to obtain some humble place there, I shall look out for you, my dear people. There I shall expect your company, that we may ascend together to join in the more exalted services and enjoyments of heaven, as we have frequently in the humbler forms of worship in the church on earth. But, O! when I think what unexpected separations will then be made, I tremble lest I should miss some of you there. And are you not afraid lest you should miss some of your friends, or some of your families there? or that you should there see them move off to the left hand, and looking back with eagerness upon you as if they would say, "this is my doom through your carelessness; had you but acted a faithful part towards me, while conversant with you or under your care, I might now have had my place among the saints." O! how could you bear such significant piercing looks, from a child, a servant, or a friend? Therefore, now do all in your power to *convert sinners from the error of their way, and to save their souls from death.*

When we entered upon this practical digression, we left all things ready for the judicial process. And now the trial begins. *Now God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.* All the works of all the sons of men will then be tried; for, says St. Paul, *we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every man may receive the things done in the body according to what he hath done, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*

What strange discoveries will this trial make; what noble dispositions, that never shone in full beauty to mortal eyes; what pious and noble actions concealed under the veil of modesty; what affectionate aspirations, what devout

exercises of heart, which lay open only to the eyes of Omniscience, are now brought to full light, and receive the approbation of the supreme Judge before the assembled universe! But, on the other hand, what works of shame and darkness, what hidden things of dishonesty, what dire secrets of treachery, hypocrisy, lewdness, and various forms of wickedness, artfully and industriously concealed from human sight, what horrid exploits of sin now burst to light in all their hellish colors, to the confusion of the guilty, and the astonishment and horror of the universe! Sure, the history of mankind must then appear like the annals of hell, or the biography of devils! There the mark of dissimulation will be torn off. Clouded characters will clear up, and men as well as things will appear in their true light. And may not the prospect of such a discovery fill some of you with horror? for many of your actions, and especially of your hearts, will not bear the light. How would it confound you, if they were now all published, even in the small circle of your acquaintance? How, then, can you bear to have them all fully exposed before God, angels, and men!

We are now come to the grand crisis, upon which the eternal states of all mankind turn; I mean, the passing the great decisive sentence. Heaven and earth are all silence and attention, while the Judge, with smiles in his face, and a voice sweeter than heavenly music, turns to the glorious company on his right hand, and pours all the joys of heaven into their souls, in that transporting sentence, of which he has graciously left us a copy, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* Every word is full of emphasis, full of heaven, and exactly agreeable to the desires of those to whom it is addressed. They desired, and longed, and languished to be near their Lord; and now their Lord invites them, *Come near me, and dwell with me for ever.* There was nothing they desired so much as the blessing of God, nothing they feared so much as his curse, and now their fears are entirely removed, and their designs fully accomplished, for the supreme Judge pronounces them blessed of his Father. They were all poor in spirit, and most of them poor in this world, and all sensible of their unworthiness. How agreeably, then, are they surprised, to hear themselves invited to a kingdom, invited to inherit a kingdom, as princes of the

blood-royal born to thrones and crowns! How will they be lost in wonder, joy, and praise to find that the great God entertained thoughts of love towards them, before they had a being, or the world in which they dwelt had its foundation laid, and that he was preparing a kingdom for them while they were nothing, unknown even in idea, except to himself! O! brethren, dare any of us expect this sentence will be passed upon us? Methinks the very thought overwhelms us. Methinks our feeble frames must be unable to bear up under the ecstatic hope of so sweetly oppressive a blessedness. O! if this be our sentence in that day, it is no matter what we suffer in the intermediate space; that sentence would compensate for all, and annihilate the sufferings of ten thousand years.

But hark! another sentence breaks from the mouth of the angry Judge, like vengeful thunder. Nature gives a deep tremendous groan; the heavens lower and gather blackness, the earth trembles, and guilty millions sink with horror at the sound! And see, he whose words are works, whose fiat produced worlds out of nothing; he who could remand ten thousand worlds into nothing at a frown; he whose thunder quelled the insurrection of rebel angels in heaven, and hurled them headlong down, down, down to the dungeon of hell; see, he turns to the guilty crowd on his left hand; his countenance discovers the righteous indignation that glows in his breast. His countenance bespeaks him inexorable, that there is now no room for prayer and tears. Now the sweet, mild, mediatorial hour is past, and nothing appears but the majesty and terror of the Judge. Horror and darkness frown upon his brow, and vindictive lightnings flash from his eyes. And now, (O! who can bear the sound!) he speaks, *Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.* O! the cutting emphasis of every word! Depart! depart from me; from Me, the Author of all good, the fountain of all happiness. Depart, with all my heavy, all-consuming curse upon you. Depart into fire, into everlasting fire, prepared, furnished with fuel, and blown up into rage, prepared for the devil and his angels, once your companions in sin, and now the companions and executioners of your punishment.

Now the grand period is arrived in which the final everlasting states of mankind are unchangeably settled.

From this all-important era their happiness or misery runs on in one uniform, uninterrupted tenor; no change, no gradation, but from glory to glory, in the scale of perfection, or from gulf to gulf in hell. This is the day in which all the schemes of Providence, carried on for thousands of years, terminate.

“Great day? for which all other days were made:  
For which earth rose from chaos; man from earth;  
And an eternity, the date of gods,  
Descended on poor earth-created man!”—*Young*.

Time was, but is no more! Now all the sons of men enter upon a duration not to be measured by the revolutions of the sun, nor by days, and months, and years. Now eternity dawns, a day that shall never see an evening. And this terrible illustrious morning is solemnized with the execution of the sentence. No sooner is it passed than immediately the wicked *go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal*. See the astonished thunderstruck multitude on the left hand, with sullen horror, and grief, and despair in their looks, and crying and wringing their hands, and glancing a wishful eye towards that heaven which they lost; and now an eternal farewell to earth and all its enjoyments! Farewell to the cheerful light of heaven! Farewell to hope, that sweet relief of affliction!

“Farewell, happy fields,  
Where joy for ever dwells! Hail, horrors! hail,  
Infernal world! and thou profoundest hell,  
Receive thy new possessors!”—*Milton*.

Heaven frowns them from above, the horrors of hell spread far and wide around them, and conscience within preys upon their hearts. Conscience! O thou abused, exasperated power, that now sleepest in so many breasts, what severe, ample revenge wilt thou then take upon those that now dare to do thee violence! O the dire reflections which memory will then suggest! the remembrance of mercies abused! of a Saviour slighted! of means and opportunities of salvation neglected and lost! this remembrance will sting the heart like a scorpion. But O eternity! eternity! with what horror will thy name circulate through the vaults of hell! eternity in misery! no end to pain! no hope of an end! O this is the hell of hell! this is the

parent of despair! despair the direst ingredient of misery, the most tormenting passion which devils feel. But let us view a more delightful and illustrious scene. See the bright and triumphant army marching up to their eternal home, under the conduct of the Captain of their salvation, where they *shall ever be with the Lord*, as happy as their nature in its highest improvement is capable of being made, with what shouts of joy and triumph do they ascend! with what sublime hallelujahs do they crown their Deliverer! with what wonder and joy, with what pleasing horror, like one that has narrowly escaped some tremendous precipice, do they look back upon what they once were! once mean, guilty, depraved, condemned sinners! afterwards imperfect, broken-hearted, sighing, weeping saints! but now innocent, holy, happy, glorious immortals!

“Are these the forms that moulder’d in the dust?  
O the transcendent glories of the just!”—*Young*.

Now with what pleasure and rapture do they look forward through the long, long prospect of immortality, and call it their own! the duration not only of their existence, but of their happiness and glory! O shall any of us share in this immensely valuable privilege! how immensely transporting the thought!

“Shall we, who some few years ago were less  
Than worm, or mite, or shadow can express;  
Were nothing; shall we live, when every fire  
Of every star shall languish or expire?  
When earth’s no more, shall we survive above,  
And through the shining ranks of angels move?  
Or, as before the throne of God we stand,  
See new worlds rolling from his mighty hand!  
All that has being in full concert join,  
And celebrate the depths of love divine!”—*Young*.

O what exploits, what miracles of power and grace are these! But why do I darken such splendor with words without knowledge? the language of mortals was formed for lower descriptions. *Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things that God hath laid up for them that love him.*—1 Cor. ii. 9.

And now when the inhabitants of our world, for whose sake it was formed, are all removed to other regions, and that it also meets its fate, it is fit so guilty a globe, that has been the stage of sin for so many thousands of years,

and which even supported the cross on which its Maker expired, should be made a monument of the divine displeasure, and either be laid in ruins or refined by fire. And see! the universal blaze begins! the heavens pass away with a great noise; the elements melt with fervent heat; the earth and the works that are therein are burnt up. Now stars rush from their orbits; comets glare; the earth trembles with convulsions; the Alps, the Andes, and all the lofty peaks of long-extended ridges of mountains burst out into so many burning Etnas, or thunder, and lightning, and smoke, and flame, and quake like Sinai, when God descended upon it to publish its fiery law! Rocks melt and run down in torrents of flame; rivers, lakes, and oceans boil and evaporate. Sheets of fire and pillars of smoke, outrageous and insufferable thunders and lightnings burst, and bellow, and blaze, and involve the atmosphere from pole to pole.

“ See all the formidable sons of fire,  
Eruptions, earthquakes, comets, lightnings play  
Their various engines; all at once discharge  
Their blazing magazines, and take by storm  
This poor terrestrial citadel of man.”— *Young*.

The whole globe is now dissolved into a shapeless ocean of liquid fire. And where now shall we find the places where cities stood, where armies fought, where mountains stretched their ridges, and reared their heads on high? Alas! they are all lost, and have left no trace behind them where they once stood. Where art thou, O my country? Sunk with the rest as a drop into the burning ocean. Where now are your houses, your lands, and earthly possessions you were once so fond of? They are nowhere to be found. How sorry a portion for an immortal mind is such a dying world as this! And, O!

“ How rich that God who can such charge defray,  
And bear to fling ten thousand worlds away !”— *Young*.

Thus, my brethren, I have given you a view of the solemnities of the last day which our world shall see. The view has indeed been but very faint and obscure; and such will be all our views and descriptions of it, till our eyes and our ears teach us better. Through these avenues you will at length receive your instructions. Yes, brethren, those ears that now hear my voice shall hear the all-alarm-

ing clangor of the last trumpet, the decisive sentence from the mouth of the universal Judge, and the horrid crash of falling worlds. These very eyes with which you now see one another, shall yet see the descending Judge, the assembled multitudes, and all the majestic phenomena of that day. And we shall not see them as indifferent spectators; no, we are as much concerned in this great transaction as any of the children of men. We must all appear before the judgment-seat, and receive our sentence according to the deeds done in the body. And if so, what are we doing that we are not more diligently preparing? Why does not the present affect us more? Why does it not transport the righteous with joy unspeakable, and full of glory? And why are not the *sinner*s in Zion afraid? Why does not fearfulness surprise the hypocrite? Can one of you be careless from this hour till you are in readiness for that tremendous day? What do the sinners among you now think of repentance? Repentance is the grand preparative for this awful day; and the apostle, as I observed, mentions the final judgment in my text as a powerful motive to repentance. And what will criminals think of repentance when they see the Judge ascend the throne? Come, sinners, look forward and see the flaming tribunal erected, your crimes exposed, your doom pronounced, and your hell begun; see a whole world demolished and ravaged by boundless conflagration for your sins! With these objects before you, I call you to repent! —I call you! I retract the words; God, the great God whom heaven and earth obey, commands you to repent. Whatever be your characters, whether rich or poor, old or young, white or black, wherever you sit or stand, this command reaches you; *for God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.* You are this day firmly bound to this duty by his authority. And dare you disobey with the prospect of all the awful solemnities of judgment before you in so near a view? O! methinks I have now brought you into such a situation, that the often repeated but hitherto neglected call to repentance will be regarded by you. Repent you must, either upon earth, or in hell. You must either spend your time or your eternity in repentance. It is absolutely unavoidable. Putting it off now does not remove the necessity, but will only render it the more bitter and severe hereafter. Which, then, do you choose?



the tolerable, hopeful, medicinal repentance of the present life, or the intolerable, unprofitable, despairing repentance of hell? Will you choose to spend time or eternity in this melancholy exercise? O! make the choice which God, which reason, which self-interest, which common sense recommend to you. Now repent at the command of God, *because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, of which he hath given you all full assurance in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

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## XV.

### THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”—*Luke, x. 41. 42.*

FOR what are we placed in this world? Is it to dwell here always? You cannot think so, when the millions of mankind that have appeared upon the stage of time are so many instances of the contrary. The true notion therefore of the present state is, that it is a state of preparation and trial for the eternal world; a state of education for our adult age. As children are sent to school, and youth bound out to trades, to prepare them for business, and qualify them to live in the world, so we are placed here to prepare us for the grand business of immortality, the state of our maturity, and to qualify us to live for ever. And is there a heaven of the most perfect happiness, and a hell of the most exquisite misery, just before us, perhaps not a year or even a day distant from us? And is it the great design, the business and duty of the present state, to obtain the one and escape the other? Then what are we doing? What is the world doing all around us? Are they acting as it becomes candidates for eternity? Are they indeed making that the principal object of their most zealous endeavors, which is the grand design, business, and duty of the present state? Are they minding this at all

adventures whatever else they neglect? This is what we might expect from them as reasonable creatures, as creatures that love themselves, and have a strong innate desire of happiness. This a stranger to our world might charitably presume concerning them. But, alas! look upon the conduct of the world around you, or look nearer home, and where you are most nearly interested, upon your own conduct, and you will see this is not generally the case. No; instead of pursuing the one thing needful, the world is all in motion, all bustle and hurry, like ants upon a mole-hill, about other affairs. They are in a still higher degree than officious Martha, *careful and troubled about many things*.

Now to recall you from this endless variety of vain pursuits, and direct your endeavors to the proper object, I can think of no better expedient than to explain and inculcate upon you the admonition of Christ to Martha, and his commendation of Mary upon this head.

Martha was the head of a little family, probably a widow, in a village near Jerusalem, called Bethany. Her brother and sister, Lazarus and Mary, lived alone with her. And what is remarkable concerning this little family is, that they were all lovers of Jesus: and their love was not without returns on his side; for we are expressly told that Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.—What a happy family is this! but O how rare in the world! This was a convenient place of retirement to Jesus, after the labors and fatigues of his ministry in the city; and here we often find him.

Though spent and exhausted with his public services, yet when he gets into the circle of a few friends in a private house he cannot be idle: he still instructs them with his heavenly discourse, and his conversation is a constant sermon. Mary, who was passionately devout and eager for instruction, would not let such a rare opportunity slip, but sits down at the feet of this great Teacher, which was the posture of the Jewish pupils before their masters, and eagerly catches every word from his lips. Though she is solicitous for the comfort of her heavenly guest, yet she makes no great stir to provide for him an elegant or sumptuous entertainment; for she knew his happiness did not consist in luxurious eating and drinking: it was his *meat and drink to do the will of his Father*; and as for the suste-

nance of his body, plain food was most acceptable to him. He was not willing that any should lose their souls by losing opportunities of instruction, while they were making sumptuous provision for him. Mary was also so deeply engaged about her salvation, that she was nobly careless about the little decencies of entertainments. The body and all its supports and gratifications appeared of very small importance to her when compared with the immortal soul. All this she did with Christ's warm approbation, and therefore her conduct is an example worthy of our imitation.

Martha, though a pious woman, yet like too many among us, was too solicitous about these things. She seemed more concerned to maintain her reputation for good economy and hospitality than to improve in divine knowledge at every opportunity, and to entertain her guest rather as a gentleman than as a divine teacher and the Saviour of souls. Hence, instead of sitting at his feet with her sister in the posture of a humble disciple, she was busy in making preparations, and her mind was distracted with the cares of her family. As moderate labor and care about earthly things is lawful, and even a duty, persons are not readily suspicious or easily convinced of their guilty excesses in these labors and cares. Hence Martha is so far from condemning herself on this account, that she blames her devout sister for not following her example.

Jesus turns upon her with just severity, and throws the blame where it should lie. *Martha, Martha!* There is a vehemence and pungency in the repetition, *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.* "Thy worldly mind has many objects, and many objects excite many cares and troubles, fruitless trouble and useless cares. *But one thing is needful*; and therefore dropping thy excessive care about many things, make this one thing the great object of thy pursuit. This one thing is what thy sister is now attending to, while thou art vainly careful about many things; and therefore, instead of blaming her conduct I must approve it. She has made the best choice, for *she hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.* After all thy care and labor, the things of this vain world must be given up at last, and lost for ever. But Mary hath made a wiser choice; the portion she hath chosen shall be hers for ever."

But what does Christ mean by this *one thing* which alone is needful?

I answer, it must mean something different from, and superior to all the pursuits of time. The one thing needful must mean the salvation of the soul, and an earnest application to the means necessary to obtain this end, above all other things in the world. The end, namely, salvation, will be granted by all to be necessary, and the necessity of the end renders the means also necessary. If it be necessary you should be for ever happy, and escape everlasting misery, it is necessary you should be holy; for you can no more be saved without holiness, than you can be healthy without health, see without light, or live without food. And if holiness be necessary, then the earnest use of the means appointed for the production and improvement of holiness in us must be necessary too; for you can no more expect to become holy without the use of these means, than to reap without sowing, or become truly virtuous and good by chance or fatality. To be holy in order to be happy, and to use all the means of grace in order to be holy, is therefore the one thing needful.

It may also be called the one thing needful, to intimate that this is needful above all other things. It is a common form of speech to say of that which is necessary above all other things, that it is the one or only thing necessary: so we may understand this passage. There are what we call the real necessities of life, such as food and raiment; there are also necessary callings and necessary labors. All these are necessary in a lower sense; necessary in their proper place. But in comparison of the great work of our salvation, they are all unnecessary; if we be but saved, we may do very well without them all. This is so necessary, that nothing else deserves to be called necessary in comparison of it. I add further, this one thing may be said to be necessary, always, or for ever. The necessities of this life we cannot want long, for we must soon remove into a world where there is no room for them; but holiness and salvation we shall find needful always: needful under the calamities of life; needful in the agonies of death; needful in the world of spirits; needful millions of ages hence; needful to all eternity; and without it we are eternally undone. This is a necessity indeed! a necessity in comparison of which all other necessities are but

superfluities. I hope by this short explication I have cleared the way through your understandings to your hearts, and to your hearts I would now address myself.

My first request to you is, that you would make this passage the test of your characters, and seriously inquire whether you have lived in the world as those that really and practically believe that this is the one thing of absolute necessity. Are not all the joys of heaven and your immortal souls worth the little pains of seriously putting this short question to your consciences? Review your life, look at your hearts, and inquire, has this one thing lain more upon your hearts than all other things together? Has this been, above all other things, the object of your most vehement desire, your most earnest endeavors, and eager pursuit? I do not ask you whether you have heard or read that this one thing is necessary, or whether you have sometimes talked about it. I do not ask whether you have paid to God the compliment of appearing in his house once a week, or of performing him a little lip-service morning and evening in your families, or in your closets, after you have served yourselves and the world all the rest of your time, without one affectionate thought of God. I do not ask whether you have performed many actions that are materially good, and abstained from many sins. All this you may have done, and yet have neglected the one thing needful all your lives.

But I ask you, whether this one thing needful has been habitually uppermost in your hearts, the favorite object of your desires, the prize of your most vigorous endeavors, the supreme happiness of your souls, and the principal object of your concern above all things in the world? Sirs, you may now hear this question with stupid unconcern and indifference; but I must tell you, you will find another day how much depends upon it. In that day it will be found, that the main difference between true Christians and the various classes of sinners is this:—God, Christ, holiness, and the concerns of eternity, are habitually uppermost in the hearts of the former; but, to the latter, they are generally but things by the by; and the world engrosses the vigor of their souls, and is the principal concern of their lives. To serve God, to obtain his favor, and to be happy for ever in his love, is the main business of the saint, to which all the concerns of the world and the flesh,

must give way; but to live in ease, in reputation, in pleasure, or riches, or to gratify himself in the pursuit and enjoyment of some created good, this is the main concern of the sinner. The one has made a hearty resignation of himself, and all that he is and has, to God, through Jesus Christ; he serves him with the best, and thinks nothing too good for him. But the other has his exceptions and reserves: he will serve God willingly, provided it may consist with his ease, and pleasure, and temporal interest; he will serve God with a bended knee, and the external forms of devotion; but, with the vigor of his spirit, he serves the world and his flesh. This is the grand difference between a true Christian and the various forms of half-christians and hypocrites. And certainly this is a difference that may be discerned. The tenor of a man's practice, and the object of his love, especially of his highest love and practical esteem, must certainly be very distinguishable from a thing by the by, and from the object of a languid passion, or mere speculation. Therefore, if you make but an impartial trial, you have reason to hope you will make a just discovery of your true character. Brethren, I beseech you, by one means or other, to bring this matter to an issue, and let it hang in suspense no longer. Why are you so indifferent how this matter stands with you? Is it because you imagine you may be true Christians, and obtain salvation, however this matter be with you? But be not deceived; no man can serve two masters, whose commands are contrary; and *ye cannot serve God and Mammon*, with a service equally devoted to both. *If any man love the world with supreme affections, the love of the Father is not in him. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap;—if you sow to the flesh, of the flesh shall you reap corruption; miserable harvest indeed! But if you sow to the spirit, you shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.* Therefore you may be sure that *if you live after the flesh, you shall die*; and that you can never enjoy the one thing needful unless you mind and pursue it above all other things.

But I shall not urge you further to try yourselves by this test. I take it for granted the consciences of some of you have determined the matter, and that you are plainly convicted of having hitherto neglected the one thing needful. Allow me then honestly to expose your conduct in

its proper colors, and tell you what you have been doing while you were busy about other things, and neglected this one thing needful.

1. However well you have improved your time for other purposes, you have lost it all, unless you have improved it in securing the one thing needful. The proper notion of time is, that it is a space for repentance. Time is given us to prepare for eternity. If this is done, we have lived long enough, and the great end of time and life is answered, whatever else be undone. But if this be undone, you have lived in vain, and all your time is lost, however briskly and successfully you have pursued other things. And, believe me, time is a precious thing. So it will appear in a dying hour, or in the eternal world, to the greatest spendthrift among you. Then, O for a year, or even a week, or a day, to secure that one thing which you are now neglecting! And will you now waste your time, while you enjoy it? Shall so precious a blessing be lost? Time was given you to secure an eternity of happiness, but you have spent it in adding sin to sin, and consequently in treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. And is not your time then a thousand times worse than lost? Let me tell you, if you continue in this course to the end, you will wish a thousand times, either that you had never one hour's time given you, or that you had made a better use of it.

2. Whatever else you have been doing, you have lost your labor with your time, if you have not labored above all things for this one thing needful. You have perhaps toiled through many anxious and laborious days, and your nights have shared in the anxieties and labors of your days. But if you have not labored for the one thing necessary, all your labors and all the fruits of it are lost.

But this is not all. Not only your secular labor is lost, but all your toil and pains, if you have used any in the duties of religion, they are lost likewise. Your reading, hearing, praying, and communicating; all your serious thoughts of death and eternity—all your struggles with particular lusts and temptations—all the kind offices you have done to mankind—all are lost; since you have performed them by halves with a lukewarm heart, and have not made the one thing needful your great business and pursuit. All these things will not save you; and what is

that religion good for which will not save your souls? What do those religious endeavors avail which will suffer you to fall into hell after all? Certainly such religion is vain.

And now, my hearers, do you believe this, or do you not? If you do, will you, dare you, still go on in the same course? If you do not believe it, let me reason the matter with you a little. You will not believe that all the labor and pains you have taken all your life have been quite lost; no, you now enjoy the fruits of them. But show me now, if you can, what you have gotten by all that stir you have made, that will follow one step beyond the grave, or that you can call your own to-morrow? Where is that sure, immortal acquisition that you can carry with you into the eternal world? Were you to die this hour, would it afford you any pleasure to reflect that you have lived a merry life, and had a satiety of sensual pleasures, or that you have labored for riches and honors, and perhaps acquired them? Will this reflection afford you pleasure or pain? Will this abate the agony of eternal pain, or make up for the loss of heaven, which you willfully incurred by an over-eager pursuit of these perishing vanities? But,

3. This is not all. All your labor and pains have not only been lost while you have neglected this one thing, but you have taken pains to ruin yourselves, and labored hard all your lives for your own destruction. You may indulge the carnal mind, and walk after the flesh, and yet hope no bad consequences to follow: but God has told you that *to be carnally minded is death*, and that if you live after the flesh you shall die. No enemy in the whole universe could do you that injury without your consent which you are doing to yourselves. To tempt you to sin is all the devil can do; but the temptation alone can do you no injury; it is consenting to it that ruins you; and this consent is your own voluntary act.

4. If you have hitherto neglected the one thing needful, you have unmanned yourselves, acted beneath, and contrary to your own reason, and in plain terms behaved as if you had been out of your senses. If you have the use of your reason, it must certainly tell you for what it was given to you. And, I beseech you, tell me what was it given you for but to serve the God that made you, to secure his



favor, to prepare for your eternal state, and to enjoy the supreme good as your portion? Where was your reason when your dying flesh was preferred to your immortal spirit? Was reason your guide when you chose the trash of this perishing world, and sought it more than the favor of God and all the joys of heaven? What have you done all your life to make a wise man think you truly reasonable? Is that your reason, to be wise to do evil, while to do good you have no knowledge; or to be ingenious and active about the trifles of time, while you neglect that great work for which you were created and redeemed? Can you be wise and not consider your latter end? Nay, can you pretend to so much as common sense, while you sell your eternal salvation for the sordid pleasures of a few fleeting years? Have you common sense, when you will not keep yourselves out of everlasting fire? What can a madman do worse than willfully destroy himself? And this you are doing every day. And yet these very persons are proud of their madness, and are apt to fling the charge of folly upon others, especially if they observe some poor weak creatures, that though it be but one in five hundred, fall into melancholy, or lose their reason for a time, while they are groaning under a sense of sin, and anxious about their eternal state; then what a clamor against religion and preciseness, as the ready way to make people run mad! then they even dare to publish their resolution, that they will not read and pore so much upon these things, lest it should drive them out of their senses. O miserable mortals! is it possible they should be more dangerously mad than they are already? Do you lay out your reason, your strength, and time in pursuing vain shadows, and in feeding a mortal body for the grave, while the important realities of the eternal world and the salvation of your immortal souls are forgotten or neglected? Do you sell your Saviour with Judas for a little money, and change your part in God and heaven for the sordid pleasures of sin, which are but for a season? and are you afraid of seriously reflecting upon this course, that you may reform it, for fear such thoughts should make you mad? What greater madness than this can you fear? Will you run from God, from Christ, from mercy, from the saints, from heaven itself, for fear of being mad! Alas! you are mad in the worst sense already. Will you run to hell to prove yourselves in your senses?

He was a wise and good man who said, "Though the loss of a man's understanding is a grievous affliction, and such as I hope God will never lay upon me, yet I had a thousand times rather go distracted to Bedlam with the excessive care about my salvation, than to be one of you that cast away the care of your salvation for fear of being distracted, and will go among the infernal Bedlams into hell for fear of being mad."

It would be easy to offer many more considerations to expose the absurdity and danger of your conduct in neglecting the one thing necessary, but these must suffice for the present hour. And I only desire you to consider further, if this be a just view of the conduct of such as are guilty of this neglect, in what a miserable, pitiable condition is the world in general! I have so often tried the utmost energy of my own words upon you with so little success as to many, that I am grown quite weary of them. Allow me, therefore, for once, to borrow the more striking and pungent words of one now in heaven; of one who had more success than almost any of his cotemporaries or successors in the important work of converting sinners from the error of their way, and saving souls from death; I mean the incomparable preacher, Mr. Baxter, who sowed an immortal seed in his parish of Kidderminster, which grows, and brings forth fruit to this day. His words have, through the divine blessing, been irresistible to thousands; and O that such of you, my dear hearers, whose hearts may have been proof against mine, may not be so against his also!

"Look upon this text of Scripture," says he, "and look also upon the course of the earth, and consider the disagreement; and whether it be not still as before the flood, that all the imaginations of man's heart are evil continually. Were it possible for a man to see the affections and motions of all the world at once as God seeth them, what a pitiful sight it would be! What a stir do they make, alas, poor souls! for they know not what! while they forget, or slight, or hate the one thing needful. What a heap of gadding ants should we see, that do nothing but gather sticks and straws! Look among persons of every rank, in city and country, and look into families about you, and see what trade it is they are most busily driving on, whether it be for heaven or earth? and whether you can discern,

by their care and labor, that they understand what is the one thing necessary. They are as busy as bees, but not for honey; but in spinning such a spider's web as the besom of death will presently sweep down. They labor hard; but for what? *for the food that perisheth*, but not for that *which* endureth to everlasting life. They are diligent seekers; but for what? Not first for God, his kingdom and righteousness, but for that which they might have had as an addition to their blessedness. They are still doing; what are they doing? Even undoing themselves by running away from God, to hunt after the perishing pleasures of the world. Some of them hear the word of God, but they presently choke it *by the deceitfulness of riches, and the cares of this life*. They are careful and troubled about many things; but the one thing that should be all to them is cast by as if it were nothing. Providing for the flesh and minding the world is the employment of their lives. They have no covetousness for the things which they are commanded *earnestly to covet*. Come at any time into their company and you may talk enough, and too much, of news, or other men's matters, of their worldly business, sports, and pleasures; but about God and their salvation, they have so little to say, and that so heartlessly, and by the by, as if they were things that belonged not to their care and duty, and no whit concerned them. Talk with them about the renovation of the soul, the nature of holiness, and the life to come, and you will find them almost as dumb as a fish. The most understand not matters of this nature, nor much desire or care to understand them. If one would teach them personally, they are too old to be catechised or learn, though not too old to be ignorant of the matters they were made for and preserved for in the world. They are too wise to learn to be wise, and too good to be taught how to be good, though not too wise to follow the seducements of the devil and the world, nor too good to be the slaves of Satan and the despisers and enemies of goodness. If they do any thing which they call serving God, it is some cold and heartless use of words to make themselves believe that for all their sins they shall be saved; so that God will call that a serving their sins and abominations, which they will call a serving God. Some of them will confess that holiness is good, but they hope God will be merciful unto them without it; and some

do so hate it, that it is a displeasing, irksome thing to them to hear any serious discourse of holiness; and they detest and deride those as fanatical, troublesome precisians, that diligently seek the one thing needful; so that if the belief of the most may be judged from their practices, we may confidently say, that they do not practically believe that ever they shall be brought to judgment, or that there is any heaven or hell to be expected; and that confession of the truth of the Scriptures and the articles of the Christian faith are no proof that they heartily take them to be true. Who can be such a stranger to the world as not to see that this is the case of the greatest part of men? And, which is worst of all, they go on in this course against all that can be said to them, and will give no impartial, considerate hearing of the truth, which would recover them to their wits, but live as if it would be a felicity to them in hell to think that they came thither by willful resolution and in despite of the remedy."

This, sinners, is a true representation of your case, drawn by one that well knew it and lamented it. And what do you now think of it yourselves? What do you think will be the consequence of such a course? Is it safe to persist in it? or shall I be so happy as to bring you to a stand? Will you still go on, troubling yourselves with many things? or will you resolve for the future to mind the one thing needful above all? I beseech you to come to some resolution. Time is on the wing, and does not allow you to hesitate in so plain and important an affair. Do you need any further excitements? Then I shall try the force of one consideration more, contained in my text, and that is necessity. Remember necessity, the most pressing, absolute necessity, enforces the care upon you. One thing is needful, absolutely needful, and needful above all other things. This, one would think, is such an argument as cannot but prevail. What exploits has necessity performed in the world! What arts has it discovered as the mother of invention! What labors, what fatigues, what sufferings has it undergone! What dangers has it encountered! What difficulties has it overcome! Necessity is a plea which you think will warrant you to do any thing and excuse any thing. To obtain the necessaries of life, as they are called, how much will men do and suffer! Nay, with what hardships and perils will they not conflict for things

that they imagine necessary, not to their life, but to their ease, their honor, or pleasure! But what is this necessity when compared to that which I am now urging upon you? To escape everlasting misery, and to secure everlasting salvation, this is the grand necessity! And shall not this grand necessity prevail upon you to work out your salvation, and make that your great business, when a far less necessity, a necessity that will last but a few years, at most, sets you and the world around you upon such hard labors and eager pursuits for perishing vanities? If you do not labor or contrive for *the bread that perisheth*, you must beg or starve; but if you do not labor for the bread that endureth unto everlasting life, you must burn in hell for ever. You must suffer hunger and nakedness unless you take care to provide food and raiment; but you must suffer eternal banishment from God and all the joys of his presence, if you do not labor to secure the one thing needful. Without the riches of the world you may be rich in faith, and heirs of the heavenly inheritance. Without earthly pleasures you may have joy unspeakable and full of glory in the love of God, and the expectation of the kingdom reserved in heaven for you. Without health of body you may have happiness of spirit; and even without this mortal life you may enjoy eternal life. Without the things of the world you may live in want for a little while, but then you will soon be upon an equality with the greatest princes. But, without this one thing needful, you are undone, absolutely undone. Your very being becomes a curse to you. O then let this grand necessity prevail with you!

Therefore, to conclude with the awakening and resistless words of the author I before quoted, "Awake, you sluggish, careless souls! your house over your head is in a flame! the hand of God is lifted up! If you love yourselves prevent the stroke. Vengeance is at your backs, the wrath of God pursues your sin, and woe to you if he find it upon you when he overtaketh you. Away with it speedily! up and begone; return to God; make Christ and mercy your friends in time, if you love your lives! the Judge is coming! for all that you have heard of it so long, yet still you believe it not. You shall shortly see the majesty of his appearance and the dreadful glory of his face; and yet do you not begin to look about you, and make ready for such a day? Yea, before that day, your separated souls

shall begin to reap as you have sowed here. Though now the partition that stands between you and the world to come do keep unbelievers strangers to the things that most concern them, yet death will quickly find a portal to let you in; and then, sinners, you will find such doings there as you little thought of, or did not sensibly regard upon earth. Before your friends will have time enough to wrap up your pale corpse in your winding-sheet, you will see and feel that which will tell you to the quick, that one thing was necessary. If you die without this one thing necessary, before your friends can have finished your funeral, your souls will have taken up their places among devils in endless torments and despair, and all the wealth, and honor, and pleasure that the world afforded you will not ease you. This is sad, but it is true, sirs; for God hath spoken it. Up therefore and bestir you for the life of your souls. Necessity will awake even the sluggard. Necessity, we say, will break through stone walls. The proudest will stoop to necessity: necessity will make men do any thing that is possible to be done. And is not necessity, the highest necessity, your own necessity, able to make you cast away your sins, and take up a holy and heavenly life? O poor souls! is there a greater necessity of your sin than of your salvation, and of pleasing your flesh for a little time than of pleasing the Lord and escaping everlasting misery?" O that you would consider what I say! and the Lord give you understanding in all things. Amen.

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## XVI.

### SAINTS SAVED WITH DIFFICULTY, AND THE CERTAIN PERDITION OF SINNERS.

"And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"—1 *Peter*, iv. 18.

THIS text may sound in your ears like a message from the dead; for it is at the request of our deceased friend\*

\* The person was Mr. James Hooper; the sermon is dated August, 21, 1756.

that I now insist upon it. He knew so much from the trials he made in life, that if he should be saved at all, it would be with great difficulty, and if he should escape destruction at all, it would be a very narrow escape; and he also knew so much of this stupid, careless world, that they stood in need of a solemn warning on this head; and therefore desired that his death should give occasion to a sermon on this alarming subject. But now the unknown wonders of the invisible world lie open to his eyes; and now also he can take a full review of this passage through this mortal life; now he sees the many unsuspected dangers he narrowly escaped, and the many fiery darts of the devil which the shield of faith repelled; now, like a ship arrived at port he reviews the rocks and shoals he passed through, many of which lay under water and out of sight; and therefore now he is more fully acquainted with the difficulty of salvation than ever. And should he now rise and make his appearance in this assembly in the solemn and dreadful attire of an inhabitant of the world of spirits, and again direct me to a more proper subject, methinks he would still stand to his choice, and propose it to your serious thoughts, that *if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear.*

The apostle's principal design in the context seems to be to prepare the Christians for those sufferings which he saw coming upon them, on account of their religion. *Them that obey not the gospel of God*, is a description of the unbelieving Jews, to whom it was peculiarly applicable. But I see no reason for confining the apostle's view entirely to the temporal destruction of the Jews; he seems to refer further to that still more terrible destruction that awaits all that obey not the gospel in the eternal world; that is to say, if the children are so severely chastised in this world, what shall become of rebels in the world to come, the proper state of retribution? How much more tremendous must be their fate!

In the text he carries on the same reflection. *If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear.* The righteous is the common character of all good men or true Christians; and the ungodly and sinners are characters which may include the wicked of all nations and ages. Now, says he, "if the righteous be but scarcely saved, saved with great difficulty, just saved and

no more, where shall the idolaters and vicious sinners appear, whose characters are so opposite?"

The abrupt and pungent form of expression is very emphatical. *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* I need not tell you, your own reason will inform you: I appeal to yourselves for an answer, for you are all capable of determining upon so plain a case. *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* Alas! it strikes me dumb with horror to think of it; it is so shocking and terrible that I cannot bear to describe it. Now they are gay, merry, and rich; but when I look a little forward, I see them appear in very different circumstances, and the horror of the prospect is hardly supportable.

The method in which I intend to prosecute our subject is this:

I. I shall point out the principal difficulties which even the righteous meet with in the way to salvation.

II. I shall mention those things in the condition and character of the righteous, which render his salvation so promising and seemingly easy, and then show you that, if with all these favorable and hopeful circumstances he is not saved but with great difficulty and danger, those who are of an opposite character, and whose condition is so evidently and apparently desperate, cannot be saved at all.

I. I am to point out the principal difficulties which even the righteous meet with in the way to salvation.

Here I would premise, that such who have become truly religious, and persevered in the way of holiness and virtue to the last, will meet with no difficulty at all to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. The difficulty does not lie here, for the same apostle Peter assures us, that if we give all diligence *to make our calling and election sure*, we shall never fall; but *so an entrance shall be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*—2 Peter, i. 10, 11. But the difficulty lies in this, that, all things considered, it is a very difficult thing to obtain, and persevere in real religion in the present corrupt state of things, where we meet with so many temptations and such powerful opposition. Or, in other words, it is difficult in such a world as this to prepare for salvation; and this renders it difficult to be saved, because we cannot be saved without preparation.

The enemies that oppose our religious progress are the



devil, the world, and the flesh. These form a powerful alliance against our salvation, and leave no artifice untried to obtain it.

The things of the world, though good in themselves, are temptations to such depraved hearts as ours. Riches, honors, and pleasures spread their charms, and tempt us to the pursuit of flying shadows, to the neglect of the one thing needful. These engross the thoughts and concerns, the affections and labors of multitudes. They engage with such eagerness in an excessive hurry of business and anxious care, or so debauch and stupefy themselves with sensual pleasures, that the voice of God is not heard, the clamors of conscience are drowned, the state of their souls is not inquired into, the interests of eternity are forgotten, the eternal God, the joys of heaven, and the pains of hell are cast out of the mind and disregarded; and they care not for any or all of these important realities, if they can but gratify the lust of avarice, ambition, and sensuality. And are such likely to perform the arduous work of salvation? No; they do not so much as seriously attempt it. Now these things, which are fatal to multitudes, throw great difficulties in the way even of the righteous man. He finds it hard to keep his mind intent upon this great concern in the midst of such labors and cares he is obliged to engage in; and frequently he feels his heart estranged from God and ensnared into the ways of sin, his devotion cooled, and his whole soul disordered by these allurements. In short, he finds it one of the hardest things in the world to maintain a heavenly mind in such an earthly region, a spiritual temper among so many carnal objects.

But the greatest difficulty in our way arises from the corruption and wickedness of our own hearts. This is an enemy within; and it is that betrays us into the hands of our enemies without. When we turn our eyes to this quarter, what vast difficulties rise in our way! difficulties which are impossibilities to us, unless the Almighty Power enables us to surmount them. Such are a blind mind, ignorant of divine things, or that can speculate only upon them, but does not see their reality and dread importance; a mind empty of God and full of the lumber and vanities of this world. Such are a hard heart, insensible of sin, insensible of the glory of God, and the beauties of holiness, and the infinite moment of eternal things. And how strangely does this

inward corruption indispose men for religion! Hence their ignorance, their security, carelessness, presumptuous hopes, and impenitence. Hence their unwillingness to admit conviction, their resistance to the Holy Spirit and their own consciences, their love of ease and impatience of sorrow for sin, and of solicitude about their eternal state. Hence their contempt of the gospel, their disregard to all religious instructions, their neglect of the means of grace, and the ordinances of Christ, or their careless, formal, lukewarm attendance upon them. Hence it is so difficult to awaken them to a just sense of their spiritual condition, and to suitable earnestness in their religious endeavors; and hence their fickleness and inconstancy, their relapses and backslidings, when they have been a little alarmed. In short, hence it is that so many thousands perish amidst the means of salvation. These difficulties prove eventually insuperable to the generality, and they never surmount them. But even the righteous, who is daily conquering them by the aid of divine grace, and will at last be more than a conqueror, he still finds many hinderances and discouragements from this quarter. The remains of these innate corruptions still cleave to him in the present state, and these render his progress heavenward so slow and heavy. These render his life a constant warfare, and he is obliged to fight his way through. These frequently check the aspirations of his soul to God, cool his devotion, damp his courage, ensnare his thoughts and affections to things below, and expose him to the successful attacks of temptation. And such of you as do not know this by experience, know nothing at all of true experimental Christianity.

See, my brethren, see the way in which you must walk if you would enter into the kingdom. In this rugged road they have walked who are now safe arrived at their journey's end, the land of rest. They were saved, but it was with great difficulty; they escaped the fatal rocks and shoals, but it was a very narrow escape: and methinks it is with a kind of pleasing horror they now review the numerous dangers through which they passed, many of which they did not perhaps suspect till they were over. And is this the way in which you are walking? Is your religion a course of watchfulness, labor, conflict, and vigorous exertion? Are you indeed earnest in it above all things in

this world? Or are not many of you lukewarm Laodiceans and indifferent Gallios about these things? If your religion is a course of security, carelessness, sloth, and formality; alas! if all the vigor and exertion of the righteous man be but just sufficient for his salvation, where, O where shall you appear? Which leads me,

II. To mention those things in the character and condition of the righteous, which renders his salvation so promising and seemingly easy, and then show that if with all those hopeful circumstances he shall not be saved but with great difficulty, that they whose character is directly opposite, and has nothing encouraging in it, cannot possibly be saved at all. And this head I shall cast into such a form as to exemplify the text.

1. If those that abstain from immorality and vice be but scarcely saved, where shall the vicious, profligate sinner appear?

It is the habitual character of a righteous man to be temperate and sober, chaste, just, and charitable; to revere the name of God, and every thing sacred, and religiously observe the holy hours devoted to the service of God. And if such shall scarcely be saved, where shall those of the opposite character appear? Where shall the brute of a drunkard, the audacious swearer, the scoffer, the thief, the extortioner, the liar, the Sabbath-breaker, the reveler, where shall those appear? Are these likely to stand in the congregation of the righteous, or to appear in the presence of God with joy? Is there the least likelihood that such shall be saved? If you will regard the authority of an inspired apostle in the case, I can direct you to the place where you may find his express determination. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10: *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God! Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

2. If those that conscientiously performed the duties of religion be scarcely saved, where shall the neglecters of them appear?

The righteous are characterized as persons that honestly endeavor to perform all the duties they owe to God. They devoutly read and hear his word, and make divine things their study; they are no strangers to the throne of grace;

they live a life of prayer in their retirements, and in a social capacity. They make their families little churches, in which divine worship is solemnly performed. Now if persons of this character are but *scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly appear*, who persist in the willful neglect of these known duties of religion? Can they be saved, who do not so much as use the means of salvation? Can those who do not study their Bible, the only directory to eternal life, expect to find the way thither? Can prayerless souls receive answers to prayer? Will all the bliss of heaven be thrown away upon such as do not think it worth their while importunately to ask it?

3. If they that are more than externally moral and religious in their conduct; that have been born again, created in Christ Jesus to good works, as every man that is truly righteous has been; if such, I say, be but scarcely saved, where shall they appear who rest in their mere outward morality, their proud self-righteous virtue, and their religious formalities, and have never been made new creatures, never had the inward principle of action changed by the power of God, and the inbred disorders of the heart rectified? Where shall they appear who have nothing but a self-sprung religion, the genuine offspring of degenerate nature, and never had a supernatural principle of grace implanted in their souls? Can men flatter themselves they shall be saved by the Christian religion, in opposition to the plain, strong, and repeated declarations of the Christian revelation?

4. If they that are striving to enter in at the strait gate, and pressing into the kingdom of heaven, do but just obtain admission; if they who forget things that are behind, and reach after those that are before, and press with all their might towards the goal, do scarcely obtain the prize, what shall become of those lukewarm, careless, formal, presumptuous professors of Christianity who are so numerous among us? If those whose hearts are habitually solicitous about their eternal state, who labor in earnest for the immortal bread, who in short make the care of their souls the principal business of their life, if such are but scarcely saved, where shall they appear who are at ease in Zion?

I shall now conclude with a few reflections. 1. You may hence see the work of salvation is not that easy, tri-

fling thing which many take it to be. They think they can never be too much in earnest, or too laborious in the pursuit of earthly things; but religion is a matter by the by with them; only the business of an hour once a week: this is not the religion of the Bible: this is not the way to life laid out by God, but it is the smooth downward road to destruction. Therefore,

2. Examine yourselves to which class you belong, whether to that of the righteous, who shall be saved, though with difficulty, or to that of the ungodly and the sinner, who must appear in a very different situation. To determine this important inquiry, recollect the sundry parts of the righteous man's character which I have briefly described, and see whether they belong to you. Do you carefully abstain from vice and immorality? Do you make conscience of every duty of religion? Have you ever been born again of God, and made more than externally religious? Are you sensible of the difficulties in your way from Satan, the world, and the flesh? Do you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, and press into the kingdom of God? Are you true believers, penitents, and lovers of God? Are these, on the contrary, the constituents of your habitual character? I pray you make an impartial trial, for much depends upon it.

3. If this be your habitual character, be of good cheer, for you shall be saved, though with difficulty. Be not discouraged when you fall into fiery trials, for they are no strange things in the present state. All that have walked in the same narrow road before you have met with them, but now they are safe arrived in their eternal home. Let your dependence be upon the aids of divine grace to bear you through, and you will overcome at last. But,

4. If your character be that of the ungodly and the sinner, pause and think where shall you appear at last! When, like our deceased friend, you leave this mortal state, and launch into regions unknown, where will you then appear? Must it be in the region of sin, which is your element now? in the society of devils, whom you resemble in temper, and imitate in conduct? among the trembling criminals at the left hand of the Judge, where the ungodly and sinners shall all be crowded? If you continue such as you now are, have you any reason at all to hope for a more favorable doom?

I shall conclude with a reflection to exemplify the context in another view, and that is, "If judgment begin at the house of God, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel?" If the righteous, the favorites of Heaven, suffer so much in this world, what shall sinners, with whom God is angry every day, and who are vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, what shall they suffer in the eternal world, the proper place for rewards and punishments, and where an equitable Providence deals with every man according to his works? If the children are chastised with various calamities, and even die in common with the rest of mankind, what shall be the doom of enemies and rebels? If those meet with so many difficulties in the pursuit of salvation, what shall these suffer in enduring damnation? If the infernal powers are permitted to wrong Christ's sheep, how will they rend and tear the wicked as their proper prey? O that you may in *this your day know the things that belong to your peace, before they are for ever hid from your eyes.*—Luke, xix. 42.



## XVII.

### INDIFFERENCE TO LIFE URGED FROM ITS SHORTNESS AND VANITY.

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."—1 Cor. vii. 29-31.

A CREATURE, treading every moment upon the slippery brink of the grave, and ready every moment to shoot the gulf of eternity, and launch away to some unknown coast, ought to stand always in the posture of serious expectation; ought every day to be in his own mind taking leave of this world, breaking off the connection of his heart from it, and preparing for his last remove into that world in which he must reside, not for a few months, or years, as in this, but through a boundless, everlasting duration. Such a

situation requires habitual, constant thoughtfulness, abstraction from the world, and serious preparation for death and eternity. But when we are called, as we frequently are, to perform the last sad offices to our friends and neighbors who have taken their flight a little before us; when the solemn pomp and horrors of death strike our senses, then certainly it becomes us to be usually thoughtful and serious. Dying beds, the last struggles and groans of dissolving nature, pale, cold, ghastly corpses,

“The knell, the shroud, the mattock, and the grave;  
The deep, damp vault, the darkness and the worm;”

these are very alarming monitors of our own mortality; these out-preach the loudest preacher; and they must be deep and senseless rocks, and not men, who do not hear and feel their voice. Among the numberless instances of the divine skill in bringing good out of evil, this is one, that past generations have sickened and died to warn their successors. One here and there, also, is singled out of our neighborhood or families, and made an example, a *memento mori*, to us that survive, to rouse us out of our stupid sleep, to give us the signal of the approach of the last enemy, death; to constrain us to let go our eager grasp of this vain world, and set us upon looking out and preparing for another.

One great reason of men's excessive attachment to the present state, and their stupid neglect to the concerns of eternity, is their forming too high an estimate of the affairs of time in comparison with those of eternity. While the important realities of the eternal world are out of view, unthought of, and disregarded, as, alas! they generally are by the most of mankind, what mighty things in their esteem are the relations, the joys and sorrows, the possessions and bereavements, the acquisitions of this life? What airs of importance do they put on in their view? How do they engross their anxious thoughts and cares, and exhaust their strength and spirits! To be happy, to be rich, to be great and honorable, to enjoy your fill of pleasure in this world, is not this a great matter, the main interest with many of you? is not this the object of your ambition, your eager desire and laborious pursuit? But to consume away your life in sickness and pain, in poverty and disgrace, in abortive schemes and disappointed pursuits,

what a serious calamity, what a huge affliction is this in your esteem? What is there in the compass of the universe that you are so much afraid of, and so cautiously shunning? Whether large profits or losses in trade be not a mighty matter, ask the busy, anxious merchant. Whether poverty be not a most miserable state, ask the poor that feel it, and the rich that fear it. Whether riches be not a very important happiness, ask the possessors; or rather ask the restless pursuers of them, who expect still greater happiness from them than those that are taught by experience can flatter themselves with. In short, it is evident, from a thousand instances, that the enjoyments, pursuits, and sorrows of this life are mighty matters! nay, are all in all in the esteem of the generality of mankind. These are the things they most deeply feel, the things about which they are chiefly concerned, and which are the objects of their strongest passions.

But is this a just estimate of things? Are the affairs of this world then indeed so interesting and all important? Yes, if eternity be a dream, and heaven and hell but majestic chimeras or fairy lands; if we were always to live in this world, and no concern with any thing beyond it; if the joys of earth were the highest we could hope for, or its miseries the most terrible we could fear, then indeed we might take this world for our all, and regard its affairs as the most important that our nature is capable of. *But this I say, brethren,* (and I pronounce it as the echo of an inspired apostle's voice,) *this I say, the time is short:* the time of life in which we have any thing to do with these affairs is a short, contracted span. Therefore, *it remaineth,* that is, this is the inference we should draw from the shortness of time, *they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it, or using it to excess; for the fashion of this world, these tender relations, this weeping and rejoicing, this buying, possessing and using this world passeth away.*

The phantom will soon vanish, the shadow will soon fly off, and they that have wives or husbands in this transitory life, will in reality be as though they had none; and they that weep now, as though they wept not; and they that now rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that



now buy, possess, and use this world, as though they never had the least property in it. This is the solemn, mortifying doctrine I am now to inculcate upon you in the further illustration of the several parts of my text; a doctrine justly alarming to the lovers of this world, and the neglecters of that life which is to come. When St. Paul pronounces any thing with an unusual air of solemnity and authority, and after the formality of an introduction to gain attention, it must be a matter of uncommon weight and worthy of the most serious regard. In this manner he introduces the funeral sentiments in my text. *This I say, brethren*; this I solemnly pronounce as the mouth of God; this I declare as a great truth but little regarded, and which, therefore, there is much need I should repeatedly declare; this I say with all the authority of an apostle, a messenger from heaven; and I demand your sincere attention to what I am going to say.

And what is it he is introducing with all this solemn formality? Why, it is an old, plain, familiar truth, universally known and confessed, namely, that the time of our continuance in this world is short. But why so much formality in introducing such a common plain truth as this? Because, however generally it be known and confessed, it is very rarely regarded; and it requires more than even the most solemn address of an apostle to turn the attention of a thoughtless world to it. How many of you, my brethren, are convinced against your wills of this melancholy truth, and yet turn every way to avoid the mortifying thought, are always uneasy when it forces itself upon your minds, and do not suffer it to have a proper influence upon your temper and practice; but live as if you believed the time of life was long and even everlasting? O! when will the happy hour come when you will think and act like those that believe that common uncontroverted truth, that the time of life is short! Then you would no longer think of delays, nor contrive artifices to put off the work of your salvation; then you could not bear the thought of such negligent, or languid, feeble endeavors in a work that must be done, and that in so short a time.

*This I say, my brethren, the time is short*; the time of life is absolutely short; a span, an inch, a hair's breadth. How near the neighborhood between the cradle and the grave! How short the journey from infancy to old age, through

all the intermediate stages! Let the few among you who bear the marks of old age upon you in gray hairs, wrinkles, weakness, and pains look back upon your tiresome pilgrimage through life, and does it not appear to you, as though you commenced men but yesterday?

And how strongly does the shortness of this life prove the certainty of another? Certainly this is not the last stage of human nature; certainly there is an eternity; there is a heaven and a hell:—otherwise we might expostulate with our Maker, as David once did upon that supposition, *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?*

In that awful eternity we must all be in a short time. Yes, my brethren, I may venture to prophesy that in less than seventy or eighty years the most, if not all of this assembly, must be in some apartment of that strange, untried world. The merry, unthinking, irreligious multitude in that doleful mansion which I must mention, grating as the sound is to their ears, and that is hell! and the pious, penitent, believing few in the blissful seats of heaven. There we shall reside a long, long time indeed, or rather through a long, endless eternity. Which leads me to add,

That as the time of life is short absolutely in itself, so especially it is short comparatively; that is, in comparison with eternity. In this comparison, even the long life of Methuselah and the antediluvians shrink into a mere point, a nothing. Indeed, no duration of time, however long, will bear the comparison. Millions of millions of years! as many years as sands upon the sea-shore! as many years as the particles of matter in the whole material universe, all these years do not bear so much proportion to eternity as a moment, a pulse, or the twinkling of an eye, to ten thousand ages! not so much as a hair's breadth to the distance from the spot where we stand to the farthest star, or the remotest corner of the creation. In short, they do not bear the least imaginable proportion at all; for all this length of years, though beyond the power of distinct enumeration to us, will as certainly come to an end as an hour or a moment; and when it comes to an end, it is entirely and irrecoverably past: but eternity, (O the solemn tremendous sound!) eternity will never, never, never come to an end! eternity will never, never, never be past! And is this eternity, this awful, all-important eternity, entailed upon us! upon us, the offspring of the dust! the creatures

of yesterday! upon us who are every moment liable to the arrest of death, sinking into the grave, and mouldering into dust one after another in quick succession! upon us whose thoughts, and cares, and pursuits are so confined to time and earth, as if we had nothing to do with any thing beyond! O! is this immense inheritance unalienably ours? Yes, brethren, it is; reason and revelation prove our title beyond all dispute. It is an inheritance entailed upon us, whether we will or not. Sin may make our souls miserable, but it cannot make them mortal. Sin may forfeit a happy eternity, and render our immortality a curse; so that it would be better for us if we never had been born: but sin cannot put an end to our being, as it can to our happiness, nor procure for us the shocking relief of rest in the hideous gulf of annihilation.

And is a little time, a few months or years, a great matter to us? to us who are heirs of an eternal duration? How insignificant is a moment in seventy or eighty years! but how much more insignificant is even the longest life upon earth when compared with eternity! How trifling are all the concerns of time to those of immortality! What is it to us who are to live for ever, whether we live happy or miserable for an hour? whether we have wives, or whether we have none; whether we rejoice, or whether we weep; whether we buy, possess, and use this world, or whether we consume away our life in hunger and nakedness, and the want of all things, it will be all one in a little, little time. Eternity will level all: and eternity is at the door.

And how shall we spend this eternal duration that is thus entailed upon us? Shall we sleep it away in a stupid insensibility, or in a state of indifference, neither happy nor miserable? No, no, my brethren; we must spend it in the height of happiness or in the depth of misery. This is not the place of rewards or punishments, and therefore the great Ruler of the world does not exert his perfections in the distribution of either; but eternity is allotted for that very purpose, and therefore he will then distribute rewards or punishments worthy himself, such as will proclaim him God in acts of grace and vengeance, as he has appeared in all his other works. O eternity! with what majestic wonders art thou replenished, where Jehovah acts with his own immediate hand, and displays himself God-

like and unrivaled, in his exploits both of vengeance and of grace! In this present state, our good and evil are blended; our happiness has some bitter ingredients, our misery has some agreeable mitigations: but in the eternal world good and evil shall be entirely and for ever separated; all will be pure, unmingled happiness, or pure, unmingled misery. In the present state the best have not uninterrupted peace within; conscience has frequent cause to make them uneasy; some mote or other falls into its tender eye, and sets it a weeping; and the worst also have their arts to keep conscience sometimes easy, and silence its clamor. But then conscience will have its full scope. It will never more pass a censure upon the righteous, and it will never more be a friend, or even an inactive enemy to the wicked for so much as one moment. The most terrible images which even the pencil of divine inspiration can draw, such as *a lake of fire and brimstone, utter darkness, the blackness of darkness, a never-dying worm, unquenchable everlasting fire*, and all the most dreadful figures that can be drawn from all parts of the universe, are not sufficient to represent the punishments of the eternal world. And, on the other hand, *the eye*, which has ranged through so many objects, *has not seen*; *the ear* which has had still more extensive intelligence *has not heard*; *nor has the heart*, which is even unbounded in its conceptions, *conceived the things that God hath laid up for them that love him*.

But what gives infinite importance to these joys and sorrows is that as they are enjoyed or suffered in the eternal world, they are themselves eternal. Eternal joys! eternal pains! joys and pains that will last as long as the King eternal and immortal will live to distribute them! as long as our immortal spirit will live to feel them! O what joys and pains are these! And these, my brethren, are awaiting every one of us. These pleasures or these pains are felt this moment by such of our friends and acquaintances as have shot the gulf before us; and in a little while, you and I must feel them.

And what then have we to do with time and earth? Are the pleasures and pains of this world worthy to be compared with these? *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*; the enjoyments and sufferings, the labors and pursuits, the laughter and tears of the present state, are all nothing in this comparison. What is the loss of an estate, of a dear

relative, to the loss of a happy immortality? But if our heavenly inheritance be secure, what though we should be reduced into Job's forlorn situation, we have enough left, more than to fill up all deficiencies. What though we are poor, sickly, melancholy, racked with pains, and involved in every human misery, heaven will more than make amends for all. But if we have no evidence of our title to that, the sense of these transitory distresses may be swallowed up in the just fear of the miseries of eternity. Alas! what avails it that we play away a few years in mirth and gayety, in grandeur and pleasure, if when these few years are fled, we lift up our eyes in hell, tormented in flames! O what are all these things to a candidate for eternity! an heir of everlasting happiness or everlasting misery!

It is from such convictive premises as these that St. Paul draws his inference in my text; *it remaineth therefore that they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it.* Whatever afflictions may befall us here, they will not last long, but will soon be swallowed up in the greater joys or sorrows of the eternal world. These tears will not always flow; these sighs will not always heave our breasts. When we enter the eternal world, if we have been the dutiful children of God here, his own gentle hand shall wipe away every tear from our faces, and he will comfort the mourners. Then all the sorrows of life will cease for ever, and no more painful remembrance of them will remain, than of the pains and sickness of our unconscious infancy. But if all the discipline of our heavenly Father fails to reduce us to our duty, if we still continue rebellious and incorrigible under this rod, and consequently the miseries of this life convey us to those of the future, the smaller will be swallowed up and lost in the greater, as a drop in the ocean. Some desperate sinners have hardened themselves in sin with this cold comfort, "That since they must be miserable hereafter, they will at least take their fill of pleasure here, and take a merry journey to hell." But, alas! what a sorry mitigation will this be! how entirely will all this career of pleasure be forgotten at the first pang of infernal anguish! O! what poor relief to a soul lost for ever, to reflect that this eternity of pain

followed upon, and was procured by a few months or years of sordid, guilty pleasure! Was that a relief or an aggravation which Abraham mentions to his lost son, when he puts him in mind, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things? Thou hadst then all the share of good which thou ever shalt enjoy; thou hadst thy portion in that world where thou didst choose to have it, and therefore stand to the consequences of thine own choice, and look for no other portion! O! who can bear to be thus reminded and upbraided in the midst of remediless misery! Upon the whole, whatever afflictions or bereavements we suffer in this world, let us moderate our sorrows and keep them within bounds. Let them not work up and ferment into risings against God, who gives and takes away, and blessed be his name! Let them not sink us into a sullen dislike of the mercies still left in our possession. Do not mistake me, as if I recommended or expected an utter insensibility under the calamities of life. I allow nature its moderate tears; but let them not rise to floods of inconsolable sorrows; I allow you to feel your afflictions like men and Christians, but then you must bear them like men and Christians too. May God grant that we may all exemplify this direction when we are put to the trial! The third branch of the inference refers to the joys and pleasures of life. *The time is short, it remaineth therefore that they that rejoice be as if they rejoiced not*; that is, the joys of this life, from whatever earthly cause they spring, are so short and transitory, that they are as of no account to a creature that is to exist for ever; to exist for ever in joys or pains of an infinitely higher and more important kind. These vanishing, uncertain joys should not engross our hearts as our chief happiness, nor cause us to neglect and forfeit the divine and everlasting joys above the skies. When we are rejoicing in the abundance of earthly blessings, we should be as careful and laborious in securing the favor of God and everlasting happiness as if we rejoiced not. If our eternal all is secured it is enough; and it will not at all be heightened or diminished by the reflection that we lived a joyful or a sad life in this pilgrimage.

*Use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away.* The whole scheme and system of worldly affairs, all this marrying, and rejoicing, and weeping, and buying, and enjoying, *passeth away, passeth away*

this moment; it not only will pass away, but it is even now passing away. The stream of time, with all the trifles that float on it, and all the eager pursuers of these bubbles, is in motion, in swift, incessant motion, to empty itself and all that sail upon it, into the shoreless ocean of eternity, where all will be absorbed and lost for ever. And shall we excessively doat upon things that are perpetually flying from us, and in a little time will be no more our property than the riches of the world before the flood? *O ye sons of men, how long will you follow after vanity? why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which profiteth not?*

*For the fashion of this world passeth away.* Others apprehend the apostle here alludes to some grand procession, in which pageants or emblematical figures pass along the streets. The staring crowd wait their appearance with eager eyes, and place themselves in the most convenient posture of observation; they gape at the passing show; they follow it with a wondering gaze;—and now it is past; and now it begins to look dim to the sight; and now it disappears. Just such is this transitory world. Thus it begins to attract the eager gaze of mankind; thus it marches by in swift procession from our eyes to meet the eyes of others; and thus it soon vanishes and disappears.

And shall we always be stupidly staring upon this empty parade, and forget that world of substantial realities to which we are hastening? No; let us live and act as the expectants of that world, and as having nothing to do with this world, but only as a school, a state of discipline, to educate and prepare us for another.

O! that I could successfully impress this exhortation upon all your hearts! O! that I could prevail upon you all this day to break off your over-fond attachment to earth, and to make ready for immortality! Could I carry this point, it would be a greater advantage than all the dead could receive by any funeral panegyrics from me. I speak for the advantage of the living upon such occasions, and not to celebrate the virtues of those who have passed the trial, and received their sentence from the supreme Judge. And I am well satisfied the mourning relatives of our deceased friend, who best knew and esteemed his worth, would be rather offended than pleased, if I should prostitute the present hour to so mean a purpose. Indeed,

many a character less worthy of praise often makes a shining figure in funeral sermons. Many that have not been such tender husbands, such affectionate fathers, and such kind masters, such sincere, upright friends, so honest and punctual in trade, such zealous lovers of religion and good men, have had their putrefying remains perfumed with public praise from a place so solemn as the pulpit; but you can witness for me, it is not my usual foible to run to this extreme. My business is with you, who are yet alive, to hear me. To you I call, as with the voice of your deceased friend and neighbor,—Prepare! prepare for eternity! O! if the spirits that you once knew, while clothed in flesh, should take my place, would not this be their united voice, “Prepare, prepare for eternity! Ye frail, short-lived mortals; ye near neighbors of the world of spirits; ye borderers upon heaven or hell; make ready, loosen your hearts from earth, and all that it contains; weigh anchor, and prepare to launch away into the boundless ocean of eternity, which, methinks, is now within your ken, and roars within hearing.” And remember, this I say, brethren, with great confidence, *the time is short: it remaineth therefore, for the future, that they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as if they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world, all its schemes and affairs, all the vain parade, all the idle farce of life, passeth away.* And away let it pass, if we may at last obtain a better country; that is, a heavenly: which may God grant for Jesus’ sake! Amen.



## XVIII.

## LIFE AND IMMORTALITY REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL.\*

“And hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.”  
2 *Tim.* i, 10.

So extensive have been the havoc and devastation which death has made in the world for near six thousand years, ever since it was first introduced by the sin of man, that this earth is now become one vast grave-yard, or burying-place for her sons. The many generations that have followed upon each other, in so quick a succession from Adam to this day, are now in the mansions under ground. And there must we and all the present generation sleep ere long. Some make a short journey from the cradle to the grave; they rise from nothing at the creative fiat of the Almighty, and take an immediate flight into the world of spirits, without an intermediate state of probation. Like a bird on the wing, they perch on our globe, rest a day, a month, or a year, and then fly off to some other regions. It is evident, these were not formed for the purposes of the present state, where they make so short a stay; and yet we are sure they are not made in vain by an all-wise Creator, and therefore we conclude that they are young immortals, that immediately ripen in the world of spirits, and there enter upon scenes for which it was worth their while coming into existence. Others spring up and bloom for a few years, but they fade away like a flower, and are cut down. Others arrive at the prime or meridian of human life, but in all their strength and gayety, and amid their hurries and schemes and promising prospects, they are surprised by the arrest of death, and laid stiff, senseless, and ghastly in the grave. A few creep into their beds of dust under the burden of old age and the gradual decay of nature. In short, the grave is *the place appointed*

\* This Sermon was preached at the funeral of Mr. William Yuille, and is dated Sept. 1, 1756.

for all living ; the general rendezvous of the sons of Adam. There the prince and the beggar, the conqueror and the slave, the giant and the infant, the scheming politician and the simple peasant, the wise and the fool, Heathens, Jews, Mahometans, and Christians, all lie equally low, and mingle their dust without distinction. There lie our ancestors, our neighbors, our friends, our relatives, with whom we once conversed, and who were united to our hearts by strong and endearing ties ; and there lies our friend, the sprightly, vigorous youth, whose death is the occasion of this funeral solemnity. This earth is overspread with the ruins of the human frame ; it is a huge carnage, a vast charnel-house, undermined and hollowed by the graves, the last mansions of mortals.

And shall these ruins of time and death never be repaired ? Is this the final state of human nature ? Are all these millions of creatures, that were so curiously formed, that could think, and will, and exercise the superior powers of reason, are they all utterly extinct, absorbed into the yawning gulf of annihilation, and never again to emerge into life and activity ?

My text revives us with heavenly light to scatter this tremendous gloom. Jesus hath abolished death, overthrown its empire, and delivered its captives ; and he *hath brought life and immortality to light in the gospel*. Life and immortality here seem to refer both to the soul and the body, the two constituents of our person. As applied to the body, life and immortality signify, that though our bodies are dissolved at death, and return into their native elements, yet they shall be formed anew with vast improvements, and raised to an immortal existence ; so that they shall be as though death never had *had* any power over them ; and thus death shall be abolished, annihilated, and all traces of the ruins it had made for ever disappear, as though they had never been. It is in this sense chiefly that the word *immortality* or *incorruptibility* is made use of in my text. But then the resurrection of the body supposes the perpetual existence of the soul, for whose sake it is raised ; therefore life and immortality, as referring to the soul, signify that it is immortal, in a strict and proper sense ; that is, that it cannot die at all, or be dissolved like the body ; it lives after the dissolution of the animal frame in a separate state ; and it lives at the resurrection to reanimate

the new-formed body ; and it lives for ever, and shall never be dissolved nor annihilated. In this complex sense we may understand the immortality of which my text speaks. My present design is not to propose arguments for the conviction of your judgments, which I hope you do not so much need ; but I shall give you some idea of immortality, in both the senses I have mentioned, and then improve it.

Let us look through the wastes and glooms of death and the grave to the glorious dreadful morning of the resurrection. At the alarming clangor of the last trumpet, Adam, and the sleeping millions of his posterity, start into sudden life. *The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth ; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.*—John, v. 28.

Then, my brethren, your dust and mine shall be organized and reanimated ; and *though after our skin worms destroy these bodies, yet in our flesh shall we see God. Then this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.* And may not the prospect alarm us, and set us upon earnest preparation for these important scenes ? Shall we take so much care of our bodies in this mortal state, where, after all our care, they must soon fall to dust, and become the prey of worms, and shall we take no care that they may have a happy and glorious resurrection ! My brethren, you must not let *sin reign in your mortal bodies now, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof*, if you would have them raised holy and happy in that awful morning ; but you must consecrate your bodies, and keep them holy as the temples of the Holy Ghost, and *yield your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.* Can you flatter yourselves that bodies polluted with filthy lusts and sensual gratifications shall ever be admitted into the regions of perfect purity ? It would be an unnatural element to such depraved constitutions. Shall those feet ever walk the crystal pavement of the New Jerusalem, which have been accustomed to run into the foul paths of sin ? Shall those tongues ever join the songs of heaven, which have been oftener employed in swearing and imprecation, the language of hell, than in prayer and praise ? Shall those ears ever be charmed with celestial music, which have not listened with pleasure and eagerness to the joyful

sound of the gospel, but were entertained with the song of drunkards, the loud, unthinking laugh, and the impure jest? Are those knees likely to bow in delightful homage before the throne of God and the Lamb on high, which have not been used to the posture of petitioners at the throne of grace on earth? No, my brethren, this is not at all probable, even to a superficial inquirer; and to one that thinks deeply, and consults with reason and the sacred Scriptures, this appears utterly impossible.

Therefore, take warning in time. Methinks this consideration might have some weight even with epicures and sensualists, who consider themselves as mere animals, and make it their only concern to provide and gratify the flesh. Unless you be religious now, unless you now deny yourselves of your guilty pleasures, not only your soul, that neglected, disregarded trifle, must perish, but your body, your dear body, your only care, must be wretched too. But if you now keep your bodies pure, and serve God with them, and with your spirit too, they will bloom for ever in the charms of celestial beauty; they will flourish in immortal youth and vigor! And will you not deny yourselves the sordid pleasures of a few years, for the sake of those of a blessed immortality? But let me give you a view of immortality of a more noble kind, the immortality of the soul. And here, what an extensive and illustrious prospect opens before us! Look a little way backward, and your sight is lost in the darkness of non-existence. A few years ago you were nothing. But at the creative fiat of the Almighty, that little spark of being, the soul, was struck out of nothing; and now it warms your breast, and animates the machine of flesh. But shall this glimmering spark, ever be extinguished? No; it will survive the ruins of the universe, and blaze out into immortality. The duration of your souls will run on from its first commencement in parallel lines with the existence of the Deity. What an inheritance is this entailed upon the child of dust, the creature of yesterday? Here let us pause,—make a stand,—and take a survey of this majestic prospect! This body must soon moulder into dust, but the soul will live unhurt, untouched, amid all the dissolving struggles and convulsions of animal nature. *These heavens shall pass away with a great noise; these elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth and the things that are therein, shall be burnt*

*up*; but this soul shall live secure of existence in the universal desolation;

“Unhurt amidst the war of elements,  
The wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds.”—*Addison*.

And now, when the present system of things is dissolved, and time shall be no more, eternity, boundless eternity, succeeds, and on this the soul enters as on its proper hereditary duration. Now look forward as far as you will, your eyes meet with no obstruction, with nothing but the immensity of the prospect; in that, indeed, it is lost, as extending infinitely beyond its ken. Come, attempt this arithmetic of infinities, and exhaust the power of numbers; let millions of millions of ages begin the vast computation; multiply these by the stars of heaven; by the particles of dust in this huge globe of earth; by the drops of water in all the vast oceans, rivers, lakes, and springs that are spread over the globe; by all the thoughts that have risen in so quick a succession in the minds of men and angels, from their first creation to this day; make this computation, and then look forward through this long line of duration, and contemplate your future selves: still you see yourselves in existence; still the same persons; still endowed with the same consciousness, and the same capacities for happiness or misery, but vastly enlarged; as much superior to the present as the capacities of an adult to those of a new-born infant. Still you will bloom in immortal youth, and as far from an end as in the first moment of your existence. O, sirs, methinks it may startle us to view our future selves so changed, so improved, removed into such different regions, associated with such strange, unacquainted beings, and fixed in such different circumstances of glory or terror, of happiness or misery. Men of great projects and sanguine hopes are apt to sit and pause and take an imaginary survey of what they will do, and what they will be in the progress of life. But then death, like an apparition, starts up before them, and threatens to cut them off in the midst of their pursuits. But here no death threatens to extinguish your being, or snap the thread of your existence; but it runs on in one everlasting tenor. What a vast inheritance is this, unalienably entailed upon every child of Adam! What importance, what value, does this consideration give to that neglected thing, the soul! What an awful thing is it!

Immortality! What emphasis, what grandeur in the sound! Immortality is so vast an attribute, that it adds a kind of infinity to any thing to which it is annexed, however insignificant in other respects; and, on the other hand, the want of this would degrade the most exalted being into a trifle. The highest angel, if a creature of a day, or of a thousand years, what would he be? A fading flower, a vanishing vapor, a flying shadow. But an immortal! a creature that shall never, never, never cease to be! that shall expand his capacity of action, of pleasure, or of pain, through an everlasting duration! What an awful, important being is this! And is my soul, this little spark of reason in my breast, is that such a being? I tremble at myself. I revere my own dignity, and am struck with a kind of pleasing horror to view what I must be. And is there any thing so worthy the care of such a being as the happiness, the everlasting happiness, of my immortal part? What is it to me, who am formed for an endless duration, what I enjoy, or what I must suffer in this vanishing state?

And what shall become of me through this immortal duration? This, and this only, is the grand concern of an immortal; and in comparison of it, it does not deserve one thought what will become of me while in this vanishing phantom of a world. For consider, your immortality will not be a state of insensibility, without pleasure or pain; you will not draw out an endless inactive existence in an eternal stupor or a dead sleep. But your souls will be active as long as they exist; and as I have repeatedly observed, still retain all their capacities; nay, their capacities will perpetually enlarge with an eternal growth, and for ever tower from glory to glory in heaven, or plunge from depth to depth in hell. Here then, my fellow-immortals! here pause and say to yourselves, "What is like to become of my soul through this long space for ever? Is it likely to be happy or miserable?" What though you are now rich, honorable, healthy, merry, and gay? Alas! terrestrial enjoyments are not proper food for an immortal soul; and besides this, they are not immortal as your souls are. If these are your portion, what will you do for happiness millions of ages hence, when all these are fled away like a vapor? Are you provided with a happiness which shall last as long as your souls will live to crave it? Have you an interest in God? Are you prepared for the frui-

tion of the heavenly state? Do you delight in God above all? Have you a relish for the refined pleasures of religion? Do you now accustom yourselves to the service of God, the great employment of heaven? and are you preparing yourselves for the more exalted devotion of the church on high, by a serious attendance on the humbler forms of worship in the church on earth? Do not some of you know that this is not your prevailing character? And what then do you think will become of you without a speedy alteration in your temper and conduct? Alas! must your immortality, the grand prerogative of your nature, become your eternal curse? Have you made it your interest that you should be a brute? that is, that you should perish entirely, and your whole being be extinguished in death? Then it is no wonder you strive to disbelieve the doctrine of a future state, and your own immortality. But alas! in vain is the strife. The principles of atheism and infidelity may lull your consciences into a stupid repose for a little while, but they cannot annihilate you. They may lead you to live like beasts, but they cannot enable you to die like beasts; no, you must live, live to suffer righteous punishment, whether you will or not. As you did not come into being by your own consent, so neither can you lay down your being when you please. And will you not labor to make your immortality a blessing? Is there any thing in this world that can be a temptation to you to forfeit such an immense blessing? O that you were wise! that you would consider this!

I shall now accommodate my subject to the present melancholy occasion, and endeavor to make a particular improvement of it.

Do you expect a character of our deceased friend? This is not my usual practice; and I omit it, not because I can see nothing amiable in mankind, nor because I would enviously deny them their just praises, but because I have things of much greater importance to engage your attention. The dead have received their just and unchangeable doom at a superior tribunal; and our panegyrics or censures may be often misapplied. My business is with the living—not to flatter their vanity with compliments, but awaken them to a sense of their own mortality, and to a preparation for it. However, if you must have a character, I will draw it to you in the most important and

interesting light. Here was a youth in the bloom of life, in the prime of his strength, with a lively flow of spirits, who seemed as secure from the stroke of death as any of us; a youth that had escaped many dangers by sea and land; a youth launched into the world with, no doubt, the usual projects and expectations of that sanguine age. But where is he now? In yonder grave, alas! lies the blooming, promising flower, withered in the morning of life. Come to his grave, ye young and gay, ye lively and strong, ye men of business and hurry, come and learn what now may, and shortly must be, your doom. Thus shall your purposes be broken off, your schemes vanish like smoke, and all your hopes from this world perish. Death perpetually lurks in ambush for you, ready every moment to spring upon his prey. "O that death! (said a gentleman of a large estate, strong constitution, and cheerful temper,) I do not love to think of that death; he comes in and spoils all." So he does indeed; he spoils all your thoughtless mirth, your idle amusements, and your great schemes. Methinks it becomes you to prepare for what you cannot avoid. Methinks, among your many schemes and projects, you should form one to be religious. You may make a poor shift to live without religion, but you can make none to die without it.

But was our departed friend nothing but an animal, a mere machine of flesh? Is the whole of him putrefying in yonder grave? No; I must draw his character further. He was an immortal; and no sooner did he resign his breath, than his soul took wing, and made its flight into the regions of spirits. There it now dwells. And what amazing scenes now present themselves to his view! what strange, unknown beings does he now converse with! There also, my brethren, you and I must ere long be. We, too, must be initiated into those grand mysteries of the invisible world, and mingle in this assembly of strangers. We must share with angels in their bliss and glory, or with devils in their agonies and terrors.

And do you, sirs, make it your main concern to secure a happy immortality? Do you live as expectants of eternity? Or do you live as though this world were to be your eternal residence, and as if your bodies, not your souls, were immortal? Does your conscience approve of such conduct? Do you really think it is better for you,



upon the whole, to commence fashionably wicked, or, perhaps, ringleaders in debauchery and infidelity, in a country overrun with all manner of vice? Is this better than to retain the good impressions you might, perhaps, receive in youth, and to act upon the model built for you in a religious education? Which do you think you would approve of in the hour of death, that honest hour, when things begin to appear in their true light? And of which, think ye, will you be able to give the most comfortable account at the supreme tribunal? Brethren, form an impartial judgment upon this comparison, and let it guide your conduct. Behave as *strangers and pilgrims on earth, that have no continuing city*; behave as expectants of eternity, as candidates for immortality; as *beholding Him that is invisible, and looking for a city which has foundations, eternal in the heavens*. In that celestial city may we all meet at last, through Jesus Christ. Amen!

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## XIX.

### A SERMON ON THE NEW YEAR.\*

“This year thou shalt die.”—*Jer.* xxviii. 16.

WHILE we are entering upon the threshold of a new year, it may be proper for us to stand and pause, and take a serious view of the occurrences that may happen to us this year, that we may be prepared to meet them. Future contingences are indeed unknown to us; and this ignorance is as agreeable to our present state, and as conducive to our improvement and happiness, as our knowledge of the things which it concerns us to know. But though we cannot predict to ourselves the particular events that may befall us, yet the events of life in general, in a vague indeterminate view, are not so contingent and unknowable as to leave no room for rational suppositions, and probable expectations. There are certain events which regularly

\* This sermon was preached at Nassau-Hall, and consequently to a number of young persons, Jan. 1, 1761. The author died the 4th of Feb. following.

happen to us every year, and therefore we may expect them this year. There are others sometimes occur in the compass of a year, and sometimes do not; such are many of the blessings and afflictions of life; of these we should be apprehensive, and prepare for them. And there are events which we know are before us, and we are sure they will occur; but at what particular time they will happen, whether this year or next, whether this day or to-morrow, is to us an utter uncertainty. Such is that interesting event, the close of the present life, and our entrance into eternity. That we must die, is as certain as that we now live; but the hour or year when, is kindly and wisely concealed from us, that we may be always ready, and stand in the posture of constant, vigilant expectation, that we may not be surprised. But certainly it becomes us to reflect seriously upon the mere possibility of this event happening this year, and realize to ourselves those important consequences that result from this supposition. The mere possibility of this may justly affect us more than the certain expectation of any other futurity. And it is not only possible, but highly probable, death may meet some of us within the compass of this year. Yes, it is highly probable that if some prophet, like Jeremiah, should open to us the book of the divine decrees, one or other of us would there see our sentence, and the time of its execution fixed. *Thus saith the Lord: This year thou shalt die.* There are some of us would find it written, "This year thou shalt enjoy a series of prosperity, to try if the goodness of God will lead thee to repentance." Others might read this melancholy line, "This year shall be to thee a series of affliction; this year thou shalt lose thy dearest earthly support and comfort; this year thou shalt pine away with sickness, or agonize with torturing pain, to try if the kind severities of a Father's rod will reduce thee to thy duty." Others, I hope, would read the gracious decree, "This year thy stubborn spirit, after long resistance, shall be sweetly constrained to bow to the despised gospel of Christ; this year thou shalt be born a child of God, and an heir of happiness, which the revolutions of years shall never, never terminate." O happy and glorious event! May we hope this mercy is reserved among the secrets of heaven for any thoughtless, impenitent sinner among us! And that the decree will bring

forth this year! this year which finds us in a deep sleep, stupidly careless of our everlasting interest, and which, if like the preceding, will be a season of thoughtless impenitence and presumptuous security! Others perhaps would read this tremendous doom, "This year, my spirit, so long resisted, shall cease to strive with thee; this year I will give thee up to thine own heart's lusts, and swear in my wrath thou shalt not enter into my rest." O! dismal sentence! None can equal it with terror but one, and that is, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*: and the former is an infallible presage of the latter. Others, (O! let our souls dwell upon the thought!) would probably find the doom of the false prophet, Hananiah, pronounced against them: *Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die*. This year you may die, for your life is the greatest uncertainty in the world. You have no assurance of another year, another day, or even another moment.

This year you may die, because thousands have died since the last new year's day; and this year will be of the same kind with the last: the duration of mortals; a time to die. The causes of death, both in the human constitution and in the world without, will exist and operate in this year as well as the last.

This year you may die, though you are young; for the regions of the dead have been crowded with persons of your age; and no age is the least security against the stroke of death.

This year you may die, though you are now in health and vigorous, and your constitution seems to promise a long life; for thousands of such will be hurried into the eternal world this year, as they have been in years that are past. The principles of death may be even now working within you, notwithstanding the seeming firmness of your constitution, and you may be a pale, cold, lifeless corpse sooner than the invalid whose life is apparently near its close.

This year you may die, though you are full of business, though you have projected many schemes, which may be the work of years to execute, and which afford you many bright and flattering prospects. Death will not consult your leisure, nor be put off till another year, that you may accomplish your designs. Thousands have died before

you, and will die this year amidst their golden prospects, and while spinning out their eternal schemes. And what has happened to them may happen to you.

This year you may die, though you have not yet finished your education, nor fixed in life, but are preparing to appear in the world, and perhaps elated with the prospect of the figure you will make in it. Many such abortive students are now in the dust. Many that had passed through a laborious course of preparation for public life, and had inspired their friends, as well as themselves, with high hopes, have been snatched away as they were just stepping upon the stage; and this may be your doom also.

This year you may die, though you are not prepared for it. When death shows you his warrant under the great seal of Heaven, it will be no excuse to plead, "I am not ready." Though the consequences of your dying unprepared will be your everlasting ruin, yet that dreadful consideration will have no weight to delay the execution.

This year you may die, though you deliberately delay your preparation, and put it off to some future time. You may fix upon the next year, or the decline of life, as the season for religion; but that time may not be at your disposal. Others may live to see it, but you may be engulfed in the boundless ocean of eternity before it arrives, and your time for preparation may be over for ever.

This year you may die, though you are unwilling to admit the thought. Death does not slacken his pace towards you, because you hate him, and are afraid of his approach. Your not realizing your latter end as near, does not remove it to a greater distance. Think of it or not, you must die; your want of thought can be no defence; and you know not how soon you may feel what you cannot bear to think of.

This year you may die, though you strongly hope the contrary, and flatter yourself with the expectation of a length of years. You will not perhaps admit the thought of a short abortive life; but notwithstanding this, you may be a lifeless corpse before this year finishes its revolution.

Thus it appears very possible, that one or other of us may die this year. Nay, it is very probable, as well as possible, if we consider that it is a very uncommon, and almost unprecedented thing, that not one should die in a

whole year out of such an assembly as this. More than one have died the year past, who made a part of our assembly last new year's day. Therefore let each of us (for we know not on whom the lot may fall) realize this possibility, this alarming probability, "this year I may die."

And what if you should? Surely you may be startled at this question: O! the surprising change! O! the important consequences!

If you die this year, then all your doubts, all the anxieties of blended hopes and fears about your state and character will terminate for ever in full conviction. If you are impenitent sinners, all the artifices of self-flattery will be able to make you hope better things no longer; but the dreadful discovery will flash upon you the resistless blaze of intuitive evidence. You will see, you will feel it to be such. If you lie under the condemnation of the divine law, you will no longer be able to flatter yourselves with better hopes; the execution of the penalty will sadly convince you of the tremendous truth. To dispute it would be to dispute the deepest heart-felt sensations of the most exquisite misery. But, on the other hand, if your fears and doubts are the honest anxieties of a sincere, self-diffident heart, ever jealous of itself, and afraid of every mistake in a matter of such vast importance, you will meet with the welcome demonstration of your sincerity, and of your being unquestionably the favorites of Heaven. Sensation will afford you conviction, and you will believe what you see. In short, the possibility that this year may be your last may be joyful tidings to you. If you die this year, this year you shall be in heaven, imparadised in the bosom of God. And is it possible your salvation is so near! Transporting thought!

It would be easy to enumerate several happy consequences of death with regard to those who have spent their life in preparation for it; and the nearness of death, instead of striking them with terror, may heighten the transports of expectation. It would afford me no small pleasure to trace those blessed consequences, and it would be an act of kindness and compassion to the heirs of heaven, many of whom go mourning and trembling even towards the regions of happiness, as though they were going to the place of execution, and anticipate but very little of those infinite pleasures which are so near at hand. But I

intend to devote the present hour chiefly to the service of a part, perhaps the greater part, of my hearers, who are in a more dangerous and alarming situation, I mean such who may die this year, and yet are not prepared; such who are as near to hell as they are to death, and consequently stand in need of the most powerful and immediate applications, unless they be undone for ever beyond recovery. To you therefore, my dear brethren, my fellow-mortals, my fellow-candidates for eternity, whose everlasting state hangs in a dread suspense, who have a secret conviction that you are not qualified for admission into the kingdom of heaven, and who cannot promise yourselves that you shall not sink into the infernal pit this year, but upon this supposition, which is the most precarious and doubtful in the world, namely, that you shall live out another year; to you I would address myself with affectionate tenderness, and yet with plainness and pungency. And I beg your most solemn attention to an affair of infinite moment, to which you may not have another year to attend.

This year you may die: and should you die this year, you will be for ever cut off from all the pleasures of life. Then farewell, an everlasting farewell to all the mirth and gayety, the tempting amusements and vain delights of youth. Farewell to all the pleasures you derive from the senses, and all the gratifications of appetite. This year the sun may lose its lustre as to you, and all the lovely prospects of nature, may become a dismal blank. To you music may lose all her charms, and die away into everlasting silence; and all the gratifications of the palate may become insipid. When you lie in the cold grave, you will be as dead to such sensations as the clay that covers you. Then farewell to all the pompous but empty pleasures of riches and honors. The pleasures both of enjoyment and expectation from this quarter will fail for ever. But this is not all. If you should die this year, you will have no pleasures, no enjoyments to substitute for those you will lose. Your capacity and eager thirst for happiness will continue, nay, will grow more strong and violent in that improved adult state of your nature. And yet you will have no good, real or imaginary, to satisfy it; and consequently the capacity of happiness will become a capacity of misery, and the privation of pleasure will be positive

pain. Can imagination feign any thing more wretched than a creature formed for the enjoyment of the infinite good, pining away for ever with hungry, raging desires, without the least degree of gratification! banished at once from the supreme good, and from all the created enjoyments that were wont to be poorly substituted in his stead! Yet this may be your case in the short compass of the following year. O! what a terrible change! What a prodigious fall!

Should you die this year, all your hopes and prospects as to a future life will perish abortive. Several of you now are in a state of education, preparing to enter upon the stage of the world; and you are perhaps often pleasing yourselves with gay and magnificent dreams about the figure you will make upon it. You may be planning many schemes to be accomplished in the several periods of a long life: and are perhaps already anticipating in idea the pleasure, the profit, or the honor you expect to derive from their execution. In these fond hopes your affectionate parents, friends, and teachers concur with generous pleasure. But, alas! in the swift revolution of this beginning year, all the sanguine expectations and pleasing prospects may vanish into smoke. Youth is the season of promise, full of fair blossoms; but these fair blossoms may wither and never produce the expected fruits of maturity. It may perhaps be the design of Heaven, that after all the flattering hopes and projects, and after all the pains and expense of a liberal education, you shall never appear upon the public stage; or that you shall vanish away like a phantom as soon as you make your appearance. Certainly, then, you should extend your prospects beyond the limits of mortality; extend them into that world where you will live to execute them, without the risk of disappointment! Otherwise,

If you die this year, you will not only be cut off from all the flattering prospects of this life, but from all hope entirely and for ever. If you die in your sins, you will be fixed in an unchangeable state of misery; a state that will admit of no expectation but that of uniform, or rather of ever-growing misery; a state that excludes all hopes of making a figure, except as the monument of the vindictive justice of God, and the deadly effects of sin. How affecting is the idea of a promising youth cut off from the land

of the living, useless and hopeless in both worlds! fallen from the summit of hope into the gulf of everlasting despair! Yet this may be your doom, my dear youth—your doom this very year, if you should die in your sins. If you should die this year, then all the ease and pleasure you now derive from thoughtlessness, self-flattery, and suppressing the testimony of your consciences will for ever be at an end. You will then be obliged to view yourselves in a just light, and to know the worst of your condition. The secret plaudits of self-flattery will be for ever silenced, and conscience will recover itself from that state of insensibility into which you have cast it by repeated violences; and, as exasperated by your ill treatment it will become your everlasting tormentor, it will do nothing but accuse and upbraid you for ever; you will never more be able to entertain so much as one favorable thought of yourselves. And what a wretched state will this be! for a man to be self-condemned! to disapprove of his whole past conduct! to be pleased with nothing in himself, but heartily, though with horror, to concur in the condemning sentence of the Supreme Judge and the whole creation! to esteem himself a self-destroyer, an outcast from all happiness, and from the society of all happy beings; an unlovely, odious, useless, miserable, despairing being for ever! O miserable situation! Does it not alarm you to think you may be so near it?

If you should die this year, you will be deprived for ever of all the means of salvation. All these are confined to the present life, and have no place in the world of eternal punishment. There the thunders of the divine law roar, but the gentle voice of the gospel never sounds. There the Lion of the tribe of Judah rends the prey; but never exhibits himself as a Lamb that was slain, an atonement for sin, and the Saviour of the guilty. There conscience exerts its power, not to excite the medicinal anguish of kindly repentance, but the hopeless horrors of everlasting despair. There Jehovah works, but not to enable the sinner to work out his own salvation, but to touch all the springs of painful sensation, and open all the sources of misery in the criminal. There mercy no more distributes her bounties, but justice reigns in her awful rigors. There the sanctifying spirit no more communicates his purifying, all-healing influences, but sin, the great Apollyon, diffuses



its deadly poison. In a word, when you leave this state of trial, all the discipline of the present state, all your advantages for salvation, all the means of grace, and all the encouragements of hope will be for ever removed out of your reach; and consequently all possibility of your salvation will cease for ever; for when the necessary means are taken away, the end becomes utterly impossible. Therefore,

If you should die this year, all your hopes of heaven will vanish for ever. No more happiness for you! You have received your portion in this life—a few years of sordid, unsatisfactory happiness; and an entire eternity of misery, permanent, exquisite, consummate misery follows behind! No more intellectual amusements and pleasing studies! no more gentle beams of science! but the blackness of darkness for ever! intense poring upon your hopeless wretchedness! tormenting recollections of your past folly and madness in voluntarily rushing into the pit! No agreeable companion! no sympathizing friend! no relaxation! no pleasing exercise! no encouraging prospects! no comforting reviews; no friendly intercourse with heaven! no token of love! no gift of grace from the Father of mercy! no hope in the future! no relief from the past! no refuge, no escape, at the expense of existence, into the gulf of annihilation! but above, an angry God and a lost heaven! behind, a misspent life and opportunities of salvation irrecoverably lost! within, a guilty, remorseful conscience, an implacable self-tormentor! around, malignant, enraged ghosts, mutual tormentors! before, an eternity of hopeless misery, extending infinitely beyond the ken of sight! O, tremendous doom! who can bear the thought?

And is it possible it should be so near to any of us? Where is the unhappy creature, that we may all drop our tears over him? Where is he? Rather, where is he not? An impenitent sinner is almost everywhere to be found; and that is the wretched creature who stands every moment upon the slippery brink of this horrible precipice; and this year, nay, this hour, for what mortals or angels know, he may be thrown down, engulfed, and lost for ever. And is this a safe situation for you, thoughtless, fool-hardy mortals! Does it become you, in such a situation, to be cheerful, merry, and gay, or busy, restless, and laborious in the pursuits of this transitory life? Does it become you

to dread nothing but the disasters and calamities of the present state, or spin out your eternal schemes of grandeur, riches, or pleasures, in hopes to accomplish them within the narrow, uncertain limits of time allotted to you? Alas! before another year has run its hasty round, the world and all it contains, all its pursuits and enjoyments, all its cares and sorrows, may be as insignificant to you as the grandeur of Cæsar, or the riches of the world before the flood. Earthly riches or poverty, liberty or slavery, honor or disgrace, joy or sorrow, sickness or death, may in this year become as little your concern, and be as much nothing to you as to your coffin, or to the dust that shall cover it, or to Judas, that has been gone to his own place above seventeen hundred years. Does it not rather become you to turn your thoughts to another inquiry: "Is it possible for me to escape this impending danger? Where, how, whence may I obtain deliverance?" If you are not desirous seriously to attend to this inquiry, it will be to no purpose for me to solve it: to you it will appear as a solemn trifle, or an impertinent episode. But if you will lay it to heart, if you will, as it were, give me your word that you will pay a proper regard to it, I shall enter upon the solution with the utmost alacrity.

I assure you, then, in the first place, your case is not yet desperate, unless you choose to make it so; that is, unless you choose to persist in carelessness and impenitence, as you have hitherto done. If you now begin to think seriously upon your condition, to break off from your sins, and attend in good earnest upon the means appointed for your salvation, there is hope that this year, which now finds you in so deplorable a state, will introduce you into another, under the blessing of Heaven, safe from all danger, and entitled to everlasting happiness. I presume you all know so well the external means you should use for your salvation, that I need not particularly direct you to them. You all know that prayer, reading and hearing the word of God, meditation upon divine things, free conference with such as have been taught by experience to direct you in this difficult work; you all know, I say, that these are the means instituted for your conversion; and if you had right views of things, and a just temper towards them, you would hardly need instruction, or the least persuasion to make use of them. But to

give you such views, and inspire you with such a temper, this is the difficulty. O that I knew how to undertake it with success! I can only give you such directions as appear to me proper and salutary; but it is the almighty power of God alone that can give them force and efficacy.

You must learn to think, to think seriously and solemnly upon your danger, and the necessity of a speedy escape. You must retire from the crowd, from talk, dissipation, business, and amusement, and converse with yourselves alone, in pensive solitude.

You must learn to think patiently upon subjects the most melancholy and alarming, your present guilt and depravity, and your dreadful doom so near at hand, if you continue in your present condition. The mind, fond of ease, and impatient of such mortifying and painful thoughts, will recoil, and fly off, and seek for refuge in every trifle; but you must arrest and confine it to these disagreeable subjects; you must force upon it this medicinal pain, as you often force your stomach, when your health requires it. There is not any moroseness in this advice; no ill-natured design upon your pleasure and happiness. On the other hand, it is intended to procure you more pleasure and happiness than you can possibly obtain any other way; it is intended to prevent many sorrowful days and years, nay, a complete eternity of misery. The alternative proposed to you is not whether you shall be pensive and serious or not. This is not at all the state of the case; for you must feel the sorrows of repentance; you must be thoughtful and pensive; you must confine your minds to subjects of terror; you must, whether you will or not; it is utterly unavoidable. But the only alternative proposed to your choice is, whether you will voluntarily submit to the kindly, hopeful, medicinal, preventive sorrows of repentance in this state of trial, which will issue in everlasting joy, or be forced to submit to the despairing pangs, and useless, destructive horrors of too late a repentance in the eternal world, which will only torment you, but not save you; which will be your punishment, and not a means of your reformation, or a preparative for happiness. Whether you will confine your thoughts for a time to the contemplation of your present miserable circumstances, while hope even eradicates even the darkest gloom of discouragement, and the gospel opens such bright and invi-

ting prospects beyond those melancholy views that now first present themselves to your thoughts, or whether you will choose to pine away a doleful eternity in sullen, intense, hopeless porings upon your remediless misery, in pale reviews of past folly, and shocking surveys of endless ages of woe before you. This is the true state of the case; and can you be at a loss what choice to make? Does not the voice of reason, the voice of conscience, of self-interest and self-love, as well as the voice of God, direct you to choose a few serious, sad, solemn, sorrowful, penitent hours now, rather than to invert the choice and to purchase a few hours of presumptuous ease at the expense of a wretched, despairing eternity? O choose life, that you may live. While you indulge a trifling levity of mind, and a roving dissipation of thought, there is no hope you will ever seriously attend to your most important interest. Hence it is that I have made it so much my endeavor to-day to make you serious and thoughtful. To enforce this, let me repeat what I think cannot but have some effect, especially as it comes not from the priesthood, but the court, and from a courtier as eminent as England ever boasted.

“Ah! my friends! while we laugh, all things are serious round about us: God is serious, who exerciseth patience towards us; Christ is serious, who shed his blood for us; the Holy Ghost is serious, who striveth against the obstinacy of our hearts; the Holy Scriptures bring to our ears the most serious things in the world; the holy sacraments represent the most serious and awful matters; the whole creation is serious in serving God and us; all that are in heaven and hell are serious;—how then can you be gay?”

I pray you, my brethren, yield an immediate compliance. Do not delay this great affair for another year. You may perhaps have time enough before you to work out your salvation, if you immediately begin to improve it; but, if you loiter, you may perish for want of time: the riches of the world will not be able then to redeem one of those precious hours you now squander away.

Let me now make you one of the most reasonable, salutary, and advantageous proposals that Heaven itself can make to you; and that is, that you endeavor to enter upon this new year as new creatures. Let the old man with his affections and lusts die with the old year. *Let the*

*time past of your life more than suffice you to have wrought the will of the flesh. What profit have you then in those things of which you shall now be ashamed?* How shocking the thought that your old guilt should follow into the new year, and haunt you in future times! O begin this year as you would wish to end your life! Begin it so as to give hopes that your time will be so spent as to render death harmless, and ever welcome to you. Let the possibility suggested in my text have due weight with you: This year you may die.

But perhaps some of you may be inverting this consideration, and whispering to yourselves, "This year I may not die," and therefore there is no immediate necessity of preparation for death. But what if you should not die this year, if you still delay the great work for which time is given you? Alas! if you persist in this, one would think it can give you but little pleasure whether you die this year or not? What end will your life answer, but to add to your guilt, and increase your punishment? What safety can another year afford you, when you must die at last? What valuable end do you intend to answer in future life? Do you propose to spend this year as you have your past years? What! in offending your God! abusing his mercies! neglecting the precious seasons of grace! hardening yourselves more and more in impenitence! adding sin to sin, and treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath! Is it worth your while to live for such horrid, preposterous purposes as these? Can you wish for another year with these views? Could you venture to pray for it? Will the prayer bear to be put down in words? Come, put on the hardness of an infernal ghost, that you may be able to support yourselves under the horror of the sound. "Thou supreme Excellence! Thou Author of my being, and all my powers! Thou Father of all my mercies! Thou righteous Judge of the world! I have spent ten, twenty, or thirty years in displeasing thee and ruining myself; but I am not yet satisfied with the pleasures of such a conduct. Grant me, I pray thee, another year to spend in the same manner. Grant me more mercies to abuse; more time to misspend; more means of grace to neglect and profane." Could you now fall on your knees, and present such petitions to Heaven? Surely you could not. Surely your frame would shudder; nay, would not the heavens gather

blackness, and the earth tremble at the sound! But have your temper and practice no language? Language expresses the thoughts and intentions of the mind; and are not the habitual temper and practice a more certain discovery of the thoughts and intentions than mere words? words, which may be spoken without a thought, or in a passion, and which may soon be heartily retracted? But the temper and practice is a steady and sure rule of judging, and decisive of a man's predominant character? Therefore, while your temper and practice are agreeable to your prayer; that is, while you are disposed to spend your time that God gives you in sin and impenitence, you are perpetually insulting Heaven with such petitions, and that too in a manner much more expressive and strong than if you should utter them in words. And can you quietly bear the thought of this horrid blasphemy, which you are constantly breathing out against Heaven? Can you wish and pray for another year for this purpose? What though you should not die this year? Will this exempt you from death in another, or from the punishment of a misspent life? Alas! no; this will only render you a greater criminal, a more miserable wretch in eternity. One year of sinning will make a dreadful addition to your account.

Therefore conclude, every one for himself, "It is of little importance to me whether I die this year, or not; but the only important point is, that I may make a good use of my future time, whether it be longer or shorter." This, my brethren, is the only way to secure a happy new year: a year of time, that will lead the way to a happy eternity.

## XX.

RELIGION THE HIGHEST WISDOM, AND SIN THE GREATEST  
MADNESS AND FOLLY.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.”—*Psalm* iii. 10.

WISDOM is a character so honorable and ornamental to a reasonable being, that those who best know the dignity of their own nature, have had no higher ambition than to be esteemed and called lovers of it.

This little world of ours is an improved spot in the creation. How vastly different an appearance does it now make from its original state of pure nature, when it emerged out of chaos, uncultivated by art! What numerous arts and trades have been found out to furnish life with necessaries and comforts! How deeply have some penetrated into the world of knowledge! They have traced the secret workings of nature; they have even brought intelligence from the worlds above us, and discovered the courses and revolutions of the planets.

When we see these discoveries, you would conclude mankind to be a wise race of creatures; and indeed in such things as these they discover no inconsiderable abilities. Almost every man in his province can manage his affairs with some judgment. Some can manage a farm; others are dexterous in mechanics; others have a turn for mercantile affairs; others can unfold the mysteries of nature, and carry their searches far into the ideal worlds; others can conduct an army, or govern a nation. In short, every man forms some scheme which he apprehends will conduce to his temporal advancement; and prosecutes with some degree of judgment.

But is this all the wisdom that becomes a candidate for eternity? Has he a good understanding who only acts with reason in the affairs of this life; but, though he is to exist for ever in another world, and to be perfectly happy or miserable there, yet takes no thought about the concerns

of his immortal state? Is this wisdom? Is this consistent even with common sense? No; with sorrow and solemnity I would speak it, the most of men in this respect are fools and madmen; and it is impossible for the most frantic madmen in Bedlam to act more foolishly about the affairs of religion and eternity. There is such a thing as a partial madness; a person may have, as it were, one weak side to his mind, and it may be sound and rational in other respects. You may meet with some lunatics and madmen that will converse reasonably with you, and you would not suspect their heads are disordered, till you touch upon some particular point, and then you are to expect reason from them no more; they talk the wildest nonsense, and are governed entirely by their imaginations. They are wise for this world; they talk and act at least agreeably to common sense; but hear them talk, and observe their conduct about the concerns of their souls, and you can call them reasonable creatures no longer. *They are wise to do evil; but to do good they have no knowledge; there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God.* To bring them to themselves by exposing to them their madness, is my present design. The text shows us the first step to true wisdom, and the test of common sense. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.* *The fear of the Lord*, in Scripture, signifies not only that pious passion of filial reverence of our adorable Father who is in heaven, but it is frequently put for the whole of practical religion; hence it is explained in the last part of the verse, by *doing his commandments*. The fear of the Lord, in this latitude, implies all the graces and all the virtues of Christianity; in short, all that holiness of heart and life which is necessary to the enjoyment of everlasting happiness. So that the sense of the text is this: "To practice religion and virtue, to take that way which leads to everlasting happiness, is wisdom, true wisdom, the beginning of wisdom, the first step towards it; unless you begin here, you can never attain it; all your wisdom without this, does not deserve the name; it is madness and nonsense. To do his commandments is the best test of a good understanding; a good sound understanding have all they that do this, all of them without exception: however weak some of them may be in other things, they are wise in the



most important respects; but without this, however cunning they are in other things, they have lost their understandings; they contradict common sense; and there can be none without this."

Wisdom consists in two things: choosing a right end, and using right means to obtain it. Now what end so becoming a creature to live for ever, as everlasting happiness? And in what way can it be obtained, but in the way of holiness? Consult the judgment of God in his Word; consult your own conscience, or even common sense, and you will find that this is the case. Therefore he is a man of sense that pursues this end in this way; but he is a fool, he is brutish, that chooses an inferior end, or that pursues this in another way.

My time will not allow me to do any more than to mention some instances of folly and madness of such as do not make the fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom.

I. Men will not take the safest side in religion, which their reason and self-love carry them to do in other cases.

It is very possible the love of ease and pleasure, and a self-flattering disposition, may prompt your invention to form a plausible system of religion; a religion that admits of great hopes with little evidences, and that allows you many indulgences and lays few restraints upon you; a religion purged, as you imagined, from some of the melancholy and gloomy doctrines of Christianity, and that releases you from those restraints, so painful to a wicked heart, which the holy religion of Jesus lays upon you. It is very possible you may hope you shall obtain eternal happiness without much pains, and without observing the strictness of universal holiness; you may indulge hopes of heaven, though you indulge yourselves willfully in sin; you may flatter yourselves that the punishments of a future state are not intolerably dreadful, nor of everlasting duration; you may excuse and diminish your sins, and make a great many plausible apologies for them. But are you sure of these things? Have you demonstration for them, upon which you may venture your eternal all? Think the matter over seriously again; have you certainty that these things are so? and are you willing to perish for ever if they should be otherwise? What if you should be mistaken? What if you should find God as strict and holy as his Word represents him? What if all his dreadful

threatenings should be sincere and true? What if in a little time you should find that the Scriptures give a more just account of the punishments of hell than your self-flattering heart suggested to you, and that they are indeed intolerable and strictly eternal? What if you should find, when it is too late to correct the mistake, that those neglected, ridiculed things, regeneration, conversion, holiness of heart and practice, the mortification of sin, and a laborious course of devotion—what if you should find that they are absolutely necessary to everlasting happiness? What if it should appear that the willful indulgence of the least-known sin will eternally ruin you? Stand and pause, and ask yourselves, what if you should find matters thus, quite the reverse to what you flattered yourselves? What will become of you then? You are undone, irreparably undone through eternity. Well, to speak modestly, this may be the case, for what you know; and is it not then the part of a wise man to provide against such dreadful contingency? Will you run so terrible a risk, and yet claim a good understanding? Do you esteem a life of religion so burdensome, that you had better make such a desperate venture than choose it? Do you esteem the pleasures of sin so sweet, so solid, so lasting, that it is your interest to run the risk of intolerable, eternal misery, rather than part with them? He is certainly not in his right mind, that would rather be tormented in hell for ever, than lead a holy life, and labor to escape the wrath to come. Therefore act in this as you do in other cases of uncertainty, choose the safest side. Believe and regard what God has said; be holy in all manner of conversation; strive with all your might to enter in at the strait gate; accept of Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Do this, and you are safe, let the case be as it will; there are no bad consequences that can possibly follow from this conduct. But if you are resolutely set upon running the risk, and fool-hardy enough to venture your eternal all upon such improbability, not to say impossibilities, you forfeit the character of a reasonable being; you are mad in this respect, however wise you may be in others.

II. Is it not the greatest folly to believe, or profess to believe, the greatest truths of religion, and yet act quite contrary to such a belief?

How many are there who own God to be the greatest

and the best of beings, and yet neglect him. They own him lovely, and do not love him; their King, and they do not obey him; and their Benefactor, and make no returns of gratitude to him. They confess that heaven is better than earth, and yet they pursue the things of this life, to the neglect of the happiness of heaven. They believe their souls are of more importance than their bodies; and yet they will not take half the care about them that they take about their bodies. They confess that a life of sin and impenitence is very dangerous, and that it will end in everlasting misery; yet, with this confession in their mouths, and this conviction in their consciences, they will, they obstinately will go on impenitently in sin. They believe that all the pleasures of this transitory life are infinitely inferior to the pleasures of religion and the happiness of the heavenly state; they believe these pleasures will ruin them for ever if they continue in them, and yet they will persist in them, though by this they throw away their everlasting happiness, and incur eternal misery! Thus they believe, or profess to believe; and our country is full of such believers; but what absurd, self-contradicting creatures are they! What madness is it to entertain a belief that answers no other end but to condemn their practice, and aggravate their sin! Do they really believe these things, or do they not? if not, what folly is it to profess to believe them? Do they think to impose by an empty profession on Him who searches the hearts and the reins? But if you suppose they believe these things, it is certain they are entirely mad in this affair. What! to neglect God, and holiness, and heaven, when they know they are of infinite importance! to choose the ways of sin, when they believe they will end in ruin! Is this the part of a wise man?

III. Is it not the greatest folly for men to pretend to love God, when their temper and conduct are inconsistent with it, and plainly evidential of the contrary?

If you go round the world with the question, "Do you love God? do you love him above all?" you will hardly meet with any one but what will answer, "Yes, to be sure; I have loved him all my life." Well, but where are the evidences and effects of this love? If you pretend friendship to men, they expect the expressions of it from you on every occasion; otherwise they will see through the

pretence, and pronounce it flattery. They expect you should often think of them with tender affection, perform them all the kind offices in your power, study to please them, to be tender of their characters, solicitous about their interest, and delight in their society. These are the inseparable effects of love; certainly, if you love God, your love will have such effects, especially since, if you love him at all with sincerity, you love him above all other persons and things. But men will insist upon it that they love him above all, and yet very seldom or never think of him with tender affection; they love him above all, and yet indulge themselves in sin, that abominable thing which he hates; they love him above all, and yet have no pleasure in conversing with him in prayer, and the other ordinances of his grace where he holds spiritual interviews with his people. Indeed, it may astonish any man that knows what love is, to find that the most of men pretend they love God, even while they are giving the most glaring evidences of disaffection to him; and after all, it is almost impossible to convince them that they do not thoroughly love him. What madness has seized the world, that they will not receive conviction in such a plain case! What mean thoughts must they have of God, when they think to put him off with such an empty compliment, and hypocritical profession!

IV. Is it not the greatest folly for men to hope for heaven, when they have no evidences at all of their title to it, or fitness for it? Is it not the dictate of common sense, that no man can be happy in any thing but what he has a relish for, and delights in?

There are thousands who have no relish for the enjoyment of God, no pleasure in thinking of him, no delight in his service and acts of devotion, who yet hope to be for ever happy in these exercises in heaven. The happiness of heaven, as I have often told you, consists in such things as these, and how can you hope to be happy there, while you have no pleasure in them! There are thousands who have no delight in any thing holy and religious, but only in the gratifications of their senses, and the enjoyment of earthly things, who yet hope to be happy in heaven, in the wants of all sensual and earthly enjoyment. And have they a sound understanding who can entertain such absurd hopes? Does not common sense tell us, that God,

who does every thing wisely, will bring none to heaven, but those whom he has made fit for it beforehand? and that as none shall be sent to hell but those that were previously wicked, so none shall be admitted into the world of glory, but those who were previously made holy? None first begin to be holy in heaven, or wicked in hell: both parties bring with them those dispositions which are fit for their respective places and employments. How absurd is it therefore to hope for heaven, while you have no heavenly dispositions! You may as well hope to see the sun without eyes. Further, God has assured you in his Word, and you profess to believe him, that without regeneration, faith, repentance, an interest in Christ, and universal holiness, you cannot enter into his kingdom; and yet are there not some of you who are foolish enough to hope for it, though destitute of all these? Has he not told you that drunkards, swearers, unclean, malicious, contentious persons, liars, and the like, shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven? And yet, though you know these are your characters, and the world knows it too, you will hope for admission to it, in defiance of God's most express repeated declarations! What madness is this!

V. And lastly, Is it not the greatest madness to be more concerned about the affairs of time than those of eternity?

It is plain to any man in his senses, that the happiness and misery which are extreme, and which shall endure for ever, are of infinitely greater importance than all the enjoyments, and all the sufferings of this transitory state. And you will hardly meet with any man but will own this to be his belief. But alas! into what consternation may it strike us, when we survey the conduct of the generality! Are they as much concerned about the eternal world to which they are hastening, as to the concerns of time? Are they as laborious and zealous to obtain everlasting happiness, as to gain the riches of this world, and to gratify their sensual appetites? Are they as solicitous to avoid everlasting misery, as to shun sickness, poverty, or any temporal calamity? Are they as cautious of sinning, which ruins their souls for ever, as of drinking poison, which may endanger their health or temporal life! Do not many of you know that it is quite the reverse with you? Are not the concerns of this life the principal objects of your thoughts, your cares, and labors? And what can be

a more consummate folly? You practically prefer a trifle of an hour to a substantial good of endless duration. You are careless about everlasting torment, and yet cautiously shun the light sufferings of a few moments. It matters not what you think or say in this matter; it is your practice that determines the affair; and does not that show that time outweighs a vast eternity with you? And what can be more absurd! if you should prefer pebbles to crowns and kingdoms, darkness to light, or one luxurious meal to the support of your whole life, it would not be so shocking a piece of madness.

I might give you many instances of the madness of those who do not begin this wisdom with the fear of the Lord, but the inferences from the subject are so numerous and important, that I must reserve the rest of the time for them.

1. Since there is so much folly in the world in matters of religion, how astonishing is it that it is not universally contemned and ridiculed, or pitied and lamented! If men act a foolish part in other things, they soon furnish matter of laughter and contempt to the gay and witty part of mankind; and the thoughtful and benevolent view them with compassion. But let them act ever so foolishly in the concerns of eternity, there is hardly any notice taken of it; the absurdity is no way shocking; the generality commend their conduct, by imitating it themselves; and if any are so wise as to find fault with this madness, they are termed fools themselves, and the general laugh is turned against them. How unaccountable is this, that men who act prudently in other things, and are easily shocked with a mad and frantic behavior, can view the folly of mankind in this respect without horror, or perhaps with approbation! The only reason for it is, that the generality are madmen in this respect, and the folly is approved because it is common. To be singularly wise is to be foolish, in the opinion of the world; and to be fools with the multitude, is the readiest way to get the reputation of wisdom. They prove religion to be folly, by a majority of votes; and as many who are fools in this affair, are wise in other respects, their judgment is implicitly submitted to. But pray, sirs, use your own reason, and judge impartially for yourselves, and I am sure you must see the wild absurdity of their conduct. Be nobly singular in beginning wisdom, with the fear of the Lord; and whatever others think of you now, God,

angels, and good men will applaud your wisdom; and even those who now ridicule it, will approve of it at last.

2. With what an ill grace do the irreligious contemn and despise those that make religion their great concern, as weak, silly creatures! Sinners, let your own reason determine, can there be any thing more foolish than your own behavior? And does it become you to brand others with the odium of folly? Alas! you have reason to turn your contempt upon yourselves, and to be struck with horror at your own willful stupidity. Do you set yourselves up as the standards of wisdom, who want sense to keep out of everlasting ruin? Are you wise men, who throw away your eternal happiness for the trifles of time? No, they only are wise who are wise for eternity. You may excel them in a thousand things; nature may have favored you with a better genius; you may have had a more liberal education; you may be better acquainted with men and books; you may manage your secular affairs with more discretion; in such things you may be wiser than many of them. But they are wise for eternity! they have sense to escape everlasting burnings! they have wisdom to obtain everlasting happiness! and this is a more important piece of wisdom than all your acquisitions. The wisdom of Solomon, of Socrates, or Plato is the wildest madness without this.

3. If the fear of the Lord, religion, is the perfection of wisdom, how unreasonably does the world charge it with making people mad? There are multitudes that lose their senses by excessive sorrows and anxieties about some temporal affair; many more than by religion; and yet they never fall out with the world on this account. But when any one, that seemed thoughtful about religion, loses his senses, then religion must bear all the blame; and sinners are glad to catch at such a handle to expose it. It is indeed very possible that too intense application of the mind to divine things, with a deep concern about our everlasting state, may be the occasion of melancholy; but there is nothing peculiar in this; let the mind be excessively attentive to any thing, it will have the same effect. How many disorders do men contract by their eager pursuit of the world? and yet the world is their favorite still. Those that are pious, are many of them much superior to the wisest of us in all accomplishments; and they are gen-

erally as far from madness as their neighbors. Therefore drop this senseless slander, and be yourselves holy, if you would be truly wise.

4. Since men are such fools in matters of religion, since they censure it with so much severity and contempt, how astonishing is it that God should send down that divine, heaven-born thing, religion, into our world, where it is so much neglected and abused! Where the celestial guest meets with but few hearts that will entertain it; where its professors neglect it, contradict it, and by their practice call it madness; and where even its friends and subjects frequently treat it very unkindly! What astonishing condescension and grace is it, that God has not left our mad world to themselves, since they are so averse to be reclaimed! But lo! he hath sent his Son, he hath instituted the gospel, and a thousand means of grace, to bring them to themselves!

5. And lastly, Hence we may infer, that human nature is exceedingly depraved and disordered. I think this is as plain as any disorder incident to the body. Men are universally indisposed as to religion; the same natural faculties, the same understanding, will, and affections, that render us able to act with prudence in the affairs of this life, are also sufficient for the affairs of religion; but, alas! with regard to this, they are disordered, though they exercise themselves aright about other things. They can acquire the knowledge of languages and sciences; but, alas! they have no disposition to know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. They understand how to trade, and carry on schemes for this world; but they will not act wisely for eternity. They have sense enough not to run into the fire, or to drink poison; but they will run on in the ways of sin to everlasting misery. They will ask the way when they have lost themselves; but how hard is it to bring them to inquire, What shall I do to be saved? In short, they can contrive with prudence, and act with vigor, courage, and perseverance, in the affairs of time; but in the concerns of religion and eternity they are ignorant, stupid, languid, and careless. And how can we account for this, but by supposing that they are degenerate creatures, and that their nature has suffered a dreadful shock by the fall, which has deprived them of their senses? Alas! this is a truth too evident to be denied!



## XXI.

## THE DOOM OF THE INCORRIGIBLE SINNER.

“He that being often reprovèd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”—*Proverbs*, xxix. 1.

A PROVERB is a system of wisdom in miniature; it is a pertinent, striking observation, expressed in a few words, that may be the more easily remembered; and often in metaphorical language, that it may be the more entertaining. A collection of proverbs has no connection, but consists of short, independent sentences, each of which makes full sense in itself; and therefore, in explaining them, there is no need of explaining the context; but we may select any particular sentence, and consider it separably. Such a collection of wise sayings is that book of the sacred Scriptures which we call *The Proverbs of Solomon*.

Among the many significant and weighty sayings of this wisest of men, the solemn monitory proverb in my text deserves peculiar regard: *He that being often reprovèd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

The request of a friend, and my fears that this proverb may have a dreadful accomplishment upon some of my hearers, have induced me to make it the subject of my meditations for the present hour. And O! that the event may show that I was divinely directed in the choice! This proverb may be accommodated to all the affairs of life. In whatever course a man blunders on, headstrong, and regardless of advice and admonition, whether in domestic affairs, in trade, in politics, in war, or whatever it be he pursues by wrong measures with incorrigible obstinacy, it will ruin him at last, as far as the matter is capable of working his ruin. To follow the conduct of our own folly, and refuse the advantage we might receive from the wisdom of others, discovers pride and self-sufficiency; and the career of such a pursuit, whatever be the object, will always end in disappointment and confusion. In

this extent perhaps, this adage was intended by Solomon, who was a good economist and politician, and well skilled in the affairs of common life, as well as those of religion. But he undoubtedly intended it should be principally referred to matters of religion. It is especially in these matters it holds true in the highest sense; that *he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth himself, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

*He that being often reprov'd.*—This is undoubtedly our character. We in this congregation have been often reprov'd, and that in various forms, and by various monitors. We have been reprov'd from heaven and earth, by God, men, and our own consciences; and, I might add, by the irrational creation, and even by infernal spirits.

It is the happiness of several of us to live in families where we are often reprov'd and admonish'd with the tender affecting address of a father and a master, who are deeply concern'd that their children and domestics should be their companions in the heavenly road, and be effectually warn'd from the alluring paths of sin and ruin. And have not our affectionate mothers often become our monitors, and gently, yet powerfully reprov'd us with that forcible eloquence which could only proceed from the heart of a woman and a mother;—or if our parents have been cruelly deficient in this noblest office of love, has not God rais'd up unexpected reprovers for us, in a brother, a sister, or perhaps a poor despis'd slave? And who can resist the force of an admonition from such an unexpected quarter? And have not some of us found an affectionate faithful monitor in the conjugal state; a husband or a wife, that has reprov'd the vices or the negligence and carelessness of the other party; and, by a striking example at the least, if not in more explicit language, given the alarm to greater diligence and concern in the affairs of religion and eternity? Such are powerful, though modest and private assistants to the ministers of the gospel, and O! that they had but more assistance from this quarter! But to return—If we are not so happy as to be agreeably surrounded with such honest reprovers in our own houses, yet, blessed be God, we live in a neighborhood where we may meet with one of them here and there. Has not a pious friend or neighbor dropt a word now and then in conversation which might have serv'd, and perhaps was intended as

serious admonition to you? Alas! have you never had a friend in the world, who has sometimes taken occasion to talk solemnly and pungently with you about the neglected concerns of your souls? But though all around you, both saints and sinners, should refuse to be your monitors, how many solemn warnings and reproofs have you had from the pulpit! You have heard many ministers of Christ, who have been your solemn admonishers in the dread name of their Master. And it is now eleven or twelve years since I have begun to discharge the painful and unacceptable office of a reprover of sin and sinners among you. And what kind and liberal assistance have I received in my office, from the other side of the vast ocean, in the many excellent books which British piety and charity have furnished us with.

Thus have you been reprovèd by men from all quarters. And certainly so loud, so general, so repeated an admonition even from men must have great weight, but who can resist an admonition from heaven! Surely, if Jehovah the great Sovereign of the universe, condescends to be your reprovèr, you must immediately take the reproof, and set about a reformation. Well, this office he has condescended to sustain. He has himself become your monitor; and that in various ways, both mediately and immediately: mediately by his word and providence; and immediately by his blessed Spirit, whose office it is to *reprove the world of sin*.

The Word of God has reprovèd you; has honestly laid before you the destructive consequences of sin, and denounced the divine displeasure against you on its account. All its commands, prohibitions, and dissuasives of various forms, are so many friendly warnings and admonitions to you. In short, you must own yourselves, that if any of you go on obstinately in sin and perish, it will not be because the Word of God did not act a faithful part towards you, but because you presumptuously disregard its most solemn and affectionate warnings.

Again: God has often reprovèd you by his providence. His providence has kindly chastised you with personal and relative afflictions, with sickness and pains, bereavements, losses, and disappointments. Providence has admonished you with the striking voice of sick beds, dying groans, ghastly corpses, and gaping graves in your families or neighborhoods, or perhaps in both. How many among us

in a few years have been brought down to the gates of the grave, that they might enter into serious conference with death and eternity, which they were so averse to in the giddy, unthinking hours of health and hurry of business! And what signal, unexpected deliverance has Providence wrought for you in those seasons of danger and distress, that you might enjoy a longer space for repentance! How many of our friends and neighbors have sickened and died, for the admonition of sinners! They are gone before, to show us the way, and put us in mind that our time will soon come.

But has he not often laid aside all instruments, and re-proved you more immediately by his Spirit? Has not his Spirit been long and frequently striving with you; re-proving you of sin; alarming you with apprehensions of your danger; exciting in you good resolutions, and serious thoughts of reformation? Has not the blessed Spirit at times borne home the word upon your hearts with unusual power, and roused your conscience to fall upon you with terrible, though friendly violence? Which leads me to add, You have been your own monitors; I mean your consciences have often admonished and warned you; have whispered in your breasts, that "this course of vice and irreligion will not do; this carelessness and indifference in the concerns of your souls, this stupid neglect of God and eternal things, will not end well." Conscience has often honestly pronounced your doom: "Thou art a guilty, wicked creature, under the displeasure of God. Thou art destitute of true vital religion, and hast no title to the divine favor. If thou die in this condition, thou wilt be undone for ever." Thus has conscience warned you; and you have, no doubt, sometimes agonized under its chastisements. Though you have preposterously labored to bribe it, or suppress it by violence; yet it has still borne at least a faint testimony for its Master, and against you.

Nay, even infernal spirits, those everlasting enemies of man and goodness, may serve as your reprovers. Can you think of their unwearied roaming over the earth, in quest of souls as their prey, and their industry to do mischief, without blaming your own negligence to save souls and do good? And could you bear the lost ghosts of your own race, who are now shut up in the infernal prison, bursting out into despairing cries, and bitterly accusing themselves for

their presumption and security, their lazy delays, misimprovement of time, and neglect of the means of grace, while upon earth; how loud and striking a warning would this be to you, who are now walking in their steps!

Thus, my brethren, I have given you a brief list of your many monitors. And who can stand the united reproofs of such a multitude? Who dare set himself against the admonition of earth, heaven, and hell; of God and all his creatures? Must you not all yield to the warning?

Solomon supposes, in my text, that a man may be often reprov'd, and yet *harden his neck*; that is, obstinately refuse submission and reformation. A stiff neck is a metaphor often used in Scripture, to signify an unyielding, incorrigible spirit, resolute in disobedience, in spite of all restraints; in spite of advice, dissuasives, and reproofs. And to harden the neck, is to confirm one's self in disobedience, in spite of all the means of reformation. It is to cherish obstinacy, to despise reproof, and resolve to follow a headstrong, impetuous self-will at all adventures. The metaphor is taken from an unmanageable, sullen ox, that will not bend his neck to the yoke, nor kindly draw under it. Thus, nothing but a sullen and senseless beast can represent the stupid, unreasonable conduct of that man who hardens himself in sin, against the strongest dissuasives and reproofs from God and his creatures.

And is not this the character of some of you? I am very unwilling to presume such bad things of any of you; but I must at least put it to your consciences to determine, whether it be so or not. This you may know by this single inquiry, whether you have reformed of those things for which you have been reprov'd? or whether you still obstinately persist in them, in opposition to the most striking admonitions? The profane and profligate among you have often been reprov'd for your vices; your drunkenness, swearing, lying, contempt of sacred things, and other immoralities; but do you not still obstinately persist in the practice of them? You have often been reprov'd for the neglect of the worship of God in your families, and the souls of your domestics; what warm remonstrances have you had upon this head! And yet, have you not prayerless families, prayerless mornings and evenings still? Have you not been solemnly warn'd of the danger of neglecting, or carelessly attending upon the means of grace? And

yet you are negligent and careless still! Have you not been earnestly admonished for your presumption and security, your entertaining high hopes of future happiness, and that you are genuine Christians, at random, without honest trial and repeated self-examination! And yet do not some of you still persist in this stupid, pernicious conduct? Alas! how ignorant of your own true character! How unwillingly are you dragged to the bar of conscience, there to be tried, and hear your sentence! How ready are you to flatter yourselves with pleasing expectations, though in reality contrary to the declarations of eternal truth! And how secure and thoughtless are you about the great concerns of religion and eternity! How often and how solemnly have you been reprov'd for your excessive eagerness and avarice in the pursuit of this vain world, and your stupid neglect to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, and to be rich towards God! And yet, is not this enchanting world your favorite, and the idol of your heart still? That one expostulation from Christ himself might have been an irresistible rebuke to you, *What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* But, alas! have you stood out against this, and a thousand other pungent admonitions? Have you not often had the dreadful guilt and danger of making light of Christ and his precious gospel, of delaying your conversion to some uncertain hereafter, and of presuming upon the mercy and patience of God, exposed to your view in a striking light? And yet you have still persisted in the practice, in spite of reproof and conviction. I might easily multiply instances on this head, but these must suffice as specimens for the present; and I shall only add this general rule for your further conviction, that whatever sin you indulge yourselves in, whatever duty you omit, whatever grace or virtue you live destitute of, in opposition to the convictions of your own minds within, and of the reproofs and admonitions of God and man from without, you are then guilty of hardening your neck.

And if this be the case, how many of you are involved in this guilt? Lay your hand upon your heart, and say, does not conscience whisper, or perhaps clamor, "Guilty! guilty!" It is strange, it is unaccountable, it is horrible, that there should be such a monster upon earth, on whom

the repeated reproofs and warnings of God and his fellow-creatures have been thrown away; and who dares singly to stand it out against the whole universe! But, alas! are there not many such monsters among us? To reprove them again is a very unpromising and almost desperate attempt; for they have been so inured to it, that they are hardened against it, and set it at defiance. Yet duty and compassion constrain us to make the attempt once more; for O! we cannot give them up as altogether desperate, nor resign them with willing hands as a tame prey to ruin. I know no other way to bring them out of danger but to make them sensible of it. And this I shall attempt, in illustrating the remaining part of the text, which informs us of the plain truth, that he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, or broken, and that without remedy; or, "and there is no cure." The stiff neck that will not bend to the yoke of obedience, must be broken: it may harden itself into insensibility under reproof; but O! it cannot harden itself into insensibility under divine judgments. It may refuse the easy and gentle yoke of the divine law, but divine justice will forcibly impose its iron yoke upon it, and constrain it to bow till it be broken. This is the doom of the obstinate, incorrigible sinner; thus shall he be destroyed or broken to pieces.

But this is not all: he shall suddenly be destroyed—suddenly broken. Sudden ruin is aggravated, because it strikes a man into a consternation, overtakes him unawares, surprises him at a disadvantage, when unprovided with any methods to escape; and also tears all his pleasing hopes from him. Till he feels the stroke, he would not believe it was coming; and therefore his destruction is sudden, surprising, and confounding.

Reproofs and admonitions from God and men, and our own consciences, are the great means to recover sinners: and while these are ineffectual, no other can possibly have any effect. How can he be reclaimed from sin, who will sin in opposition to the checks of conscience, and the strivings of the Holy Spirit within, and the united dissuasives and rebukes of Providence, of the Word of God, and of his friends from without! It is unavoidable, that he should suddenly be destroyed; and there is no help for it; he must be given up as an incurable. The whole universe may look on, and pity him; but, alas! they cannot help

him; he has the instrument of self-murder in his own hand; and he will not part with it, but uses it against his own life, without control; and none can take it out of his hand; that is, none can give his free-will a new turn, but that God whom he is daily offending, and who is therefore not obliged to obtrude such a favor upon him.

This is the unavoidable doom of the man that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck. And since this is the character of some of you, have you not reason to fear and forebode this tremendous doom?

Your danger will appear from these two considerations, that if you always continue in your present condition, proof against all admonition, you must be destroyed without remedy; and that there is dreadful reason to fear, you always will continue in your present condition.

That if you live and die in your present condition, you must be destroyed without remedy, is lamentably evident from what has been said. It is the declaration of the wisest of men, inspired from heaven; *he that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be broken, and there is no remedy.* Your destruction is unavoidable and remediless, according to the nature of things; it is the natural, spontaneous, and inseparable result and effect of incorrigible obstinacy. You resolutely set your free wills, which are not under the control of any creature but yourselves, upon your own ruin; and what then remains but that you must be ruined! To ruin you must go, though attended with the prayers and tears of the saints, and checked by their friendly admonitions, enforced with those of God himself. They cannot help you against your wills. What can keep you from ingulfing yourselves in destruction, when you break through all restraints from God and the whole creation? You reject the only means of cure; and must you not die as incurables! If the Spirit of God strives with you in vain; if conscience check and admonish you in vain; if Providence uses its chastising rod in vain; if sickness, and death, and graves preach in vain; if Bibles and good books are put into your hands in vain; if ministers, and friends, and neighbors, and the nearest relatives, advise, and persuade, and warn, and reprove in vain; if heaven, and earth, and hell, if God and all his creatures admonish in vain, what hopes can yourselves entertain of your salvation? what better means can you desire? what



other means can you expect? can you hope to be reformed and prepared for heaven, when these means, the best, the only means that ever were used with sinful creatures, and which have proved effectual in the most discouraging cases, have no effect upon you? Judge yourselves, whether your destruction is not unavoidable in your present condition.

And that you will always continue in your present condition, is, alas! but too probable. You have continued in it all your life past; and is not this a dreadful presumption that you will continue in it all your life to come! Can you expect better means than you have had? Or are your hearts become more soft and pliable now, when hardened by an obstinate course of incorrigible impenitence, that you should hope the same means will have greater efficacy upon them in time to come than formerly? Are you as sure of twenty or thirty years before you, as that you have enjoyed twenty or thirty years in time past? Is God the less provoked by how much the longer you have offended him, so that you have more encouragement to expect the assistance of his grace hereafter than formerly? Are you now any more out of danger of being judicially hardened and given up of God, than ten years ago? And are you more sure of his favor, by how much the more you deserve his wrath? Are the habits of sin grown weaker through inveteracy and long indulgence? Does the work of your salvation grow easier by delays, and by your having fewer days for work? Does conscience gain strength upon you, by your repeated violences, or the Spirit of God work the more powerfully, the more you resist and grieve him? Does your being inured to the gospel give it greater force upon you? If the happy change of your present condition be probable, the probability must depend, in human view, upon such absurdities as these. But can these be the foundation of probability? No; but of the greatest improbability. The truth of the case is, your condition is growing more and more discouraging every day; and you are approaching fast towards a fixed unchangeable state of incorrigible obstinacy in wickedness. Ten years ago it was much more likely, in human view, that you would have been converted ere now, than it now is that you will be converted in ten years to come. I may say of your salvation what Christ said of the salvation

of the rich, *with men that is impossible. But with God things are possible*; he can and sometimes does act contrary to appearances and the natural tendency of things, and astonishes his creatures with unexpected and surprising wonders. Thus, veteran, obstinate sinners! he may yet deal with some of you. Omnipotence may yet take you in hand, disarm all your resistance, and cause you to feel those admonitions you have made light of. This, perhaps, God may do. But O! it is an anxious, dreadful peradventure; for you must know, though he sometimes singles out a hardened sinner of your class here and there, to make him the illustrious trophy of the power of his grace, yet this is not his usual way: he does not commonly work upon such rough, unsuitable materials. He generally pitches upon the young and pliable, upon those that have not been long inured to the gospel, nor hardened in sin. Therefore even this, which is your only ground of hope, can afford you but a trembling anxious hope. Notwithstanding this, you have reason to fear that you will die as you have hitherto lived, hardy, resolute, incorrigible sinners. And if so, you know your dreadful end; you shall suddenly be destroyed; your stiff neck shall be unexpectedly broken, and there shall be no help, no remedy.

And if you are indeed in so much danger, will you not now lay it to heart, and endeavor to escape while you may? Alas! shall this admonition also, this admonition for your disregarding all past admonitions, be lost upon you like the rest? O! will you not at length take warning before it is too late? Perhaps the voice that now warns you, may not long sound in your ears. But O! let me find this day, that those whom I have reproved in vain for so many years, regard me at last, and submit and yield. Then, and not till then, you will be safe from the vengeance denounced in this alarming proverb, *He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

## XXII.

THE NATURE OF LOOKING TO CHRIST OPENED AND  
EXPLAINED.

“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.”—*Isaiah*, xlv. 22.

It is the peculiar sin and unhappiness of the Christianized world, that, while they profess and speculatively believe Jesus to be the Messiah, the Saviour of sinners, and while they harbor some kind of esteem for him as a benefactor that appeared upon earth more than 1700 years ago, who should be still remembered with gratitude, yet that they are not deeply sensible of that intimate, personal concern which degenerate sinners have with him in every age.

They do not make that eager, importunate, affectionate application to him, which his character requires as the Saviour of guilty men. Divine justice indeed was satisfied, the demands of the law were answered by the obedience and sufferings of our divine Redeemer long before we came into existence, and God became reconcilable to a guilty world. But all this alone does not insure our salvation. Redemption must not only be purchased, but applied; and though it was purchased without our concurrence, yet all mankind, in all ages, are concerned in the application of it. There was no need of the gospel and its ordinances to procure it; but all these are necessary, and therefore appointed for our obtaining an actual interest in it. Hence Christ, as an Almighty Saviour, is exhibited, and the blessings of his purchase are offered in the gospel; and all that hear the gracious proposal are invited to entertain this Saviour with suitable dispositions, and to consent to the terms on which these blessings are offered, upon the penalty of everlasting damnation. Our personal consent is required as much in this age as when the gospel was first published to the world; and it is this which is solicited by all the means of grace; it is to gain your consent to this gracious proposal, that the gospel is still continued among

you. It is for this we preach; for this you should hear, and perform every other duty; for this the Lord's Supper in particular was instituted, and has been, to-day, administered among you. It is to melt your hearts, and engage your affections to a dying Saviour that he is represented both in words and in speaking actions, in all the agonies of Gethsemane, and in all the tortures of Calvary. But though these affecting means have been used from age to age, yet, alas! they have not had the intended effect upon multitudes. There is as much reason to exhort unregenerate sinners now to repent and be converted, as there was to exhort the impenitent Jews to it. There is as much cause to direct and persuade men now to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the heathen jailer, who had been an infidel. We must have those affectionate dispositions and vigorous exercises of heart towards him, which become guilty, perishing sinners towards an Almighty and gracious Saviour, who deserves and therefore demands our supreme affection, our humble dependence on his merits alone, and our hearty consent to be his servants for ever. We must be brought to believe in him with such a faith as will regulate our practices, and render the whole of our life a series of grateful obedience to him, who is an atoning Priest upon a throne of royal authority, enacting laws and demanding the dutiful submission of his subjects. This faith is one of the principal subjects of sacred Scripture, and is expressed in various forms: sometimes in plain terms, but more frequently in metaphors borrowed from earthly things, and particularly from the actions of the body. We speak of the eye of the understanding as well as our bodily eye. The evidence by which the soul forms its determinations is called light, as well as the medium of proper vision. And as the metaphor is here borrowed from the eye, so it is frequently borrowed from the other organs of the body and their actions. And there is not only necessity but reason for this, as there is a resemblance between those actions of the body from which those metaphors are borrowed and those actions of the mind to which they are transferred; yea, it is not only a reasonable, but a beautiful method of representing divine things. In such metaphorical terms, as I observed, faith is often represented in sacred Scripture. Sometimes the metaphor is borrowed from the feet; and then to believe

is to come to Christ; to come to him as one oppressed with a heavy burden to a person that can relieve; to come to him as one perishing with thirst to a fountain of living water; or as the manslayer, closely pursued by the avenger of blood, to the city of refuge: hence it is expressed by the most emphatical phrase of *fleeing for refuge*. Sometimes the metaphor is taken from the ears; and faith is expressed by hearing his voice, as the impoverished, dying wretch would hear the offer of plenty and life. And sometimes, as in the text, the metaphor is taken from the eyes; and faith is represented as looking to Christ. My present design is:

I. To explain the duty here expressed by the metaphor of looking.

II. To urge it upon you by sundry considerations.

I. To explain the duty expressed by the metaphor of looking, we are to observe in general that a man's looks often discover his condition and the frame of his mind. By virtue of the strange union between the soul and the body, the dispositions of the one are often indicated by the emotions and appearances of the other. The eye, in particular, is a mirror in which we may see the various passions of the mind; and it has a kind of silent, and yet significant language, which conveys to others those inward exercises which the tongue does not, and perhaps cannot express. Hence we can understand a look of surprise and consternation, a look of sorrow and compassion, a look of joy, the look of a perishing suppliant, or a needy, expecting dependent. Looking to Christ, implies those suitable dispositions and exercises of heart towards him, which are expressed by the earnest and significant looks of persons in a distressed condition towards their deliverer. And in such a case it is natural to conceive a person as expressing by his looks a particular notice and distinct knowledge of his deliverer, an importunate cry for his assistance—a wishful expectation of it—a dependence upon him for it—a universal submission to him—a hearty love and approbation of him—and joy and gratitude for his deliverance. And these dispositions and exercises of mind towards Christ are intended in the text by looking to him.

1. Looking to Christ, implies a particular notice and distinct knowledge of him. When we fix an earnest look upon an object, we take particular notice and a distinct

survey of it, and so obtain a clear knowledge of it. Thus we are called to fix our intellectual eyes upon Christ, to make him the object of our contemplation, and by these means to obtain the knowledge of him. Mankind are too commonly regardless and ignorant of him. And are not many of you chargeable with this criminal neglect? The blessed Jesus has exhibited himself to your observation in the gospel, but your attention is so engaged by other objects, that you will not allow him an earnest look. He has been set forth evidently crucified before your eyes, but you have, as it were, passed and repassed careless and unconcerned by his cross. It is by the knowledge of him you are justified; and if you are a *people of no understanding, he that formed you will not have mercy on you*; but you shall be destroyed through lack of knowledge. Not that a mere speculative knowledge of Christ will suffice; no, it must not be a look of curiosity and speculation, but you must be affected with the object; your eye must affect your heart; and by beholding the glory of the Lord in the glass of the gospel, you must be changed into the same image, or conformed to him in holiness. But this will be further illustrated under the following particulars.

2. Looking to Christ implies an importunate eagerness for relief from him. When a guilty creature, that had been involved in the general presumptuous security, is effectually alarmed with just apprehensions of his danger; when he sees his numberless transgressions in all their horrid aggravations, and the dreadful threatenings of the law in full force, and ready to be executed against him: in short, when he sees himself ripe for ruin, and ready every moment to sink into it, with what importunate cries will he betake himself to him for relief! Behold, he prayeth! now he is often on his knees before God in secret, as well as in social prayer; and in the intervals between his prayers, he is often looking to the hills from whence cometh his aid, and wafting up many an importunate cry to heaven.

3. Looking unto Jesus implies an humble dependence upon him for salvation. This supposes that we are deeply sensible of our own utter inability to relieve ourselves; and when we are convinced of this, we shall immediately look to another, when we see no ground for self-confidence, we shall place our trust in Jesus alone. It was

such a look as this that good Jehoshaphat raised to heaven: *We have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon thee.* So Micah, finding no room for human confidence, resolves, *Therefore I will look unto the Lord.* Thus an humble sinner, sensible of his utter inability, resolves to venture upon Christ, *to trust in him, though he should slay him.* And in those happy moments when the sinner has some glimmering hopes of acceptance, with what pleasure and satisfaction does he rest upon this eternal rock! and how happy we, should we be engaged this day to place our humble dependence there! It is to this the text calls us.

4. Looking to Christ implies a hearty approbation of him as a Saviour, and supreme affection to him. Love is often expressed by looks; and when we look affectionately upon an object, it evidences that we are pleased with the survey. So a perishing world is commanded to acquiesce in the method of salvation through Christ, to love him above all, and to take the fullest and noblest complaisance in him; and upon their so doing, they are assured of salvation. We have, indeed, been influenced by education and the like means to entertain a general good esteem of Christ; but, alas! this is very far short of that endearing affection and hearty complacence which he claims and deserves. Our hearts must be engaged to him; he must be the chief among ten thousand in our eyes. Our thoughts and passions must often ascend to him, and we must rest in him with complacence, as containing all our salvation and all our desire. The duty of looking to Christ being explained, I shall,

II. Urge you to look to him by several weighty considerations. This is the great duty of saints and sinners, and consequently of every one in all ages and places, even to *the ends of the earth.* It is the duty of sinners to turn away their eyes from beholding vanity, and fix them upon this attractive, but, alas! neglected Saviour; to turn their attention from the trifles of time to the great anti-type of the brazen serpent, who is lifted up that a dying world may open their eyes just closing in death, and look and live. And saints, whose eyes have been turned to this glorious object, ought to fix them more intensely upon him, to take larger surveys of his glory, and to renew their affectionate trust in him. I would premise, that when I

exhort sinners to look to Jesus, I would not intimate that they are able to do this of themselves. No; I am sensible, that all the exhortations, persuasions, invitations, and expostulations that a feeble mortal, or even the most powerful angel in heaven can use with them, will have no effect, but vanish into air, without the efficacious operation of Almighty grace. And yet such exhortations are neither useless, improper, or unscriptural: they tend to convince sinners of their inability to believe, which is necessary to their believing aright; and it is while such arguments are addressed to their understandings, that the Holy Spirit is wont to work upon their hearts. Hence they are so often commanded in Scripture *to repent, to believe in Christ, to look to him to make them a new heart, &c.*

The arguments to enforce this evangelical duty can never be exhausted, and therefore I must confine myself to those which this copious text furnishes us with, which, when resolved into particulars, will stand thus:

It is salvation we are called upon to pursue; it may be obtained upon the easiest terms, without any personal merit, viz., by a look; it is Immanuel, the incarnate God, that commands and invites us to look—and our looking shall not be in vain, for he is God, who engages to save those that look to him; and it is in vain to look elsewhere for salvation, and needless to fear his grace should be controlled by another; for as he is God, so there is none else—and we in particular are invited, being especially meant by *the ends of the earth.*

1. It is salvation that is here offered. Look, and be saved. Salvation! O most propitious, transporting sound! Amazing! that ever it should be heard by our guilty ears! Sin, my brethren, has exposed us to the curse of the divine law, to the loss of heaven, and all its joys, yea, and of earth too, and all its entertainments; for death, the consequences of sin, will rend us from them. We have no title to any good to satisfy our eager pantings; and must languish and pine through an endless duration without a drop of bliss, if punished according to our demerit. We are also subject to the torturing agonies of a remorseful conscience, to be cut off from the earth by the sword of justice, and swept away by the bosom of destruction into the regions of horror and despair, there to consume away a long, long eternity in inextinguishable flames, in remedi-



less, intolerable torments, in the horrid society of devils and damned ghosts, who shall mutually promote and join in the general roar of torture and desperation. This, sirs, is our just, our unavoidable doom, unless we obtain an interest in the salvation of the Lord. But salvation brings us a complete remedy, equal to our misery. It contains a title to the divine favor, and consequently to all the joys of heaven; it contains a perfect deliverance from all the torments of hell: and shall we not then regard and obey the voice that cries, *Look unto me, and be ye saved!* Is it not fit those should perish without remedy, who hear the offer of such a salvation with indifference? *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?* Were we now under a sentence of condemnation to death by an earthly court, and were going out one after another to the place of execution, and should some welcome messenger with a general pardon in his hand, come with joyful speed into this assembly, and proclaim, salvation! salvation! to all that would accept it on the easiest terms, what a shout of general joy would burst from this assembly! What changed faces, what tears of general joy would appear among us! In this agreeable character, my brethren, I have the honor and the happiness of appearing among you this day. I proclaim salvation from the Lord to dying men; salvation to all that will look to him for it. And I would not make the offer to the air, or to the walls of this house, but to rational creatures, capable of consenting and refusing. I therefore request you to look upon it as a proposal made to you; to you men, to you women, to you youth and children, to you negroes, demanding a speedy answer. Will you look to Jesus? or will you hide your faces from him? Will you not think him and his salvation worth a look! Which leads me to observe,

2. This salvation may be obtained upon low terms. It may be obtained by a look. Look and be saved; and this metaphor implies that no merit is required in us to procure this salvation. It is as cheap a cure as that which the Israelites obtained by looking to the brazen serpent. The salvation is wrought already; Christ would not separate his soul and body, and put an end to his pains, till he could say, *It is finished*, and all required of us is a cheerful acceptance; and what terms could be easier? It is true we are required to abstain from sin, and be holy, in order

to enjoy this salvation; but can this be looked upon as a hard term? It is impossible in the nature of things you should be saved in a course of sin; for one great part of the salvation consists in deliverance from sin. This is the deadly disease which must be healed, in order to your happiness. And how then can you expect to be saved while you indulge it? What do those deserve who do not think of a salvation purchased with the blood of God worth a look? What drudgery do you endure, what hardships do you voluntarily undergo, to procure some of the specious toys of this world? How eagerly will you accept the offer of any temporal advantage! and will you neglect this invitation to look and live? Especially, when,

3. It is Immanuel, our incarnate God, that invites and commands you to look to him and be saved. That it is Christ who here calls us to look to him, is evident from the application of this context to Christ by the apostle, Rom. xiv. 9-11. See also Phil. ii. 9-11. He spake us into being, and we obeyed; and shall we, when blessed with existence, resist his almighty call? It is his voice whom angels obey; nay, universal nature hears his awful mandate, and all her laws are observed, or cancelled according to his pleasure. And is this the majestic voice which sinners hear sounding in the gospel, and yet disregarded? Is this he whom they make so light of, as not to vouchsafe him a look? Amazing presumption! And further, it is his voice which shall pronounce the final sentence upon the assembled universe. He now sits exalted upon a throne of grace, scattering blessings among his subjects, and inviting a dying world to look to him and live; but ere long he will put on majesty and terror, and ascend the throne of judgment. From thence he will pronounce, *Come ye blessed*, on all that hear his call now; and neither earth nor hell can repeal the joyful sentence. And on those that will not now look to him, he will pronounce, *Depart from me*; "away, away from my blissful presence, ye cursed creatures, never, never to see me more." And though they can now resist the voice of mercy, yet then they must obey the dreadful orders of Justice, and sink confounded from his face, and sink to hell. We, my brethren, must mingle in that vast assembly, and hear our doom from his lips; and can we, in the serious expectation of that day, refuse his call to look to him now? Behold, he cometh

with clouds, and every eye shall see him; and how shall we stand the terror of his face, if we now treat him so contemptuously? These considerations show that the call in my text is the command of authority, and therefore that our neglect of it is disloyalty and rebellion. But O! there is a more melting, a more endearing consideration still. It is the voice of our Beloved, it is the gracious invitation of love; it is his voice who heard the cry of helpless misery; who, though equal with God, and possessed of infinite, independent happiness, emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a servant. For us he was reproached, belied, persecuted; and O! for us he sweat and groaned in Gethsemane; for us he was nailed to the cross; for us he hung in ignominy and torture; for us he shed his blood, he breathed out his life; and for us the Lord of life lay in the dust of death. And O! blessed Jesus! after all this love, after all these sufferings, will not the sons of men afford thee one affectionate, believing look? O sirs, can you reject the invitations of such a Saviour? are you capable of such horrid ingratitude? He bespeaks your attention with dying groans; his wounds preach from the cross and cry, *Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth.*

4. It is Immanuel we are to look to. *Look unto me.* He that issues the command is the glorious and attractive object we are called to behold. He has exhibited himself to your view this day in a vesture dipt in blood. He has emblematically past before you crowned with thorns, and covered with blood; and as Pilate said to the Jews, to melt them in compassion, so say we to you, *Behold the man!* And will you turn away from him regardless, or view him with as much indifference as though he were a malefactor? What is this but to join the Jewish rabble, *Away with him! crucify him! crucify!* He has virtually said to you as to Thomas, *Look into my hands, and behold the print of the nails; and look into my side, and behold the stab of the spear, which opened a fountain of life for you.* Shall he complain, with David, his type, *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; no man cared for my soul.* Blessed Jesus! shalt thou take up this complaint over creatures for whom thou didst bleed and die? Over creatures who owe all their hopes to thee? may not the whole creation be struck

with consternation at the complaint! why are not the miraculous solemnities that attend thy death renewed? why does not the earth tremble, the rocks rend, the sun put on the livery of a mourner, to see a dying God and a careless world! the Creator, the Saviour of men, in agony, in blood! and his creatures, his ransomed, asleep, and not affording him so much as a look of love and compassion? But the cross is not the only place where we should look upon him. Lift up your eyes to seats above, there you may behold him who tasted of death, crowned with glory and honor. His head, that was once crowned with thorns, is now adorned with a crown of glory: His hands that were once nailed to the cross, now sway the sceptre of the universe: and his feet, that were cruelly pierced, now walk the crystal pavement of heaven. He that was insulted by Jews and Gentiles, he at whom they wagged their heads, is now adored by all the heavenly hosts, who congratulate his exaltation, and cry with united voice, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing.*

Shall we not look to him whose glory attracts the eyes of all the celestial armies, and congratulate his exaltation? We have cause indeed to rejoice in it; for O! he is exalted, that he may have mercy upon us: he has ascended the throne, that he may thence scatter blessings on a guilty world beneath him. And can we slight such glory and love united?

5. Look to him; for as he is God, so there is none else. This implies that there is no other Saviour, and that this sole Saviour is uncontrollable, and therefore able to save.

It is only a God that is able to work our salvation. Men, angels, all creatures are unequal to the task. They cannot satisfy divine justice for our sins; they cannot subdue our corruptions, and sanctify our hearts; nor conduct us safe through all the dangers and temptations that surround us. We in particular are utterly incapable of these things. And if you will not look to Christ, to whom will you look? *Call now, if there be any that will answer thee; to which of the saints, to which of the angels, wilt thou turn?* You are shut up to the faith, my brethren; you have no alternative but to look to Christ, or sink to hell. There is no salvation in any other. And will you rather be without a Saviour than look to him as such? Why such strange

aversion to your best friend, who is able to save to the utmost?

He is able to save, because beyond control. There is no God besides, to reverse his will; but whom he blesses, is blessed indeed. *He is head over all things to his church.* He limits the power, controls the rage, and baffles all the politic schemes of the powers of hell; and the hearts of men, of kings, are in his hand; and he turns them whithersoever he pleases. None therefore shall pluck his sheep out of his hand; but he will give unto them eternal life.

6. And lastly, look to him, for you are particularly invited, being especially meant by those in the ends of the earth. We dwell in a continent that may be called the ends of the earth with peculiar propriety; "Look unto me, ye that dwell in the uttermost ends of the inhabited earth; look unto me, ye Americans. O what a joyful sound! Not many years ago we or our near ancestors came from the old continent of Europe or its adjacent islands; and the Lord has driven out the heathen from before us, and planted us in their stead. In the days of Isaiah, God was mindful of America, and treasured up a rich invitation, till it should be inhabited, and in need of it. He has turned this wilderness into a fruitful field; the residence of savages and wild beasts into a mart of nations. *He hath blessed us also, so that we are multiplied greatly; and he suffereth not our cattle to decrease.* But, alas! we have turned his blessings into an occasion of sinning, we have improved in guilt and impiety in proportion to our improvement in riches and the arts of life. And it is an instance of divine patience that may astonish even heaven itself, that so ungrateful a land has not been visited with some signal judgment. *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise! is not he thy Father, that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee and established thee?* But to abuse the gospel is the greatest of all crimes. It is this that ripens a people for ruin, and fills up the measure of their iniquity: God will easier bear with the abuse of any mercy than with the contempt of his Son. *Therefore look unto him, and be ye saved, O ye ends of the earth.*

## XXIII.

## THE WONDERFUL COMPASSION OF CHRIST TO THE GREATEST SINNERS.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.”—*Matt. xxiii. 37.*

THERE is not, perhaps, a chapter in the whole Bible so full of such repeated denunciations of the most tremendous woes as this. Certainly there is none like it among all the discourses of Christ left upon record. Here the gentle Jesus, the inoffensive Lamb of God, treats the unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees with the most pungent severity. Woe, woe, woe, breaks from his lips like repeated claps of thunder. He repeatedly calls them hypocrites, fools, and blind, blind guides, whited sepulchres, children of hell, serpents, a generation of vipers who cannot escape the damnation of hell. But in my text he melts into tenderness, even in this vein of terror, and appears the same compassionate, gentle Saviour we are wont to find him. His most terrible denunciations were friendly warnings, calculated to reform, and not to destroy. And while denouncing the most terrible woes against Jerusalem, in an abrupt flow of passion he breaks out into the most moving lamentation over her: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens, &c.* This is one of those tender cases which requires a familiar and moving, rather than a grand illustration; and that which Jesus has chosen is one of the most tender, familiar, and moving that could be devised. How often would I have gathered thee, O Jerusalem, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings. As much as to say, “As the parent-bird, when she sees some bird of prey hovering over her helpless young, gives them the signal, which nature teaches them to understand, and spreads her wings to protect them, resolved to become

a prey herself rather than her tender brood; or, as she shelters them from the rain and cold, and cherishes them under her friendly feathers, "So," says the compassionate Redeemer, "so, O Jerusalem! I see thy children, like heedless chickens, in the most imminent danger; I see the judgments of God hovering over them; I see the Roman eagle ready to seize them as its prey; I see storms of vengeance ready to fall upon them; and how often have I invited them to fly to me for shelter, and give them the signal of their danger! But, O lamentable! O astonishing! ye would not! I was willing, but ye would not!"

His compassion will appear the more surprising, if we consider the object of it. Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent to thee, though upon the kind design of reforming and saving thee, and who will, in a few days, crucify that Saviour who now laments thy doom, how often would he have gathered even thy ungrateful children and received them under his protection, with an affection and tenderness like the instinctive fondness of the mother-hen for her brood!

The important truths which my text suggests are such as these:—That sinners while from under the protection of Jesus Christ are in a very dangerous situation—that they may obtain safety by putting themselves under his protection—that he is willing to receive the greatest sinners under his protection—that he has often used means to prevail upon them to fly to him, that they may be safe—that notwithstanding all this, multitudes are unwilling to fly to him, and put themselves under his protection—that this unwillingness of theirs is the real cause of their destruction—that this unwillingness is an instance of the most irrational and brutal stupidity—and, that it is very affecting and lamentable.

1. The text implies, that sinners, while from under the protection of Jesus Christ, are in a very dangerous situation. As the hen does not give the signal of danger, nor spread her wings to shelter her young, except when she sees danger approaching, so the Lord Jesus would not call sinners to fly to him for protection were they not in real danger. Sinners, you are in danger from the curse of the divine law, which is in full force against you, while you have no interest in the righteousness of Christ, which alone can answer its demands; you are in danger from the dread arrest of divine justice, which guards the sacred rights of

the divine government, and will avenge itself upon you for all the insults you have offered it; you are in danger from the various judgments of God, who is angry with you every day, and whose judgments are hovering over you, and ready to seize you like hungry birds of prey: you are in danger from your own vile corruptions, which may hurry you into such courses as may be inconvenient, or, perhaps, ruinous to you in this world, may harden you in impenitence, and at length destroy you for ever; you are in danger from the arrest of death, which is ready every moment to stretch out his mortal hand, and seize you; you are in danger from the malice and power of devils, who like hungry lions are ready to snatch away your souls, as their helpless prey. In short, you are surrounded with dangers on every hand, and dangers rise still more thick and dreadful before you. You are not sure of an hour's enjoyment of one comfort; nay, you are not sure there is so much as one moment between you and all the miseries of the damned. This minute you are upon earth, thoughtless, secure, and gay; but the next may be—I tremble to tell you where—in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, tormented in flames. Yes, sinners, one flying moment may strip you entirely naked of all the enjoyments of earth, cut you off from all hope of heaven, and engulf you in remediless despair. Some of you, whose very case this is, will not, probably, believe me, nor take the alarm. But here, alas! lies your principal danger. If you would take warning in time, you might escape; but you will not believe there is danger until it becomes inevitable. Had Lot's sons-in-law taken warning from him, they might have escaped; but they saw no sensible appearance of the impending judgment, and, therefore, they continued blindly secure, regarded the good old man as a mocker, and, therefore, perished in Sodom. Had Jerusalem been apprehensive of its danger in time, it might have flourished to this day; but it would not be warned, and, therefore, became a ruinous heap: and this will be your doom, sinners, unless you be apprehensive of it before it breaks upon you like a whirlwind. Indeed, it may make one sad to think how common this danger is, and how little it is apprehended, to see crowds thoughtless and merry on the brink of ruin, secure and careless while hanging over the infernal pit by the frail thread of life. This is sad;



but, alas! it is a common case in the world, and I am afraid it is too common among you, my hearers. And whither shall you fly for safety? Is the danger inevitable? If so, where is the friendly arm that can guard you? Where the wing that can shelter you from those judgments that are hovering over you, like ravenous birds, to make a prey of you? Blessed be God, I can show you a place of safety; for,

2. The text implies, that if sinners fly to Christ, and put themselves under his protection, they shall obtain safety.

How great and seemingly inevitable your dangers, yet if you place yourselves under the protection of Jesus Christ, you are safe for ever; safe from the deluges of divine wrath, that are ready to rush down upon you; safe from the sword of justice, and the thunders of Sinai; safe from the intestine insurrections of your own conscience, and from the power and malice of infernal spirits; safe from the oppression of sin, and you shall be gloriously triumphant over death itself, the king of terrors. Brethren, if we are covered with the righteousness of Christ, the sword of divine justice cannot reach us. If we are sheltered under the wings of his guardian care, the most threatening dangers of time or eternity cannot affect us with real injury. How happy then, how safe are such of you as have put yourselves under his protection! Now every blessing is yours, and nothing can do you a real injury. You shall never fall a prey to your various enemies, but shall at length obtain an illustrious victory over them all through the blood of the Lamb. But, alas! are there not some of you that are exposed to all the dreadful dangers of a sinner without Christ? And is there no place of safety for you? Yes, under those wings where believers have sheltered themselves. But you may perhaps inquire, "What encouragement have I to fly to him? I, who am so vile a sinner; I, who have nothing at all to recommend me! can I hope that he will stretch out the wings of his mercy, and receive me into protection?" Yes, poor trembling creature, even you may venture; for remember what my text further implies, viz.:

3. That the compassionate Jesus is willing to receive the very greatest sinner under his protection. Can you question this, after this moving lamentation of his over

Jerusalem? Jerusalem, that killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto her, though upon messages of grace; Jerusalem, upon whom should come all the righteous blood of the prophets, through a length of nearly 4000 years, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias; Jerusalem, the den of those murderers, who, he well knew, would in a few days imbrue their hands in his own blood; Jerusalem, that had abused so many mercies, been incorrigible under so many chastisements, deaf to so many invitations; yet of this very city the compassionate Saviour says, *How often would I have gathered thy children under the wings of my protection; thy children, obstinate and ungrateful as they are!* O what gracious encouragement is here to the greatest sinners among us! Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, the same compassionate, all-sufficient Saviour. He did not lose his pity for Jerusalem after he had suffered death by her bloody hands! but after his resurrection he orders his apostles to make one trial more with her obstinate children: *Go, says he, and preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem;* as much as to say, "Though Jerusalem be the ungrateful city, where so much pains have been taken in vain, and where I have just been crucified with cruel hands, yet do not give them up; try once more to gather them under my wings; yea, let them have the very first offer of grace under this new dispensation;" O what melting, overpowering mercy! What overflowing and free grace are here! This exemplifies his own declarations, that *he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance;* and sinners of the vilest character are welcome to him. Therefore come sinners, fly to Jesus, however deep your guilt. Had you been murderers of fathers, or murderers of mothers; nay, had you come hither this day with hands reeking with the blood of the Son of God, yet, if you repent and believe, he is willing to receive you under the shadow of his wings. To encourage you the more, and even to constrain you, consider what my text implies further, viz.:

4. That the Lord Jesus has often used means to prevail upon you to fly to him for safety. What he says to Jerusalem may be applied to you; *how often would I have gathered thy children together!* How often has he given you the signal of danger, that you might fly from it! how

often has he spread out a friendly wing to shelter you! as often as the law has denounced its curses against you; as often as the gospel has invited and allured you; as often as conscience has checked and warned you, or prompted you to duty; as often as the Holy Spirit has moved upon your hearts, and excited some serious thoughts and good purposes and inclinations; as often as Providence has allured you with its profusion of blessings, or chastened you with its afflictive rod; as often as you have seen a good example, or heard a pious word dropt in conversation; in short, as often as any means of any kind have been used with you, that had a tendency to make you sensible of your danger, or your need of Jesus Christ, so often has he used means with you to engage you to fly to the shelter of his wings for protection. The gracious call of a compassionate Saviour has followed you ever since you were capable of hearing it to this day. But, alas! does not the next remark hold true as to some of you, viz.:

5. That, notwithstanding all this, multitudes are unwilling to fly to him for protection! It was not of Jerusalem alone that he had reason to say, *I would have gathered you, but ye would not!* I was willing, but ye were unwilling. This is strange indeed, and might seem incredible, were it not a most notorious fact. That the Judge should be willing to pardon, but the criminal unwilling to receive pardon; that the offended Sovereign should be ready to take a perishing rebel under his protection, but the rebel should stand off, and rather perish than fly to him—this is a most astonishing thing; and it is the hardest thing in the world to convince sinners that this is their conduct towards the Lord Jesus Christ. They are generally more suspicious of his willingness to save them, than of their own to come to him. Were he as willing to save them, as they are to be saved by him, they think there would be no danger of their salvation; but the case is directly the reverse; the unwillingness lies entirely upon their side. To convince them of this let it be considered, that we are not truly willing to be saved by Christ at all, unless we are willing to be saved by him in his own way, or upon his own terms. We are not willing to be saved, unless the nature of the salvation be agreeable to us. Now one principal part of the salvation which we need, and which Christ offers, is deliverance from sin; deliverance from the power, the

pleasures, and profits of sin, as well as from the destructive consequences of it in the world to come. Are sinners willing to accept of such a salvation as this from Christ? No, this appears no salvation to them; this seems rather a confinement, a loss, a bereavement. They are willing to indulge themselves in sin, and therefore it is impossible they should, in the mean time, be willing to be restrained from it, or deprived of it. To tear their sins from them is to rob them of their pleasures, and they rise up in arms against the attempt. They are willing to be happy, but they are not willing to be holy, in which alone their happiness consists; they are willing to be saved from hell, but they are not willing to be saved from those dispositions which create a hell within them, even according to the nature of things; they are willing to go to heaven when they can live no longer in this their favorite world, but they are unwilling to be prepared for it in their temper and disposition. An eternity spent in holy exercises would be an eternal drudgery to them, unless they have a relish for holiness. Freedom from sin would be a painful bereavement to them while they take pleasure in sin, and how then could they be happy, even in the very region of happiness, since the sordid pleasures of sin never mingle with those pure rivers of living water? The only way of salvation, according to the divine appointment, is the way of holiness. This is not an arbitrary appointment, but necessary in the very nature of things; for, as I observed, till they are made holy, it is impossible in the nature of things they should be happy in heaven, because the happiness of heaven consists in the perfection of holiness. To be saved without holiness is as impossible as to be healthy without health, or be saved without salvation. God is wise in all his constitutions, and therefore the way of salvation by Christ is agreeable to the nature of things, it is in itself consistent and possible; and if sinners are not willing to be saved in this possible way, they are not willing in reality to be saved at all.

Again: the way of salvation by Christ is all through grace. It is adapted to stain the glory, and mortify the pride of all flesh, and to advance the mercy of God, and the honor of Christ, without a rival. Now baughty, self-righteous sinners are unwilling to be saved in this humbling, mortifying way, and therefore they are unwilling to

be saved by Christ. If they would be saved by him, they must be saved entirely upon the footing of his merit, and not their own; they must feel themselves self-condemned, they must utterly renounce all dependence upon their own righteousness, and receive every blessing as the free, unmerited gift of grace. And it is the hardest thing imaginable to bring a proud sinner so low as this; but till he is brought thus low, he cannot be saved upon the gospel plan. It would be inconsistent with the honor of the great God, the supreme Magistrate of the universe, and with the dignity of his government, to receive a rebel into favor, on any other footing than that of mere grace. If after sinning so much the sinner still has merit enough to procure a pardon, in whole or in part, or to render it cruel or unjust for God to condemn and punish him, certainly he must be a being of very great importance indeed; and sin against God must be a very small evil. To save a sinner in a way that would give any room for such insinuations as these, would be inconsistent with the honor of God and his government; and therefore the plan he has constituted is a method of grace, of pure rich grace, in all and every part. Now while sinners are not willing to be saved in this way, they are not willing to be saved at all. Here lies the grand mistake. Because they have a general willingness that Christ should save them from hell, they therefore conclude they are really willing to come to him according to the gospel constitution, whereas there is nothing in the world to which they are more averse. There are many that think, and perhaps declare, they would give ten thousand worlds for Christ, when, in reality, they are not willing to receive him as a free gift; they are not yet brought to that extremity as to fly to him.

6. The text implies that this unwillingness of sinners is the real cause of their destruction.

Sinners complain of the want of ability; but what is their inability but their unwillingness? Coming to Christ is an act of the will, and therefore to will it heartily is to perform the act. To be unable to come to him is to be so perverse, so disaffected to Jesus Christ, as not to have power to will to come to him. This, by the way, shows the vanity of that popular excuse, "I am not able to fly to Christ, therefore it is not my fault if I do not." That is, you are so wicked that you can do no good thing; you

are so disaffected to Jesus Christ that you have no will, no inclination, to choose him for your Saviour; you are such an obstinate enemy to him, that you would rather perish than take him for a friend; therefore your not coming to him is no crime. Is this consistent reasoning? Is it not all one as if a rebel should think to excuse himself by pleading, "I have such an inveterate hatred to my sovereign that I cannot love him;" or a robber, "I have such an aversion to honesty, that I cannot possibly help stealing? Would not this be an aggravation of the crime rather than an excuse? Sinners, give up this foolish reasoning, for the matter is too important to be trifled with. Your inability in this case is nothing else then your unwillingness; and your unwillingness is the effect of your disaffection to Jesus Christ; therefore own that this is the true cause of your destruction.

In short, whatever pleas and excuses you make, you will find at last that your destruction is entirely the effect of your own perverse choice. *Ye will not come unto Christ that ye might have life*; and therefore you must perish without it. This reflection will for ever torment you, that you willfully destroyed yourselves, and were guilty of the most unnatural self-murder. Jesus was willing, but you would not. God has even sworn that *he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn and live*. To you therefore, I may properly address that expostulation, *Why will ye die? Why will ye? why do ye most willfully, destroy yourselves? why do ye ruin yourselves by your own free choice? why will you die? you, whom Jesus is willing to save, whom he has often invited, why will you, above all men in the world, causelessly die by your own act? Are you capable of so much stupidity? It is a stupidity that is a dreadful peculiarity of your own, for,*

7. Unwillingness to fly to Jesus is the most irrational, and worse than brutal stupidity. This is implied in my text. No sooner does the hen give the signal of danger, then her little family, taught by instinct to understand the alarm, immediately fly under her wings. "So," says Christ, "I gave you the alarm, but you would not regard it; so I spread the wing of my guardian care to defend you, but you would not shelter under it." To refuse the offer of eternal salvation, when proposed upon the most reasonable terms—to rush into hell, rather than be saved by the

friendly hands of Jesus Christ—to suffer the most terrible execution, rather than accept a free pardon—to reject all the bliss of heaven when freely proposed—to choose the pleasures of sin for a season rather than an eternity of the most exalted happiness—to resist the calls of redeeming love, and all the friendly efforts of divine grace, to save a sinking soul—is this the conduct of a reasonable creature? Let me endeavor to make you sensible,

8. And lastly, that this conduct is extremely affecting and lamentable.

It is on this account that Jesus laments over Jerusalem in such pathetic strains in my text. He knew the truth of the case; his all-seeing eye took it in all its extent, and viewed it in all its circumstances and consequences. And since he, who knew it best, deeply laments it, we may be sure it is lamentable indeed, and it cannot but appear so even to us who know so little of it. An immortal soul lost! lost for ever! lost by its own obstinacy! lost amidst the means of salvation! how tragical a case is this!—God dishonored! Jesus rejected! his love defeated! his blood trampled upon! his spirit grieved! how lamentable is this? And yet are there not some of you in this lamentable condition in this assembly? It was over such as you that Jesus wept and mourned. And shall he weep alone! Shall not our tears keep time with his, since we are so much more nearly concerned? *O that our heads were waters, and our eyes fountains of tears,* that we might weep along with the Saviour of men! But, alas! our tears are too much reserved for dying friends, or some less affecting object, while immortal souls perish around us, unpitied, unlamented!



## XXIV.

### THE NATURE AND AUTHOR OF REGENERATION.

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”—*John*, iii. 7.

THOSE doctrines are not always most absurd in themselves, nor strange to a well-informed mind, which are most

wondered at in the world. Ignorance is apt to wonder where knowledge discovers nothing amazing or unaccountable. To support our observations proofs might be given ; but it is to my present purpose to take notice only of one, one that excited from Nicodemus wonder, about 1700 years ago, and is still wondered at ; nay, more, is ridiculed in an ignorant world : I mean the doctrine of regeneration, or the New Birth. Nicodemus comes to Christ with a conviction of his high character as a teacher from God, who attested his commission by the strong and popular evidence of miracles. From such a teacher he expects sublime instructions ; and from his own improvements in Jewish learning, he, no doubt, flatters himself he shall be able to comprehend them ; but when, instead of gratifying his curiosity by telling him great and strange things of the Messiah, as a secular prince, and a mighty conqueror, as he and his countrymen expected, or discoursing like a Rabbi on the Jewish law ; I say, when, instead of this, Jesus opens the conference by a solemn and authoritative declaration of the necessity of something under the name of another birth, how is Nicodemus surprised ! This he cannot understand. This seems strange, new doctrine to him, and he has an objection ready against it, as an absurdity and an impossibility : *How can a man be born when he is old ? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born ?* This objection, which was altogether impertinent, and founded upon a gross mistaken notion of the doctrine, may serve as a specimen of all the objections that have been made against this doctrine ever since ; they have all proceeded from ignorance, or from gross mistaken notions of an evident truth ; and hence men have imagined, like this master of Israel, that they reasoned strongly against it, when in reality they were saying nothing at all to the purpose, and did not as much as understand the case.

Our condescending Lord took a great deal of pains to give Nicodemus right notions of this doctrine. For this purpose he presents it before him in various views. He tells him he did not mean a second natural birth, but a birth of water and of the spirit ; a birth that renders a man spiritual, and consequently fit for that spiritual kingdom he was about to erect ; and that the free and sovereign Spirit of God, the Author of this new birth, operated like the *wind, that bloweth where it listeth.*



The connection of my text is this: *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit; therefore marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.* That is to say, "the doctrine you are so much surprised at, is not at all absurd, so as to make you wonder to hear it from my mouth. You cannot but know that all mankind are born of the flesh; that is, propagated in a way that communicates a depraved nature to them; and hence they are flesh; that is, corrupt and carnal; and therefore wholly unfit to be admitted into my kingdom, which is pure and spiritual. But that which is born of the spirit, is spirit; that is, spiritual and holy; and therefore fit for that spiritual and holy kingdom, which I am come to set up. Now, if this be the case, you have certainly no need to marvel at this doctrine: can it seem strange to you, that impure, unholy creatures must be changed, before they can be fit for members of so holy a society? Can you marvel at this? No; you would have more reason to marvel at the contrary.

Let us inquire what the new birth is. And,

Who is the author of it?

And in what way does he generally produce it?

Let us inquire, what it is to be born again?

To gain your attention to this inquiry, I need only put you in mind, that whatever be meant by the new birth, it is not an insignificant speculation, not the disputed peculiarity of a party, not the attainment of a few good men of the first class, but it is essential to every good man, and absolutely necessary to salvation. You cannot doubt this, if you look upon Jesus Christ as a person of common veracity, and worthy of credit in his most solemn declarations; for he has declared, over and over again, with the utmost solemnity, that *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.* Attend then, if you think your eternal salvation worthy your attention. The phrase *to be born again*, like most other expressions used upon divine subjects, is metaphorical, and brings in natural things, with which we are familiarly acquainted, to assist our conceptions of divine things, which might otherwise be above our comprehension. We all know what it is to be born; and our knowledge of this may help us to understand what it is to be born again. As by our first birth we became men, or partake of human nature; so, by our second birth, we become

Christians, and are made partakers of a divine and spiritual nature. As our first birth introduces us into this world, and into human society, so our second birth introduces us into the church of Christ, and makes us true members of that holy society. As by our first birth we resemble our parents, at least in the principal lineaments of human nature, so by our second birth we are made partakers of the divine nature; that is, we are made to resemble the blessed God in holiness; or, as St. Paul expresses it, *we are renewed after his image in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness.* The effect is like its cause; the child like the parent. In our first birth we are endowed with childlike and filial dispositions towards our human parents; and when we are born of God, we are inspired with a childlike and filial temper towards him as our heavenly Father. By our natural birth we are placed in an imperfect, but growing state. We have all the powers of human nature, though none of them in perfection; but from that time they grow and improve till they at length arrive at maturity. In like manner, in our second birth, all the principles of virtue and grace are implanted; but their growth and improvement is the work of the Christian life. And from that time they continue gradually growing, though with many interruptions, till at death they arrive at maturity and perfection. In our natural life we pass through a great change. The infant that had lain in darkness, breathless, and almost insensible, and with little more than a vegetative life, enters into a new state, feels new sensations, craves a new kind of nourishment, and discovers new powers. In like manner, in the second birth, the sinner passes through a great change: a change as to his view of divine things; as to his temper, his practice, and his state; a change so great that he may with propriety be denominated another man, or a new creature.

The various forms of expression which the Scripture uses to represent what is here called a second birth, all conspire to teach us that it consists in a great change. It is represented as a resurrection, or a change from death unto life: *You hath he quickened into life, saith St. Paul, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* It is represented as a new creation: *If any man be in Christ, says the same inspired author, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; and behold all things are become new.* *Put on, says he, the new*

*man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.* These, and like expressions, signify a very great change; and such forms of speech are very commonly used in the same sense, which shows that they are so far from being ridiculous, that they are agreeable to the common sense of mankind.

Now, since it is evident that the new birth signifies a great change, you are impatient, by this time, I hope, to know more particularly what it is. It is the change of a thoughtless, ignorant, hard-hearted, rebellious sinner into a thoughtful, well-informed, tender-hearted, dutiful servant of God. It is the implantation of the seeds or principles of every grace and virtue in a heart that was entirely destitute of them and full of sin. The sinner that was wont to have no practical affectionate regard for the great God, is now made to revere, admire, and love him as the greatest and best of Beings; to rejoice in him as his supreme happiness, and cheerfully submit to him as his Ruler. Formerly his temper and conduct would better agree to the infidelity of an atheist than to the faith of a Christian; but now, he thinks, and speaks, and acts as one that really believes there is a God—a God who inspects all his ways, and will call him to an account. The heart that had no realizing affecting views of a future state, now feels the energy of that doctrine, and looks upon heaven and hell as indeed the most important realities. The heart that was once earthly and sensual, eagerly set upon things below, as its main pursuit, is now taught to aspire to heaven; in heaven is its treasure, and there it will be. The thoughts that were once scattered among a thousand trifles, are now frequently collected, and fixed upon the great concerns of religion. Now, also, the heart is remarkably altered towards the Lord Jesus: formerly it seemed sufficient to wear his name, to profess his religion, to believe him to be the Saviour of the world, and to give a formal attendance upon the institutions of his worship; but O! now he appears in a more important and interesting light. Now the sinner is deeply sensible that he is indeed the only Saviour, and he most eagerly embraces him under that endearing character, and intrusts his eternal all in his hands. Now, also, the man has very different views of himself: he sees himself to be a guilty, depraved, vile creature, all overrun with sin, and destitute of all goodness, but as it is wrought in

him by divine grace ; how different is this from the proud, self-righteous estimate he was wont to form of himself ! His views of sin are also quite different from what they used to be : he used to look upon it as a slight excusable evil, except when it broke out into some gross acts. But now he sees it to be unspeakably vile and base, in every instance and degree. An evil thought, a corrupt motion of desire, an indisposed heart towards God, appears to be a shocking evil, such as nothing but the infinite mercy of God can forgive, and even that mercy, upon no other account but that of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He sees it does most justly deserve everlasting punishment. It breaks his heart to think that he indulged so base a thing so long, and he can never be fully reconciled to himself while he feels the remains of it within him. His repentance now takes a new turn. Formerly he was entirely under the influence of self-love, and therefore, when he had any concern for his sin, it entirely proceeded from the servile principle of fear ; fear of the punishment, and not hatred of the crime ; now he can mourn over sin, as a base and ungrateful evil, even when he has no thoughts of the punishment ; now he can mourn over sin as against God, and not only as against a sin-punishing, but as against a sin-pardoning God. O ! that he should be so base as to sin against a God who is so gracious as to forgive him after all ! This thought breaks his heart ; and God's forgiving him is a reason why he can never forgive himself. The heart has also a new temper in the duties of religion : it can no more indulge an habitual coldness or lukewarmness in them, but exerts its power to the utmost ; and when it has a languishing interval, it cannot be easy in that condition, but tries to rouse itself again. Now religion is no longer a matter by the by, but a serious business ; and every thing that comes in competition with it must give way to it. The man is resolved to save his soul at all adventures ; and this, he is now convinced, is no easy work. To sum up the whole, for I can only give a few specimens of particulars, the regenerate soul is changed universally in every part. I do not mean the change is perfect in any part : alas ! no ; sin still lives, and sometimes makes violent struggles, though crucified. The old man dies hard, but I mean, the change does really extend to every part. The soul is in no respect the same as it was wont to

be, as to the concerns of religion. It has new views, new sensations, new joys, new sorrows, new inclinations and aversions, new hopes and fears; in short, as the apostle tells us, *all things are become new. The whole man, soul, body, and spirit, is sanctified.* By way of confirmation, let me add a few characters of a regenerate man, which are expressly scriptural. *Every one that is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* That is, whatever temptations may arise from the riches, honors, or pleasures of the world, or from the society of mankind, the man that is born of God has such believing views of eternal things, as constrains him to conflict with them, and overcome them. He is enabled, by divine grace, to brave dangers, and encounter difficulties in so good a cause; he dares to be wise and happy, though all the world should turn against him. O what a change is this from his former temper!

Another distinguishing characteristic of the new birth, is universal holiness of practice, or a conscientious observance of every known duty, and an honest, zealous resistance of every known sin. There is no known duty however unfashionable, disagreeable, or dangerous, but what the true convert honestly endeavors to perform; and there is no known sin, however customary, pleasing, or gainful, but what he honestly resists, and from which he labors to abstain. When the heart is made holy, it will infallibly produce habitual holiness of practice. This St. John asserts in the strongest manner, and in various forms. *We know, says he, that every one that doeth righteousness is born of God. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; that is, keepeth himself from the infection of sin; and that wicked one toucheth him not. Little children, says he, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous. But he that committeth sin is of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; i. e. as I explained it before, he does not habitually sin in the general tenor of his practice, so as to make sin his distinguishing character; for his seed remaineth in him; that is, the principles of grace, implanted in him in regeneration, are immortal, and will never suffer him to give himself up to sin, as formerly; and he cannot sin because he is born of God: his being born of God happily disables him for ever from abandoning himself to sin again. In this the children of God are mani-*

*fest; and the children of the devil; that is, this is the grand distinguishing characteristic existing between them, who-soever doth not righteousness is not of God.* You see, then, a holy practice is one of the most certain signs of regeneration; and therefore in vain do such pretend to it, or boast of high attainments in inward experimental religion, who are not holy in all manner of conversation, and do not live righteously, soberly, and godly in the world.

By this time, I hope, my brethren, you understand what it is to be born again. And now, upon a review of the subject, there are several things of importance which I would submit to your consideration.

First, I leave you now to consider, whether baptism be the same thing with regeneration, or the new birth in the Scripture sense.

If baptism be regeneration in the Scripture sense, then, whatsoever the Scripture says concerning persons regenerated, born again, or created anew, will also hold true concerning persons baptized. Proceeding upon this obvious principle let us make the trial in a few instances. It may be truly said of him that is born of God, in the Scripture sense, that he does not habitually sin, &c. Now substitute baptized, instead of born of God, and consider how it will read, "Every one that is baptized sinneth not; but he that is baptized keepeth himself; and the evil one toucheth him not." Has this the appearance of truth? Do not all of you know so much of the conduct of many who have been baptized as to see this is most notoriously false? for where can you find more audacious sinners upon earth, than many who have been baptized? Let us make another trial. *Whosoever is born of God, in the Scripture sense, overcometh the world.* But will it hold true, that whosoever is baptized overcometh the world? *If any man be in Christ, in the Scripture sense, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new!* Does baptism universally make such a change in the subject as that it may, with any tolerable propriety, be called a new creation? That man must labor to be deceived, who can work up himself to believe, after such a representation of the case, that if he has been baptized he has all that regeneration which is necessary to his admission into the kingdom of heaven. I can find no Scripture that says of baptism, "This is regeneration." Another

thing which I would now leave to your consideration is, whether regeneration or the new birth, in the sense I have explained it, be not a rational, noble thing? And whether so great a change in a man's temper and conduct may not emphatically be called a new birth? When a man is born again, the ruins of his nature are repaired, and every noble and divine grace and virtue are implanted in his heart. His heart is made capable of generous sensations; his understanding has suitable views of the most interesting and sublime objects; and his temper and behavior are rightly formed towards God and man. This change gives a man the very temper of heaven, and prepares him for the enjoyments and employments of that holy place. Therefore, *marvel not that I say unto you, ye must be born again.* Do not gaze and wonder at me, as if I told you some strange, new, absurd thing, when I tell you, you must be regenerated in the manner I have explained, if ever you would enter into the kingdom of heaven. Consult your own reason and experience, and they will tell you that as heaven is the region of perfect holiness, and as you are indisputably corrupted, depraved creatures, you must be so changed, as to be made holy, or, in other words, you must be born again, before you can enjoy the happiness of that sacred region; or consult the Bible, and you will find the absolute necessity of being born again asserted in the strongest terms. Need I remind you of the solemn asseveration of Christ in my context, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven!* The same blessed lips have assured us, that, *except we be converted, and become as little children, we cannot enter into his kingdom.* St. Paul speaks in the same strain: *If any man be in Christ, as we all must be before we can be saved by him, he is a new creature, &c. In Christ Jesus, says he, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but the new creature.* All external forms of religion, whether Jewish or Christian, are of no avail, without this new creation.

Now if this be true, that except a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God, then it will follow, that just as many persons in this assembly as have been born again, just so many are in a state of favor with God, and prepared for the happiness of heaven. And, on the other hand, just as many as are unregenerate, just so many

lie dead in sin, under the wrath of God, and liable to everlasting misery. Let each of you particularly admit this conviction: "If I am not born again, I have not the least ground to hope for happiness in my present state."

Upon this follows another inquiry, of the utmost importance; and that is, whether you have ever experienced the blessed change of the new birth? Have your views, your dispositions, and your conduct been changed in the manner described? and can you lay claim to those distinguishing characters of a regenerate soul which have been mentioned? Pause, and think seriously; recollect your past experiences; look into your own hearts; observe the tenor of your practice; and from the whole, endeavor to gather an honest answer to this grand question, "Have I been born again?"

If you can answer this in your favor, St. Peter will tell you the happy consequences: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope—to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.* But if, on the other hand, you find you have never been born again, what is to be done? Must you lie still in that condition, or shall you try to get out of it? I am sure my design in endeavoring to let you see your condition, is that you may escape out of it, and be happy; and if you are so kind to yourselves as to concur with me in this design, I hope, through divine grace, we shall succeed. This introduces the next inquiry, namely,

II. Who is the author of this divine change, called the new birth?

The change is so great, so noble, and divine, that from thence alone we may infer it can be produced only by divine power. And the nature of man, in its present state, is so corrupt and weak that it is neither inclined nor able to produce it. It is also uniformly ascribed to God in the sacred writings. *Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* And it is he who has changed many a heart in our guilty world. Here the next inquiry comes in very seasonably, namely,

III. In what way does this divine agent produce this change?



He generally carries it on in the following manner. The first step is to convince the sinner of his need of this change, by discovering to him his guilt and danger, and particularly the universal corruption of his nature. He is roused out of a state of a stupid security by an affecting view of the holiness of God, of the purity of his law, of the terror of its penalty, of the great evil of sin, and of his own exposedness to the divine displeasure upon the account of it. Upon this he becomes sad and serious, uneasy in his mind, and anxious about his condition. He endeavors to reform his life; he prays and uses the other means of grace with earnestness unknown before. And when he has gone on in this course for some time, he begins perhaps to flatter himself that now he is in a safe condition. But, alas! he does not yet know the worst of himself. Therefore the Holy Spirit opens his eyes to see the inward universal corruption of his whole soul, and that a mere outward reformation is far from being a sufficient cure of a disease so inveterate. Hereupon the awakened sinner betakes himself to the means of grace with redoubled vigor and earnestness, and strives to change the principles of action within. But, alas! he finds his heart is a stubborn thing, and altogether unmanageable to him; and after repeated strivings to no purpose, he is effectually convinced of his own inability, and the absolute necessity of the exertion of divine power to make him truly good. Therefore he lies at the throne of grace, as a poor, anxious, helpless sinner, entirely at mercy, and unable to relieve himself. Now the important hour is come, when the old man must be crucified; when the divine and immortal principles must be implanted in a heart full of sin, and when the dead sinner must begin to live a holy and divine life. The great God instantaneously changes the whole soul, and gives it a new and heavenly turn. In short, now is wrought that important change, which I have already described, which is called the new birth, and denominates the man a new creature.

Here again you may furnish yourself materials for self-examination. If you have been born again, you have thus felt the pangs of a new birth, and seen your guilty, sinful, and dangerous condition in a true light. And what do those of you who are in a state of nature determine to do? Will you not resolve to seek after this im-

portant change, upon which your eternal all depends? Oh, let us part to-day fully determined upon this—that we will implore the power and mercy of God to create in us clean hearts, and renew within us right spirits.



## XXV.

### THE WAY OF SIN HARD AND DIFFICULT.

“It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”—*Acts*, iv. 6.

You often hear of the narrow and rugged road of religion, which leadeth unto life, and some of you, I am afraid, have not courage enough to venture upon it. You rather choose the smooth, broad, down-hill road to vice and pleasure, though it leads down to the chambers of death. It must be owned that a religious life is a course of difficulties, a hard struggle, a constant conflict; and it is fit you should be honestly informed of it; but then it is fit you should also know that the difficulties arise, not from the nature of religion, but from the corruption and depravity of the nature of man in its present degenerate state. A course of religion is disagreeable, is hard, is difficult to mankind, just as a course of action is difficult to the sick, though it is easy and affords pleasure to those that are well. There are difficulties in the way of sin as well as in that of holiness, though the depravity of mankind renders them insensible of it. This is the view of the case I would now lay before you. There is a sense in which it is true, that it is a hard thing to be a sinner as well as to be a saint; there are difficulties in the way to hell as well as in the way to heaven. And if you are insensible of them, it is owing, as I just observed, to the corruption of your nature, and not to the real easiness of the thing itself. If it be hard, in one sense, to live a life of holiness, it is certainly hard, in another sense, to live a life of sin; namely, to run against conscience, against reason, against honor, against interest, against all the strong and endearing obligations you are under to God, to mankind, and to your-

selves; or, in the words of my text, *it is hard for you to kick against the pricks.*

This is a proverb, in use among various nations, which has received a sanction from heaven in the text. *To kick against the pricks*, is an allusion to a lazy or unruly plough-horse, or ox, that when pricked with a goad (an instrument used in ploughing, in sundry places, instead of a whip) refuses to go on, and spurns and kicks against the goad, and so wounds himself and not the driver. It is to this the phrase alludes; and it signifies a resistance injurious to the person that makes it, when it would be easy to obey. Hence we may learn the precise sense in which it is used by the mouth of Christ, in his pungent address to Saul the persecutor, whom we now know under the higher name of Paul the apostle.

Saul, animated with a furious, misguided, though honest zeal, against the disciples of Jesus, was now on his way to Damascus in pursuit of them, and had a commission from the highest court of the Jews to apprehend them, a commission which he was impatient to execute. This, in human view, was a very unpromising hour for his conversion; now it appears more likely that vengeance will arrest him as a criminal, than that grace will prevent him as a vessel of mercy. But O! what agreeable exploits of grace has Jesus performed! At the first introduction of his religion, it was fit he should single out some great sinner, and make him a monument of his mercy, for the encouragement of future ages. Therefore he surprises this fierce persecutor in his daring career, darts the splendor of his glory around him, and pierces him to the heart with this irresistible expostulation, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Saul, in a trembling consternation, replies, *Who art thou, Lord?* He thought he was only bringing to justice a parcel of contemptible, blasphemous sectaries, unworthy of toleration; and little did he think that his persecuting zeal reached so high; little did he expect to hear one crying from the throne of heaven, *Why persecutest thou me?* But Jesus feels and resents the injuries done to his people as done to himself. The head sympathizes with its members; therefore he answers, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.* And then follows my text, *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

That I may the more fully illustrate the striking thought

suggested by my text, I shall point out to you some seemingly insuperable obstacles in the way to hell, or some dire exploits, which one would think would be too hard for you to perform, which you must perform, if you persist in a course of sin.

1. Is it not a hard thing to be an unbeliever or a deist, in our age and country, while the light of the gospel shines around us with full blaze of evidence? Before a man can work up himself to the disbelief of a religion attended with such undeniable evidence, and inspiring such divine dispositions and exalted hopes, what absurdities must he embrace! what strong convictions must he resist! what dark suspicions, what boding fears and misgivings, what shocking peradventures and tremendous doubts must he struggle with! what glorious hopes must here sign! what gloomy and shocking prospects must he reconcile himself to! what violence must he offer to his conscience! what care must be used to shut up all the avenues of serious thought, and harden the heart against the terrors of death and the supreme tribunal! How painful a piece of preposterous self-denial to reject the balm the gospel provides to heal a broken heart and a bleeding conscience, and the various helps and advantages it furnishes us with to obtain divine favor and everlasting happiness! How hard to work up the mind to believe that Jesus, who spoke, and acted, and suffered, and did every thing like an incarnate God, was an impostor, or at best a moral philosopher! or that the religion of the Bible, that contains the most sublime and Godlike truths, and the most pure and perfect precepts of piety and morality, is the contrivance of artful and wicked men, or evil spirits! These, brethren, are no easy things. There are many skeptics and smatterers in infidelity, but few, very few are able to make thorough work of it, or commence stanch unbelievers. The attempt itself is a desperate shift. A man must have reduced himself to a very sad case indeed, before he can have any temptation to set about it. He has, by his willful wickedness, set Christianity against him, before he can have any temptation to set himself against Christianity; and when he proclaims war against it, he finds it hard, yea, impossible, to make good his cause. He may indeed put on the airs of defiance and triumph, and affect to laugh at his enemy, and at times may be half persuaded he has really got the

victory. But such men find the arms of their own reason often against them, and their own conscience forms violent insurrections in favor of religion, which they cannot entirely suppress; so that they are like their father, whatever they pretend, they believe and tremble too. Alas, that there should be so many unhappy companions in this infernal cause, in our country and nation! They find it hard, even now, to kick against the goad; and O! how much harder will they find it in the issue! Their resistance will prove ruinous to themselves; but neither they nor the gates of hell shall prevail against the cause they oppose. Christianity will live when they are dead and damned, according to its sentence.

2. Is it not hard for men to profess themselves believers, and assent to the truths of Christianity, and yet live as if they were infidels!

A professed speculative atheist or infidel is a monster that we do not often meet with; but the more absurd and unaccountable phenomenon of a practical atheist, one who is orthodox in principle, but infidel in practice, we may find wherever we turn; and it would be strange if none such have mingled in this assembly to-day. To such I would particularly address myself.

If you believe Christianity, or even the religion of nature, you believe that there is a God of infinite excellency, the Maker, Preserver, Benefactor, and Ruler of the world, and of you in particular; and consequently, that you are under the strongest obligations to love him, and make it your great study and endeavor to obey his will in all instances. Now is it not strange, that while you believe this, you are able to live as you do? How can you live so thoughtless of this great and glorious God, who bears such august and endearing relations to you? How can you withhold your love from him, and ungratefully refuse obedience? Is not this a hard thing to you? Does it not cost you some labor to reconcile your consciences to it? If this be easy to you, what champions in wickedness are you? how mighty to do evil? This would not be easy to the mightiest archangel; no, it is a dire achievement he would tremble to think of.

Again; if you believe the Christian religion, you believe the glorious doctrine of redemption through Jesus Christ; you believe that he, the Father's great coequal Son, as-

sumed our nature, passed through the various hardships of life, and died upon a cross for you; and all this out of pure unmerited love. And is it no difficulty to neglect him, to dishonor him, to slight his love and disobey his commands? Does this monstrous wickedness never put you to a stand? Degenerate and corrupt as you are, have you not such remains of generous principles within you, as that you cannot, without great violence to your own hearts, reject such a Saviour? Does not conscience often take up arms in the cause of its Lord, and do you not find it hard to quell the insurrection? Alas! if you find no difficulty in treating the blessed Jesus with neglect, it shows that you are mighty giants in iniquity.

Again; if you believe the Christian religion, you must believe that regeneration, or a thorough change of heart and life, and universal holiness, are essentially necessary to constitute you a real Christian, and prepare you for everlasting happiness. And while you have this conviction, is it not a hard thing for you to be only Christians in name, or self-condemned hypocrites, or to rest contented in any attainments short of real religion?

Finally, if you believe Christianity, or even natural religion, you believe a future state of rewards and punishments, the highest that human nature is capable of. And is it not a hard thing to make light of immortal happiness or everlasting misery? Since you love yourselves, and have a strong innate desire of pleasure and horror of pain, how can you reconcile yourselves to the thought of giving up your portion in heaven, and being ingulfed for ever in the infernal pit? Or how can you support your hope of enjoying the one and escaping the other, while you have no sufficient evidence? Can you venture on so important an interest upon an uncertainty, or dare to take your chance, without caring what might be the issue? Are you capable of such dreadful fool-hardiness? Do you not often shrink back aghast from the prospect? Does not the happiness of heaven sometimes so strongly attract you, that you find it hard to resist? And do not the terrors of hell start up before you in the way of sin, and are you not brought to a stand, and ready to turn back? The pit of hell, like a raging volcano, thunders at a distance, that you may not fall therein by surprise. You may perceive its flames, and smoke, and roarings, in the threatenings of

God's law, while you are yet at a distance from it. And is it easy for you to push on your way, when thus warned? O! one would think it would be much more easy and delightful to a creature endowed with reason and self-love, to abandon this dangerous road, and choose the safe and pleasant way of life.

3. Is it not hard for a man to live in a constant conflict with his conscience? This obstacle in the way to hell has appeared in all the former particulars; but it is so great, and seemingly insuperable, that it deserves to be pointed out by itself. When the sinner would continue his career to hell, conscience, like the cherubim at the gates of paradise, or the angel in Balaam's road, meets him with its flaming sword, and turns every way, to guard the dreadful entrance into the chambers of death. When a man goes on in the thoughtless neglect of God, and the concerns of eternity, or indulges himself in vice or irreligion, conscience whispers, "What will be the end of this course? thou shalt yet suffer for this. Is it fit thou shouldst thus treat the blessed God, and the Saviour Jesus Christ? Is it wise to neglect the great work of salvation, and run the risk of eternal ruin?" I may appeal to sinners themselves, whether they do not often hear such remonstrances as these from within? Indeed, in the hurry and bustle of business and company, and the headlong career of pleasure and amusement, the voice of conscience is not heard. But you cannot always avoid retirement; sometimes you must be by yourselves, and then you find it hard to close up and guard all the avenues of serious thought. Then conscience insists upon a fair hearing, and enters many a solemn protestation against your conduct, warns you of the consequences, and urges you to take another course. Whatever airs of impious bravery you put on in public, and however boldly you bid defiance to these things, yet, in such pensive hours, do you not find that you are cowards at heart? Is not conscience like to get the victory? Are you not obliged to break out into the world, and rally all its forces to your assistance, that you may suppress your conscience? Now, how hard a life is this! The life of the sinner is a warfare, as well as that of the Christian. Conscience is his enemy, always disturbing him; that is, he himself is an enemy to himself while he continues an enemy to God. Some, indeed, by repeated

violences, stun their conscience, and it seems to lie still, like a conquered enemy. But this is a conquest fatal to the conqueror. O! would it not be much easier to let conscience have fair play, to pursue your own happiness, as it urges you, and leave the smooth, down-hill road to ruin, from which it would retain you? Conscience urges you to your duty and interest with many sharp goads, and will you still kick against them? O! do you not find this hard? I am sure it would be very hard, it would be impossible to a creature under the right conduct of reason and self-love. And before you can be capable of performing this dire exploit with ease, you must have acquired a prodigious, gigantic strength in sinning.

4. Is it not a hard piece of self-denial for you to deprive yourselves of the exalted pleasures of religion? You love yourselves, and you love happiness, and therefore one would reasonably expect you would choose that which will afford you the most solid, refined, and lasting happiness, and abandon whatever is inconsistent with it. Now religion is a source of happiness. Yes; that dull, melancholy thing, religion, which you think perhaps would put an end to your pleasures, and which, for that reason, you have kept at a distance from; religion, I say, will afford you a happiness more pure, more noble, and more durable than all the world can give. Religion not only proposes future happiness beyond the comprehension of thought, but will afford you present happiness beyond whatever you have known while strangers to it. The pleasures of a peaceful approving conscience, of communion with God, the supreme good, of the most noble dispositions and most delightful contemplations, these are the pleasures of religion. Besides, religion has infinitely the advantage of other things as to futurity. Those pleasures which are inconsistent with it end in shocking prospects, as well as pale reviews. But religion opens the brightest prospects: prospects of everlasting salvation and happiness; prospects that brighten the gloomy shades of death, and the awful world beyond, and run out infinitely beyond our ken through a vast eternal duration. Such, my brethren, is religion, the highest, the most substantial, and the most lasting happiness of man. And is it not a painful piece of self-denial to you, to give up all this happiness, when nothing is required to purchase it but only your choice of



it? Is not this doing violence to the innate principle of self-love and desire of happiness? Can you be so stupid, as to imagine that the world, or sin, or any thing that can come in competition with religion, can be of equal or comparable advantage to you? Sure your own reason must give in its verdict in favor of religion. And is it not a hard thing for you to act against your own reason, against your own interest, your highest, your immortal interest, and against your own innate desire of happiness? Is it not hard that whilst others around you, in the use of the very means which you enjoy, are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and are animated to endure the calamities of life, and encounter the terrors of death, by the prospect of everlasting glory: I say, is it not hard that you should be destitute of all these transporting prospects, and have nothing but a fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation, or at best a vain self-flattering hope, which will issue in the more confounding disappointment?

And now, sinners, will you, with infernal bravery, break through all these obstacles, and force a passage into the flames below? Or will you not give over the preposterous struggle to ruin yourselves, and suffer yourselves to be saved? O! let me arrest you in your dangerous career, as the voice which pronounced my text did St. Paul; and let me prevail upon you for the future to choose the highway of life, and take that course to which God, conscience, duty, and interest urge you. In that, indeed, you will meet with difficulties; it is a narrow and rugged road; and it will require hard striving to make a progress in it. But then the difficulties you have here to surmount are in the road to happiness; but those in the other are in the road to destruction, and your striving to surmount them is but striving to destroy yourselves for ever. It may be worth your while to labor and conflict hard to be saved; but is it worth while to take so much pains, and strive so hard to be damned? Besides, the difficulties in the heavenly road result from the weak, disordered, and wicked state of human nature, as the difficulty of animal action and enjoyment proceeds from sickness of body; and consequently, every endeavor to surmount these difficulties tends to heal, to rectify, to strengthen and ennoble our nature, and advance it to perfection. But

the difficulties in the way to hell proceed from the contrariety of that course to the best principles of human nature, and to the most strong and rational obligations; and consequently, the more we struggle with these difficulties, the more we labor to suppress and root out the remains of good principles, and break the most inviolable obligations to God and ourselves. The easier it is for us to sin, the more base and corrupt we are: just as the more rotten a limb is, the easier for it to drop off; the more disordered and stupefied the body is, the more easy to die. To meet with no obstacle in the way to hell, but to run on without restraint, is terrible indeed; it shows a man abandoned of God, and ripe for destruction.

Upon the whole, you see, that though there be difficulties on both sides, yet the way to heaven has infinitely the advantage; and therefore let me again urge you to choose it; you have walked long enough at variance with God, with your own conscience, with your own interest and duty; come now be reconciled; make these your antagonists no longer. While you persist in this opposition, you do but kick against the pricks; that is, you make a resistance injurious to yourselves. For the future declare against sin, Satan, and all their confederates, and ere long ye shall be made more than conquerors; and for your encouragement remember, *He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son, saith the Lord God Almighty.*

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## XXVI.

### THE CHARACTERS OF THE WHOLE AND SICK, IN A SPIRITUAL SENSE, CONSIDERED AND CONTRASTED.

“But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”—*Matt. ix. 12.*

THERE is no article of faith more certain than that Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient and most willing Saviour, *able to save to the utmost all that come unto God through him, and those who come unto him he will in no wise cast out.*

They that intrust their souls into his hands he keeps, and none of them is lost. It is certain that all the guilty sons of Adam stand in the most absolute need of him; in vain do they seek for salvation in any other. Without him, they are undone for ever; and without him, their very existence becomes a curse, and their immortality but the duration of their misery. The disease of sin has so deeply infected their souls, that none but this divine Physician can heal them.

Since this is the case, who would not expect that Jesus would be universally the darling of mankind? Who would not expect that as many as are wounded, and just perishing of their wounds, would all earnestly apply to this Physician, and seek relief from him upon any terms? Must not all love and desire him, since all need him so extremely, and since he is so completely qualified to be their deliverer. But, alas! notwithstanding all such favorable presumptions from the nature of the thing, it is a most notorious fact, that this divine Physician is but little regarded by our dying world. This all-sufficient and willing Saviour is generally neglected by perishing sinners. There are thousands among us that have no affectionate thoughts of him; no eager longings after him; they exert no vigorous endeavors to obtain an interest in him, nor are they tenderly solicitous about it. They indeed profess his religion, and call themselves Christians, after his name; they pay him the compliment of a bended knee, and now and then perform the external duties of religion, and thus have high hopes they shall be saved through him; but as to their hearts and affections, he has no share there.

Now whence is this strange and shocking phenomenon in the rational world? Whence is it that the dying are careless about a physician? That a Deliverer is neglected by those that are perishing? The true reason we may find in my text, *They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick*; that is, "they who imagine themselves well, however disordered they are in reality, do not feel their need of a physician, and therefore will not apply to him; but they who feel themselves sick, will eagerly apply to him, and put themselves under his care."

This is the answer of Christ to the proud caviling Pharisees, who censured his free conversation with publicans and sinners, at an entertainment which Matthew had pre-

pared for him. The publicans were a sort of custom-house officers among the Jews, appointed by the Romans, whose tributaries they then were, to collect the levies or duties imposed by government. They were generally persons of bad morals, and particularly given to rapine and extortion in raising the taxes. The publicans, therefore, were objects of general contempt and abhorrence, as an abandoned sort of men; and the Jews, particularly the rigid and haughty Pharisees, held no conversation with them, but kept them at a distance, as though they had been excommunicated.

The condescending Jesus, who *came to seek and to save that which was lost*, did not conduct himself towards these poor outcasts upon the rigid principles of the Pharisees. They held them in such contempt, that they did not labor to instruct and reform them. But Jesus preached to them, conversed with them freely, and used the most condescending, affable, and ingratiating measures to reform them, and called some of them to the honor of being his disciples; of this number was Matthew, the author of this history. O! the condescension, the freeness, the efficacy of the grace of Christ! it can make a publican an apostle! an abhorred outcast the favorite of Heaven and the companion of angels! What abundant encouragement does this give to the most abandoned sinner among you to turn unto the Lord! Let publicans and sinners despair of mercy and salvation if they continue in their present condition; but if they arise and follow Jesus at his call, and become his humble, teachable disciples, they need not despair; nay, they may rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and be assured they shall be admitted into the kingdom of God, when the self-righteous are shut out.

When Matthew had embraced the call, he made a feast for his new Master, that he might show his respect and gratitude to him, and that he might let his brother publicans and old companions have an opportunity of conversing with him, and receive his instructions. How natural it is for a sinner, just brought to love Jesus, to use means to allure others to him, especially his former companions! Having seen his own guilt and danger, he is deeply affected with theirs, and would willingly lead them to that Saviour who has given him so gracious a reception. The blessed Jesus, who was always ready to embrace every opportunity of doing good, whatever popular odium it might expose

him to, cheerfully complies with Matthew's invitation, and mingles with a crowd of publicans at his table. The Pharisees now thought they had a good handle to raise popular clamor against Christ, and therefore cavil at these freedoms, as though they had been profane, and inconsistent with the character of the Messiah, or even of a prophet. If he claimed this character, they thought it much more becoming him to keep company with them than with profligate publicans. Hence, to stumble and perplex his disciples, they come to them, and ask, *Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?* Jesus answers them, and takes upon himself his own defence. *The whole, says he, have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.* He here answers the Pharisees upon their own principles. As if he had said, "I come into the world under the character of a physician for sick souls. Such, you will grant, these despised publicans are; and therefore you must also grant that these are the persons I have to deal with, and these are most likely to make application to me. But as for yourselves, you think you are righteous; you think you are not so far gone with the disease of sin, as to need a physician sent down from heaven to heal you."

To give a fuller view of this text, and to adapt it to practical purposes, I intend to describe the characters of those that are whole and of those that are sick, in the senses here intended. There are none of the sons of men who are really whole. Their souls are all diseased; *for all have sinned, and there is none righteous, no, not one.* And perhaps there are none upon earth so proud, and so ignorant of themselves, as to affirm in so many words that they are whole, that is, "perfectly righteous." Therefore, by the whole, cannot be meant either those who are really free from all sin, or those who imagine themselves entirely free from it. It does not appear that even the proud Pharisees were capable of flattering themselves so far. But by the whole are meant those who are indeed guilty, depraved sinners, and who are ready to make a superficial confession in words that they are sinners, but continue secure and impenitent, insensible of their guilt, their corruption, their danger, and their need of a Saviour; that is, those who are really sick, and dangerously ill, and yet are as easy, as unapprehensive of danger, as careless about applying to the physician, as if nothing ailed them. The disease is of

a lethargic nature, and stupefies the unhappy creatures, so that they are not sensible of it. It renders them delirious, so that they think themselves well when the symptoms of death are strong upon them. What multitudes of such may we see in the world! The Word of God pronounces them dangerously ill; their friends may see the most deadly symptoms upon them; but alas! they are stupidly insensible of their own case. Jesus, the divine physician, warns them of their danger, offers them his help, and prescribes to them the infallible means of recovery; but they disregard his warnings, neglect his gracious offer, and refuse to submit to his prescriptions. This is the general character of those that are whole, in the sense of my text.

By the sick are meant those who, like the former, are really guilty, corrupt sinners, in extreme need of a Saviour, and who readily confess they are such; but here lies the difference, they are not only such in reality, but they are deeply sensible of it, and they are tenderly affected with their case; their temper and conduct, their thoughts of themselves and of Jesus Christ, their designs and endeavors are such as are natural to a soul sensibly sick of sin, and such as bear a resemblance to those of a person sick in body, and using all means for a recovery. This is the general character of the sick, in the sense of my text; but it is necessary I should descend to particulars. The particular characters of the whole and sick, in contrast, are such as these:

1. He that is whole has never had a clear affecting sight and sense of sin; but he that is sick is fully convicted, and deeply sensible of it. The one has only a general, superficial, unaffecting conviction, that he is a sinner; that he has not been so good as he should have been; that his heart is somewhat disordered, and especially that he has been guilty of sundry bad actions. Sin appears to him a small evil, and he has a thousand excuses to make for it. Hence he is as easy, as careless, as presumptuous in his hopes, as if he believed he did not really deserve punishment from a righteous God, and therefore was in no danger. Thus, like a man in health, he is unconcerned, and neither apprehends himself sick, nor uses the least means for his recovery.

But is it so with a poor, sick sinner? O, no! he sees, he feels, that his *head is sick, and his whole heart faint*; he

feels that sin has enfeebled all his powers, and that he is no more able to exert them in religious endeavors, than a sick man is to employ himself in active life. O! into what a consternation is he struck when awakened out of his lethargic security, and his eyes are opened to see himself in a just light! He had flattered himself that he had a good constitution of soul, and that little or nothing ailed him; but now, he is surprised to see the strong symptoms of spiritual death upon him.

Suppose some of you, who have come here to-day vigorous and healthy, should suddenly discover the spots of a plague broken out all over you, how would it strike you with surprise and horror! Such is the surprise and horror of the awakened sinner; thus he is alarmed and amazed. So clear are his views of his entire and universal depravity and imminent danger, that he is utterly astonished he was so stupid as never to discover it before. Now, also, he has a deep sense of the evil of sin: he not only sees himself universally disordered, but he sees, he feels the disorder to be deadly; sin now appears to him the greatest evil upon earth, or even in hell. O! how worthy of the severest vengeance from a righteous God! how contrary to the divine purity; how base, how ungrateful a violation of the most strong and endearing obligations! how destructive to the soul! During the progress of the Christian life, he feels himself recovering a little, though very slowly, while he follows the prescriptions of his divine Physician, and receives healing influences from him.

2. They that are whole are generally easy and secure, and unapprehensive of danger; but the sick soul is alarmed and anxious, and cannot be easy till it perceives some appearances of recovery. He that is whole is benumbed with a stupid insensibility; but he that is sick is in pain from the disease of sin, which he sensibly feels. The one can walk about merry and thoughtless, with a hard, depraved heart within him; the other is perpetually uneasy, and, like a sick man, he has no taste for any thing while he feels such a heart within him. If the one is anxious, it is with some worldly care; if the other is anxious, it is chiefly for the recovery of his dying soul. The one can give himself up to business, or pleasure, or idleness, as a man in health, and at ease; the other is apprehensive that his soul is in great danger, and, like a sick man, gives up his eager pur-

suits, till he sees whether he is likely to recover. He is alarmed with the deadly consequences of sin, as it exposes him to the wrath of God, the loss of heaven, and all the miseries of the infernal world. But this is not all that distresses him; he considers sin, in itself, as a loathsome disease, and is pained with its present effects upon him. How strongly does St. Paul represent the case, when he cries out, *O! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*—Rom. vii. 24. The image seems to be that of a living man walking about with a rotten, nauseous carcass tied fast to him, which he cannot, with all his efforts, cast off; but it lies heavy upon him wherever he goes. This is the character of the soul sick of sin. But he that is whole hath little or no uneasiness upon this account. If he is alarmed at all, it is with the consequence of sin; his slavish soul fears nothing but the punishment. As for the disease itself, it is so far from giving him uneasiness, that he is in love with it. It affords him sensations of pleasure, rather than of pain, and he rather dreads a recovery, than the continuance of the disorder. Sin has intoxicated him to such a degree, that holiness, which is the health of the soul, is disagreeable to him, and he would rather continue languishing than recover.

3. They that are whole are unwilling to apply to a physician, or to follow his prescriptions; but to the sick a physician is most welcome, and they will submit to his directions, however self-denying and mortifying. This is the point my text has particularly in view, and therefore we must take particular notice of it.

They that are in health have no regard to a physician, as such; they neither send for him nor will they accept of his help, offered gratis; they look upon the best of medicines with neglect, as of no use or importance to them; the prescriptions proper to the sick they hear with indifference, as not being concerned. Thus it is with thousands, who imagine themselves whole in spirit. The Lord Jesus exhibits himself to the sons of men under the character of a physician; the gospel makes a free offer of his assistance to all sick souls that will freely accept it. And what reception does he generally meet with? Why, multitudes neglect him as though they had no need of him. They may indeed pay him the compliment of professing his



religion, because it happened to be the religion of their fathers and their country, but they have no eager desires after him; they do not invite him with the most affectionate entreaties to undertake their case; they do not beg and cry for relief from him, like blind Bartimeus: *Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on us.* And the reason is, they are whole in their own apprehensions; or, if they feel some qualms of conscience, some fits of painful remorse, they soon heal their own hurt slightly, *crying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.* They have a medicine of their own, prayers, tears, repentance, and religious endeavors, and with this they hope to heal themselves. Thus Jesus is neglected; they give him the name of a Saviour; but in reality they look to themselves for a cure. How is the gospel that makes the offer of relief from this heavenly Physician generally received in the world? Alas! it is neglected, as the offer of superfluous help. It is heard with that indifference with which men in health attend to the prescriptions of a physician to the sick, in which they have no immediate concern. Brethren, is this neglected gospel the only effectual means for healing your dying souls? Then what means the stupidity and inattention with which it is heard? What means the general neglect with which it is treated? O! how affecting is it to see a dying world rejecting the only restorative that can heal their disease and preserve their lives! But alas! thus it is all around us.

Again; Jesus prescribes to the sons of men the only means of their recovery. Particularly he enjoins them no more to drink poison; that is, no more to indulge themselves in sin, which is, in its own nature, the most deadly poison to the soul. And what can be more reasonable than this? Yet this is what a stupid world principally objects against, and multitudes rather die than submit to it. A disordered, empoisoned constitution of soul is to them the most agreeable. This divine Physician likewise requires them to use the means of grace instituted in the gospel; but how few observe them in earnest! What a general neglect of the means of grace prevails in our country, or what a careless attendance upon them! which is equally pernicious. Christ always enjoins them to submit to him as their physician, to flatter themselves no longer that they can heal themselves by means within their own power, but to apply his blood as the only healing balm, to their wounded

souls. But, alas! they disregard this grand prescription; they will not submit to him, but, like an obstinate patient, will have their own way, though eternal death should be the consequence.

But this is not the case of the sinner spiritually sick; he will do any thing, he will submit to any thing, if it may but save him from the mortal disease of sin. How ardently does he long after Jesus! With what cheerfulness does he put himself under his care! With what joy and gratitude does he hear the offer of free salvation in the gospel! and how dear is the gospel to his heart on this account! With what eager, wishful eyes does he look upon his Physician! How does he delight to feel himself under the operation of his hand! With what anxiety does he observe the symptoms, and inquire whether he is upon the recovery or not! and O! with what pleasure does he discover the signs of returning health! to feel a little eager appetite for spiritual food! to feel a little spiritual life in religious exercises! to feel himself able to run in the way of God's commandments! to feel the principles of sin weakened within him! How sweet is this! Let those that think their souls healthy and vigorous, boast of their strength, and what mighty things they can do in religion; as for him he feels his weakness; he feels he can do nothing aright, but just as he receives daily strength from Christ. In short, the sick sinner is a tender, delicate, frail creature, entirely subject to the prescriptions of Christ, and every day taking means from him; anxious for his recovery and willing to submit to any thing that may promote it. This is the man, in our Christ-despising world, that gives Jesus a most willing and welcome reception, and embraces his gospel, as containing all his salvation and all his desire. O! that there were many such in our world! for this man is in a hopeful way of recovery. This world is a vast hospital, full of dying souls; Jesus descends from heaven and enters among them, offering them health and eternal life, if they will but submit to his directions, which are as easy as possible. Repentance, indeed, and some other bitter ingredients, are included in a religion for sinners; and how can it be otherwise, since these are necessary for their recovery in the very nature of things? But, after all, the generality die in their sins, amidst the full means of their recovery; and the great reason is, that they will not be

convinced of their danger, nor be persuaded to apply to the Physician. O! how tragical and affecting a case this! and what may render it the more so to us is, that it is the case of some of us. Yes, my brethren, though I am unwilling to harbor one hard thought of any of you, yet I cannot avoid concluding that there are some, I am afraid many souls, in this assembly, who are not sensible of their dangerous disease, and their need of Christ as a physician, and therefore are in danger of perishing without him. Sin, like a strong dose of opium, has stupefied you, and you feel easy and whole-hearted, as if nothing ailed you, when the symptoms of death are strong upon you. We can weep and lament over the sick-bed of a dying friend, and we even drop our tears after him into a dying grave; but shall we drop no tears this day over dying souls, that are so numerous among us. What renders the case more affecting is, that they perish by their own willful obstinacy, under the hands of an all-healing Physician: *O that my head were waters; and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night over the slain of the daughters of my people!* Ye secure and whole-hearted sinners, must it not shock you to think that Jesus Christ, the only physician, gives you up? You see, in my text, he looks upon you as persons that he has no business with. He had rather converse with publicans and sinners than with you, as having more hopes of success among them. Let publicans and sinners be encouraged to apply to Jesus. Come, ye profligates, drunkards, swearers, come sinners of the most abandoned character, apply to this Physician. He is willing to heal you. He offers you healing. *Wilt thou be made whole?* is his question to you this day. He is also perfectly able, able to save to the uttermost, however inveterate your disease may be. If the children of the kingdom shut themselves out; if self-righteous Pharisees reject this Physician, and die in their sins, do you come in; put yourselves under his care, submit to his prescriptions, and you shall yet live, and be restored to perfect health, and eternal life. Rugged as you are, you are very proper materials for the temple of God. Therefore this day give yourselves up to him as his willing patients. Cry to him to undertake your case. *Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed.* Submit to his prescriptions, and follow his directions, and you shall live for ever.

I shall conclude my subject by giving answer from it to some questions that may arise in your minds on this occasion.

What is the reason that the world lies in such a dead security around us? Whence is it there is so much sin in the world, and so little fear of punishment? Whence is it that men will entertain such hopes of heaven upon such slight evidences, or, rather, with the full evidence of the word of God against them? Alas! the reason is, they are whole in their own imagination; they think themselves well, and therefore apprehend no danger, but lie in a dead, inactive sleep. What is the reason why so many neglect the means of grace in public and private? Whence is it there are so many prayerless families and prayerless closets among us? Why is the Bible thrown by, in some families, as a piece of useless lumber? Why is the house of God so thinly frequented in many places, and the table of the Lord almost deserted? Why is Christian conversation so unfashionable? and why do we hear so few inquiries from sinners, what they shall do to be saved? The reason is, they imagine themselves well; they are whole-hearted; and therefore it is no wonder they neglect the means of recovery; they think they have no more to do with them than persons in health with physic. The only method to bring them to use those means in earnest is to make them sensible of their dangerous disease. And O that ministers may use all proper means with them for this end, and that divine grace may render them effectual. What is the reason that the means of grace are attended upon by others with so much formality and indifference? Whence is it there are so many lukewarm, spiritless prayers, and solemn mockeries of God? so many wandering eyes and wandering hearts in the heavenly exercise of praise, and in hearing the most solemn and affecting truths? Whence is it that all the religion of many is nothing but a dull round of insipid, lifeless formalities! Alas! the same reason returns: they are whole in their own conceit. And how can they, while they flatter themselves with this imagination, use those means in earnest, which are intended for the recovery of the sick?

Would you know what is the reason that the blessed Jesus, the most glorious and benevolent person that ever appeared in our world, is so generally neglected? O!

why is his love forgotten by those very creatures for whom he shed his blood? Why is not a Saviour, an almighty and complete Saviour, more sought after by perishing sinners? Why is his name of so little importance among them? How comes it to pass that he may continue for months, for years, for scores of years, offering salvation to them, entertaining, commanding, and persuading them to accept it, and warning them of the dreadful ruin they will bring upon themselves by rejecting it? Whence is this shocking conduct in reasonable creatures? O it is the same old reason still: they are whole-hearted, and do not feel themselves dangerously ill; and how then can they be solicitous about a Physician!

What is the reason that the gospel, which reveals and offers life and salvation to the world meets with so cold a reception? Why does the Christian world in general, practically despise that religion which they profess! O! it is because they are not sensible of their need of the gospel and its blessings. O! if they were but once sensible how dangerously ill they are, they would soon change their opinion.

Would you know why so many fools make a mock of sin! Why they can go on impenitent in it, apprehending little or no danger from it? Why they can love and delight in sin, which God hates, and which he has threatened with such heavy vengeance? Alas! the reason is, they are whole; they do not look upon sin as a deadly disease that requires a cure, but as their health which ought to be cherished.

Would you know where you should begin your religion, or what is the grand preparation for your embracing the gospel in such a manner as to be saved by it? To this interesting inquiry you may easily infer an answer from what has been said. Begin your religion in a deep sense of sin; labor to get a deep sense of your disease, and then you will so give yourselves up to the Physician, that he may apply to you what he thinks proper, and make an effectual cure. Some of you, perhaps, have wondered why you see poor mourning creatures here and there that cannot live as you do—thoughtless, careless, and unaffected. You ascribe it, perhaps, to melancholy, to preciseness, to hypocrisy, or an affectation of singularity. But I will tell you the true reason. They are sick: whereas you imagine yourselves well; and you cannot wonder that the sick and

the healthy should behave in a different manner. Why do they not indulge themselves in sin as you do? Is it because they are sick of it. They see it to be a mortal poison, and they cannot be easy while they feel it working through their frame. Why do they not, like you, abandon themselves, and devote all their time to some worldly pursuit? O! it is because they are sick, and must take time for the use of means for their recovery, whatever else be omitted. Why are they so much afraid of temptation, and keep out of its way? It is because they are afraid of a relapse, and that sin, their old disease, will renew its strength. Whence are they so often filled with doubts and fears and anxious perplexities? O! it is because the symptoms of the disorder are doubtful, and they know not whether they are in a way of recovery or not. When they are satisfied in this point, then they can rejoice, and that with a joy more noble than you are capable of.

And poor, sick souls, be of good cheer; you shall yet be healed. Yes, there is balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there; Jesus can heal you; and, blessed be his name, he is as willing as he is able. The deep sense of our disorder is often discouraging to you; O! you are afraid it will at last prove mortal. But this very thing ought to encourage you. The persons that I cannot speak one comfortable word to are not of your character; they are the secure, whole-hearted sinners: but for you this is strong consolation; so strong that it may bear down all your fears before it. The sense of your disorder qualifies you for the Physician, and renders you proper objects of his care. The poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind, the broken-hearted, are the characters of the persons that he has to do with, and who are recovering under his hands. And are not these your character? They are indeed humbling and mortifying; but, O! they are encouraging, as they prepare you for Christ's healing care.

But as for you, whole-hearted sinners, I must pronounce you lost and dead souls. Jesus himself has declared that he has no business with such as you. And if he casts you off, O! what other physician can you employ? Alas! you will die in your sins! Die in your sins! O! dreadful! better die in a ditch, or a dungeon, than die in your sins! Therefore now labor to be sensible of your disorder, while it is curable; for all that are not healed in this life,

are given up as incurable for ever. Now apply to Christ as a physician, for he is willing to undertake your cure.



## XXVII.

### A SACRAMENTAL DISCOURSE.

“Then the master of the house being angry,” &c.—*Luke*, xiv. 21–24.

#### THE CONCLUSION OF THE SERMON.

I PROCLAIM to all in this assembly this day, (said the preacher,) *all things are now ready; come unto the marriage.* And why should you not all comply? why should any of you exclude yourselves? Let every one resolve for himself, “for my part, I will not make myself that shocking exception.” How do you know but this resolution is now forming in the person that sits or stands next to you? And shall you be left behind? Will you, as it were, shut the door of heaven against yourselves with your own hand? I once more assure you, there is yet room, room for all. There are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the patriarchs, and *yet there is room.* There are many from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, and *yet there is room.* There are persecuting Manasseh and Paul; there are Mary Magdalene, the demoniac, and Zacchæus the publican, and *yet there is room.* There is the once incestuous and excommunicated, but afterwards penitent, Corinthian; nay, there are several of the Corinthians, who, as St. Paul tells us, were once fornicators, idolaters, effeminate, Sodomites, covetous, thieves, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, yet there they now are, *washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God;* and there may you also be, though vile as they, if, with them, you come in at the call of the gospel, *for yet there is room.* There is, says St. John, (Rev. vii. 9,) *a great multitude, which no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation;* multitudes from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America; and *yet there is room.* There is room for you, poor negroes! and for you,

I hope, some vacant seats are reserved. Therefore, *I turn to the Gentiles; for to you also is the word of this salvation sent.* You may, with peculiar propriety, be represented by the poor, the blind, the halt, and maimed, in the highways and hedges. To you, therefore, I am sent with the offer of all the rich blessings of the gospel; and let me tell you, you are in extreme need of them, whether you feel your want or not: you need them more than liberty, than food, than health, than life itself; and without him you must perish for ever. Come then, let this feast be adorned with your sable countenances, and furnished with guests from the savage wilds of Africa. Do not mistake me, as if I was just now inviting you to sit down at the Lord's table: alas! many have sat there who are now banished for ever from that Saviour whom they professed to commemorate, and shut up in the prison of hell. But I am inviting you to accept of the blessings of the gospel, which I have briefly explained to you. A hearty consent to this, and nothing short of it, will save you. Come then, ye poor Africans, come add yourselves to the guests at this divine entertainment, for yet there is room, and you are as welcome as kings and princes. There being so much room left unoccupied in the spacious apartment is represented as an excitement to the master of the feast to send out his servants to invite more guests; for when the servant had made his report, the master immediately orders him to *go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that his house might be filled.* He could not bear it, that the seats about his table should be empty, or his provisions be lost for want of guests. So the blessed God will not suffer the death of his Son to be in vain, nor the mansions he has prepared to be empty. That Jesus may see his spiritual seed, and the travail of his soul, and be satisfied; and that the heavenly mansions he has prepared may be furnished with guests, God has appointed the ministry of the gospel and the means of grace to be continued from age to age: for this end he exercises a providential government over the world, and manages all its affairs in subserviency to the grand scheme of redemption, for peopling the heavenly world with colonies transplanted from our guilty globe. For this he has continued our sinful world, so ripe for destruction, through the space of near 6000 years; and he will not be defeated in his



purposes. If you and thousands more should refuse, yet his feast shall be furnished with guests. He will send his gospel where it will not pass for such a trifle as it does among many of us. He will send it where thousands of perishing sinners will eagerly embrace it, and obtain eternal salvation by it. But O! how deplorable will be your loss! Since his house shall and must be filled, O! why should it not be filled from Virginia, and particularly from among you, my dear people? Will you not make trial, whether there be not seats prepared in heaven for you? whether there be not room in the arms of divine mercy for you? whether the blood of Christ has not efficacy to procure pardon and life even for you, great sinners as you are? How can I forbear to urge this proposal upon my dear congregation? We meet together in the house of God on earth; and many of us sit down together at his table. And O! why should we not all meet together at the great supper of the Lamb in heaven? Why should we not, as it were, make an appointment, and engage to meet one another there, after the dispersion which death will soon make among us? While transported with so agreeable a thought, I feel myself zealous to execute the commission in my text.

*Compel them to come in.* Overcome them with arguments, subdue them with persuasions and entreaties, take no denial; never give over till you prevail. This is the commission of gospel ministers; and O! that one of the meanest of them may be enabled to act according to it!

The patrons of persecution have tortured this text to speak in their favor. But it is sufficient to observe, that it is evident Christ never commissioned his apostles, nor did they ever pretend to propagate his religion, like Mahomet, with a sword in his hand, but by dint of evidence, and the power of the Holy Spirit; and, indeed, no other arms were fit to propagate a rational religion. The terrors of the secular arm may scare men into the profession of a religion, but they have no tendency to enlighten the understanding, or produce a real faith; and therefore they are fitted only to make hypocrites, but can never make one genuine, rational Christian. The weapons of the apostolic warfare, which were so mighty through God, were miracles, reasoning, entreaty, and the love of a crucified Saviour; and these were adapted to the nature of the human mind, to

subdue it without violence, and sweetly captivate every thought into obedience to Christ.

These weapons, as far as they may be used in our age, I would try upon you. I would compel you to come in, by considerations so weighty and affecting, that they must prevail, unless reason, gratitude, and every generous principle, be entirely lost within you. By the consideration of your own extreme, perishing necessity; by the consideration of the freeness, the fullness, and sufficiency of the blessings offered; by the dread authority, by the mercy and love of God that made you, and is your constant benefactor; by the meekness and the gentleness of Christ; by the labors and toils of his life; by the agonies of his death; by his repeated injunctions, and by his melting invitations; by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon your hearts, and by the warnings of your own consciences; by the eternal joys of heaven, and the eternal pains of hell; by these considerations, and by every thing sacred, important, and dear to you, I exhort, I entreat, I charge, I adjure you, I would compel you to come in. You have refused, you have loitered, you have hesitated long enough; therefore now at length come in; come in immediately, without delay. Come in, that these rich provisions may not be lost for want of partakers, and that God's house may be completely furnished with guests. As yet there is room; as yet the guests are invited; as yet the door is not shut. The number of those who shall enjoy this great salvation, is not yet made up. Therefore you may press in among them, and be added to their happy company. But, ere long, the ministry of the gospel will be withdrawn, the servants be recalled, and no longer be sent to search for you. The door of heaven will be shut against all the workers of iniquity. Therefore, now is the time to come in. I shall only urge, as another persuasive, the awful denunciation that concludes my text: *I say unto you, none of those men who were bidden, and refused the invitation, shall taste of my supper*; that is, none who refuse to receive the blessings of the gospel, as they are offered, shall ever enjoy any of them; but must consume away a miserable eternity in the want of all that is good and happy.

## XXVIII.

THE REJECTION OF GOSPEL LIGHT THE CONDEMNATION OF  
MEN.

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because (or for) their deeds were evil.—*John*, iii. 19.

WHAT a strange, alarming declaration is this! *Light is come into the world*: the Sun of Righteousness is risen upon this region of darkness; therefore it is enlightened; therefore it is bright intellectual day with all its rational inhabitants; therefore they will no longer grope and stumble in darkness, but all find their way into the world of eternal light and glory. These would be natural inferences; this event we would be apt to expect from the entrance of light into the world. But hear and tremble, ye inhabitants of the enlightened parts of the earth! hear and tremble, ye sons of Nassau-Hall, and inhabitants of Princeton! The benevolent Jesus, the Friend of human nature, the Saviour of men, whose lips never dropped an over-severe word, or gave a false alarm; Jesus himself proclaiming, *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, &c. This is the condemnation*; that is, this is the great occasion of more aggravated condemnation at the final judgment, and of more severe and terrible punishments in the eternal world; or, this is the cause of men's condemning themselves even now at the bar of their own consciences.

*That light is come into the world*—Jesus, the Sun of the moral world, is risen, and darts his beams around him in the gospel. And this furnishes guilty minds with materials for self-condemnation; and their obstinate resistance of the light enhances their guilt, and will render their condemnation the more aggravated; and the reason is, that *men love darkness rather than light*. They choose ignorance rather than knowledge! The Sun of Righteousness is not agreeable to them, but shines as a baleful, ill-boding luminary. If they did but love the light, its entrance into the world

would be their salvation ; but now it is their condemnation. But why do they hate the light? Truly, light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to the eyes to see the sun : and no light so sweet as this from heaven : no sun so bright and reviving as the Sun of Righteousness ; and why then do they not love it? Alas! there is no reason for it, but this wretched one,

*Because their deeds are evil.* And evil deeds always excite uneasiness in the light, and afford the conscience matter for self-accusation, therefore they wrap up themselves in darkness, and avoid the painful discoveries of the light.

The text directs us to the following inquiries :

What is the light which comes into the world? What is the darkness that is opposed to it? What are the evidences of men's loving darkness rather than light? What is the reason of it? And in what respects the light's coming into the world, and men's loving darkness rather than light, is their condemnation?

I. What is the light which is come into the world?

The answer to this, and the other questions, I shall endeavor to accommodate to our own times and circumstances, that we may the more readily apply it to ourselves.

The light of reason entered our world as soon as the soul of man was created ; and, though it is greatly obscured by the grand apostasy, yet some sparks of it still remain. To supply its defects the light of revelation soon darted its beams through the clouds of ignorance, which involved the human mind, on its flying off to so great a distance from the Father of lights. This heavenly day began feebly to dawn upon the first pair of sinners, in that early promise concerning *the seed of the woman* ; and it grew brighter and brighter in the successive revelations made to the patriarchs, to Moses, and the prophets, till at length the Messiah appeared, as an illustrious sun after a gradual, tedious twilight of the opening dawn.

The Lord Jesus Christ often represents himself under the strong and agreeable metaphor of light. *I am the light of the world*, says he ; *he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.* *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness.* But wherever he does not shine, all is sullen and dismal darkness. Hell is *the blackness* of darkness for ever, because he does not extend to it the light of his countenance. That country

where he does not shine, is *the land of darkness* and the shadow of death; and that heart which is not illuminated with the *light of the knowledge of his glory*, is the gloomy dungeon of infernal spirits; but wherever he shines, there is intellectual day, the bright meridian of glory and blessedness.

His gospel also is frequently represented as a great light; and no metaphor was ever used with more emphasis and propriety. It is the medium through which we discover the glory of the Deity, the beauties of holiness, the evil of sin, and the reality and infinite importance of eternal, invisible things. This is the light that reveals the secrets of the heart, and discovers ourselves to ourselves. It is this that gives us a just and full view of our duty to God and man, which is but imperfectly or falsely represented in every other system of religion and morality in the world. It is this that discovers and ascertains a method in which rebels may be reconciled to their offended Sovereign, and exhibits a Saviour in full view to perishing sinners. Hail! sacred heaven-born light! welcome to our eyes, thou brightest and fairest effulgence of the divine perfections! May *this day spring from on high*, visit all the regions of this benighted world, and overwhelm it as with a deluge of celestial light! Blessed be God, its vital rays have reached to us in these ends of the earth; and if any of us remain ignorant of the important discoveries it makes, it is because we love darkness rather than light! Which leads me to inquire,

II. What is that darkness that is opposed to this heavenly light?

Darkness is a word of gloomy import; and there is hardly any thing dismal or destructive but what is expressed by it in sacred language. But the precise sense of the word in my text is, a state of ignorance, and the absence of the means of conviction. *Men love darkness rather than light*; that is, they choose to be ignorant rather than well-informed; ignorant particularly of such things as will give them uneasiness to know—as their sin, and the danger to which it exposes them. They are willfully ignorant; and hence they hate the means that would alarm them with the mortifying discovery. They would rather be flattered than told the honest truth, and know their own character and condition; and hence they shut their eyes against the light of the gospel, that would flash the painful conviction

upon them. Though the light of the gospel shines round you, yet are not some of you involved in this darkness? This you may know by the next inquiry,

III. What are the evidences of men's loving darkness rather than light?

The general evidence, which comprehends all the rest, is their avoiding the means of conviction, and using all the artifices in their power to render them ineffectual. It is not impossible to characterize such of you as *love darkness rather than light*, though you may be so much upon your guard against the discovery, as not to perceive your own character.

Though you may have a turn for speculation, and perhaps delight in every other branch of knowledge, yet the knowledge of yourselves, the knowledge of disagreeable duties, the discovery of your sin and danger, of your miserable condition as under the condemnation of the divine law, this kind of self-knowledge you carefully shun; and when it irresistibly flashes upon you, you endeavor to shut up all the avenues of your mind through which it might break upon you, and you avoid those means of conviction from which it proceeds.

You set yourselves upon an attempt very preposterous and absurd in a rational being, and that is, not to think. When the ill-boding surmise rises within, "All is not well; I am not prepared for the eternal world; if I should die in this condition I am undone for ever;" I say, when conscience thus whispers your doom, it may make you sad and pensive for a minute or two, but you soon forget it; you designedly labor to cast it out of your thoughts, and to recover your former negligent serenity. The light of conviction is a painful glare to a guilty eye; and you wrap up yourselves in darkness, lest it should break in upon you.

When your thoughts are likely to fix on this ungrateful subject, do you not labor to divert them into another channel? You immerse yourselves in business, you mingle in company, you indulge and cherish a thoughtless levity of mind, you break out of retirement into the wide world, that theatre of folly, trifling, and dissipation; and all this to scatter the gloom of conviction that hangs over your ill-boding minds, and silence the clamors of an exasperated conscience! You laugh, or talk, or work, or study

away these fits of seriousness! You endeavor to prejudice yourselves against them by giving them ill names, as melancholy, spleen, and I know not what; whereas they are indeed the honest struggles of an oppressed conscience to obtain a fair hearing, and give you faithful warning of approaching ruin; they are the benevolent efforts of the Spirit of grace to save a soul! And, O! it would be happy for you if you had yielded to them, and cherished the serious hour! For the same reason, also, you love a soft representation of Christianity, as an easy, indolent, inactive thing; requiring no vigorous exertion, and attended with no dubious conflict, but encouraging your hopes of heaven in a course of sloth, carelessness, and indulgence. Those are the favorite sermons and favorite books which flatter you with smooth things, putting the most favorable construction upon your wickedness, and representing the way to heaven smooth and easy. Or if you have an unaccountable fondness for faithful and alarming preaching, as it must be owned some self-flatterers have, it is not with a view to apply it to yourselves, but other objects; and whenever it forces upon you a glance of yourselves, you turn from it and hate it.

Hatred of the light, perhaps, is one reason why so many among us are so impatient of public worship; so fond of their own homes on the sacred hours consecrated to divine service; and so reluctant, so late, or so inconstant in their attendance. It is darkness, perhaps, at home; but the house of God is filled with light, which they do not love. This, also, is one reason why the conversation of the zealous, communicative Christians, who are not ashamed to talk of what lies nearest their hearts, I mean their religion, their Saviour, and their God, and to express an abhorrence of what they so sincerely hate, I mean the vices of mankind, and every appearance of evil; I say, this is one reason why their conversation is such a heavy burden, such a painful restraint to many. Such men reflect the beams of the Sun of Righteousness and the beauties of holiness all around them; they carry light with them whithersoever they go, and strike conviction to the guilty. The strictness, the warm devotion and spirituality of their lives pass a sentence of condemnation upon sinners; a sentence which they cannot but feel, and which, therefore, renders them uneasy. Hence it is that such lively and circumspect

Christians are not at all popular in the world; but the favorites of the world are your pliable, temporizing, complaisant Christians, that never carry their religion with them into polite company, but conform themselves to the taste of those they converse with. These give no man's conscience uneasiness, they reflect no heavenly light, but thicken the darkness of every company in which they appear; therefore they are acceptable to the lovers of darkness.

Another expedient that has often been used, and which some of you, perhaps, have attempted, to avoid the light, is, to endeavor to work up yourselves to a disbelief of the Christian revelation. If you could banish that heavenly light out of the world, or substitute darkness in its place, then you might perpetuate the works of darkness with more confidence and licentiousness. Therefore you eagerly listen to the laughs, the jeers, the railleries and sophisms of loose wits against it; and you are afraid to give a fair hearing to many satisfactory evidences in its favor. Thus you cherish that hideous monster, infidelity; your own offspring, not Satan's, though the father of lies; for he *believes and trembles*.

These artifices, and the like, are the effects, and consequently, the evidences and indications of men's loving darkness rather than light. And instead of a larger illustration, I shall conclude this head with a plain, honest appeal to my hearers. As in the presence of the heart-searching God, I solemnly appeal to your consciences, whether you do not deal partially with yourselves, and refuse pursuing those hints of your dangerous condition, till you make a full discovery? Do not your hearts smite you because you have suppressed evidence, when it was against you, and shut your eyes against conviction? When the glass of the divine law has been held up before you, and shown you your own hideous image, have you not gone away, and soon *forgot what manner of man you were*? Do you not know in your consciences, that the hopes you entertain of future happiness are not the result of severe repeated trial, but, on the other hand, owe their strength and even their being to a superficial examination, or none at all, to blind self-flattery and excessive self-love, which tempt you to believe things as you would have them? Is it censoriousness, or is it evidence and faithfulness, that



constrains me to cry out, O! how rare are well-grounded, well-attested hopes among us? Hopes that have not been slightly entertained, nor retained without good evidence, after impartial repeated trials; hopes that have risen and fallen, gathered strength or languished, been embraced or abandoned, perhaps a thousand times, according to the various degrees of evidence; and after a series of such vicissitudes, attended with a variety of corresponding passions, of joys and fears, of discouraging anxieties and transporting prospects, have at length arrived at a settled, confirmed state, supported by that only sufficient proof, conspicuous holiness of heart and life. I proceed to inquire,

IV. What is the reason of this abused preference, that men *love* darkness rather than light? The melancholy reason of this is easily discovered, and has been partially anticipated; and it is this, that men love ease and security of mind rather than fear and anxiety. They are really obnoxious sinners, under the terrible displeasure of Almighty God, and on the slippery brink of everlasting destruction. Now to have a full conviction of this would alarm their fears, imbitter their pleasures, damp their eager pursuits, and cast their minds into a ferment of anxiety and terror. But to be blind to all these miserable prospects, to be elated with sanguine expectations of the contrary, to have all serene and calm within, to be charmed with all the fine chimeras of a flattering imagination, to be fearless of danger, and pleased with themselves; this is a state they naturally delight in: in this state they will lull themselves asleep at all adventures, regardless of the consequences; and as darkness is the most proper attendant of sleep, therefore they choose it. But the light of the gospel let into the conscience would give them quite another view of things—would overturn all their towering hopes, and set the terrors of the Lord in array against them—would open such shocking prospects in the ways of sin, that they could no longer dare to walk in them; would constrain them to indulge the sorrows of a broken heart, and to long, and pant, and look, and cry for a Saviour. This would be a very painful exercise to them; and therefore they hate and shun the light which would force the unwelcome conviction upon them.

V. Let us inquire in what respects the light's coming

into the world, and men's loving darkness rather than light, is their condemnation.

Here I have only to illustrate two particulars already hinted: that this furnishes them with matter for self-condemnation now, and will be the occasion of their more aggravated condemnation in the eternal world.

1. This furnishes them with matter of self-condemnation in the present state. It is hard, perhaps impossible, for sinners under the meridian light of the gospel, to avoid all conviction of their guilt and danger. That light is very penetrating, and will dart its rays through the thickest glooms of ignorance; it is vital and powerful, *sharper than a two-edged sword; piercing and dividing asunder the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* Such of you, my brethren, as are resolved to shun the mortification of self-knowledge, must live in a situation very unfavorable to your design. You have had "burning and shining lights" among you;\* who, I doubt not, shine as the sun, and as the stars in the firmament for ever and ever; but, when they are translated to a higher sphere, the gospel has not left you, but still shines around you; and you will find it very difficult, I hope impossible, to wrap up yourselves in Egyptian darkness in such a Goshen, such a land of vision. In Tartary-or Japan, or some savage region of darkness, you might have lived in contented ignorance, and avoided those unacceptable glares of light which will now break in upon you, in spite of all your vigilance; for under the faithful and solemn preaching of the gospel, your consciences will often be disturbed, and you will find yourselves unable to go on in sin, bold and intrepid. And though in the thoughtless gayety of health, and the hurry and din of business, you may drown the clamors of conscience, yet in a retired hour, upon a sick-bed, and in the near view of death and eternity, conscience will speak, and constrain you to hear; and thus you will live unhappy, self-condemned creatures in this world, till you are condemned by the righteous sentence of God in the world to come. Therefore consider,

2. Your loving darkness rather than light, will occasion your more aggravated condemnation in the eternal world.

\* Mr. Burr and Mr. Edwards, Presidents of the College of Nassau-Hall before Mr. Davies.

It was in your power to receive warning, and discover your danger in time; nay, it cost you some pains to avoid the discovery, and make light of the warning. And what a faithful source of self-tormenting reflections will this be! How will you fret, and vex, and accuse yourselves for acting so foolish a part! How will you exhaust and spend yourselves in eager, fruitless wishes, that you had admitted conviction while the danger was avoidable! But O, it will then be too late! Hell is a reign of darkness too, but not of that soothing, peaceful darkness of ignorance, which you now prefer to the light of the gospel, but a lowering, tremendous, tormenting darkness, that will for ever hide every bright and pleasing prospect from your eyes, and yet be the proper medium for discovering sights of woe and terror; a thick darkness, occasioned by the everlasting eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness and the light of God's countenance, who will never dart one ray of comfort or hope through the sullen gloom. In this blackness of darkness you must dwell for ever, who now love darkness rather than light. And O! how will your consciences haunt and terrify you, in that cheerless and stormy night!

And now, my dear hearers, upon a review of this subject, you see your own circumstances; the light is come among you; it shines all around you; and I doubt not but at times it finds some openings through which it forces its way even into unwilling minds. You have light to distinguish between truth and error; between sin and duty; between the way to heaven and the way to hell; you are warned, admonished, and instructed; you have the strongest inducements to a life of religion, and the strongest dissuasives from a course of sin. I leave you therefore to determine what your guilt and punishment must be if you choose darkness rather than light—light so clear, so reviving, so salutary, so divine! This alarming subject is very pertinent to us all, and we should all apply it to ourselves; but it is so peculiarly adapted to the residents of this house, (Nassau-Hall,) that I cannot but direct my address particularly to you, my dear pupils, who are the children of the light in more respects than one.

There is not one in a thousand of the sons of men that enjoys your advantages. Light, human and divine, natural and supernatural, ancient and modern; that is, knowledge of every kind shines upon you, and you are every

day basking under its rays. But let me put you in mind, that unless you admit the light of the glorious gospel of Christ to shine in your hearts, you will still be the children of darkness, and confined in the blackness of darkness for ever. This is intolerably shocking, even in supposition. Suppose your sins should be the sins of men of learning and knowledge, the most daring and gigantic sins on this side of hell; suppose you should turn out sinners of great parts, fine geniuses, like the fallen angels, those vast intellects, wise but wicked. Suppose it should be your highest character, that you can harangue well, that you know a few dead languages, that you have passed through a course of philosophy; but as to that knowledge which sanctifies all the rest, and renders them useful to ourselves or others; that knowledge which alone can make wise to salvation, and guide you to avoid the paths of destruction, you shun it, you hate it, and choose to remain contentedly ignorant in this important respect; suppose your parents, who have been at the expense of your education; your friends, who have entertained such high and pleasing expectations concerning you; your careful instructors, who observe your growing improvements with proportional pleasure; suppose, that after all this generous labor, and all these pleasing prospects, they should see you at last doomed to everlasting darkness, for your voluntary abuse of the light you now enjoy;—suppose these things, and—but the consequences of these suppositions are so terrible, that I am not hardy enough to mention them. And O! shall they ever become matters of fact!

Therefore, my dear youth, admit the light, love it, and pursue it, though at first it should make such discoveries as may be painful to you. By discovering your danger in time, you may be able to escape it; but never expect to remove it by the silly expedient of shutting your eyes. Be impartial inquirers after truth as to yourselves, as well as other things, and no longer attempt to put a cheat upon yourselves. Alas! how childish and foolish, as well as wicked and ruinous, would such an imposture be! The gospel, in this particular, only requires you to be honest men; and surely this is a most moderate and reasonable demand. Therefore, be ye *children of the light and of the day*, and walk as such, and then it will be a blessing to the world and to yourselves, that ever you were born.

## XXIX.

## A NEW YEAR'S GIFT.

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”—*Rom. xiii. 11.*

TIME, like an ever-running stream, is perpetually gliding on and hurrying us, and all the sons of men, into the boundless ocean of eternity. We are now entering upon one of those imaginary lines of division which men have drawn to measure out time for their own conveniency; and while we stand upon the threshold of a new year, it becomes us to make a solemn contemplative pause; though time can make no pause, but rushes on with its usual velocity. Let us take some suitable reviews and prospects of time past and future, and indulge such reflections as our transition from year to year naturally tends to suggest.

The grand and leading reflection is that in the text, with which I present you as a New Year's Gift: *Knowing the time, that it is now high time to awake out of sleep.*

The Romans, to whom this epistle was written, were Christians indeed, in the judgment of charity; they were such whose salvation the apostle could point at as near approaching: *Now, says he, is your salvation nearer than when you believed;* and yet he calls even upon such to awake out of sleep. Even sincere Christians are too often apt to fall into negligence and security. Now such a state of dullness and inactivity is often represented by the metaphor, Sleep; because, as sleep disables us from natural actions, and blunts our animal senses, so this spiritual sleep indisposes the soul for the service of God and spiritual sensations.

Hence it follows, that to *awake out of sleep* signifies to rouse out of carnal security, to shake off spiritual sloth, and to engage in the concerns of religion with vigor and full exertion, like men awake. This is a duty proper at all times. There is not one moment of time in which a Christian may lawfully and safely be secure and negligent.

Yet the apostle intimates, that some particular times call for particular vigilance and activity; and that to sleep at such times is a sin peculiarly aggravated. *Now*, says he, *it is high time for us to awake out of sleep*; this is not a time for us to sleep; this time calls upon us to rouse and exert ourselves; this is the hour for action; we have slept too long already; now let us rouse and rise.

The reason the apostle urges upon the Roman Christians to awake at that time is very strong and moving; it is this: *Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed*. Or, as he expresses it in the next verse, *the night is far spent, the day is at hand*. The gloomy, turbulent night of the present state is near over; the dawn of eternal day is just ready to open upon us; and can we sleep at such a time? What, sleep on the very threshold of heaven! sleep, when salvation is just ready to embrace us! sleep, when the dawn of celestial day is just about shining around us! Is it possible we should sleep at such a time?

The text implies that Christians should always be growing in grace; and that the nearer their salvation is the more lively and zealous should they be; and since it is nearer this year than the last, they ought to be more holy this year than the last. The nearer they are to heaven the more heavenly they should be.

My chief design, at present, is, to lead you to know the time, and to make such reflections upon it, as its nature and circumstances require, and as are suited to our present conditions.

The first thing I would set you upon, as a necessary introduction to all the rest, is the important but neglected duty of self-examination. Methinks it may shock a man to enter upon a new year, without knowing whether he shall be in heaven or in hell before the end of it; and that man can give but a very poor account of the last year, and perhaps twenty or thirty years before it, that cannot yet give any satisfactory answer to this grand question. Let us therefore resolve, this day, that we will not live another year strangers to ourselves, and utterly uncertain what will become of us through an endless duration. This day let us put this question to our hearts: "What am I? Am I a humble, dutiful servant of God, or am I a disobedient, impenitent sinner? Am I a disciple of Christ in reality? or do I only wear his name, and make an empty profession

of his religion? Whither am I bound? For heaven or for hell? Which am I most fit for in temper? For the region of perfect holiness, or for that of sin and impurity? Shall I stupidly delay the determination, till it be passed by the irrevocable sentence of the Supreme Judge, before whom I may stand before this year is at a close?"

If I should push home this inquiry, it will probably discover two sorts of persons among us, to whom my text leads me particularly to address myself: the one, entirely destitute of true religion, and consequently altogether unprepared for a happy eternity, and yet careless and secure in that dangerous situation; the other, Christians indeed, and consequently habitually prepared for their latter end, but criminally remiss or formal in the concerns of religion, and in the duties they owe to God and man. The one sunk in a deep sleep in sin; the other nodding and slumbering, though upon the slippery brink of eternity. Now as to both these sort of persons, it is high time for them to awake out of sleep. And this exhortation I would press upon them, first, by some general considerations common to both; and then by some particular proper to each respectively. The general considerations are such as these:

I. Consider the uncertainty of time as to you. You may die the next year, the next month, the next week, the next hour, or the next moment. And I once knew a minister who, while he was making this observation, was made a striking example of it, and instantly dropped down dead in the pulpit. When you look forward through the year now begun, you see what may never be your own. No, you cannot call one day of it your own. Before that day comes, you may have done with time, and be entered upon eternity. Men presume upon time, as if it was entailed upon them for so many years, and this is the delusion that ruins multitudes. How many are now in eternity who begun the last year with as little expectation of death, and as sanguine hopes of long life, as you have at the beginning of the present! And this may be your doom.

Therefore, if sinners would repent and believe; if they would obtain the favor of God and preparation for the heavenly state; and if saints would make their calling and election sure; if they would be of service to their families, their friends, their country, and mankind in general, now is the time for them to awake out of sleep, and set about

their respective work. Now is the time, because this is the only time they are certain of. Sinners, you may be in hell before this year finishes its round, if you delay the great blessings of religion any longer. And saints! if you neglect to improve the present time, you may be compelled to shoot the gulf of eternity, and launch away to unknown coasts, full of fears and perplexities.

II. Consider the shortness of time as to you. Time, in its utmost extent, including what is past from the creation, and what is future to the conflagration, is nothing to eternity. But the time of your life is vastly shorter. That part of time which is parceled out to you, is not only uncertain, but extremely short; it is uncertain when it will end, but it is absolutely certain it will end very soon. You cannot hope to surpass the common standard of long lives; and that is but seventy or eighty years. A shorter space than that will probably convey you from this world to heaven or hell. And is it not time then for you to awake out of sleep?

III. Consider how much of your time has been lost and misspent already. Some of you that are now sincere servants of God may recollect how late in life you engaged in his service; how long you stood idle in his vineyard, when his work was before you and his wages in your offer. How many guilty days and years have you spent in the drudgery of sin, and in the base neglect of God and your immortal souls. Others of you, who have the noble pleasure of reflecting that you devoted yourselves to God early in comparison to others, are yet sensible how many days and years were lost before you made so wise a choice, lost in the sins and follies of childhood and youth. And the best of you have reason to lament how much of precious time you have misspent—how much of it has been wasted upon trifles, or in an over-eager pursuit of this vain world. Does not the loss, upon the whole, amount to many days, and even years? And a day is no small loss to a creature who has so few days at most to prepare for eternity.

As to many of you, is it not sadly evident you have lost all the days and years that have rolled over your heads? You have perhaps managed time well, as to the purposes of the present life; but that is the lowest and most insignificant use of it. Time is given as a space for repentance and preparation for eternity; but have you not



entirely lost it, as to this grand use of it? Nay, are not your hearts more hard, and you less prepared for eternity now, than you were some years ago? To heighten the loss, you should consider it is irrecoverable. Nothing is more impossible than to recall past time. It is gone! It is gone for ever! Yesterday can no more return than the years before the flood. Power, wisdom, tears, entreaties, all the united efforts of the whole universe of creatures can never cause it to return. Much must now be done in a little time, since you have now but little left. You have indeed had ten, twenty, thirty, and forty precious years; but, alas! they are irrecoverably lost. And may not this thought startle you, and cause you to awake out of sleep? The loss of the same number of kingdoms would not be half so great. To a candidate for eternity, whose everlasting state depends upon the improvement of time, a year is of infinitely greater importance than a kingdom can be to any of the sons of men.

IV. Consider the great purposes of the present life can be answered only in time; for there are certain important duties peculiar to this world, which, if unperformed here, must remain so for ever, because eternity is not the season for them.

Both worlds have their proper business allotted them; and the proper business of the one cannot be done in the other. Eternity and time are intended for quite different purposes. The one is seed-time; the other, harvest: the one is the season of working; the other, for receiving the wages: and if we invert the unchangeable order of things, and defer the business of life till after death, we shall find ourselves miserably mistaken. Therefore, if saints would be of service to mankind, as members of civil or religious society; and particularly, if they would be instrumental to form others for a blessed immortality, and save souls from death, by converting sinners from the error of their way; if they would do these things, the present life is the only time. In heaven they will have more noble employ. These things must now be done or never. And O! what pious heart can bear the thought of leaving the world while these are undone? When once death has laid his cold hand upon you, you are for ever disabled from such services as these. Then farewell to all opportunities of usefulness, in the manner of the present life. Then, even

your children and dearest friends may run on in sin, and perish, while it is not in your power so much as to speak one word to dissuade them.

Again: if sinners, who now are in a state of condemnation, would escape out of it; if they who are at present slaves to sin, would become sincere converts to righteousness; if they would use the means of grace for that purpose, now is the time. There is none of this work in hell: they no sooner enter into the eternal world, than their state will be unchangeably and eternally fixed. All are ripe for eternity before they are removed into it: the good ripe for heaven, and wicked ripe for hell; the one, vessels of mercy afore-prepared for glory; and the other, vessels of wrath fitted for destruction; and therefore they must remain for ever in their respective mansions. In hell, indeed, sinners repent; but their repentance is their punishment, and has no tendency to amend or save them. They mourn and weep; but their tears are but oil to increase the flame. They cry, and perhaps pray; but the hour of audience and acceptance is past—past for ever! The means of grace are all gone; the sanctifying influences of the Spirit are all withdrawn for ever. And hence they will corrupt and putrefy into mere masses of pure unmingled wickedness and misery. Sinners! realize this thought, and sure it must rouse you out of sleep. Trifle on a little longer, and it is over with you; spend a few days more as you have spent your time past, and you will be engulfed in as hopeless misery as any devil in hell. Another year now meets you, and invites you to improve it to prepare for eternity; and if you waste it like the past, you may be undone for ever. Therefore, take Solomon's warning, *whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom in the grave, whither you are going.*

These considerations, methinks, must have some weight, both upon slumbering Christians and impenitent sinners, to persuade them to awake out of sleep. I now proceed to a few considerations peculiar to each.

Upon slumbering saints I would again try the force of the apostolic consideration in my text; *awake, for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed.* Heaven may be only at the distance of a year or an hour from you; it is, however, nearer to-day than it ever was before. Is not

salvation the thing you have been longing and laboring for? and now can you slumber when it is so near? can you sleep when the night of life is so far spent, and the day of eternity is ready to shine around you? Can you sleep on the brink of eternity, on the threshold of heaven?

Some of you, perhaps, are now thinking, "O! if I were certain my salvation is so near, it would even transport me, and inspire me with flaming zeal and unwearied activity. But, alas! I am afraid of a disappointment. It is true, I cannot but entertain some humble hope, which the severest trial cannot overthrow. But O! what if I should be mistaken! This jealousy makes me tremble, and shrink back from the prospect."

This may be the case of many an honest soul. But can this be pleaded as a reason or excuse for security? Alas! can you sleep in such a dreadful suspense? sleep, while you are uncertain what shall become of you through an endless duration? If you have not the sure prospect of salvation to awaken you, methinks the fear of damnation must effectually do it; for it is certain one or the other is near you; therefore endeavor, by severe self-examination, to push this matter to some certain issue. Resolve that you will not spend another day, much less another year, in a state of such dangerous, alarming uncertainty. If this point is not yet determined, it is certainly *high time for you to awake out of sleep.*

Consider, further, how far your religious improvements have come short of your own resolutions and expectations, as well as your obligations. Ye happy souls, who now enjoy a good hope through grace, recollect the time when you were in a very different and more melancholy condition; the time when your spirits bled with a thousand wounds; when the terrors of the Lord set themselves in array against you, and the thunders of Sinai rung the most alarming peals in your astonished ears; when the arrows of God stuck fast in you, and the poison of them drank up your spirits; when guilt lay heavy upon your consciences, and you sunk down into the depth of despondency; O! what were then your vows and resolutions, if it should please God to deliver you? Did you then expect you would fall asleep so soon after your deliverance? Recollect also the happy hour when the face of a reconciled God first smiled upon you, when Jesus appeared to your

souls in all the attractive glories of a Saviour; when he delivered your soul from death, your feet from falling, and your eyes from tears; O! what were then your thoughts and resolutions? how firmly did you bind yourselves to be his servants for ever! But how soon, alas! did you begin to slumber! How far short have you fallen of your vows and promises! Recollect also what were your expectations at that memorable time. O! would you then have believed it, that in the space of ten or twenty years you would have made such small progress in your heavenly course, as you have in fact done? And can you bear the thought of slumbering on still? O! shall this year pass by like the former? Sure you cannot bear the thought.

Let me conclude my address to you with this advice: Begin this year by dedicating yourselves afresh to God; take some hour of retirement—this evening, or as soon as you can redeem the time. Call yourselves to account for the year past, and all your life. Examine yourselves both as to the reality of your religion, and as to your proficiency in it. Conclude the whole by casting yourselves anew upon Jesus Christ, and devoting yourselves for this new year entirely to him.

Let me now address a few considerations to impenitent sinners. Consider what a dreadful risk you run by neglecting the present time. The longer you indulge yourselves in sin, the harder it will be to break off from it; and do you not then run the risk of cementing an eternal union with that deadly evil? The longer you cherish a wicked temper, the stronger the habits of sin will grow. And are you not in danger of becoming eternal slaves to it? The more you sin against God, and grieve his Spirit, the more you provoke him to withhold the influences of his grace, and in righteous judgment to give you up. And dare you run so dreadful a risk as this? Alas! the day of your visitation may be drawing fast towards evening, when *the things that belong to your peace will be eternally hid from your eyes.*

Let me deal plainly and without reserve with you, on a point too dangerous to allow of flattery. If you do not awake and turn your attention to the concerns of your souls, it is but too probable you will go on in carnal security, and at last perish for ever. Blessed be God, this is not certain, and therefore you have no reason to despair;

but it is really too probable, and therefore you have great reason to fear. This alarming probability, methinks, must force its evidence upon your minds, upon principles you cannot reasonably dispute. You have lived twenty, thirty, or forty years, or more, in the world. In this time you have enjoyed the same means of grace which you can expect in time to come. You had done less to provoke the great God to cast you off; your sinful habits were not so strong; you were not so much hardened through the deceitfulness of sin; and the longer you live in this condition, the more discouraging it will grow. The most hopeful part of your life is over with you; and yet even in that you were not brought to repentance. How much less likely is it then, that you will be converted in time to come?

Suffer me to tell you plainly that I cannot but tremble for some of you. I am really afraid some of you will perish for ever; and the ground of my fear is this: The most generous charity cannot but conclude that some of you are impenitent sinners; your temper and conduct proclaim it aloud; and it is very unlikely, all things considered, that you will be ever otherwise. Since you have not repented in the most promising season of life, it is much to be feared you will not repent in the less promising part of it. And since no impenitent, unholy sinner can enter into the kingdom of heaven, it is much to be feared you will perish for ever; not because the mercy of God or the merit of Christ is insufficient to save you, if you apply to him for it, according to the terms of the gospel; not because your case is in itself hopeless, if you would awake out of sleep, and seek the Lord in earnest; but because it is too likely you will go on careless and secure, as you have done, and persist in it, till all your time is gone, and then your case will be desperate. I honestly warn you of your danger, which is too great to be concealed. And yet I give you sufficient encouragement to fly from it, while I assure you, that if you now lay your condition to heart, and earnestly use all proper means for your conversion, you have the utmost reason to hope for success, as much reason as the saints now in heaven once had when in your condition.

Therefore, now, sinners, awake out of sleep. Instead of entering upon this new year with carousals and extravagances, consecrate it to the great purposes for which it is

given you, by engaging in earnest in the great work of your salvation. *What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be he will think upon thee, that thou perish not.*

Consider, this year may lay you low in the dust of death. How many are now in the grave who saw the last new year's day! And though I cannot point out the persons, yet, without a spirit of prophecy, I may venture to foretell that some of us will be in heaven or hell before this year performs its round; some gray head or some sprightly youth; perhaps you; or perhaps I. And since none of us know who it shall be, none of us are exempted from the necessity of immediate preparation. O! that we may be all so wise as to consider our latter end.

I beg leave of my promiscuous auditory to employ a few minutes in addressing myself to my important family, whom my paternal affection would always single out from the rest, even when I am speaking in general terms to a mixed crowd. Therefore, my dear charge, my pupils, my children, and every tender and endearing name! Ye young immortals, ye embryo-angels or infant-fiends, ye blooming, lovely, fading flowers of human nature, the hope of your parents and friends, of church and state, the hope, joy, and glory of your teachers! hear one that loves you; one that has nothing to do in the world but to promote your best interest; one that would account this the greatest blessing he could enjoy in his pilgrimage, and whose nights and days are sometimes made almost equally restless by his affectionate anxieties for you; hear him upon a subject in which you are most intimately interested—a subject the most important that even an apostle or an angel could address you upon; and that is, the right improvement of time, the present time, and preparation for eternity. I make no doubt but you will all look upon religion as an object worthy of your notice. You all believe heaven and hell are not majestic chimeras, or fairy lands, but the most important realities; and that you must in a little time be the residents of the one or the other. It cannot, therefore, be a question with any of you, whether you shall mind religion at all! On that you are all determined. But the question is, What is the most proper time for it? Whether the present or some uncertain hereafter? And in what order you should attend to it, whether in the first place, and above all, even

in your early days? or whether you should not rather indulge yourselves in the pleasures of youth for some time, and then make religion the dull business of old age. If any of you hesitate upon this point, it may be easily solved. This is the most convenient, promising season for this purpose that you are likely to see; never will you live more free from care, or more remote from temptation. When you launch out into the noise, and bustle, and hurry, and company, and business, and vice of the world, you will soon find the scene changed for the worse. Therefore, now, my dear youth, now in this inviting season, awake out of sleep; awake to righteousness and sin not. I beg you would not now commit sin with a design to repent of it afterwards; for can you be so foolish, as knowingly and deliberately to do that which you explicitly intend to repent of?—that is, to do that which you intend to wish undone, and to lament with broken hearts that you ever did it. Can Bedlam itself parallel the folly of this? O! take warning from the fate of your wretched predecessors in this course. Could you ask the crowds of lost ghosts who are now suffering the punishment of their sin, whether they intended to persist impenitent in it and perish, they would all answer, that they either vainly flattered themselves they had repented already, or intended to repent before they died; but death seized them unawares, and put an end to all their sanguine hopes. Young sinners among them imagined they should not die till old age; and old age itself thought it might hold out a few days longer, and that it was time enough to repent. But, O! they have now discovered their error, when it is too late to correct it. Therefore, do not harbor one thought of putting off repentance to a sick bed or to old age; that is the most inconvenient and desperate season in your whole life; and if you fix upon this, one would think you had reviewed your whole life on purpose to find out the most unfit and discouraging period of it for the most necessary, difficult, and important work in the world. Come, then, now devote yourselves to God, and away with all excuses and delays. Remember, that upon the principles I have laid down,—principles that must gain your assent by the force of their own evidence; I say, remember that upon these principles it is extremely likely you will always persist impenitent in sin, and perish for ever, if you waste away the present sea-

son of youth, destitute of vital religion. You may every day have less and less hope of yourselves; and can you bear the thought of perishing for ever? Are your hearts so soon arrived to such a pitch of hardiness, as to be proof against the terrors of the prospect? It cannot be; *for who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burning?* As for such of you as have not the great work to begin, I have only this to say, *Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*—1 Cor. xv. 58.

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### XXX.

#### A TIME OF UNUSUAL SICKNESS AND MORTALITY IMPROVED.

“O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.”—*Jeremiah*, v. 3.

MY FELLOW-MORTALS! So I call you, because mortality is the certain doom of us all. This is a truth at all times evident; but now, methinks, it is more striking than usual when death has made such ravages among us; when it has made breaches upon sundry of our families, and swept off some of them almost entirely; and when we who survive are in daily expectation of a visit from this tremendous conqueror. Therefore, my dear fellow-mortals! under this character would I address you this day—as a mortal whose breath may be stopped the next day, or the next hour; I would speak with more seriousness than, alas! is usual to me, to you, mortals, about the concerns of immortality!\* If I should do any thing to save myself and them that hear me, I see I must do it quickly. I have for some time been

\* Mr. Baxter was wont to say:

“I preach as if I ne'er should preach again,  
And as a dying man to dying men.”

And oh, that I may imbibe the same spirit, and enter the pulpit always under its influence!



languishing and indisposed myself, and the contagious disease made its entrance into my family; but, through the amazing and distinguishing kindness of God, which I desire publicly to celebrate, and, I hope, in answer to prayer, its progress has been stopped. And what better return can I make to my gracious Deliverer, than to devote this life, which he has spared, to his glory and the service of your souls, with increasing zeal and industry? The blind and secure world has accused me of making too much ado about religion; and when my mind is impressed with realizing views of death and the supreme tribunal, I cannot but accuse myself; but, oh! it is upon a very different account. I never feel one uneasy thought from the excess of my zeal, or from the review of those few solemn hours when I have delivered the messages of God to you with such pathos and earnestness that the world may have thought me mad. I am more sensible than usual that I must work while the day of life lasts; for oh! it is short and uncertain; and the night of death is coming, when I cannot work. I have little time to labor for my divine Master; but little time to warn, instruct, and edify my dear hearers. Therefore, now, while my mouth is not silent in the dust, I would address you with the utmost earnestness and solemnity.

But this is not the only reason for improving the present time. As I am mortal myself, so are my dear people; they are dying fast around me, and dropping into the grave from my hands. About twenty that were wont to mingle with us in this assembly, and to hear the word from my lips, have been hurried into the eternal world in a few days. They have now passed the grand decisive trial; their state of probation is over, and an irrevocable sentence has fixed their eternal state in the mansions of glory or misery! These I have done with for ever. No more can I labor to warn and convince them—no more can I comfort and edify them—no more can I denounce the terrors of the Lord against their sin, nor offer the blessing of the gospel to their acceptance! Farewell, then, to these our friends and neighbors—farewell, till we all meet in one vast assembly before the supreme tribunal! But, blessed be God, all my dear people are not yet swept off from the land of the living! Here is a goodly number, as yet in a state of trial for that strange world, whither our brethren have taken their flight.

Here is a goodly number who can still hear the gospel of peace, and who are still interested to hear it, and who, unless they hear it in time, must soon be miserable for ever! And why, then, should you not all hear it with the most solemn attention and seriousness? Why, brethren, should you not hear it so that your souls may live?

I shall endeavor to show you what good effects afflictions should have upon us, especially upon impenitent sinners. This my text naturally leads me to; for though, in express terms, it only contains a complaint of the misimprovement of afflictions, or incorrigibleness under them, yet this very plainly points out the right improvement of them. When it is said, "Lord, thou hast stricken them, but they were not grieved," this implies that they should have been grieved—grieved for their undutiful conduct towards God, which has exposed them to the scourges of his rod—grieved with a godly sorrow, with kindly, generous relentings for sin, as against God, and not merely as tending to ruin themselves. Ingenuous sorrow, shame, and repentance; a submissive temper, and a sincere conversion to God, are the effects which afflictions should have upon us, according to my text. Indeed, I know no more convictive method of showing what it is to misimprove afflictions, and to be incorrigible under them, than to show positively what it is to make a right use of them, or what are their proper effects when sanctified; for if you find they have not had such effects upon you, you may be sure you have refused to receive correction.

I shall include all I have to say concerning the right improvement of afflictions under this simple inquiry—What is it to turn to the Lord? to which the other expressions contained in my text may be reduced.

First, turning to God presupposes a deep conviction that you have gone astray, both from the way of duty and the way of safety. You never will leave your present course till you plainly see that it leads down to the chambers of death. You never will turn to the Lord till you are sensible you are under the most pressing, absolute necessity to do so, both from duty and interest. O! sirs, if it should please God to open the eyes of unconverted sinners among you this day, what strange, unsuspected, and astonishing views would open to you concerning your past and present course and condition! Then, to your sur-

prise, you would see that you have lived so many years in the world without so much as earnestly attempting that work, which is the great business of your life. You would see that your hopes of heaven in your present condition are but a delusive dream, and that you are every moment in the utmost danger of sinking into the depth of misery, under the heavy wrath of Almighty God. You would see that you have not such hearts as you once flattered yourselves you had, but that they are deceitful and desperately wicked. You would see that they are, and always have been, destitute of the reality of all the Christian graces, and have imposed upon you hitherto with counterfeits and deceitful appearances; destitute of true repentance, faith, and love towards God and Jesus Christ; and full of pride, hypocrisy, ignorance, hardness of heart, disaffection to God and his government, unbelief, earthly-mindedness, sensuality, sordid and wicked lusts and passions, and an endless variety of evils. This would, no doubt, be a surprising, unexpected discovery to some of you; you have no such thoughts of yourselves, but quite the contrary. But the reason why you do not see this to be your case, in fact, is because the god of this world has blinded your minds, and because your treacherous hearts flatter you. This is, indeed, the truth of your case, while unconverted, if you believe the plainest declarations of the word of God. But, O! the astonishing ignorance and self-flattery of the heart of man! Here, alas! lies the difficulty in dealing with unconverted sinners! We cannot open their eyes to see their guilt and danger. Could we do this, a grand point would be gained, and the work would be well begun. But, alas! they will not believe they are so guilty, so vile and corrupt; and hence the gospel, which is a religion for self-condemned, broken-hearted sinners, is but an idle tale or a vain speculation to them; and to invite them to come to Christ, is but to invite the whole to a physician.

Further, if it should please God to bring you out of darkness this day into his marvelous light, then you would also see the exceeding sinfulness of sin. You would see it is not that harmless, innocent thing, or that slight excusable foible, you once took it to be; but that it is indeed the most abominable thing, the most terrible, base, and malignant evil upon earth or in hell. Then, instead of

wondering that such a thing should be punished with everlasting destruction by a gracious God, the parent of mankind; and instead of disputing yourselves into doubts about it, or caviling at it as cruel and unjust—instead of this, I say, you would rather wonder that so dreadful an evil could be pardoned at all, upon any consideration whatsoever; and you would be *more apt to question the possibility of forgiveness, than the justice of punishment*. I really want words to express the views and apprehensions you would then have of things. O that experience may be your teacher! Blessed be God, I have seen and conversed with many a sinner formerly, upon their first receiving this conviction; formerly, I say, for alas! now-a-days, I hardly meet with one to converse with me upon this subject. No; the generality have no such alarming views of themselves; like the Laodiceans, they are “rich in their own conceit; and know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” But formerly, it has been my happy employ to instruct such convinced sinners; and I can still remember, it was a very affecting conversation. Their language still seems to sound in my ears; and methinks I hear them complaining in a flood of tears, “Oh! what shall I do to be saved? I see I am upon the brink of destruction; I see I have been all my life a poor deceived, self-flattering sinner. Oh! I never thought I was such a monster of wickedness, and upon the slippery brink of eternal ruin; but now I see it; now it is so evident to me, that I am amazed I never discovered it before. Oh! is there any possibility of escape for such a condemned wretch as I? Let me know what is necessary and I will attempt any thing, if I may but get my perishing soul for a prey.” These are the affecting strains of awakened sinners. This must be your language, sinners, or at least the thoughts of your hearts, before you can turn unto the Lord. But, oh! when shall we hear it from you? To teach you this lesson, your neighbors, or perhaps your parent, your child, or some of your relatives have died; and shall they die in vain? Oh! hear them as it were crying to you from the dust. Some of you have lost pious friends, who during their life labored to awaken you out of your security. And when you view their grave, methinks you may recollect the epitaph which a minister wrote for his own tombstone:

' If all my life I tried in vain to save,  
Hear me, oh! hear me, crying from the grave."

But, alas! I know that even this alarming voice will not awaken impenitent sinners, unless God bear it home to their hearts by his almighty power. And O! that that divine agent would begin to work among us! Then, sinners, you would soon see that the account I have been giving you of your guilt and danger is not at all exaggerated.

Secondly, turning to God supposes a full conviction of the necessity of turning to him immediately, without delay. Brethren, if God should begin this work upon your hearts this day, you would no longer stand hesitating and loitering. We should no more hear from you that there is no need of so much ado, or that it is time enough as yet. You would have such clear views of your own vileness, and the disaffection of your souls to God and holiness, that nothing could be more evident to you than that you are utterly unfit for heaven, in your present condition, and that you are fitted for destruction and nothing else. You would not stand disputing, and hoping, and flattering yourselves in the matter, but you would come to this peremptory conclusion, "If I continue in my present condition, I am as certainly lost for ever, as ever as I was born; I shall as surely be in hell in a little time, as I am now upon earth. The matter will admit of no doubt." This, sirs, is a very alarming conclusion; and you may be very unwilling to admit it; but terrible as it is, you will be forced to believe it, if ever you be converted. It is, indeed, one of the first steps towards your conversion.

But this is not all: you will be not only convinced of the absolute necessity of turning to God in general, but of turning to him immediately without delay. You will see that you are so far from having time to delay, that it will wound your heart to think this work was not done many years ago. You will see that having delayed it so long already was the most desperate madness in the world, and that if you put it off any longer you may be lost beyond recovery; for, O! you will see you stand in slippery places, ready to be cast down into destruction every moment. You will apprehend yourselves held over the pit of hell, in the hand of an angry God, by the slender thread of life, just as we hold a spider, or some poisonous insect over a

fire, ready to throw it in immediately. Now while I am speaking to you, you would immediately set about this great work: you would pray and hear at once. And upon your returning home, instead of trifling, and chattering about the world, you would retire to cry for mercy, and meditate upon your miserable condition—you would fly to your bibles, and other good books for direction; and I should expect the pleasure once more of seeing you come to your poor minister, anxiously inquiring what you shall do to be saved. O! when will the crowds of unconverted sinners among us be brought to this? When will they give over their delays, and see they must engage in this great business immediately? I am sure the sickness and mortality among us have a tendency to bring them to this. Can you imagine that conversion may be put off to some future time, when you see so many in health and youth around you seized with sickness, and hurried into the grave in a few days? This has been the doom of sundry vigorous youth, and even of little children among us; and my dear surviving youth and children, shall this be no warning to you? Alas! will you dare to sin on still as thoughtless as ever? Will you any more pretend that you may safely delay your conversion to a sick-bed or a dying hour? But ask those that have made the trial, and what do they say? Do any of them tell you that this is the proper time for this work? What do sinners say when the time comes? "Oh!" they cry out, "what a fool was I to put it off till now! oh, how bitterly do I now repent that I did not attempt it sooner!" What do those say who made it their business in health and prosperity? Do they repent of it as premature? No; they all cry out, "I should be in a sad case, indeed, if it were left undone till now; now I have enough to do to struggle with my pains. But, blessed be God, that work is not now to be done!" If the declaration of dying men have any weight or credibility, the present time is the most fit season; therefore, oh! improve it while you have it. But,

Thirdly, if afflictions should prove the happy means of turning you to God, they will rouse you to the most earnest, persevering endeavors. You would immediately set about the work, and use all the means God has instituted for that purpose. You would pray without ceasing; you would pray in secret places; and if you hitherto had prayerless

families, they should be so no more; you would consecrate them to God with prayer this evening. You will also accustom yourselves to deep and solemn meditation. You will seriously attend to the gospel and its ordinances. Your bibles will no longer gather dust by you; but you will find use for them—there you will eagerly search for the words of eternal life. You will also love and frequent the society of those who, you hope, have experienced that happy change you are seeking after; and you will catch all the instruction you can from their conversation. Oh! sirs, if such a concern to turn to the Lord should spread among us, how would it change the aspect of things? How different would be the desires, the labors, the pursuits, and conversation of mankind! Believe me, sirs, there is need of such an alteration among us; and woe, woe to many of us, if things run on as they have done—if the world continue to usurp the pre-eminence of God and eternal things—if you are still more solicitous to lay up earthly treasure than to lay up treasure in heaven. Need I tell you that you shall not live here always, to enjoy the things of this world? Go, and learn this truth at the graves of your friends and neighbors. Need you be told that the enjoyments of this life are no suitable happiness of your immortal souls? Do you not learn it from the uncertain, transitory nature of these enjoyments? You can carry none of them with you to the eternal home; and what then will you have to make you happy there?

Further; as you will zealously use all endeavors to promote your conversion, as you will carefully guard against every thing that tends to hinder it, you will immediately drop your wicked courses—you will have done for ever with drinking, swearing, and all the vices you were wont to practice—you will moderate your pursuit of the world, and endeavor to disengage yourselves from successive hurries, which allow you neither leisure nor composure to mind the great business of your salvation—that business, which, whether you regard it or not, is of infinitely greater importance than all the affairs of life, and for which alone it is worth your while to live—you will shun the company of the wicked, the vain, and secure, as much as possible; yes, you will shun them as much as you now do the families that are infected with the epidemical disorder, and with much better reason; for they are infected with a much

more fatal disease—the disease of sin, which is so deadly, and which your souls are apt to catch. In short, you will avoid every obstacle to your conversion, as far as you can; and till you are brought to this, it is in vain to pretend that you have any real inclination to turn to God; and such of you as have never been brought to it, may be sure you have never been converted. O! when shall we see such earnest endeavors among us! When shall we see sinners thus vigorously striving to enter in at the strait gate? When will their dead sleep be over? When will the delusive dream of their false hopes vanish? When will they begin to conclude that they have sinned long enough—that they have delayed turning to God long enough? When will they begin to think it high time to work out their salvation with fear and trembling? My dear people, I long to see such a time among you once more! And, unless such a time come, I expect sundry of you, even as many as are unconverted, will perish for ever! Oh! the shocking thought! What shall be done to avoid so dreadful a doom? Come, Holy Spirit—come and work upon the hearts of these impenitent sinners; for thou only canst perform the work. O! come speedily, or they will be removed out of the sphere of thy sanctifying influences into the territories of eternal death! Brethren, till the Spirit be poured out upon us from on high, the work of conversion will never go on prosperously among us! We have had sufficient trial to convince us of this. We have had preaching, and all the means of grace, long enough to make us sensible that all will not do, without the Holy Spirit—therefore let us earnestly pray for his blessing. For,

Fourthly, if afflictions are followed with so blessed an effect upon you as to turn you to God, you will be made deeply sensible of your inability to turn to him by the best endeavors you can use, and of the absolute necessity of the influence of the Holy Spirit, or the power of divine grace. While you are ignorant of yourselves, and have not put the matter to a trial, you may flatter yourselves that you are able to turn to God when you please; but when you make the experiment in earnest, you will soon be undeceived. You can indeed abstain from outward acts of gross sin—you can attend upon the means of grace, and perform the outward duties of religion; and this is your duty; but, alas! this is far short of true conversion. All this



you may do, and yet the heart be so far from being turned to God, that it may be strongly set against him. The heart is disaffected to strict holiness; it is hard as the nether millstone, and no human means can break it.

Oh! when shall we see the vanity and self-confidence of sinners mortified? When shall we see them deeply sensible of their weakness and helplessness? It may seem strange, but it is undoubtedly true, that they will never strive in earnest, till they are sensible that all their strivings are not sufficient, but that God must perform the work in them. It is the high idea they have of their own power that keeps them easy and careless. When they see that it is God alone who must work in them both to will and to do, then, and not till then, they will earnestly cry to him for his assistance, and use all means to obtain it. It is not the awakened sinner that feels himself weak and helpless, that lives in the careless neglect of the means of grace. No: it is the proud, presumptuous sinner, that thinks he can do great things in religion when he sets about it. It is indeed a strange sight to see those that complain they can do nothing without Christ, laboring hard; and those that boast they can do great things, standing idle! to see those that renounce all dependence on their good works, abounding in good works; and those that expect to be saved by their good works, living in the neglect of good works, and doing the works of the devil! This, I say, is a strange sight; but so it generally is found to be, in fact, in the world. But,

Fifthly, if ever you return to the Lord, you will be made deeply sensible that Christ is the only way of access to God. You will be sensible, that it is only for his sake that you can expect acceptance with God; and that all your transactions with Heaven must be carried on through him as mediator. If ever you return, you will come in as obnoxious criminals, upon the footing of grace, and not merit; and you will see that it is only through Christ that grace can be communicated to you. Some of you, perhaps, will say, "I will never believe this concerning myself—I will never believe that I am such a guilty, obnoxious criminal!" Yes, you certainly will believe it, if ever you be converted and saved; and I hope God has not given you up. If ever you return to the Lord, you will come in as a poor, broken-hearted, penitent rebel. And until you feel

yourself such, you will never comply with the gospel, which is a method of salvation through a mediator. O that many sinners among us might thus be mortified, humbled, and brought down to the foot of their injured Sovereign this day! O that they may be sensible that they lie at mercy, and that they have not the least possible ground of hope, but only through the righteousness of Christ! But,

Sixthly, if ever you are turned to God, you will experience a great change in your temper and conduct. Your hearts and lives will take a new bias—your thoughts and affections will be directed towards God and holiness—your hearts will be turned to the holy law of God, like wax to the seal, and receive the stamp of his image. Your thoughts will run in a new channel—your will and affections will fix upon new objects, and you will become new creatures,—old things will pass away, and all things will become new. You will become fit for heaven, by having heavenly dispositions wrought in you; and thence you may infer you shall be admitted there. Believe me, sirs, when you are turned to God, heaven and hell will not be such dreams and trifles; but you will be habitually affected with these things, as the most important realities.

As you will be turned *to* God and holiness, so you will be turned *from* sin and all its pleasures. Yes, brethren, that pride, hypocrisy, sensuality, worldly-mindedness, and all the various forms of sin which you now indulge, will become for ever hateful to you—you will abhor them, resist them, make war against them, and never allow them a peaceful harbor in your hearts more. How bitter will your present pleasures and pursuits then be to you; and how will you bless God, that he opened your eyes and gave your minds a new turn before it was too late!

Seventhly, if ever you are turned to the Lord, your minds will habitually retain that turn. I mean, your religion will not be a transient fit, a fleeting thing; but it will be permanent and persevering. Never more will you be able to offend your God and neglect your Saviour and your souls as you now do—never more will you be able to rest secure and thoughtless, while your eternal state is awfully uncertain and your hearts are out of temper for devotion. The bent of your minds towards God may be weakened; but you can never lose it entirely.

Your aversion to sin may be lessened; but you will never give up yourselves to the love and practice of it. There is a secret bias upon your souls that inclines them heavenward; even while they are carried downward to the earth, by the remaining tendencies of your innate corruption.

And now, my dear hearers, I have endeavored, with the utmost plainness, to describe to you that turning to God which should be the result of your afflictions as well as of the means of grace, and which you must experience before you can enter into the kingdom of heaven. I have had something more important at heart than to embellish my style, and set myself off as a fine speaker. I have endeavored to speak, not to an itching ear or a curious fancy, but to your understanding and your heart, that you may both know and feel what I say; and, indeed, if I should aim at any thing else, I should be at once an egregious trifler and a profane mocker of God.

Now I have one serious question to put to you, upon a careful review of what I have said, and that is, Do you really hope in your consciences, after you have impartially tried yourselves as in the sight of God, that you have been converted or turned to God? Here is the work; I have plainly described it. But where is the heart in which it has been wrought? Can you put your hand upon your breast and say, "Oh! if I know myself, here is the heart that has been the subject of it!" Pause and think upon this inquiry, and never be easy till you can give at least a probable answer.

But my main business to-day lies with the unconverted; and have not some of you discovered yourselves this day to be such? Well, what is to be done now? Can you go on careless and secure still under this tremendous conviction? If you are determined on this course, then you may despair indeed—there is not the least ground of hope for you. But should you now rouse out of your security, and seek the Lord in earnest, you have the same encouragement to hope which any one of the many millions of converts in heaven or upon earth had, while in your condition. Therefore let me persuade you to take this course immediately.

But when I begin to persuade, I am in Jeremiah's perplexity: "To whom shall I speak and give warning that

they may hear?" Shall I speak to you, men of business and hurry? Alas! you have no leisure to mind such a trifle as your soul. Shall I speak to you, men of wealth and character? Alas! this is a business beneath your notice. What! a gentleman cry for converting grace! That would be a strange sight indeed. Shall I speak to you, old men—my venerable fathers in age? Alas! you are so hardened by a long course of sinning, that you are not likely to hear. Shall I speak to you, ye relics of those families where death has lately made such havoc? Sure you must be disposed to hear me—sure you cannot put me off so soon. I hope sickness and death have been sent among you as my assistants; that is, to enforce what I say, and be the means of your conversion. Shall I speak to you, young people? Alas! you are too merry and gay to listen to such things; and you, perhaps, think it is time enough as yet. Thus, I am afraid, you will put me off; and if you put me off, I shall hardly know where to turn, for of all the unconverted among us, I have most hopes of *you*. Old sinners are so confirmed in their estrangement from God, that there is but little hope of such veterans; but the habits of sin are not so strong in *you*, and God is wont to work upon persons of *your* age. If *you*, then, put me off, where shall I turn? Behold, I turn to the Gentiles. Poor negroes! Shall I find one among you that is willing to turn to God? Many of you are willing to be baptized; but that is not the thing. Are you willing to turn to God with all your hearts, in the manner I have explained to you? This is the grand question; and what do your hearts answer to it? If you also refuse—if you all refuse, then what remains for your poor minister to do, but to return home and make this complaint to him that sent him: "Lord, there were unconverted sinners among my hearers, and in my poor manner I made an honest trial to turn them to thee; but, Lord, it was in vain—they refused to return; and therefore I must leave them to thee to do what thou pleasest with them!" Oh! will you constrain me to make this complaint upon any of you to my divine Master? Oh! free me from the disagreeable necessity. Come, come all, rich and poor, young and old, bond and free; come, and let us return unto the Lord; for "he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up, and we shall live in his sight." *Amen.*

## XXXI.

## THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH; A FUNERAL SERMON.

“O wicked man, thou shalt surely die.”—*Ezek.* xxxiii. 8.

MEN love themselves, and therefore delight to hear things favorable to themselves; and a benevolent mind, that feels pain whenever he occasions pain to the meanest of his fellow-creatures, would delight to dwell upon such pleasing subjects. And as to the happy few, who are really the sincere servants of God, and are holy in heart and life, I may safely gratify this benevolent inclination, and publish the most joyful tidings. I am authorized to “say to the righteous, it shall be well with him.” “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.” This is the gracious command of God to all his ministers. And, oh! how delightful an office to perform it! This only should be the pleasing business of this hour, could I stretch my charity so far as to conclude that all this promiscuous crowd, without exception, are indeed the dutiful people of God. But was there ever such a pure assembly upon our guilty earth? upon our earth, where an accursed Ham was found in the little, select family of Noah, the best in the whole world; where a Judas mingled among the chosen twelve, the first followers of Jesus; where the tares and the wheat grow together in one field till the harvest; and where we are expressly told “many are called but few chosen.” In such a corrupt world, the most generous charity, if under any scriptural limitations, must hesitate at the sight of such a mixed multitude as this—must be jealous over them with a godly jealousy; must fear, lest there be one—yea, more than one, wicked man among them. That there is too much reason for this suspicion, and that even a benevolent mind is constrained to admit it, however unwilling, will appear evident, I presume, to yourselves before I have finished my discourse. And if there be so much as one wicked man among us, I would,

as it were, single him out from the crowd, and discharge this pointed arrow from the quiver of the Almighty against his heart, to give him not a deadly but a medicinal wound. "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die." I am obliged, at my peril, to denounce this doom against thee; and I dare not flatter thee with better hopes, unless I would be accessory to thy death, and at once ruin both myself and thee. For observe the context, which contains the instructions of the great Jehovah to his minister Ezekiel, which are equally binding upon all the ministers of his word in every age. "O thou son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hands." This phrase, "I will require his blood at thy hand," signifies "I will look upon thee as guilty of his murder, and I will punish thee accordingly." Therefore, if I would not incur the guilt and punishment of murder, soul-murder, the most shocking kind of murder; if I would not destroy you and myself, that you may enjoy the sorry pleasure of flattery, and that I may enjoy the short-lived, trifling reward of a little popular applause, I am obliged to tell such of you as are wicked, in the most pungent manner, and as it were by name, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die;" whoever thou art, however rich, or powerful, or honorable; however bold and presumptuous; however full of flattering hopes; however sure of life in thine own conceit; if thou be wicked, thou shalt *die*; thou shalt *surely die*; or, to use the force of the Hebrew phrase, *dying thou shalt die*. It is the declaration of eternal truth, which cannot fail; it is the sentence of the Lord of hosts, who is able to carry it into execution. But here two interesting questions occur, Who are the wicked? and What kind of death shall they die?

If we should not first inquire, who the wicked are, I should but speak to the air; for hardly any would apply the character to themselves. It is an odious character; and that alone is the reason why many try to persuade themselves it is not theirs. Let us submit ourselves to an impartial trial, and endeavor to discover whether the character of the wicked man belongs to us or not.

The first class of wicked men that I shall take notice of, are profane and gross sinners, who indulge themselves in notorious immoralities. Instead of particularizing them myself, I shall produce to you a list of them, which the apostle has given long ago. "Know ye not, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." He seems surprised any should be ignorant of so plain a point as this. "Be not deceived," says he; do not flatter yourselves with better hopes; but who are the unrighteous? He tells you particularly, "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate," soft, luxurious creatures, unmann'd with sensual pleasures, "nor abusers of themselves with mankind," Sodomites, "nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." You see the apostle is fixed and peremptory in it, that sinners of this class are universally excluded from the kingdom of heaven—not one of them all shall ever be admitted there, if they continue such. All such shall certainly perish, or else St. Paul was an impostor. To the same purpose he speaks, "the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like; of the which I tell you before," that is, I honestly forewarn you, "as I have told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." As sin is a monster of so many heads, he does not enumerate them all, but comprehends them in a lump; declaring that they who practised the vices mentioned, or *such like*, though not exactly the same, shall be excluded from heaven. He denounces the same doom against these vices in his Epistle to the Colossians: "fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness,"—for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. I shall add but one testimony more, "the fearful," the cowardly in the cause of God, "and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." These you see are the certain symptoms of the heirs of hell; and if they be admitted into a state of everlasting happiness,

while they continue such, it is certain your religion must be false; for the Bible, which is the foundation of your religion, repeatedly declares they shall not be admitted there. It is also observable, that in this black list you not only find such gross vices as are scandalous in the common estimate of mankind, but also such as are secret, seated in the heart, and generally esteemed but lesser evils. Here you find not only murder, whoredom, idolatry, theft, and such enormous and scandalous sins, but also covetousness, wrath, strife, envyings, unbelief, and such like latent sins, which men generally indulge themselves in without feeling much guilt upon their consciences, or apprehending themselves in great danger of punishment.

I should be very sorry so much as to suppose there are any among you of this abandoned character. But I must propose the matter to your decision; and at so favorable a tribunal you will no doubt be acquitted, if you be clear. I say, I propose it to yourselves, whether some of you be not drunkards, swearers, liars, extortioners, sabbath-breakers, and the like? Or, if you are free from these grosser forms of vice, do not some of you live in wrath, strife, reveling and carousing, covetousness, secret uncleanness, and the like? If this be your character, I have another thing to propose to you; and that is, whether it be most likely that you shall be excluded the kingdom of heaven, or that Christ and his apostles, and the other writers of the Holy Scriptures, were deceivers? one or the other must be the case; if you be admitted into heaven, then they were certainly deceivers; for they have declared you shall not be admitted.

Thus far you are assisted to judge who are the wicked; and whether some of you do not belong to this unhappy class. And now I proceed to another class.

Secondly: All those are wicked who knowingly and willfully indulge themselves habitually in any one sin, whether it be the omission of a commanded duty or the practice of something forbidden. Every good man is of the same opinion as the apostle Paul, "I delight in the law of God after the inner man." And, consequently, they who do not delight in his law are of a spirit and character directly contrary to Paul; in other words, they are wicked. The willful and habitual practice of any known sin, and the willful and habitual neglect of any known duty, are



repeatedly mentioned in the Scriptures, as the sure signs of a wicked man. Our Lord himself has repeatedly assured us, that all pretensions to love him are vain, unless we keep his commandments. What is it to be a wicked man, but to work iniquity? and what is it to work iniquity, but to neglect what God has commanded, or practice what he has forbidden?

Be this, therefore, known to you all, as an undoubted truth, that the willful habitual indulgence of any known sin is the inseparable character of a wicked man. You may plead the infirmity of human nature, the strength of temptation, or the innocence of your hearts and intentions, even in the midst of your sins; you may plead that the best have their infirmities as well as you; and that many around you are much worse than you—you may plead these and a thousand other such excuses; but plead what you will, all your excuses are in vain; and this still remains an unchangeable truth, that all the habitual practitioners of sin are the servants of sin. It matters not whether the sin be secret and clandestine, or public and avowed; whether it be a greater or smaller size; whether you are stung with remorse for it afterwards, or not; whether you intend to forsake it hereafter, or not; such circumstances as these will not alter the case; in spite of such circumstances, if you indulge any one known sin, you bear the infernal brand of wickedness upon you. I grant that good men sin, and that they are far from perfection of holiness in this life. I grant also that some of them have fallen, perhaps once in their life, into some gross sin. But after all, I must insist that they do not indulge themselves in the willful habitual practice of any known sin, or the willful habitual neglect of any known duty. St. John expressly tells us, that "he that is born of God, neither doth nor can sin," in this sense. He cannot sin *habitually*; the meaning is, he cannot go on in any one sin as his usual course; but if he fall, it is by surprise; and taking one time with another, he is generally, and for the most part, under the influence of holy principles. Again, he cannot sin *willfully*; that is, with full bent of soul. The prevailing inclination and tendency of his soul is not towards sin; but, on the other hand, he really hates it, and resists it, even in its most tempting forms; and it is his incessant struggle and honest endeavor to suppress it. He never

can abandon himself more to the free uncontrolled indulgence of the sweetest sin, though it should be only in heart. Both Scripture and reason renounce those crowds of pretended Christians we have among us, who are under the habitual power of some sin or other, and live in the neglect of some known duty.

And now, are not sundry of you convicted of the character of wicked men, who might not come under the former class of profane sinners? Do not some of you know in your conscience there is some little sweet sin (so you esteem it) which you cannot bear to part with? Is there not some duty, which is so disagreeable to you, so contrary to your inclination, to your reputation in the wicked world, or to your temporal interest, that though you are secretly convinced it is your duty, yet you omit it, you put it off, and think God will dispense with your obedience in so slight a matter? If so, you must be ranked in the numerous class of wicked men. There, indeed, you have company enough; but company is no security in a combination against Omnipotence.

Thirdly, all those are wicked who are destitute of those graces and virtues which constitute the character of positive goodness. Wickedness is a moral *privation*, or the *want* of real goodness. The want of faith, the want of love, repentance, benevolence, and charity, does as really constitute a wicked man as drunkenness, blasphemy, or any notorious immorality. Certainly I need not particularly mention to you those passages of Scripture which declare those graces essential to a good man, and the want of them the grand mark and constituent of a bad one. A good man that does not love God or mankind, a good man without faith or repentance, is as great a contradiction as a hero without courage, a scholar without learning, a righteous ruler without justice, or a fire without heat. Therefore, if any of you be destitute of the grace of repentance, if you have not a clear conviction and deep sense of your sinfulness in heart and life, by nature and practice; if you be not deeply sorry at heart for your sins, and hate them—hate them all without exception; if you do not forsake your sins, as well as sorrow for them; and if you do not fly to the mere mercy of God in Jesus Christ for pardon, and place all your dependence upon his righteousness; I say, unless this be your daily experience and practice, you

are entirely destitute of true evangelical repentance, and consequently come under the unhappy class of wicked men. If you do not love God with all your hearts, that is, if you have not frequent affectionate thoughts of him; if you do not delight in his service, and in communion with him in divine ordinances; if your love do not produce cheerful universal obedience, which is the infallible test of love, then you are certainly destitute of the heavenly grace of love; and sure, without this, you will not pretend to the character of good men! Now if all who are destitute of these qualifications should walk off to the left hand, as they must do another day, would it not thin this crowd? Oh! how few would be left behind! I beseech you to examine yourselves impartially, that you may know your true character.

Fourthly, to sum up the whole, all those are wicked who still continue in their natural state; who have never been regenerated, or experienced a thorough change of their views and dispositions towards God, and divine things. Even our own observation of the natural temper of mankind is sufficient to convince us, though the Scriptures were silent, that they are from their very birth wicked, disinclined to God and holiness, and bent to that which is evil. Alas! you are stupidly ignorant of yourselves, if you do not know, by experience, that this is your case. To this the Scriptures also bear abundant testimony. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and they that are in the flesh cannot please God." "We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others;" we and others, that is, all, without exception, are by nature children of wrath, and consequently wicked; for certainly those who are not wicked cannot be children of wrath. Upon this corruption of human nature is founded the necessity of that change of temper which the Scripture calls, and which therefore, we dare to call the new birth or new creation. And since this corruption of human nature is universal, it follows that all are wicked who have never experienced this divine change.

This must suffice, at present, in answer to the first question, Who are the wicked? And I hope sundry of you, if you honestly make use of the light you have, have discovered that whatever flattering hopes you have entertained, you must really place yourselves in the class with

wicked men. This is an alarming consideration at any time; but it is much better to receive it now, when the case may be remedied, than in the eternal world, where it will be too late. And now, O wicked man, who ever thou art, as Ehud said to Eglon, "I have a message from God to thee;" a message not unlike to his; and that is, "Thou shalt surely die." Profane sinner, drunkard, swearer, whoremonger, "thou shalt surely die." You that knowingly, willfully, and habitually indulge in any favorite sin, "you shall surely die." You that are destitute of genuine faith, love, and the other graces and virtues, essential to a good man, "you shall surely die." You that are still the same in temper and disposition that you were by nature, "you shall surely die." This is the invariable decree of Heaven, that you shall die. You may cast death out of your thoughts; but for all this you shall die; you may continue unprepared for it, but you must die prepared or not. You may be young, gay, presumptuous, rich, or powerful, but you must die. Were you as high and as bright as Lucifer, as rich as Croesus, as powerful as Alexander, you must die. Your wickedness cannot immortalize you. Though you are wicked men now, you shall be dead men ere long. Yes, as surely as you now live, you shall die. But you will, perhaps, reply, "What is this that you tell us? Is death the lot only of the wicked? Must not all men die, the good as well as the bad? How then can death be threatened as the peculiar doom of the wicked?" The answer to this naturally leads me to the second question. What kind of death shall the wicked man die? It is true, natural death is the universal doom of all the sons of men. "How dieth the wise man? as the fool?" The highest attainments in piety cannot secure an earthly immortality. Peter and Paul are dead as well as Judas. But though there be no difference in this respect, there is a wide difference in another, and that is, the death of the wicked is quite another thing, or comes under quite a different notion from the death of the righteous. The death of the wicked, like an officer from the offended sovereign, strikes off the fetters of flesh, that they may be carried away to the place of execution; but the death of the righteous, like a friendly angel, only opens the door of their prison, and dismisses them from their bondage in sinful flesh. The righteous, in death, enjoy, more or less,

the consolations of an approving conscience, of the sweets of the love of God, and the kind supports of an Almighty Saviour's hand. But the wicked die as criminals by the hand of justice, their guilt is unpardoned, and this gives death its sting; they have no Almighty friend in death, but Jesus, who alone can relieve them, is their enemy; they have no reviving sensations of divine love, but guilty reflections and shocking prospects; or, if they entertain hopes of happiness, which most of them probably do, alas! they are but short-lived delusions, which will vanish like a dream in the morning, as soon as the light of eternity flashes upon them. Death dismisses the righteous from all their sins and sorrows; and conveys them into a state of perfect and everlasting holiness and happiness; but the death of the wicked cuts them off from all enjoyments, from the means and hopes of salvation, and fixes them in an unchangeable, everlasting state of sin and misery. Then, farewell, a long, an everlasting farewell to the comforts of this life; farewell to friends; farewell to hope and peace; farewell to all the means of grace; farewell God, and Christ, and angels, and all the blessedness of heaven. Now, nothing awaits them but wrath and fiery indignation. Thus, O wicked man, you shall die; and is not this a very different thing from the death of the righteous?

Realize this prospect, sinners, and sure it must startle you. The time is just at hand when the cold hand of death shall arrest you; when the vital pulse shall cease to beat and your blood to flow, a ghastly paleness overspread your countenances, and a deadly numbness creep over your frame and stupefy your active limbs; when the unwilling, lingering soul must be torn from its old companion of flesh, must bid adieu to all the enjoyments and pursuits of this mortal life, and shoot the gulf of eternity, and launch away; when it must pass into the immediate presence of God, mingle among the strange, unacquainted beings that inhabit the unseen, untried world, and be fixed in an unchangeable state; when you must leave your riches, your honor, your pleasures, which are pursued with so much labor and eagerness, and go as naked out of the world as you came into it: when you are reduced to this extremity, think, O wicked man, think seriously how miserable your condition will be! Then no comfortable reviews of past life! no supporting whispers of conscience within! no God,

no Jesus, no Saviour to support you! no encouraging prospect before you! or none but the delusive, evanishing, confounding encouragements of a false and flattering hope! no relief, no gleam of hope from heaven or earth, from God or his creatures! But a guilty life behind you! a corrupt heart, utterly unfit for heaven, and a clamorous, gnawing conscience within you! an angry God, a frowning Saviour, and a lost heaven, above you! a boundless burning ocean below you! O! what a tragical exit, what a melancholy end is this! This is to die indeed! And thus, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die." Such a death will be the certain doom of persisting, impenitent wickedness. I need make no exception at all, but only that which I have already hinted at, namely, that many a wicked man dies with a self-flattering apprehension that he is not wicked, and with sanguine hopes of heaven. This is a common case, especially with persons who have not lived under a faithful ministry, to inform them honestly of the nature of religion, and the prerequisites of salvation. But, alas! what a sandy foundation is this! what avails it to enjoy a little delusive relief in the hour of death, when the first entrance into the eternal world will cause the dream to vanish for ever, and leave you to perish without hope, in all the confusion and consternation of a disappointment! with this trifling exception, which indeed is rather an aggravation than a real mitigation, I denounce from the living God, that thus shall every wicked man among you die, if you still continue such.

But even this, dreadful as it is, is not all; there is, besides this, that dreadful *something*, called the second death, which thou, O wicked man, must die. Besides that death, which will put an end to this transitory life, you will have another death to suffer; a death, which will immediately commence when the other is over; a death which will not be over in a few moments, like the other, but the agonies of which will continue—an everlasting death—a state of misery, which will render life worse than death, or being worse than annihilation. Then the soul will be for ever dead to God and holiness—dead to all the means of grace, and all the enjoyments of this life—dead to all happiness and all hope—dead to all the comfortable purposes of existence—and every thing that deserves the name of life; in short, dead to every thing, but the torturing sensations of pain;

to these the soul will be tremblingly alive all over to eternity; but, alas! to be alive, in this sense, alive only to suffer pain, is worse than death, worse than annihilation. This is the import of that dreadful phrase, "the second death."

And now, when you see the dreadful import of this denunciation, may it not spread terror through this assembly to hear, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die?" Are your hearts proof against the thunder of his threatenings? Are you so foolhardy as not to be concerned whether eternal life or eternal death be your doom? Is there no wicked man in this assembly so much affected as at least to inquire, "Is there no way of escape? Must I die without relief? Is the sentence passed beyond repeal?" No; blessed be God, you are yet alive; and while there is life there is hope. The gates of eternal despair are not yet shut and barred upon you. Therefore, in the name of God, I assure you there is hope, there is a possibility of escaping. But in what way? Suppose you sin on, as you have done hitherto, and herd in the crowd of wicked men; suppose you still continue thoughtless about the great concerns of eternity, neglect the Lord Jesus, and attend upon the means of grace in a careless, formal manner; suppose your hearts should never be changed by the almighty power of divine grace, but still remain hard, impenitent, in love with sin and the world, and destitute of the love of God; suppose you resist the strivings of the Holy Spirit and your own consciences, flatter yourselves with vain hopes of safety, and shut your eyes against the light of conviction; suppose you should abandon yourselves to the pursuit of this world with your usual eagerness, and drown all serious thoughts in the bustle and confusion of secular affairs: I say, suppose you should take this course, is there any hope? No; in this way there is nothing but despair. If you should live as long as Methuselah, and continue in this course, you would still continue wicked, and never become more fit for heaven than you now are; nay, like a body tending to corruption, you would corrupt and putrefy more and more. Consult your reason, consult your Bible, consult any thing, except the self-flattering heart of man, and the father of lies; and they will all tell you, that if you persist in this course, you shall surely die. Not one that ever went on in this course has entered into heaven; but in this

downward road those crowds persisted, who are now with Judas and Dives, in the place of torment; and if you tread in their steps, you shall certainly be among them.

But, if you will attend, I will endeavor to show you what you must do to be saved, and point out to you the way of life and hope. Hear me, O wicked man! who art under the sentence of death; hear me, and I will direct thee how thou mayest procure a repeal of the sentence, and live for ever. Blessed Spirit! we need thy assistance in this attempt. Oh! bear home my feeble words with resistless energy upon the hearts of sinners, that this day they may pass from death to life. If you escape death in its most dreadful form, and enter into life, then,

*First*, Betake yourselves immediately to serious thoughtfulness. No more of your levity and froth; no more of your mirth and vanity, and dissipation of thought. But now, at last, begin to think; to think seriously and sadly of your sins, of your guilty and wretched condition, of your danger of being for ever miserable, and of the best means of deliverance.

*Secondly*, Break off from those things that hinder your conversion. No more of your drunkenness, swearing, and other vices. No more mingle in the company of sinners, nor run with them in the same excess of riot. Break off from your over-eager pursuit of the world, and act as if you thought it infinitely worse to be lost for ever than to be mean and poor in this life. Read the Scriptures, and other good books, and attend upon the most faithful preaching as you have opportunity. Earnestly pray to God. If you have hitherto had prayerless families or prayerless closets, let them be so no longer; this evening, consecrate them to God by prayer. Pray, particularly, for the Holy Spirit, who alone can thoroughly convert and sanctify you.

*Thirdly*, Endeavor to receive and submit to the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. It is through him alone you can be saved; therefore make use of him as your only mediator, in all your transactions with God.

*Finally*, Do not delay to follow these directions. Alas! if, with Felix, you put it off to a more convenient season, there is very little hope. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." Therefore now, this



moment, begin the work. Now dart up a prayer to heaven, "Lord, here is a poor, wicked creature, that must die ere long, unless thou have mercy upon me: have mercy upon me, O thou God of mercy." Thus pray, and keep your souls, as it were, always in a praying posture until you are heard.

And now, my dear brethren, what is your resolution upon the whole? Are you resolved to use these means for your deliverance, or are you not? If you are, you have great reason to hope for success. But if not, I defy you to find one encouraging word in all the Bible. On the other hand, I am commanded, upon my peril, to warn you; and therefore would once more sound this dreadful alarm in your ears, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die." And if, when you hear the words of this curse, you bless yourselves in your hearts, and hope better things, God foresaw there would be such self-flattering, presumptuous sinners in the world, and he hath prepared his terrors against them. If "there shall be among you a man, or woman, or family, or tribe. . . . a root that beareth gall and wormwood, that when he heareth the words of this curse, shall bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart: the Lord will not spare him; but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him; and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven; and the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel."\* What a tremendous threatening is this! and you see it stands in full force against those that presumptuously flatter themselves with false hopes of impunity, whether they be men or women, family or tribe: and it will certainly have a dreadful accomplishment upon such of you as disregard this repeated warning, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die."

For a more immediate improvement of this funeral occasion I would suggest a few solemn reflections.

First: How uncertain and frail are the nearest ties of relation, and all our domestic and relative happiness! therefore, how much should we be concerned to contract immortal friendships, and secure a never-dying happiness!

\* Deut. xxix. 18-21.

Secondly: Such bereavements should be made occasions of exercising resignation to the will of God.

Thirdly: Let this instance of mortality put us in mind of our own. Shall others die to warn us that we must die; and shall the warning be in vain?

Fourthly: Let us rejoice, that though our friends die, yet the Lord liveth, and blessed be our rock!



## XXXII.

### EVIDENCES OF THE WANT OF LOVE TO GOD.

“But I know you, that you have not the love of God in you.”—*John*, v. 42.

NOTHING seems to be a more natural duty for a creature—nothing is more essential to religion—nothing more necessary as a principle of obedience, or a qualification for everlasting happiness, than the love of God; and it is universally confessed to be so.

Should we consider only the excellency of the divine Being, and the numerous and endearing obligations of all reasonable creatures to him, we should naturally think that the love of God must be universal among mankind; and not one heart can be destitute of that sacred, filial passion. But, alas! if we regard the evidence of Scripture or observation, we must conclude the contrary. The love of God is a rare thing among his own offspring in our degenerate world. Here, in my text, a company of Jews, highly privileged above all nations then upon earth, and making large professions of regard to God, are charged with the want of his love; charged by one that thoroughly knew them, and could not be deceived. “I know you, that you have not the love of God in you.”

But, blessed be God, his love is not entirely extinct and lost even on our guilty globe. There are some hearts that feel the sacred flame, even among the degenerate sons of Adam.

These two sorts of persons widely differ in their inward temper, and God, who knows their hearts, makes a proper

distinction between them. But in this world they are mixed—mixed in families, and in public assemblies; and sometimes the eyes of their fellow-mortals can discern but little difference; and they very often mistake their own true character, and rank themselves in that class to which they do not belong. While they continue in this mistake, the one cannot possess the pleasure either of enjoyment or hope; and the other cannot receive those alarms of danger which alone can rouse them out of their ruinous security, nor earnestly use means for the implantation of the sacred principle of divine love in their souls. To remove this mistake is therefore a necessary and benevolent attempt; benevolent not only to the former sort, but even to those who are unwilling to submit to the search, and who shut their eyes against the light of conviction.

The subject now before us is this: Since it is evident that some, under the profession of religion, are destitute of the love of God; and since it is of the utmost importance that we should know our true character in this respect, let us inquire what are those marks whereby we may know whether the love of God dwells in us or not. Let us follow this inquiry with impartiality and self-application, and receive the conviction which may result from it, whether for or against us.

Now it is evident that the love of God does not dwell in you if the native enmity of your hearts against him has not been subdued; if your thoughts and affections do not fix upon him with peculiar endearment, above all other things; if you do not give him and his interests the preference of all things that may come in competition with him; if you do not labor for conformity to him; if you do not converse with him in his ordinances, and if you do not make it the great business of your lives to please him by keeping his commandments.

*First,* The love of God is not in you, if the native enmity of your hearts against him has not been subdued. This will appear evident to every one that believes the Scripture account of human nature, in its present degenerate state. By nature we are “children of wrath;” and certainly the children of wrath cannot be the lovers of God, while such. “That which is born of the flesh, is flesh,” and they savor of the flesh, or, as we render it, “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” And hence it is, that “they

that are in the flesh cannot please God." St. Paul gives this character of the Colossians, in their natural state; and there is no reason to confine it to them: that they "were some time alienated and enemies in their minds by wicked works." In short, it is evident from the uniform tenor of the gospel, that it is a dispensation for reconciling enemies and disaffected rebels to God.

The authority of Scripture must be sufficient evidence to us, who call ourselves Christians. But this is not all the evidence we have in this case. This is a sensible matter of fact and experience. For I appeal to all of you that have the least self-acquaintance, whether you are not conscious that your temper ever since you can remember, and consequently your *natural* temper, has habitually been indisposed and disaffected, or, which is the same, lukewarm and indifferent, towards the blessed God; whether you have had the same delight in him and his service as in many other things; whether your earliest affections fixed upon him with all the reverence and endearment of a filial heart. You cannot but know the answer to such inquiries will be against you, and convince you that you are by nature enemies to the God that made you, however much you have flattered yourselves to the contrary.

Now, it is most evident, that since you are by nature enemies to God, your natural enmity to him must be subdued; or, in the language of the New Testament, you must be reconciled to him before you can be lovers of him. And have you ever felt such a change of temper? I will not say that every one who has experienced this is *assured* that it is a real sufficient change, and that he is now a sincere lover of God; but this I will say, and this is obvious to common sense, that every one who has experienced this, is assured that he has felt a great change of some kind or other, and that his temper towards God is not the same now as it once was. This, therefore, may be a decisive evidence to you. If divine grace has never changed your temper towards God, but you continue still the same, you may be sure the love of God is not in you. And if this change has been wrought, you have felt it. It was *preceded* by a glaring conviction of your enmity, and the utmost horror and detestation of yourselves upon the account of it. It was *attended* with affecting views of the attractive excellences of God, and of your obligations to him; and with

those tender and affectionate emotions of heart towards him, which the passion of love always includes. And it was *followed* with a cheerful universal dedication of yourselves to God and his service. And does conscience (for to that I now address) speak in your favor in this inquiry? Listen to its voice as the voice of God.

*Secondly*, It is evident that ye have not the love of God in you, if your thoughts and affections do not fix upon him with affectionate endearment above all other things. This is so obvious to common sense, that I need not take up your time with Scripture quotations; for you would not have the face to profess to a person that you loved him, if in the mean time you have told him that he had little or no share in your thoughts and affections. You know by experience your affectionate thoughts will eagerly pursue the object of your love over wide-extended countries and oceans, and that in proportion to the degree of your love. Now if *every* degree of love will engage a proportionable degree of your affectionate thoughts, can you imagine that you may love God in the *highest* degree, and yet hardly ever have one affectionate thought of him? And is it not as evident to some of you, as almost any thing you know of yourselves, that your affectionate thoughts are not frequently fixed upon the blessed God? Nay; are you not conscious that your thoughts fly off from this object, and pursue a thousand other things with more eagerness and pleasure? Do you not know that you can give your hearts a loose for days and weeks together, to pursue some favorite creature, without once calling them off to think seriously and affectionately upon the ever-blessed God. You may have many commendable qualities—you may have many splendid appearances of virtue—you may have done many actions materially good; but it is evident, to a demonstration, that the love of God, the first principle and root of all true religion and virtue, is not in you.

*Thirdly*, The love of God is not in you, unless you give him and his interests the preference above all other things.

If you love God at all *in sincerity*, you love him *above all*. And as the consequence of this, that if you love him at all, you will give him and his interests the preference before all things that may come in competition with him. You will cleave, with a pious obstinacy, to that which he enjoins

upon you, whatever be the consequence; and you will cheerfully resign all your other interests, however dear, when they clash with his.

I beg you would examine yourselves by this text; for here lies the dangerous delusion of multitudes. Multitudes find it easy to flatter themselves that they love God above all creatures, while, in the mean time, they will hardly part with any thing for his sake that their own imaginary interest recommends to them. But this is made the decisive test by Christ himself. "If any man come unto me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." By hating these dear relatives, and even life itself, Jesus does not mean positive hatred; for in a subordinate degree it is our duty to love them; but he means, that every sincere disciple of his, must act *as if* he hated all these, when they come in competition with his infinitely dearer Lord and Saviour; that is, he must part with them all, as we do with things that are hateful to us. This was, in fact, the effect of this love in St. Paul. "What things were gain to me, those," says he, "I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have *actually suffered the loss of all things*, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

Although this severe trial should never come in your way, yet from your conduct in lesser trials, you may judge how you would behave in greater. Therefore, inquire, when the pleasures of sin and your duty to God interfere, which do you part with? When the will of God and your own will clash, which do you obey? When the pleasing of God and the pleasing of men come in competition, which do you choose? When you must deny yourself or deny your Saviour, which do you submit to? What is your habitual conduct in such trying circumstances? Do you in such cases give to God and his interests the preference in your practice? If not, your pretended love is reprobated, and appears to be counterfeit.

*Fourthly*, The love of God is not in you, if you do not labor for conformity to him.

Conformity to him is at once the duty and the peculiar character of every sincere lover of God. "Be ye holy, as I am holy," is a duty repeatedly enjoined; and all the heirs

of glory are characterized as being "conformed to the image of God's dear Son." If we love him, nothing will satisfy us till we awake in his likeness. Now, my brethren, does your love stand this test? Have you been renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after the image of him that created you? And is it the honest endeavor of your life to be holy in all manner of conversation, holy as God is holy? Since your conformity to him consists in holiness, let me beg you to inquire again, Do you delight in holiness? Is it the great business of your life to improve in it? And are your deficiencies the burden of your spirits and matter of daily lamentation and repentance concerning yourselves, that this is not your habitual character, and, consequently, that the love of God is not in you?

*Fifthly*, You have not the love of God in you if you do not delight to converse with him in his ordinances.

I need not tell you that friends are fond of interviews and delight in each others' company. Now God has been so condescending as to represent his ordinances as so many places of interviews for his people, where they may meet with him, or, in the Scripture phrase, *draw near* to him, appear before him, and carry on a spiritual intercourse with him. Hence it is that they delight in his ordinances; that they love to pray, to hear, to meditate, to commemorate the death of Christ, and to draw near to the throne of grace in all the ways in which it is accessible. These appear to them not only duties but privileges—exalted and delightful privileges, which sweeten their pilgrimage through this wilderness and sometimes transforms it into a paradise. Now will you, my brethren, stand this test? Have you found it good for you to draw near to God in these institutions? Or are you not indisposed and disaffected to them? Do not some of you generally neglect them? or is not your attendance upon them an insipid, spiritless formality? Have not some of you prayerless closets, prayerless families? And if you attend upon public worship once a week, is it not rather that you may observe an old custom, that you may see and be seen, or that you may transact some temporal business, than that you may converse with God in his ordinances? In short, is it not evident, that devotion is not your delight, and, consequently, not your daily practice

*Sixthly*, The love of God is not in you, unless you make it the great business of your lives to please him by keeping his commandments. It is natural to us to seek to please those we love, and to obey them with pleasure if they be invested with authority to command us. If you love God you will habitually keep his commandments, and that with pleasure and delight. But if you can habitually indulge yourselves in willful disobedience in any one instance, or if you yield obedience through constraint, it is demonstration against you that you are destitute of his love. This is as plain as any thing in the whole Bible. "If ye love me," says Christ himself, "keep my commandments." "If any man love me, he will keep my words; he that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings." "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." "This is the love of God," says St. John, "that ye keep his commandments," and "his commandments are not grievous." Keeping his commandments is not grievous when love is the principle. You see, my brethren, that obedience, cheerful, unconstrained obedience, is the grand test of your love to God. There is more stress laid upon this in the Word of God, than, perhaps, upon any other, and therefore you should regard it the more. Now recollect, is there not at least some favorite sin which you willfully and knowingly indulge yourselves in? And are there not some self-denying, mortifying duties which you dare to omit? And yet you pretend that you love God! You pretend that you love him, though your love is directly opposite to this grand test which himself has appointed to try it. You may have your excuses and evasions; you may plead the goodness of your hearts, even when your practice is bad; you may plead the strength of temptation, the frailty of your nature, and a thousand other things; but plead what you will, this is an eternal truth, that if you habitually and willfully live in disobedience to the commandments of God you are entirely destitute of his love.

And now, upon a review of the whole, what do you think of yourselves? Does the love of God dwell in you, or does it not? that is, do those characters of the want of love belong to you, or do they not? If they do, it is all absurdity and delusion for you to flatter yourselves that you love him; for it is all one as if you should say, "Lord, I love thee, though my native enmity against thee still re-



mains unsubdued. I love thee above all, though my thoughts and affections are scattered among other things, and never fixed upon thee. I love thee above all, though I prefer a thousand things to thee and thy interest." And will God, do you think, accept that as supreme love to him which will not pass current for common friendship among mortals? Is he capable of being imposed upon by such inconsistent pretensions? No: "be not deceived; God is not mocked." Draw the peremptory conclusion, without any hesitation, that the love of God does not dwell in you.

And if this be the case, what do you think of it? What a soul have you within you, that cannot love God—that cannot love supreme excellence, and all-perfect beauty—that cannot love the origin and author of all the excellence and beauty that you see scattered among the works of his hands—that cannot love your prime benefactor and gracious Redeemer—that cannot love him "in whom you live, and move, and have your being; in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways," and who alone is the proper happiness for your immortal spirit—that can love a parent, a child, a friend, with all their infirmities about them, but cannot love God—that can love the world—that can love sensual and even guilty enjoyments, pleasures, riches, and honors, and yet cannot love God!—that can love every thing that is lovely but God, who is infinitely lovely—that can love wisdom, justice, veracity, goodness, clemency in creatures, were they attended with many imperfections, and yet cannot love God, where they all centre and shine in the highest perfection!

If love be the fulfilling of the whole law, then the want of love must be the breach of the whole law. You break it all at one blow, and your life is but one continued, uniform, uninterrupted series of sinning. The want of love takes away all spirit and life from all your religious services, and diffuses a malignity through all you do. Without the love of God you may pray, you may receive the sacrament, you may perform the outward part of every duty of religion; you may be just and charitable, and do no man any harm; you may be sober and temperate; but without the love of God you cannot do one action that is truly and formally good and acceptable to God.

Now I appeal to yourselves, is not this a very danger-

ous situation? While you are destitute of the love of God can you flatter yourselves that you are fit for heaven? What! fit for the region of love! fit to converse with a holy God, and live for ever in his presence? Fit to spend an eternity in his service! Can you be fit for these things while you have no love to him? Certainly not; you must perceive yourselves fit for destruction, and fit for nothing else.

And now, what must you do, when this shocking conviction has forced itself upon you? Must you now give up all hopes? Must you now despair of ever having the love of God kindled in your hearts? Yes; you may, you must give up all hopes; you must despair, if you go on, as you have hitherto done, thoughtless, careless, and presumptuous in sin, and in the neglect of the means which God has appointed to implant and cherish this divine, heaven-born principle in your souls. This is the direct course towards remediless, everlasting despair. But if you now admit the conviction of your miserable condition; if you endeavor immediately to break off from sin, and from every thing that tends to harden you in it; if you turn your minds to serious meditation; if you prostrate yourselves as humble, earnest petitioners before God, and continue instant in prayer; if you use every other means of grace ordained for this purpose; I say, if you take this course, there is hope—there is hope! There is as much hope for you as there once was for any one of that glorious company of saints, now in heaven, while they were as destitute of the love of God as any of you. And will you not take these pains to save your own souls from death? Many have taken more, to save the souls of others, and you have taken a great deal to obtain the transitory, perishing enjoyments of this life. And will you take no pains for your own immortal interests? O let me prevail, let even a stranger prevail upon you, to lay out your endeavors upon this grand concern. I must insist upon it, and can take no denial. This is not the peculiarity of a party I am urging upon you. Is it Presbyterianism, or new light, that tells you you cannot be saved without the love of God? Churchmen and dissenters, Protestants and Papists, nay, Jews, Mahometans, and pagans agree in this, that the love of God is essential to all true religion; and if you entertain hopes of heaven without it, the com-

mon sense of mankind is against you. Therefore, O seek to have the love of God shed abroad in your hearts.

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### XXXIII.

#### THE OBJECTS, GROUNDS, AND EVIDENCES OF THE HOPE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

“The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death.”—*Prov. xiv. 32.*

To creatures that are placed here a few years upon trial for an everlasting state, it is of the greatest importance how they make their departure hence. The gloomy hour of death is nature's last extremity; it stands in need of some effectual support, and that support can proceed from nothing then present, but only from reviews and prospects: from the review of past life, so spent as to answer the end of life, and from the prospect of a happy immortality to follow upon this last struggle.

Now men will love the world according to their conduct in it, and be happy or miserable hereafter according to their improvement of the present state of trial. “The wicked is driven away in his wickedness,” says the wisest of men, “but the righteous hath hope in his death.” “The wicked is driven away in his wickedness”—he dies as he lived: he lived in wickedness, and in wickedness he dies. His wickedness remains with him, when his earthly enjoyments, his friends, and all created comforts leave him for ever. The guilt of his wickedness lies heavy upon him, like a mountain of lead, ready to sink him into the depth of misery. And the principles of wickedness which he indulged in his life still live within him, even in the agonies of death; nay, they now arrive at a dreadful immortality, and produce an eternal hell in his breast. He leaves behind him not only all his earthly comforts, but all the little remains of goodness he seemed to have, while under the restraints of divine grace, and he carries nothing but his wickedness along with him. With this dreadful attendant he must pass to the tribunal of his Judge. To

leave his earthly all behind him, and die in the agonies of dissolving nature—this is terrible. But to die *in* his wickedness—this is infinitely the most terrible of all!

He once flattered himself, that though he lived in wickedness, he should not die in it. He adopted many resolutions to amend and forsake his wickedness, towards the close of life, or upon a death-bed. But how is he disappointed? After all his promising purposes and hopes, he died as he lived, in wickedness. This is generally the case of veterans in sin. They are resolving and re-resolving to reform all their lives, but after all they die the same. They purpose to prepare for death and eternity, but they have always some objections against the present time. They have always something else to do to-day, and therefore they put off this work till to-morrow—to-morrow comes, and instead of reforming, they die in their wickedness—to-morrow comes and they are in hell. Oh! that the loiterers of this generation would take warning from the ruin of thousands of their unhappy ancestors who have perished by the dread experiment! Hearers, are not some of you in danger of splitting upon the same rock? Are not some of you conscious that if you should die this moment you would die in your wickedness? And yet you have very little fear of dying in this manner. No; you purpose yet to become good, and prepare for death before you die. So thousands purposed as strongly as you, who are now in hell. The time of repentance was still a *hereafter* to them, till it was irrecoverably past. They were snatched away unexpectedly by the sudden hand of death, and knew not where they were till they found themselves in eternity, and thus they had no time for this work; or their thoughts were so much engrossed with their pains that they had no composure for it; or they found their sins, by long indulgence, were become invincibly strong, their hearts judicially hardened, and all the influences of divine grace withdrawn, so that the work became impossible. And thus they died in their sins.

“The wicked is *driven* away in his wickedness”—*driven* away in spite of all his reluctance. Let him cling to life never so fast, yet he must go. All his struggles are vain, and cannot add one moment to his days. Indeed, the wicked have so little taste for heaven, and are so much in love with this world, that if they leave it at all, they must

be *driven* out of it—driven out of it whether they will or not. When they hope for heaven, they do in reality consider it but a shift or a refuge when they can no longer live in this their favorite world. They do not at all desire it, in comparison with this world. But they must eventually let go their hold. They must be driven away, like chaff before the whirlwind—driven away into the regions of misery—into the regions of misery, I say; for certainly the happiness of heaven was never intended for such as are so disaffected to it, and that prefer this wretched world, with all its cares and sorrows, before heaven itself.

This is the certain doom of the wicked; but who are they? Though the character be so common among us, yet there are few that will own it. It is an odious character, and therefore few will take it to themselves. But there is no room for flattery in the case, and, therefore, we must inquire who are the wicked? I answer, all that habitually indulge themselves in the practice of any known wickedness—all that neglect the God that made them, and the Saviour that bought them—all that live in the willful omission of the known duties of religion and morality—all that have never known by experience what it is to repent and believe; in a word, all that are in their natural state, and have never felt a change of spirit and practice, so great and important that it may be called, with propriety, a new birth, or a new creation—all such, without exception, are wicked. They are wicked in reality and in the sight of God, however righteous they may be in their own eyes, or however unblamably some of them may conduct themselves before men. And are there not some such in this assembly? Is this assembly so glorious and happy a rarity as not to have one wicked person in it? Alas! I am afraid the most generous charity cannot indulge such a hope. May you make an impartial inquiry into a matter so important! and if you find the character of the wicked yours, believe it, you must share in the dreadful doom of the wicked if you continue such.

But I proceed to that part of my text, which I intend to make the principal subject of this discourse. “The righteous hath hope in his death.” To have hope in death is to have hope in the most desperate extremity of human nature. Then the spirits flag and the heart sinks, and all the sanguine hopes of blooming health and prosperity

vanish. Then all hopes from things below—all expectations of happiness from all things under the sun, are cut off. All hopes of escaping the arrest of death are fled when the iron grasp of its cold hand is felt. Even in these hopeless circumstances the righteous man hath hope. The foundation of his hope must be well laid, it must be firm indeed when it can stand such shocks as these. It is evident the objects of this hope must lie beyond the grave; for on this side of it all is hopeless. His friends and physician despair of him, and he despairs of himself as to all the prospects of the mortal life. But he does not despair of a happier life in another state; no, he hopes to live and be happy, when the agonies of death are over; and this hope bears him up under them. This hope I intend to consider as to its objects, its grounds and evidences, and its various degrees and limitations.

*First*, I am to consider the objects of the righteous man's hope in death. And here I shall only mention his hope of support in death—of the immortality of the soul—of the resurrection of his body—and of perfect happiness in heaven.

In the first place, The righteous man has a humble hope of *support in death*. He has repeatedly intrusted himself into the faithful hands of an almighty Saviour for life and death, for time and eternity, and he humbly hopes his Saviour will not forsake him now—now, when he must need his assistance. This was St. Paul's support under the prospect of his last hour: "I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that I have committed unto him against that day." As if he had said, finding my own weakness, I have committed my all into another hand; and I have committed it to one whose ability and faithfulness have been tried by thousands, as well as myself; and therefore I am confident he will keep the sacred depositum, and never suffer it to be injured or lost. This was also the support of the Psalmist; "Though I walk," says he, "through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." Yea, it was upon this support St. Paul leaned when he braved death, in that triumphant language, "Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No; in all these things we are more than conquerors,

through him that loved us; for, I am persuaded," says he, "that death,"—that separates our souls and bodies—that separates friend from friend—that separates us from all our earthly comforts, and breaks all our connections with this world, even death itself "shall never separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." What a faithful friend, what a powerful guardian is this, who stands by his people, and bears them up in their last extremity, and makes them more than conquerors in the struggle with the all-conquering enemy of mankind! How peculiar a happiness is this, to be able to enjoy the comfort of hope, in the wreck of human nature! How sweet to lean a dying head upon the kind arm of an almighty Saviour! how sweet to intrust a departing soul into his faithful hand! O may you and I enjoy this blessed support in a dying hour! and may we make it our great business in life to secure it! In that gloomy hour, our friends may weep around our beds; but they can afford us no help—no hope! But Jesus can, as thousands have known by experience. Then he can bear home his promises upon the heart; then he can communicate his love, which is better than life, and by his holy Spirit bear up and encourage the sinking soul! Blessed Jesus! what friend can compare to thee?

"Jesus can make a dying bed  
 Feel soft as downy pillows are;  
 While on his breast I lean my head,  
 And breathe my life out sweetly there."—WATTS.

But, secondly, *The immortality of the soul* is an object of the righteous man's hope. He is not, like Bolingbroke and other infidels, who, having made it their interest that there should be no future state, consider immortality as an object of fear, and therefore try to reason themselves out of the belief of it, and choose to ingulf themselves in the abyss of annihilation. It is not the force of argument that drives infidels to this. Demonstration and certainty were never so much as pretended for it. And after all the preposterous pains they take to work themselves up to the gloomy hope, that when they die they shall escape punishment by the loss of all the sweets of existence; yet, if I may venture to guess at and divulge the secret, they are often alarmed with the dreadful *may-be* of a future state. In their solemn and thoughtful moments their hope wavers, and they fear they shall not be more happy than a

dog or a stone when they die. Unhappy creatures! how are they to be pitied! and were it not for the universal benevolence of that religion which they despise, how justly would they be contemned and abhorred! They are men of pleasure now; they are merry, jovial, and gay, and give a loose to all their licentious passions and appetites. But how short, how sordid, how brutal the pleasure! how gloomy, how low, how shocking their highest hope! Their highest hope is to be as much nothing in a few years or moments hence as they were ten thousand years ago. They are men of pleasure, who would lose all their pleasures if they were angels in heaven, but would lose none of them if they were swine in the mire. Blessed be God, this gloomy hope is not the hope which the religion of Jesus inspires. No, "He hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel." He opens to the departing soul the endless prospects of a future state of being—a state where death shall no more make such havoc and desolations among the works of God, but where every thing is vital and immortal. Hence the righteous man hath hope in his death. He has not made it best for him that his religion should be false. He is not driven to seek for shelter in the gulf of annihilation, nor to combat with the blessed hopes which reason and revelation unitedly inspire as his worst enemies. He wishes and hopes to live for ever, that he may for ever enjoy the generous pleasure of serving his God, and doing good to his fellow-creatures. This is not a pleasing error, but a pleasing truth; nay, I had almost said, a pleasing demonstration. Such it proves to the righteous man; for oh! how pleasing to the offspring of the dust to claim immortality as his inalienable inheritance! How transporting to a soul just ready to take its flight from the quivering lips of the dissolving clay to look forward through everlasting ages of felicity and call them all its own! to defy the stroke of death, and smile at the impotent malice of the gaping grave! O what a happiness, what a privilege is this! and this is what the righteous man in some measure enjoys.

Thirdly, The righteous in death has the hope of the *resurrection of the body*. This glorious hope we owe entirely to revelation. The ancient philosophers could never discover it by their reason; and when it was discovered by a superior light, they ridiculed it as the hope



of worms. But this is a reviving hope to the righteous in the agonies of death. Those old intimate friends, the soul and body, that must now part with so much reluctance, shall again meet and be united in inseparable bonds. The righteous man does not deliver up his body as the eternal prey of worms, or the irredeemable prisoner of the grave; but his hope looks forward to the glorious dreadful morning of the resurrection, and sees the bonds of death bursting; the prison of the grave flying open; the mouldering dust collected, and formed into a human body once more—a human body, most gloriously improved. This prospect affords a very agreeable support in death, and enables the righteous to say with Job, though I die, “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory. O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? This is an illustrious victory indeed—a victory over the conqueror of conquerors, and of all the sons of Adam. And yet thus victorious shall the frail dying believer be made over that terror of human nature.

Fourthly, *The perfect and everlasting happiness of heaven* is an object of the righteous man's hope in death. He hopes to drop all his sins and their attendant train of sorrows behind him, and to be perfectly holy, and consequently happy, for ever. He hopes to see his God and Saviour, and to spend a happy eternity in society with him and in his service. He hopes to join the company of angels and of his fellow-saints of the human race. He hopes to improve in knowledge, in holiness, and in capacities for action and enjoyment, in an endless gradation. He hopes to “see the face of God in righteousness; and to be satisfied when he awakes with his image.” Oh, what a glorious hope is this! This has made many a soul welcome death with open arms. This has made them “desirous to be with Christ, which is far better.” Indeed, without this, immortality would be an object of terror, and not of hope; the prospect would be insupportably dreadful. For who can bear the thought of an immortal duration spent in an eternal banishment from God and all

happiness, and in the sufferance of the most exquisite pain! But a happy immortality, what can charm us more!

Having thus shown you some of the principal objects of a good man's hope in death, I now proceed,

*Secondly*, To show you what are the grounds and evidences of such a hope.

It is evident it is not every kind of hope that is intended in my text; it is a hope peculiar to the righteous; and it is a hope that shall never be disappointed or put to shame. Job speaks of the hope of the hypocrite; and one greater than Job tells us, that many will carry their false hopes with them to the tribunal of their Judge. When he assures them he never knew them, they hardly think him in earnest: "Strange! dost thou not know us? Have we not eat and drunk in thy presence, and hast thou not taught in our streets?" St. Paul also tells us, that while some are crying peace and safety, and apprehending no danger, then sudden destruction cometh upon them. This is likewise evidently confirmed by observation: for how often do we find in fact, that many not only hope for immortality, but for immortal happiness, who give no evidence at all of their title to it, but many of the contrary? Here, then, is a very proper occasion for self-examination. Since there are so many false hopes among mankind, we should solicitously inquire whether ours will stand the test. To assist us in this inquiry let us consider what are the peculiar grounds and evidences of the righteous man's hope.

Now it will be universally granted, that God best knows whom he will admit into heaven, and whom he will exclude—that it is his province to appoint the ground of our hope, and that constitution according to which we may be saved—that none can be saved but those who have the characters which he has declared essentially necessary to salvation, and that none shall perish who have those characters. And hence it follows, that the righteous man's hope is entirely regulated by the divine constitution, and the declarations of that holy word which alone gives us certain information in this case. This, I say, is the grand test of a true hope: it expects what God has promised; and it expects it in the way and manner established by him. It is a humble submissive hope: it does not expect happiness, as it were, in spite of him who

is the author of it; but it expects happiness just in the manner which he has appointed.

Now what has God appointed to be the ground or foundation of our hope? St. Paul will tell you, "No other foundation can any man lay than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ. God himself proclaims, by Isaiah, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." Jesus Christ, then, is the only sure ground of hope, appointed by God himself. Or, in other words, the free mercy of God, which can be communicated only through Jesus Christ, or for his sake, is the only sure ground of hope for a sinner. It is upon this, and not upon his own righteousness, that the righteous man dares to build his hope. He is sensible that every other foundation is but a quicksand. He cannot venture to hope on account of his own merit, either in whole or in part. It is in the mercy, the mere mercy of God through Jesus Christ, that he trusts. He is gratefully sensible, indeed, that God has wrought many good things in him, and enabled him to perform many good actions; but these are not the ground of his hope, but the evidence of it; I mean, he does not make these any part of his justifying righteousness; but only evidences that he has an interest in the righteousness of Christ, which alone can procure him the blessings he hopes for. Which leads me to add,

That the evidence of this hope is, the righteous man's finding, upon a thorough trial, that the characters which God has declared essentially necessary to salvation do belong to him. Has God declared that the regenerate, that believers and penitents, that they who are made holy in heart and life, and none but such, shall be saved? Then is my hope true and sure when I hope for salvation, because I find these characters belong to me. I know the God of truth will keep his word; and therefore, poor and guilty and unworthy as I am, it is no presumption for me to hope for everlasting happiness from him, if I find myself to be such as he has promised everlasting happiness to.

This, brethren, is the only valid evidence of a good hope. And is this the evidence that encourages you in this important affair? Alas! the world is overrun with delusive hopes, that are so far from being supported by evidence that they are supported in direct opposition to

it. God has declared, in the plainest and strongest terms, that no drunkard, nor swearer, nor fornicator, nor any similar characters, shall inherit his kingdom; and yet what crowds of drunkards, swearers, fornicators, and the like, will maintain their hopes of heaven in spite of these declarations. He has declared, with the utmost solemnity, that "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." And yet what multitudes presume to hope they shall enter there, though they still continue in their natural state, and have no evidence at all of their being born again? God has declared, that "except we repent, we shall all perish," like the infidel Jews; and that "he that believeth not shall be damned." And yet how many hope to be saved, though they have never felt the kindly relentings of ingenuous, evangelical repentance, nor the work of faith with power wrought upon their hearts? What can be more plain than that declaration, "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord?" And yet multitudes that hate holiness in their hearts hope to be saved as well as your precise and sanctified creatures as they call them. In short, the hopes of many are so far from being supported by the authority of the Scriptures, that they are supported only by the supposition of their being false. If the Scriptures be true, then they and their hopes must perish together; but if the Scriptures be false, then they have some chance to be saved, though it is but a very dull chance after all; for if they have to do with a lying, deceitful Deity, they have no ground at all of any confidence in him; they must be anxiously uncertain what they should hope, or what they should fear, from his hands. Hence you see that we should vindicate the truth of God in these declarations, even by way of self-defence; for if the divine veracity fail in one instance, it becomes doubtful in every instance, and we have nothing left to depend upon. If they may be saved, whom God has declared shall perish, then, by a parity of reason, they may perish whom he has characterized as the heirs of salvation; and consequently there is no certainty that any will be saved at all. Thus sinners, while establishing their own false hopes, remove all ground of hope, and leave us in the most dreadful suspense.

Brethren! let us regulate our hopes according to his declaration, who has the objects of our hope entirely at his

disposal. When we pretend to improve upon divine constitutions, or, as we think, turn them in our favor, we do in reality but ruin them, and turn them against ourselves. Make that, and that only, the ground and evidence of your hope which God has made such. His constitution will stand, and you shall be judged according to it, whether you will or not. Do not make that the ground or evidence of your hope which he has not so made, or which he has pronounced the characteristic of the heirs of hell. You hope, perhaps, to be saved, though you live in the willful neglect of some known duty, or in the willful practice of some known sin. But has God given you any reason for such a hope? You know he has not, but the contrary. You hope he will show mercy to you, because his nature is mercy and love, and he is the compassionate Father of his creatures, or because Christ has died for sinners. But has he given you any assurances that because he is merciful, because he is so compassionate a Father, because Christ has died for sinners, therefore he will save you in your present condition? You hope to be saved, because you are as good as the generality, or perhaps better than many around you. But has God made this a sufficient ground of hope? Has he told you that to be fashionably religious is to be sufficiently religious, or that the way of the multitude leads to life? This may be your hope; but is it the authentic declaration of eternal Truth? You know it is not, but quite the contrary. I might add sundry other instances of unscriptural hope; but these may suffice as a specimen. And I shall lay down this general rule, which will enable yourselves to make further discoveries, namely, Those hopes are all false which are opposite to the declarations of God in his word. Certainly this needs no proof to such as believe the divine authority of the Scriptures.

*Thirdly,* To consider the various degrees and limitations of a good hope in death.

A good hope is always supported by evidence; and, according to the degree of evidence, is the degree of hope. When the evidence is clear and undoubted, then it rises to a joyful assurance; but when the evidence is dark and doubtful, then it wavers and is weakened by dismal fears and jealousies. Now, I have told you already, that the evidence of a good hope is a person's discovering, by impartial examination, that those characters which God has

pronounced the inseparable characters of those that shall be saved, do belong to him; or that he has those graces and virtues which are, at once, his preparation for heaven and the evidence of his title to it. Now different believers, and even the same persons at different times, have very different degrees of this evidence. And the reason of this difference is, that sundry causes are necessary to make the evidence clear and satisfactory; and when any of these are wanting, or do not concur in a proper degree, then the evidence is dark and doubtful. In order to be fully satisfied of the truth and reality of our graces, it is necessary we should arrive at some eminence in them; otherwise, like a jewel in a heap of rubbish, they may be so blended with corruption that it may be impossible to discern them with certainty. Hence the weak Christian, unless he have unusual supplies of divine grace, enters the valley of the shadow of death with fear and trembling; whereas he who has made great attainments in holiness enters it with courage, or perhaps with transports of joy. It is also necessary to a full assurance of hope, that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God, or that he excites our graces to such a lively exercise as to render them visible by their effects, and distinguishable from all other principles. And, therefore, if a sovereign God see fit to withhold his influences from the dying saint, his graces will languish, his past experiences will appear confused and doubtful, and consequently his mind will be tossed with anxious fears and jealousies. But if he be pleased to pour out his Spirit upon him, it will be like a ray of heavenly light to point out his way through the dark shades of death, and open to him the transporting prospects of eternal day that lie just before him.

Another thing that occasions a difference in this case is, that an assured hope is the result of frequent self-examination; and, therefore, the Christian that has been diligent in this duty, and all his life been laboring to make all sure against his last hour, generally enjoys the happy fruits of his past diligence, and enters the harbor of rest with sails full of the fair gales of hope; but he that has been negligent in this duty, is tossed with billows and tempests of doubts and fears, and is afraid of being shipwrecked in sight of the port.

It is also necessary to the enjoyment of a comfortable

hope in death, that the mind be in some measure calm and rational, not clouded with the glooms of melancholy or thrown into a delirium or insensibility by the violence of the disorder. And according as this is or is not the case, a good man may enjoy or not enjoy the comforts of hope.

These remarks will help us to discover with what limitations we are to understand my text, "The righteous hath hope in his death." It does not mean that every righteous man has the same degree of hope, or that no righteous man is distressed with fears and doubts in his last moments. But it means, in the

First place, That every righteous man has substantial reason to hope, whether he clearly see it or not. His eternal all is really safe; and as all the false hopes of the wicked cannot save *him*, so all his fears cannot destroy *him*, though they may afford him some transient pangs of horror. He is in the possession of a faithful God, who will take care of him, and nothing shall pluck him out of his hands. He sees fit to leave some of his people in their last moments to conflict at once with death and with their more dreadful fears; but even this will issue in their real advantage. And what an agreeable surprise will it be to such trembling souls to find death has unexpectedly transported them to heaven!

Secondly, When it is said, "the righteous hath hope in his death," it means, that good men, in common, do, in fact, enjoy a comfortable hope. In the greatest agonies of fear and suspicion, the trembling soul has still some glimmering hope to support it; and its gracious Saviour never abandons it entirely. And it is the more common case of the saints to enjoy more comfort and confidence in death than they were wont to do in life. Many that in life were wont to shudder at every danger, and fly at the sound of a shaking leaf, have been emboldened at death to meet the king of terrors, and to welcome his fiercest assault. The soldiers of Jesus Christ have generally left this mortal state in triumph, though this is not a universal rule. And who would not wish and pray for such an exit? that he may do honor to his God and Saviour and to his religion with his last breath; that he may discover to the world that religion can bear him up, when all other supports prove a broken reed; and that his last words may sow the seeds of piety in the hearts of those that surround

his dying bed; this every good man should pray and wish for, though it must be left in the hands of a sovereign God to do as he pleases.

Thirdly, When it is said, "the righteous hath hope in his death," it may mean, that the hope which he hath in death shall be accomplished. It is not a flattering, delusive dream, but a glorious reality, and, therefore, deserves the name. His "hope shall not make him ashamed," but shall be fulfilled and even exceeded.

This is the glorious peculiarity of the good man's hope. Many carry their hope with them to death, and will not give it up till they give up the ghost. But as it is ungrounded, it will end in disappointment and confusion. And oh! into what a terrible consternation will it strike them, to find themselves surrounded with flames when they expected to land on the blissful coasts of paradise! To find their judge and their conscience accusing and condemning, instead of acquitting them!—to find their souls plunged into hell under a strong guard of devils, instead of being conducted to heaven by a glorious convoy of angels!—to feel the pangs and horrors of everlasting despair succeed in an instant to the flattering prospect of delusive hope! Oh! what a shocking disappointment, what a terrible change is this!

Therefore now, my brethren, make sure work. Do not venture your souls upon the broken reed of false hope. But "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." Now you may make a profitable discovery of your mistake; if your hope is ungrounded, you have now time and means to obtain a good hope through grace. But then it will be too late; your only chance, if I may so speak, will be lost, and you must for ever stand by the consequences. Why will you not labor to secure so important an interest, beyond all rational possibility of a disappointment? Have you any thing else to do which is of greater, of equal, or comparable importance? Do you think you will approve of this neglect upon a dying bed, or in the eternal world?

Let this subject strengthen the hope of such of you, whose hope will stand the Scripture test. You must die, 'tis true; your bodies must be the food of worms; but be of good courage; your almighty and immortal Saviour will support you in the hour of your extremity, and confer im-



mortality upon you. He will also quicken your mortal bodies, and reunite them to your souls, and make your whole persons as happy as your natures will admit.

Blessed be God, you are safe from all the fatal consequences of the original apostasy and your own personal sin. Death, the last enemy, which seems to survive all the rest, shall not triumph over you; but even death itself shall die, and be no more. Oh! happy people! who is like unto you, a people saved by the Lord.

Let me now conclude with a melancholy contrast; I mean the wretched condition of the wicked in a dying hour. Some of them, indeed, have a hope, a strong hope, which the clearest evidence cannot wrest from them. This may afford them a little delusive support in death; but, upon the whole, it is their plague; it keeps them from spending their last moments in seeking after a well-grounded hope; and as soon as their souls are separated from their bodies, it exposes them to the additional confusion of a dreadful disappointment. Others of them lived like beasts, and like beasts they die; that is, as thoughtless, as stupid, about their eternal state, as the brutes that perish. Oh! what a shocking sight is the death-bed of such a stupid sinner! Others, who, with a great deal of pains, make a shift to keep their consciences easy in the gay hours of health and prosperity, when death and eternity stare them in the face, find this sleeping lion rousing, roaring, and tearing them to pieces. They had a secret consciousness before that they had no ground for a comfortable hope; but they suppressed the conviction and would not regard it. But now it revives, and they tremble with a fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation. This is especially the usual doom of such as lived under a faithful ministry, and have had a clear light of the gospel, and just notions of divine things forced upon their unwilling minds. It is not so easy for them, as for others, to flatter themselves with false hopes, in the honest, impartial hour of death. Their knowledge is a magazine of arms for their consciences to use to torment them. Oh! in what horrors do some of them die! and how much of hell do they feel upon earth!

Nay, this is sometimes the doom of some infidel profligates, who flattered themselves they could contemn the bugbear of a future state, even in death. They thought

they had conquered truth and conscience, but they find themselves mistaken—they find these are insuppressible, victorious, immortal; and that, though with mountains overwhelmed, they will one day burst out like the smothered fires of *Ætna*, visibly bright and tormenting. Of this the celebrated Dr. Young, whose inimitable pen embellishes whatever it touches, gives us a most melancholy instance, related in the true spirit of tragedy—an instance of a youth of noble birth, fine accomplishments, and large estate, who imbibed the infidel principles of deism, so fashionable in high life, and debauched himself with sensual indulgences; who, by his unkind treatment broke the heart of an amiable wife, and by his prodigality squandered away his estate, and thus disinherited his only son. Hear the tragical story from the author's own words.

“The death-bed of a profligate is next in horror to that abyss to which it leads. It has the most of hell that is visible on earth, and he that has seen it has more than faith, he has the evidence of sense to confirm him in his creed. I see it now! for who can forget it? Are there in it no flames and furies? You know not, then, what a scared imagination can figure—what a guilty heart can feel. How dismal is it! The two great enemies of soul and body, sickness and sin, sink and confound his friends, silence and darken the shocking scene. Sickness excludes the light of heaven, and sin excludes the blessed hope. Oh! double darkness! more than Egyptian! acutely to be felt! See! how he lies, a sad, deserted outcast, on a narrow isthmus, between time and eternity, for he is scarcely alive. Lashed and overwhelmed on one side, by the sense of sin, on the other by the dread of punishment! Beyond the reach of human help, and in despair of divine!

“His dissipated fortune, impoverished babe, and murdered wife lie heavy on him. The ghost of his murdered time, (for now no more is left,) all stained with folly and gashed with vice, haunts his distracted thought. Conscience, which long had slept, awakes, like a giant refreshed with wine, lays waste all his former thoughts and desires, and like a long deposed, now victorious prince, takes the severest revenges upon his bleeding heart. Its late soft whispers are thunder in his ears; and all means of grace rejected, exploded, ridiculed, are now the bolt that strikes him dead—dead even to the thoughts of death. In deeper

distress, despair of life is forgot. He lies a wretched wreck of man on the shore of eternity! and the next breath he draws blows him off into ruin.

"The sad evening before the death of that noble youth, I was there. No one was with him but his physician and an intimate whom he loved, and whom he had ruined by his infidel principles and debauched practices. At my coming in he said,

"'You and the physician are come too late. I have neither life nor hope. You would aim at miracles; you would raise the dead.'

"Heaven, I said, was merciful,—

"'Or I should not have been so deeply guilty. What has it not done to bless and save *me*? I have been too strong for Omnipotence! I have plucked down ruin.'

"I said, the blessed Redeemer—

"'Hold! hold! you wound me! That is the rock on which I split; I denied his name and his religion.'

"Refusing to hear anything from me, or take any thing from the physician, he lay silent, as far as sudden starts of pain would permit, till the clock struck. Then, with vehemence,

"'Oh, Time! Time! It is fit thou shouldst thus strike thy murderer to the heart. How art thou fled for ever? A month!—oh, for a single week! I ask not for years; though an age were too little for the much I have to do!'

"On my saying we could not do too much—that heaven was a blessed place,—

"'So much the worse. It is lost! it is lost! Heaven is to me the severest part of hell, as the loss of it is my greatest pain.'

"Soon after I proposed prayer.

"'Pray you that can. I never prayed; I cannot pray; nor need I. Is not heaven on my side already? It closes with my conscience. It but executes the sentence I pass upon myself. Its severest strokes but second my own.'

"His friend being much touched, even to tears, at this,—(who could forbear? I could not,)—with a most affectionate look, he said,

"'Keep those tears for thyself. I have undone thee.—Dost thou weep for me? That is cruel. What can pain me more?'

“Here his friend, too much affected, would have left him.

“‘No; stay. *Thou* still mayest hope;—therefore hear me. How madly have I talked! How madly hast thou listened and believed! But look upon my present state as a full answer to thee and to myself. This body is all weakness and pain; but my soul, as if strung up by torment to greater strength and spirit, is full powerful to reason—full mighty to suffer. And that which thus triumphs within the jaws of mortality, is, doubtless, immortal. And as for a Deity, nothing less than an Almighty could inflict what I feel.’

“I was about to congratulate this passive, involuntary confessor, on asserting the two prime articles of his creed, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, extorted by the rack of nature, when he thus, very passionately,

“‘No, no! Let me speak on. I have not long to speak.—My much-injured friend! My soul, as my body, lies in ruins, in scattered fragments of broken thought. Remorse for the past throws my thoughts on the future. Worse dread of the future strikes it back on the past. I turn and turn and find no ray. Didst thou feel half the mountain that is on me, thou wouldst struggle with the martyr for the stake and bless Heaven for the flames: that is not an everlasting flame; that is not an unquenchable fire.’

“How were we struck? Yet soon after still more. With an eye of distraction, with a face of despair, he cried out,

“‘My principles have poisoned my friend; my extravagance has beggared my boy; my unkindness has murdered my wife! And is there another hell? Oh! thou blasphemed yet most indulgent Lord God! hell is a refuge, if it hides me from thy frown.’

“Soon after his understanding failed. His terrified imagination uttered horrors not to be repeated or ever forgotten; and ere the sun (which, I hope, has seen but few like him) arose, the gay, young, noble, ingenious, accomplished, and most wretched Altamont expired.”

Is not this tragical instance a loud warning to us all, and especially to such of us as may be walking in the steps of this unhappy youth? “Men may live fools, but fools they cannot die.” Death will make them wise, and show them

their true interest, when it is too late to secure it. Ignorance and thoughtlessness, or the principles of infidelity, may make men live like beasts; but these will not enable them to die like beasts. May we live as candidates for immortality! May we now seek a well-established hope that will stand the severest trials! and may we labor to secure the protection of the Lord of life and death, who can be our sure support in the wreck of dissolving nature! May we live the life that we may die the death of the righteous, and find that dark valley a short passage into the world of bliss and glory! *Amen.*

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### XXXIV.

#### THE GUILT AND DOOM OF IMPENITENT HEARERS.

“By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.”—*Matt. xiii. 14.*

THIS is a tremendous threatening of long standing, first denounced by Jehovah himself in the days of Isaiah, and frequently cited by Christ and his apostles in the New Testament, as being still in force and capable of application to various parts of the world. It is a threatening from God, not that he would recall the commission of his ministers or remove them, but he would give them a commission in wrath, and continue their ministry as a judgment upon their hearers. It is a threatening, not of the loss of the means of salvation, but of their being continued as the occasions of more aggravated guilt and punishment; a threatening to those who have abused the means of grace; not that they shall attend upon them no more, but that they shall attend upon them, but receive no advantage from them; a threatening that they shall hear, that is, that their life and rational powers, the ministry of the word of God, and all things necessary for hearing, shall be continued to them; but by all their hearing they shall not understand any thing to a saving purpose. Their knowledge may be increased, and their heads filled with bright notions and speculations; but all their improvements will be of no solid

or lasting advantage to them; so that their hearing is equivalent to not hearing and their understanding to entire ignorance. "Seeing ye shall see, and not perceive." You shall have your eyes open, or the usual exercise of your rational powers, and the sacred light of instruction shall shine around you; but even in the midst of light and with your eyes open, you shall perceive nothing to purpose; the good you see you will not choose, and the evil and danger you see you will not shun, but run into it willingly and obstinately.

The connection in which Christ introduces these words is this. As he had clothed his discourse in the Eastern dress of parables or allegories, his disciples, apprehending that this was not the plainest method of instruction, and that the multitude did not understand him, put this question to him, "Why speakest thou to them in parables?" He answered and said unto them, "Because unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it is not given." This informs us there is a dreadful distinction made, even in this world, between the hearers of the gospel, though they mingle in the same assembly, hear the same preacher, and seem to stand upon the same footing. Thus the disciples of Christ and the unbelieving crowd were upon a par; but, says Christ, to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, or the glorious doctrines of the gospel; and therefore you will easily perceive them through the veil of parables, which will be an agreeable medium of instruction to you. But to the unbelieving crowd it is not given to know these mysteries; though they attend upon my ministry, it is not intended that they should be made wiser or better by it. Alas! my brethren, what if such a distinction should be made between us who meet together for the worship of God from week to week in this place.

The reason of this distinction will show the justice of it, and that is assigned in the next verse: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath;" the meaning is, whosoever improves the privileges he hath, shall have those privileges continued to him with a blessed addition; whosoever makes a good use of the means of grace, he shall have grace given him to make a still better use of them; who-

soever has opened his mind to receive the light from past instructions, shall have further light and further instructions; to him it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; and they shall be conveyed to him in such forms of instruction as he shall be able to understand. "But whosoever hath not;" whosoever makes no more improvement of his privileges than if he had none given him to improve, from him shall be taken away those neglected privileges. He that has obstinately shut his eyes against the light of instruction in times past, shall be punished with the loss of that light in future; though the light still continue to shine round him, yet he shall be left in his own chosen darkness, and divine grace shall never more open his mind. He is given up as unteachable, though he may still sit in Christ's school. It is no longer the design of the gospel to show him the way to eternal life, though he may still enjoy the ministry of it, and God in his providence may order things so as to *occasion*, though not properly to *cause*, his continuance in ignorance and infidelity.

Here, by the by, I would make a remark to vindicate this dreadful instance of the execution of divine justice, which is more liable to the cavils of human pride and ignorance than perhaps any other. The remark is, that God may justly inflict *private* as well as *positive* punishment upon obstinate sinners; or, in plainer terms, he may with undoubted justice punish them by *taking away* the blessings they have abused, or *rendering* those blessings *useless* to them, as well as by inflicting positive misery upon them. This is a confessed rule of justice, and it holds good as to spirituals as well as temporals. May not God as justly take away his common grace, and deny future assistance to an obstinate sinner who has abused it, as deprive him of health or life? Why may he not as justly leave him destitute of the sanctified use of the means of grace he has neglected and unimproved in this world, as of the happiness of heaven in the world to come? This is certainly a righteous punishment, and there is also a propriety and congruity in it; it is proper and congruous that the lovers of darkness should not have the light obtruded upon them; that the despisers of instruction should receive no benefit from it; that those who improve not what they have should have no more, but should lose even what

they have. Thus their own choice is made their curse, and their sin their punishment. But to return.

“Therefore,” says Jesus, “I speak unto them in parables;” *therefore*, that is, acting upon the maxim I have just laid down, that those who abuse the light they have shall have no more, I speak to them on purpose in this mystical form, that they may still remain in darkness, while I am communicating instruction to my teachable disciples; “because they seeing, see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand;” because, though they have the exercise of their senses and intellectual powers, and have enjoyed my instructions so frequently, they still obstinately persist in ignorance and infidelity, and in that let them continue; it is no longer the design of my ministry to teach or convert them. “And in them,” says he, “is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.” And then follow the reasons of this tremendous judgment: “For this people’s heart is waxed gross and insensible, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them;” they seem afraid of their own conversion, and therefore do all they can to prevent the efficacy of the means of grace upon them. Such must be given up as desperate; and though they may still live among the means of grace, it is no longer the design of them to be of any service to them.

You see, as I observed at first, this is a denunciation of long standing—about two thousand five hundred years old. It was accomplished in Isaiah’s time, when God looked out for a messenger to send to the Jews, not to convert them, but to leave them inexcusable in their impenitence, and so aggravate their guilt and punishment. “Whom shall I send?” says Jehovah, “and who shall go for us?” As if he had said, I do not intend to deprive this obstinate people of the ministry of my servants, but am about to send them another; and where shall I find one that will accept so thankless and fruitless an office? Isaiah offers his services as a volunteer. “Here am I,” says he, “send me.” And then his commission is made out in these terrible terms—expressive rather of the office of an execu-



tioner than of a messenger of peace: "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed." About seven hundred years after, we find this denunciation applied to the Jews by Christ himself in my text. It was applied to the same people some time after by the evangelist John. "Therefore they could not believe," says he, "because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them." Some years after, it was applied by St. Paul to the unbelieving Jews in Rome; upon his preaching the gospel to them, "some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not;" and with respect to the latter, he says, "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive." Thus we can trace the accomplishment of this old denunciation in various periods. And is it antiquated, and without force in our age? May it not reach to Virginia, and Hanover, as well as to Judea, and Jerusalem? Yes, my brethren, if the sin of the Jews be found among us; that is, the abuse of the means of instruction, then the curse of the Jews lies in full force against us. The ministry of the Word may be continued among us, but many that attend upon it may not receive any advantage from it; nay, their advantage may not be so much as intended by its continuance among them, but rather the aggravation of their sin and ruin. A dreadful thought! which I would willingly avoid, but since I cannot exclude it, I will endeavor to make the best use of it for your warning.

As to those to whom my labors for above ten years have been of no real service for their conversion to God, I must own I have very discouraging thoughts of them. It is most likely, either that God will let them alone, and suffer them to run on into the burning, or that he will make use of some other hand to pluck them out. All the means that I can use with them have been so often tried in vain, there is but little reason to hope that they will ever have

any efficacy upon them. Yet I must not entirely despair even of these; I have some little hope, sinners, that the happy time is coming, when some word spoke by that feeble breath, which has hitherto only reached your ears, will be enforced with almighty power upon your hearts, and bring you to the knee as broken-hearted penitents before God. I cannot part with the little hope I have, that we shall yet see a day of the Son of Man in this place; and then the old gospel, even from the lips of your usual minister, will be quite a new thing—when the hardest sinner among you will not be able to resist it with so much ease as he does now, but will be constrained to yield to his power, and be made a willing captive to the obedience of faith. Who could live without some little hope of this kind? For can any of you bear the thought, that not only veteran sinners should persist in their obstinacy and perish, but that a new set of immortals, I mean the crowds of youth and children among us, should grow up and never see a day of divine power and grace? Alas! if this should be the case, they will only grow up in guilt and ripen for punishment; and the religion that is to be found among us, will die away with its present subjects. Let us therefore not only wish and pray for such a visitation from on high, but let us also humbly hope for it. We indeed do not deserve it, but oh! God is merciful and gracious; and whenever he has bestowed this favor, it has always been upon the undeserving. If such a happy period should come, before my eyes are shut in death, I should have my hands full of business once more—business of the most agreeable and benevolent kind; directing broken-hearted, trembling, desponding sinners to the all-sufficient Saviour, Jesus Christ, after whom but very few are now inquiring, as if he were antiquated, or become a superfluity.

But whatever hopes I entertain of this nature, I cannot but fear that my ministry will continue useless to some of you. I am afraid some of you will still have your usual opportunity of attending upon it; or “that hearing you shall hear, and not understand; and seeing you shall see, and not perceive.” I know no better method to guard you against this danger than to warn you of it in time, and this is my principal design at present. For this purpose,

I shall mention the presages and symptoms of the approach of this tremendous judgment—the judgment of

having the ministry of the gospel continued, not as the means of salvation, but as the occasion of more aggravated sin and punishment.

Now the presages and symptoms of the approach of this tremendous judgment are such as these: the abuse or neglect of the ministry of the gospel in times past—incurable obstinacy under chastisements—growing insensibility or hardness of heart—repeated violences to the motions of the Holy Spirit and convictions of conscience, or obstinate sinning against knowledge—the withdrawing of divine influences—and, as a consequence of all, a general decay of religion. In the *first* place,

One constant presage of this judgment is, the abuse or neglect of the ministry of the gospel in time past.

This is implied, as you have seen, in the maxim on which divine justice proceeds in the infliction of this judgment, namely, that “from him that hath not,”—who improves not what he hath—“shall be taken away even that which he hath.” This was the character of the Jews, against whom this judgment was denounced; they had long enjoyed the ministry of the prophets, of Christ and his apostles, but hardened themselves against the good effects of it, and continued unreformed and impenitent. In short, all the judgments of God, of every sort, are inflicted upon mankind only for their sin; and, consequently, this judgment in particular proceeds from this cause. But then it must be remembered that this particular judgment is not inflicted for every sin; for who then can escape? but for one particular kind of sin, the neglect or non-improvement of the means of grace, and particularly the ministry of the gospel. It is because men have heard so often without advantage, that they are condemned to hear without understanding. It is because they have had the use of their eyes, and the light of divine instruction shining around them, a long time, without their becoming wiser or better, that they are doomed to see and not perceive. This in particular, and not their sins in general, is the cause of this tremendous curse.

And is there no such sin as this to be found among us? Have not some of you been favored with the means of grace for a length of years, yet you are still unconverted, ignorant, and impenitent? Do not your consciences tell you that you still persist in the neglect of those duties of

which you have been convinced, and to which you have been persuaded a thousand times? And do you not still indulge some favorite sin though you have been warned, reprov'd, dissuaded, and reasoned with, for years together? What repeated, lively representations have you had of divine things? and yet are you not still unaffected with them? All that you have heard of the evil and danger of sin has not turned you from it nor struck you with a just abhorrence of it. All that you have heard of the reasonableness, obligation, happiness, and blessed consequences of the life of religion has not turned you to it; but you act as if you were afraid you should be converted and God should heal you. The very means which have broken the hearts of others into ingenuous repentance you have had as well as they, and yet your hearts are hard and insensible; nay, are they not growing harder and harder every day? The discoveries of Jesus Christ, made in the gospel, have attracted the love of thousands to him; and the very same discoveries have been exhibited to you, and yet you remain thoughtless of him and disaffected to him. To be a little more particular: you have had sufficient means to convince you of the duty of family religion; of the evil of drunkenness, lying, sabbath-breaking, covetousness, pride, carnal security, indifferency in religion; of the depravity of your nature, and the absolute necessity of the righteousness of Christ for your justification, and of the influence of the Holy Spirit for your sanctification, and yet these means have had no suitable effect upon you—and have you not then reason to fear that this judgment hangs over your heads, “that hearing you shall hear, and not understand; and seeing you shall see, and not perceive? Perhaps the judgment, near as it is, may be averted, if you take warning, and now begin with all your might to improve the means of grace. But oh! if you delay and trifle on, the curse may light upon you and never be removed, and then you are as certainly and irrecoverably undone, as if the gates of eternal despair were now shut upon you.

*Secondly*, Incurrible obstinacy under the chastisements of the divine hand is another dreadful presage of the approach of this judgment.

The various afflictions—public, domestic, and personal, with which our heavenly Father chastises the sons of men,

are excellent means of repentance and reformation, and they have often effect upon those with whom all other means had been used in vain. But when even these wholesome severities, which one would think would awaken the most secure to some sensibility, are obstinately disregarded, and men sin on still even under the angry hand of God lifted up to smite them, it argues an incorrigible hardness of heart, and they incur the same curse with those that misimprove the ministry of the gospel. The affliction may be removed; but it may be removed in judgment as a father gives over correcting an incorrigible child and leaves him to himself. But oh! how much better to lie under the rod, than to be given up as desperate, and for that reason dismissed from the discipline of our heavenly Father!

Growing insensibility or hardness of heart is, *thirdly*, a most threatening presage of the near approach of this awful judgment. This, indeed, is the very beginning of the judgment and the first perceivable effect of it; and as the sinner improves in hardness of heart, this curse falls heavier upon him and is the cause of this horrid improvement. Hence you find in Scripture, a hard heart, a stiff neck, a reprobate mind, a seared conscience, a soul past feeling, are mentioned as the dreadful characteristics of a soul judicially given up of God. And is every heart among us free from this alarming symptom? Can every one among us say, "I am as easily and deeply affected with eternal things, and the ministry of the gospel has as much effect upon me now, as it had five or ten years ago?" Alas! must not some of you say on the other hand, "Once I remember I was deeply concerned about my everlasting state; some years ago I was alarmed with a sense of my sin and danger, and earnestly used my utmost endeavors to obtain an interest in the Saviour; but now it is all over. Now I lie secure and unconcerned, except that now and then I am involuntarily seized with pangs of despairing horror, which wear off without any good effect. But though I am now so easy and careless, I cannot pretend that my state is really more safe now than it was when I was so anxiously concerned about it." May not this be the language of some of you? If so, I most honestly tell you, you are near cursing. Your hearts are waxen fat, and your ears are dull of hearing; and there

fore you have great reason to fear the dreadful God, whose grace and patience you have so long ungratefully abused, is about to pronounce the sentence upon you, "Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:" you shall enjoy the means of grace as usual, but you shall receive no advantage from them. Must not your hearts meditate terror while this heavy curse hangs over you? And will you not fly from it and use all means possible to escape?

*Fourthly*, Repeated violences of the Spirit of God and your own consciences, or an obstinate continuance in sin against knowledge, is an alarming symptom of the approach of this judgment. Though a distinction may be made in some instances between those restraints and good tendencies which proceed from your own consciences, it is not my present purpose to make the distinction. They both tend to restrain you from sin and excite you to a religious life, and therefore their tendency is the same. And I doubt not but the Spirit of God and your own consciences have repeatedly striven even with the most hardened sinner among you; and it has often cost you violent struggling to make effectual resistance. Have you not had some thoughtful, pensive, solemn intervals notwithstanding all your preposterous endeavors to live a life of dissipation and to continue in your thoughtless career? Have you not had strong convictions of your guilt and danger, and the necessity of a new heart and a new life, and dismal misgivings and forebodings of heart as to the consequences of your present conduct? Have you not in these solemn moments formed many good resolutions and vows, and determined you would live no longer as you have done? Have you not found yourselves, as it were, weary and surfeited with a course of sin, and your desires going after Christ? Has not some sermon, or passage of Scripture, or alarming providence, roused you for a while out of your security, and had a strange, irresistible force upon your hearts? Well, in such seasons as these, the Holy Spirit and your own consciences were striving with you; and had you cherished those sacred motions you might ere now have been sincere converts and heirs of Heaven. But, alas! have you not rebelled and grieved the Holy Spirit, and done violence to your own consciences? Have you not talked, or

laughed, or trifled, or labored away these thoughtful hours, and done your utmost to recover your stupid security again? Alas! in so doing you trod in the very steps of those desperate sinners who have been abandoned of God, and sealed up under his irrevocable curse. Many, indeed, who have done this have at length been subdued by the power of God and happily constrained to forego all their resistance; but oh! this has not been the blessed end of all who have thus fought against God; no, many of them have been given up and allowed to gain a victory ruinous to themselves. Therefore, as you have reason to hope, you have also reason to fear; and you have undoubtedly good reason to give over your resistance and submit to God and conscience, lest he abandon you to yourselves. And then, though you may still enjoy the gospel and its ordinances, they will be of no service to you; nay, this will not be the end God has in view in continuing these privileges; his design is the benefit of others who mingle with you in the same assembly, and enjoy these means in common with you. *They* may be converted and healed by them. But as for *you*, "hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive;" and this will be "your condemnation, that light is come into the world, and you have loved darkness rather than light."

Under this head I must add, that every instance of willful sinning against knowledge is the most dangerous and provoking manner of sinning. The language of such a practice is, "Lord, I know this is displeasing to thee; and yet I will do it." What insufferable insolence is this in a worm of the earth! How provoking must it be to the supreme Majesty! and what ravages must it make in the conscience! The wretch that can venture upon this, may venture upon any thing. Surely such a course of willful sinning against knowledge, must expose the daring sinner to the heaviest judgment of Heaven. And according to the course of nature, it tends to harden him in impenitence; for the only way in which a sinner may be wrought upon for his conversion is by letting him know his duty; but when he puts this knowledge at defiance, and obstinately does his pleasure in spite of it, what service can instruction do to him? What benefit can he receive from the ministry of the gospel? It is time such a

one should be left "to hear and not understand, and see and not perceive." Indeed this is in a great measure his character already. He runs into ruin with his eyes open, and wittingly rejects the means of salvation.

*Fifthly*, The withdrawal of divine influence is a dismal symptom of this judgment.

Whatever proud and self-conceited notions men entertain of their sufficiency for the purposes of religion, it is a certain truth, confirmed by the testimony of Scripture and the experience of near six thousand years, that the blessed Spirit of God is the sole author of all that little religion that has been among men in every age; and when he withdraws, then religion withers like the fruits of the earth without air and rain. It is also evident, both from Scripture and the history of the church, that there are certain seasons in which the Spirit is plentifully poured out; and then multitudes of sinners that had sat under the gospel unmoved from year to year, are converted; and religion wears another aspect in a country or a congregation, according to the extent of the showers of divine influences. Then the case of sinners is hopeful; for God works effectually *within*, and there are many peculiar helps and advantages for conversion *without*; then ministers preach and Christians pray, converse, and do every thing in another manner: a manner peculiarly adapted to strike conviction, to lead the convinced to Christ, and to bring down blessings upon the world. But when the abuse of so great a blessing provokes a jealous God to withdraw his influences, then the affairs of religion put on another face: offences happen; a spirit of contention begins to rise; sinners grow insolent; the gospel loses its force upon the consciences of men; ministers grow languid and faint-hearted, and though their compositions may be even more judicious and masterly than when they had more effect, yet the spirit, the life, the energy, the *unknown something*, that gave them their irresistible efficacy, is wanting. But few sinners are awakened; and the impressions of such are superficial, and they seem to halt and make but slow progress in returning to God; and as to the crowd of sinners, they go on careless, unawakened, and unreformed under the preaching of the gospel, and harden themselves more against it. It is comparatively an easy thing for them to keep down conscience, to resist the Spirit, and to sin away the week, though they have heard



the gospel on Sunday. Now in such a season the case of sinners is very discouraging; there is but a very dull chance, if I may so speak, for their conversion. They may "hear indeed, but they do not understand; they may see indeed, but not perceive." And from the brief description I have given you of such a season, have you not reason to fear that it is your lot to live in such a time? a time when the blessed Spirit, that has long been striving with Hanover, has, in a great measure, left it in displeasure and in judgment: he has left it, you may be sure he has left it in displeasure and in judgment: he has left it, because he has been ill-treated, and could bear it no longer. And he is gone! Then *the glory is departed!* You may still have your favorite minister; you may still have sermons and all the ordinances of the gospel; but, alas! "hearing you shall hear, and not understand; and seeing you shall see, and not perceive." And the very means that ripen others for heaven will only cause you to rot and putrefy till you drop, as it were by your own weight, into hell.

When the Spirit is withdrawn, it is not only a sign that the judgment threatened in my text is near, but that it is actually executed; for the absence of the Spirit is the reason why sinners attend upon the ministry of the gospel without any real advantage. The curse is actually fallen; but, oh! I hope it may be removed, at least from some of you; and now is the time for you to make the trial.

*Lastly,* A general decay of religion is a symptom, and indeed a part, of this judgment.

This is the consequence of the foregoing particulars; and when this is the case, it is evident the judgment has fallen upon some and is likely to fall upon many. When a people enjoy the ministry of the gospel, and yet religion does not gain ground, but declines, then it is evident, some "hearing, hear not, and seeing, see not."

And I leave you to judge whether this alarming symptom be not upon us. Religion is evidently declining among us in some instances; and how little ground does it gain in others?

To conclude. Let such of you as have reason to apprehend that you are "near unto cursing," pay a proper regard to this consideration, that if it be possible to escape it, now is the most likely time you will ever see, and the longer you delay the greater will be your danger. There-

fore, now endeavor with all your might to hear to purpose when you do hear, and to see to advantage when you do see. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."



## XXXV

### THE RELIGIOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE LATE EARTHQUAKE.\*

"The foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down; the earth is clean dissolved; the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall lie heavy upon it, and it shall fall and not rise again."—*Isaiah*, xxiv. 18, 19, 20.

THE works of Creation and Providence were undoubtedly intended for the notice and contemplation of mankind, especially when God *comes out of his place*, that is, departs from the *usual* and *stated* course of his providence, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquities—then it becomes us to observe the operation of his hands with fear and reverence. To this the psalmist repeatedly calls us: "Come and see the works of the Lord; he is terrible in his doings towards the children of men." To assist you in this I shall cheerfully devote an hour to-day.

Perhaps there never was since the earthquake at the deluge, that broke up the fountains of the great deep, so extensive a desolation of this kind as has lately happened in Europe and Africa. And though, blessed be God, it did not immediately affect us, yet the very fame of so dreadful a judgment ought to be improved for our advantage. To this event I may accommodate the words of my text, "The foundations of the earth," &c.

Such of you as have read the public papers need not be informed of that wide-spreading earthquake, which begun on the first of November last, and has since been felt at different times through most parts of Europe. For the sake of those that have only had imperfect hints of it, I would give you this short history. The city of Lisbon, con-

\* Preached in Hanover County, Virginia, June 19, 1756.

taining about three hundred thousand souls, is now no more! Its vast riches, and, by all accounts, between fifty and a hundred thousand persons, have been buried or burnt in its ruins. Sundry other towns in Portugal, Spain, and along the European coasts of the Mediterranean, have been damaged, overthrown, or sunk; like Sodom and Gomorrah. The earthquake extended across the sea, and has ruined a great part of Africa, particularly in the empire of Morocco, where the large and populous cities of Mequinez, Fez, and the port of Sallee have been demolished, with many thousands of the inhabitants. It has likewise been felt in sundry parts of Italy, Germany, France, Bohemia, and even in Great Britain and Ireland. Nay, the tremor has reached our continent, and has been very sensibly felt in Boston and other parts of New England. Though much mischief has not been done in those parts, yet a loud warning has been given; and oh! that it may not be given in vain. It would certainly be an instance of inexcusable stupidity for us to take no notice of so dreadful a dispensation. Such devastations are at once *judgments* upon the places where they happen, and *warnings* to others. For what end were the Israelites punished with so many miraculous judgments? St. Paul will tell you, it was not only for *their* sins, but "all these things happened to them for *ensamples*, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." For what end were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah turned into ashes? St. Peter will tell you, God "made them an *ensample* unto those that should after live ungodly." And shall not *we* regard such examples, even in our own age? Shall others perish for our admonition? and shall *we* receive no profit by their destruction? This would be stupid and inexcusable indeed. Therefore, my present design is to direct you to such meditations as this alarming event naturally suggests, and which may be sufficient to the right improvement of it.

But before I enter upon this design, I would once more inculcate upon you a doctrine, which I have often proved in your hearing, and that is, that this world is a little territory of Jehovah's government—under the management of his providence; and particularly, that all the blessings of life are the gifts of his bounty, and all its calamities the chastisements or judgments of his hand. This I would have you to apply to the event now under consideration.

It is the *providence* of God that has impregnated the bowels of the earth with these dreadful materials that tear and shatter its frame. It is *his* providence that strikes the spark which sets this dreadful train in a flame and causes the terrible explosion. There is a set of conceited philosophers risen among us who think they disprove all this, by alleging that earthquakes proceed from *natural causes*, and therefore it is superstitious to ascribe them to the agency of Providence. But there is no more reason or philosophy in this, than if they should deny that a *man* writes because he makes use of a *pen*, or that kings exercise government because they employ servants under them. I grant that natural causes concur toward the production of earthquakes; but what are these natural causes? Are they *independent, self-moved* causes? No; they were first *formed* and are still *directed* by the divine hand. The shortest and plainest view I can give of the case is this: When God formed this globe he saw what would be the conduct of its inhabitants in all the periods of time; and particularly he knew at what particular time a kingdom or city would be ripe for his judgments, and he adjusted matters accordingly. He set the train with so much exactness, that it will spring just in the critical moment when every thing is ripe for it. And thus, by a preconcerted plan, he answers all the *occasional* exigences of the world, and suits himself to particular cases without a miracle, or controlling the laws of nature; or, perhaps, he may sometimes think it necessary to work with his own immediate hand, and to suspend or counteract the usual and stated laws of creation, that his interference may be conspicuous. Let this truth, then, be laid deep in your minds, as a foundation, that earthquakes are the effects of divine providence, and produced to answer some of its important ends in the world. And hence I naturally proceed, according to promise, to direct you to such meditations as are suitable to this event. Now you may hence take occasion to reflect upon the majesty and power of God, and the dreadfulness of his anger, the sinfulness of our world, and the destruction of this globe at the final judgment.

*First*, Let the majestic and terrible phenomenon of earthquakes put you in mind of the *majesty of God and the wonderfulness of his displeasure*. He can toss and convulse this huge globe, and shake its foundations down to the

centre. Trembling continents, burning or sinking mountains, wide-yawning gulfs in solid ground, explosions of subterranean mines sufficient to shiver a world, are but hints of his indignation. But my language does but sink this exalted subject; I shall therefore give you the inimitable descriptions of the sacred writers. "He is wise in heart," says Job, "and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered? he removeth the mountains, and they know it not; he overturneth them in his anger; he shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble." "A fire is kindled in mine anger," says the Lord himself in his own language, "and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains." But the most striking and lively description, methinks, which the language of inspiration itself has given us, is in the prophecy of Nahum: "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies; the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers; the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt; and the earth is burnt at his presence; yea, the world and they that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." And is this the Being that is so little thought of in our world? Is this he whose name passes for the veriest trifle? whose word can hardly keep men awake or engage their attention? whose authority is less regarded, and whose resentment is less feared than that of an earthly king? whose laws are audaciously violated and his threatenings despised? Is this he who is complimented with empty, spiritless formalities under the name of religion? Oh! is this he whom we are met this day to worship? What! and shall there be no more attention and solemnity among us? Can any thing be more unnatural, more impious, or more shocking? Indeed, sirs, it strikes me with horror to think how contemptuously this glorious, almighty, and terrible God is treated in our world. Angels do not treat him so; nay, even devils, in the height of their malice, dare not thus trifle

with him; they tremble at his very name. Oh! "wherefore doth the wicked *contemn* God?" See, here is your antagonist, and can you make good your cause against him? Can you harden yourselves against him and prosper? This earth is as nothing in his hands. "He taketh up the isles as a very little thing." He that can shake this huge globe to the centre; he that can bury proud cities, with all their inhabitants, in the bowels of the earth; he that can toss the ocean into a ferment, and cause it to overwhelm the guilty land; he that can hurl the tallest mountains from their everlasting foundations into the sea, or sink them into the valleys, or pools of water; he that has stored the bowels of the earth as with magazines of gunpowder, and can set it all in a blaze, or burst it into ten thousand fragments—oh! what will HE make of *you* when he takes you in hand? Can you rest easy one moment, while you have reason to fear the supreme Lord of nature is your enemy for your willful provocations? In his name I charge you to seek his favor; make him your friend, and dare to rebel against him no more. Dare you continue a rebel against him, or careless about pleasing him, while you walk on *his* ground, breathe in *his* air, feed upon *his* provisions, and live in *his* territories, and within the reach of *his* arm? Why, he can make the earth you pollute with your sins open its dreadful jaws and swallow you up alive, like Korah and his company. Oh! it may break our hearts to think there should be any of the sons of men so mad as to incur his displeasure and be careless about his favor. But, alas! are there not some such among us? Well, they will soon find, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," unless they speedily repent.

*Secondly*, This desolating judgment may justly lead you to reflect upon the *sinfulness of our world*. Alas! we live upon a guilty globe; and much has it suffered for the sins of its inhabitants. Once it was all drowned in a universal deluge, and many parts of it have since sunk under the load of guilt. If sin had never defiled it, it would never have been thus torn and shattered. We have seen, these judgments are at the disposal of Providence, and we are sure a righteous Providence would never inflict them for nothing. It is *sin*, my brethren, that is the source of all the calamities that oppress our world from age to age—it is *sin* that has often convulsed it with earthquakes. Do

you not observe the language of my text on this head. "The *transgression* of the earth shall *lie heavy* upon it." *This, sirs, this* is the burden under which it totters; *this* is the evil at which it trembles; *this* is a load which men, which the earth itself, nay, which angels and the whole creation cannot bear up under. Why was the old world destroyed by a deluge? It was because "all flesh had corrupted their way; because the wickedness of man was great upon earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, and that continually." Why was Sodom consumed with lightning from heaven, and sunk into a dead sea by an earthquake? It was because "the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." In short, *sin* is the cause of all the calamities under which our world has groaned from the fall of Adam to this day. Heaven has been testifying its displeasure against the sins of men by the most terrible judgments, from age to age, for near six thousand years. The destruction of one nation is intended not only for their punishment, but for a warning to others, "that they may hear, and fear, and do no more so wickedly." But men will obstinately persist, unalarmed by the loudest warnings, and unreformed by the severest chastisements. Let the sword of war slay its thousands—let the pestilence walk about in all its desolating terrors—let the earth shake and tremble under its guilty inhabitants—let these judgments be repeated from generation to generation, from country to country, still they will sin on; and the chastisements of six thousand years have not been able to reform them. Oh! what a rebellious province of Jehovah's empire is this; and probably it has been seldom more so than in the present age, and therefore it is no wonder that the judgments of God are in the earth. The greater part of it is overrun with all the idolatry and ignorance, vice and barbarity of heathenism. A great part of it worship the impostor Mahomet instead of the Son of God, and groan under his yoke. The greatest part of Europe is corrupted with the idolatry, superstition, and debaucheries of the church of Rome, and groans under its tyranny. There the most foolish theatrical farces are devoutly performed under the name of religion—there the free-born mind is enslaved, and dare not *think* for itself in matters in which it must *answer* for itself—there the homage due to the true God

and the only Mediator is sacrilegiously given to senseless idols, and a rabble of imaginary saints—there a market for indulgences and pardons is held, and men, for a little money, may buy a license to commit the most atrocious crimes, or they make atonement for them by the penance of bodily austerities. And can pure and undefiled religion, can good morals grow and flourish in such a soil? No; religion must degenerate into priestcraft and a mercenary superstition, and the most enormous vices and debaucheries must abound. Such, alas! was Lisbon, by universal character.

And though I would not repeat the censorious sin of the Jews, with regard to the Galileans, nor suppose that this city was more deeply guilty than all the cities upon the face of the earth; yet I dare pronounce that it was a *very guilty* spot of the globe, and that it was for this it was so severely punished. If we take a survey of Protestant countries, where religion is to be found, if anywhere at all, alas! how melancholy is the prospect! The good old doctrines of the Reformation, which were adapted to advance the honors of divine grace and mortify the pride of man, have been too generally abandoned, and a more easy system, agreeable to the vanity and self-flattery of depraved hearts, has been dressed up in their stead. Nay, Christianity itself has been rejected, ridiculed, and exposed to public scorn by the increasing club of deists; and where the Christian name and profession are retained, the life and spirit are too generally lost; and the practice, an open opposition to their professed faith. How are the ordinances of the gospel neglected or profaned! What a shocking variety of crimes are to be found everywhere, even in countries that profess to have renounced popery for its corruptions? Drunkenness, swearing, perjury, lying, fraud, and injustice; pride, luxury, various forms of lewdness, and all manner of extravagances; and all these expressly forbidden, under the severest penalties, by that religion which themselves profess and acknowledge divine; and thus they continue, in spite of warnings and chastisements—in spite of mercies and instructions. They have sinned on impenitent and incorrigible for a length of years. God is but little regarded in the world which owes its existence and all its blessings to his power and goodness. Jesus is but little regarded even in those countries that profess his



name; and is it any wonder the earth trembles when the iniquity thereof lies so *heavy* upon it? Is it not rather a wonder that it has not burst to pieces long ago, and buried its guilty inhabitants in its ruins? Is there a supreme Ruler over the kingdoms of men, and shall he not testify his displeasure against their rebellion? Shall he always tamely submit to such contemptuous treatment? And shall he always look on and see his government insulted and his vengeance defied? No; at proper seasons he will come forth out of his place—he will depart from the stated course of his providence, to punish them for their iniquities. The convulsions of the earth, the inundations of the sea, and the sword of war shall at once proclaim and execute his displeasure.

*Thirdly*, That which I would particularly suggest to your thoughts from the devastations of the late earthquake, is the *last universal destruction of our world at the final judgment*. Of this, an earthquake is but a confirmation to human reason, and a lively *representation*.

It is a *confirmation* even to human reason, drawn from the constitution of our globe, that such a destruction is possible, and even probable, according to the course of nature. Our globe is stored with subterranean magazines of combustible materials, which need but a spark to produce a violent explosion, and rend and burst it to pieces. What huge quantities of these sulphurous and nitrous mines must there be, when one discharge can spread a tremor over half the world, bury islands and cities, and shatter wide extended continents! What an inexhaustible store of fire and brimstone has supplied *Ætna*, *Vesuvius*, and other burning mountains, that have been belching out torrents of liquid fire for some thousands of years, and now rage as furiously as ever? We may conjecture from the construction of our world that it was not intended for a perpetual existence, in its present form, but to be dissolved by the dreadful element of fire. And revelation assures us of this universal desolation, when the "heavens shall be shrivelled up like a parched scroll, and pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the things that are therein, shall be burnt up."

An earthquake is also a lively *representation* of the universal ruins of that day, and the horror and consternation

of mankind. Let imagination form a lively idea of the destruction of Lisbon—the ground trembling and heaving, and roaring with subterranean thunders—towers, palaces, and churches tottering and falling—the flames bursting from the ruins and setting all in a blaze—the sea roaring and rushing over its banks, with resistless impetuosity—the inhabitants running from place to place in wild consternation, in search of safety—flying to the strongest buildings for shelter, but crushed in their ruins; or to the sea, and there swept away by the rushing waves. Can human imagination represent any thing more shocking?

Such, my brethren, but infinitely more dreadful, will be the terrors of that last, that universal earthquake, which we shall all see. Stars drop, rush lawless through the air, and dash one another to pieces. The sun is extinguished and looks like a huge globe of solid darkness. The moon is turned into blood and reflects a portentous sanguinary light upon the earth. The clouds flash and blaze with sheets of lightning, and are rent with the horrid crash of thunder. This is echoed back by the subterranean thunders that murmur, rumble, and roar under ground. The earth is tossed like a ball, and bursts asunder like a mouldering clod. See the works of nature and art perishing in one promiscuous ruin!—Mountains sinking and bursting into so many volcanoes, vomiting up seas of liquid fire!—Pyramids, towers, palaces, cities, woods, and plains, burning in one prodigious undistinguishing blaze! the seas evaporating and vanishing away through the intensity of the heat!

“ See all the formidable sons of fire,  
Eruptions, earthquakes, comets, lightnings, play  
Their various engines; all at once disgorge  
Their blazing magazines, and take by storm  
This poor terrestrial citadel of man.  
Amazing period! when each mountain-top  
Out-burns Vesuvius, rocks eternal pour  
Their melted mass, as rivers once they pour'd;  
Stars rush; and final ruin fiercely drives  
Her ploughshare o'er creation —————

————— I see! I feel it!

All nature, like an earthquake, trembling round!  
All deities, like summer's swarms, on wing!  
I see the Judge enthroned! the flaming guard!  
The volume open'd! open'd every heart!  
A sunbeam pointing out each secret thought!  
No patron! intercessor none! now past

The sweet, the clement, mediatorial hour!  
For guilt no plea! to pain, no pause, no bound!  
Inexorable, all! and all, extreme!"

And where, ye hardy presumptuous sinners that can now despise the terrors of the Lord, oh! where will ye appear in this tremendous day? What shall support you when the ground on which you stood is gone? What rock or mountain shall you procure to shelter you when rocks and mountains are sinking and disappearing, or melting away like snow before the sun? How can you expect to escape hell when the earth itself is turned into a lake of fire and brimstone? Oh! how can you bear the thought of rolling and weltering there? What is now become of your lands and possessions on which you once set your hearts? Nay, where is the country, where the continent, in which you once dwelt?

And is there no safety in this wreck of nature? Are all mankind involved in this general ruin? No; blessed be God, there are some who shall be safe and unhurt while the frame of nature is dissolving around them. Those happy souls who choose the Lord for their portion, and Jesus for their Saviour, and who in this tottering world looked for a city that has foundations, firm, unshaken foundations, they shall be safe beyond the reach of this general desolation—their happiness lies secure in a "kingdom that *cannot be moved*." There is a new heaven and a new earth prepared for them.

Then, my brethren, you will see the advantage of that despised, neglected thing, *religion*, and the difference between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. Then those that are now so unfashionable as to make religion a serious business, will smile secure at a dissolving world. Then they will find the happy fruits of those hours they spent on their knees at the throne of grace—of those cries and tears they poured out after Jesus—of their honest struggles with sin and temptation, and, in short, of a life devoted to God.

Therefore, let such of you rejoice in the prospect of that glorious, dreadful day, and let it be more and more your serious business to prepare for it. You shall rest for ever in a country that shall never be shaken with earthquakes, nor be subject to any of the calamities of this mortal

state. Therefore, since this shall be your portion, be not much disturbed with any of the judgments that may befall this land of your pilgrimage and exile. The sooner it is destroyed, the sooner will you get home to the region of eternal rest. Borrow the language of the triumphant Psalmist: "We will not fear, though the earth be removed; and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar, and be troubled; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

But oh! where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? O where shall some of you, my dear people, appear in that dreadful day? I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, and am really afraid of some of you. Do you not know in your consciences that you are generally thoughtless and careless about the great concerns of your eternal state? Your hearts have never been thoroughly changed by divine grace; nor do you know by experience what it is to believe, to repent, and to love God with all your hearts. You do not make conscience of every duty; I mean, you neglect the worship of God in your families, though under the strongest obligations to perform it, perhaps from your own solemn vows and promises. You indulge yourselves in some known sin or other; and if you feel some pangs of repentance, your repentance does not issue in reformation. Alas! is this the character of one soul within the hearing of my voice? Then I must tell you that if you continue such, you will be fuel for the last universal fire, and must perish in the ruins of the world you have loved so well.

But who knows but that if you begin immediately you may yet have time enough to work out your own salvation? Therefore now begin the work. There is no safety but in Jesus Christ. Away to him, therefore; let me lay the hand of friendly violence upon you and hurry you out of your present condition, for the Lord will destroy all that continue in it; "escape for thy life—look not behind thee; escape to Jesus Christ, lest thou be consumed."

I must tell you frankly, I studied this part of my discourse with an anxious heart; "For," thought I, "I have given such exhortations over and over, but they seem generally in vain. There is indeed a happy number among my hearers, who, I doubt not, have regarded the gospel

preached by my lips. But, alas! as to the rest, I have been so often disappointed that I now hardly hope to succeed." These are my discouragements in my retirements, when no eye sees me but God. And oh! sinners, will your future conduct prove there was good reason for my fears? Alas! is the ministry of the gospel a useless institution with regard to you? Will you resist my benevolent hand, when I would stretch it forth to pluck you out of the burning? Well, my friends, I cannot help it. If you will perish—if you are obstinately set upon it, I have only this to say, that your poor minister will weep in secret for you, and drop his tears upon you, as you are falling into ruin from between his hands.

Yes, sinners, God forbid that I should cease to pray for you and pity you. While my tongue is capable of pronouncing a word, and you think it worth your while to hear me, I will send the calls of the gospel after you; and if you perish after all, you shall drop into hell with the offers of heaven in your ears. Fain would I clear myself, and say, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean." But, alas! my heart recoils and fails. I have no doubt at all but the gospel I have preached to you is indeed the gospel of Christ, and I cheerfully venture my own soul upon it. But in dispensing it among you, I am conscious of so much weakness, coldness, and unskillfulness, that I am at times shocked at myself, lest I should be accessory to your ruin. However, this is certain, great guilt will fall *somewhere*. I desire to take my own share of shame and guilt upon myself, and to humble myself for it before God. And I pray you do the same. Oh, humble yourselves before God for your past conduct, and prepare, prepare to meet him in the midst of a burning world.

Or, if you continue obstinately impenitent still, prepare to make your defence against your poor minister there, when he will be obliged to appear as a swift witness against you, and say, "Lord, I can appeal to thyself, that I warned them to prepare for this day, though with so many guilty infirmities as nothing but thy mercy can forgive. But they would not regard my warnings, though given in thine awful name, and sometimes enforced with my own compassionate tears." There, sirs, at the supreme tribunal, prepare to meet me; and thither I dare appeal for the truth and importance of the things I have inculcated upon you.

## A HYMN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE PRECEDING DISCOURSE.

1. How great, how terrible that God,  
Who shakes creation with his nod !  
He frowns, and earth's foundations quake,  
And all the wheels of nature break.
2. Crush'd under guilt's oppressive weight,  
This globe now totters to its fate ;  
Trembles beneath her guilty sons,  
And for deliv'rance heaves and groans !
3. And see ! the glorious, dreadful day,  
That takes th' enormous load away !  
See skies, and stars, and earth, and seas,  
Sink in one universal blaze !
4. Where now, ah ! where shall sinners seek  
For shelter in the general wreck ?  
Can falling rocks conceal them now,  
When rocks dissolve like melting snow !
5. In vain for pity now they fly ;  
In lakes of liquid fire they lie  
There on the burning billows toss'd,  
For ever, ever, ever lost !
6. But saints, undaunted and serene,  
Your eyes shall view the dreadful scene  
Your Saviour lives, though worlds expire  
And earth and skies dissolve in fire !
7. JESUS ! the helpless creature's friend !  
To thee my all I dare commend ;  
Thou canst preserve my feeble soul,  
When lightnings blaze from pole to pole !

# EXTRACTS FROM A SERMON

PREACHED AT NASSAU HALL, PRINCETON, MAY 28, 1761.

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF THE

REV. SAMUEL DAVIES, A.M.,  
LATE PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY.

BY SAMUEL FINLEY, D. D.,  
PRESIDENT OF SAID COLLEGE.

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“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.”—*Rom. xiv. 7, 8.*

As the very dear and reverend man, whose premature and unexpected death we, amongst thousands, this day lament, expressed his desire that upon this mournful event a sermon should be preached from these words, he plainly intimated his expectation that the audience should be entertained, not with an ornamented funeral oration, but with such an instructive discourse as the text itself naturally suggests. The subject being his own choice, I cannot doubt but this friendly audience will the more closely and seriously attend, as conceiving him, *though dead, yet speaking* to them the solemn truths it contains. For having been admitted into the full knowledge of his religious principles, I may presume on speaking many of the sentiments he intended from this text, though not in his more sublime and oratorical manner.

When I reflect on the truly Christian, generous, yet *strict catholicism* that distinguishes this whole chapter, and how deeply it was imprinted on Mr. DAVIES’ own spirit, and influenced the course of his life, I am ready to con-

clude that perhaps no text could be more aptly chosen on the occasion. It expresses the very temper that should be predominant in all, and which actually is so in every pious breast.

Thus, while our text affords a convincing argument for moderation in judging of other Christians, who differ from us in circumstantialia, it teaches us what should be the *principle* and *end* of our life, and that both *negatively* and *positively*. We may not live nor die to ourselves, but to the Lord.

I. "We may not live to ourselves."

This proposition supposes what is a demonstrable truth, that we are not the absolute proprietors, and therefore have not the rightful disposal, of our lives. For since we could exert no kind of efficiency in bringing ourselves from nothing into existence, we could not possibly design ourselves for any end or purpose of our own. Hence it is evident, that whose property soever we are, we belong not to ourselves; consequently, it is the highest indecency to behave as though we were accountable to none other. We are not at liberty, nor have we any authority to employ either the members of our bodies or the powers of our souls at pleasure, as if we had originally designed their use.

Since we were not the authors of our lives, we can have no right to take them away. We have no power to determine either the time or kind of death, any more than we can ward off or suspend its blow, when commissioned to destroy. Therefore, amidst all the miseries that can make life an unsupportable burden, and the glorious prospects that can make us impatiently pant for dissolution, it must be our determinate purpose that "all the days of our appointed time we will wait till our change come."

Reflecting further upon the preceding observations, they force upon us the disagreeable conviction that our whole race has revolted from the race of God, and risen up in rebellion against him. "The world evidently lies in wickedness;" for the allowed practice of men supposes principles which they themselves, being judges, must confess to be palpably false and absurd. They act as if they believe they were made for themselves, and had no other business in life but the gratification of their respective humors. One exerts all his powers and spends all his time in nothing else but endeavoring to amass heaps of worldly treasure; another by riotous



living disperses what had been collected with anxious care. Some live in malice and envy, whose favorite employ is calumny and wrathful contentions, as if they had been created for no other end but to be the pests of society; others blaspheme the name of God, despise his authority, mock at religion, and ridicule serious persons and things. One has no other purpose in life but sport and merriment; another eats to gluttony and drinks to besottedness. Yet all these and nameless ranks of other daring offenders would be ashamed in a Christian country to profess it as their serious belief that that they were made by a most wise, holy, and righteous God, preserved, blessed, and loaded with benefits every day, on purpose that they "might work all these abominations," or in order to live just as they do.

If, then, it is confessedly impious and unreasonable to live to *ourselves*, it necessarily follows that we are the property of another, for it will ever be "lawful for one to do what he will with his own." And whose can we be but *his* who gave us existence? Or, if ties of gratitude can more powerfully influence ingenuous minds than even those of nature, who can so justly claim us as He "who, as we hope, loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood?" This leads me to observe,

II. That we should "live and die to the Lord." This can admit of no debate; for if our Maker and Redeemer be our rightful owner, then, whatever we are, or have, or can do, must be for him. We must "present our bodies a living sacrifice," without reserve or hesitation; and avouch the Lord to be our God, to "walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and judgments, and commandments, and to hearken to his voice."

Now to live wholly to the Lord will appear to be our *reasonable service* if we consider,

*First*, That such a life is most worthy of rational and immortal creatures.

*Secondly*, Such a life is most worthy of God our Maker.

*Thirdly*, Such a life is our own happiness; for, acting as prescribed, we move in our proper sphere, and tend to our native centre. We live as near the fountain of blessedness as our present state can admit, and nothing can be so animating as the glorious and blissful prospects our course affords. Our hearts being fixed on *the chief good*, are at

rest, and no more tortured with anxious hesitation and uneasy suspense as to what we shall choose for our portion, nor do our desires wander in quest of a more suitable object. We can wish for no more but the full enjoyment of God; whom we serve "with our spirits;" "whose peace, that passeth understanding, rules in our hearts," and for whose glory we hope, secure from confounding disappointment in the day of the Lord.

Now, methinks, every attentive hearer prevents my improvement of the subject, being ready of his own accord to make such reflections as these:—How serene and placid is the life, and how triumphant must be the death of a true Christian! How reasonable a service do we perform, when we consecrate ourselves to the Lord, and receive him, freely offering himself to be our portion, our Father, and our Friend! None can plausibly urge that some things unfit or detrimental are required. None can pretend a conscientious scruple about complying with the proposal, nor dare any, however secretly reluctant, openly avow their dissent. Every mouth is stopped, and all acknowledge their obligation to this plain duty. What, then, should hinder the unanimous agreement of this whole assembly to so advantageous an overture? Why may we not join ourselves this day to the Lord in an everlasting covenant? Would it not seem uncharitable to suppose that any one in this Christian audience rejects a proposal so infinitely just and kind? How pleasing is the very imagination of a universal concurrence! Not only would each of our hearts who are here present exult, but unnumbered hosts of angels and all "the spirits of just men made perfect" would rejoice.

Since, therefore, all things that pertain to our present or future happiness conspire to urge this point, let us with one accord, in the most affectionate and reverent manner, approach the throne of our august Sovereign, and cheerfully resign ourselves to him for ever, spend our lives in his service, and expect his approbation at our end.

In some such strain, but more diffusive and sublime, would our reverend and dear deceased friend have addressed us on such a subject. We may imagine how fervent his desire was of "living to the Lord" himself, and persuading others to the same course, when he fixed on this for the subject of his funeral sermon. Now, as it is generally agreed that example has the most powerful in-

fluence, perhaps a few sketches of his own life and character may best recommend the preceding discourse, as they will prove the life described to be practicable.

President *Davies* was an only son, and, what is more, was a son of prayers and vows; was given in answer to fervent supplications, and, in gratitude, wholly devoted to God from earliest infancy by his eminently pious mother, and named *Samuel*, on the like occasion as the ancient prophet. The event proved that God accepted the consecrated boy, took him under his special care, furnished him for, and employed him in the service of his church, prospered his labors with remarkable success, and not only blessed him, but made himself a blessing.

The first twelve years of his life were wasted in the most entire negligence of God and religion, which he often afterwards bitterly lamented, as having "too long wrought the will of the flesh." But about that time, the God to whom he was dedicated, by his word and spirit awakened him to solemn thoughtfulness and anxious concern about his eternal state. He then saw sufficient reason to dread all the direful effects of divine displeasure against sin. And so deeply imprinted was the rational sense of danger, as to make him habitually uneasy and restless until he might obtain satisfying scriptural evidence of his interest in the forgiving love of God.

While thus exercised, he clearly saw the absolute necessity and certain reality of the gospel plan of salvation, and what abundant and suitable provision it makes for all the wants of a sinner. No other solid ground of hope or unfailing source of comfort could he find besides the merits and righteousness of him "whom God sent forth to be a propitiation for sin, through faith in his blood." On this righteousness he was enabled confidently to depend; by this blood his conscience was purged from guilt, and "believing he rejoiced with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Yet he was afterwards exercised with many perplexing doubts for a long season, but at length, after years of impartial repeated self-examination, he attained to a settled confidence of his interest in redeeming grace, which he retained to the end.

A diary, which he kept in the first years of his religious life, and continued to keep as long as his leisure would permit, clearly shows how intensely his mind was set on

heavenly things; how observant he was of the temper of his heart, and how watchful over all his thoughts, words, and actions. His love to God and tender concern for perishing sinners excited his earnest desire of being in a situation to serve mankind to the best advantage. With this view he engaged in the pursuit of learning, in which, amidst many obvious inconveniences, he made surprising progress, and, sooner than could have been expected, was found competently qualified for the ministerial office. He passed the usual previous trials with uncommon approbation, having exceeded the raised expectations of his most intimate friends and admirers.

When he was licensed to preach the gospel, he zealously declared the counsel of God, the truth and importance of which he knew by experience, and did it in such a manner as excited the earnest desires of every vacant congregation where he was known, to obtain the happiness of his stated ministrations. But, far from gratifying his natural inclination to the society of his friends, or consulting his ease, moved by conscience of duty, he undertook the self-denying charge of a dissenting congregation in Virginia, separated from all his brethren, and exposed to the censure and resentment of many.

Nor did he there labor in vain, or "spend his strength for naught." The "Lord, who counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry," succeeded his faithful endeavors, so that a great number, both of *whites* and *blacks*, were hopefully converted to the living God.

As to his natural genius, it was strong and masculine. His understanding was clear; his memory retentive; his invention quick; his imagination lively and florid; his thoughts sublime, and his language elegant, strong, and expressive.

His appearance in company was manly and graceful; his behavior genteel, not ceremonious; grave, yet pleasant; and solid, but sprightly too.

In the sacred desk, zeal for God and love to men animated his addresses, and made them tender, solemn, pungent, and persuasive; while at the same time they were ingenious, accurate, and oratorical. A certain dignity of sentiment and style, a venerable presence, a commanding voice, and emphatical delivery, concurred both to charm his audience and overawe them into silence and attention.

Nor was his usefulness confined to the pulpit. His comprehensive mind could take under view the grand interests of his country and of religion at once; and these interests, as well as those of his friends, he was ever ready zealously to serve.

His natural temper was remarkably sweet and dispassionate, and his heart was one of the tenderest towards the distressed. His sympathetic soul could say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" Accordingly, his charitable disposition made him liberal to the poor, and that often beyond his ability.

To his friend he was voluntarily transparent. And perhaps none better understood the ingenuities and delicacies of friendship, or had a higher relish for it, or was truer or more constant in it than he. He was not easily disgusted; his knowledge of human nature in its present state, his candid heart and enlarged soul both disposing and enabling him to make allowances for indiscretions which narrower and more selfish minds could not make. He readily and easily forgave offences against himself, whilst none could be more careful to avoid offending others; which, if he at any time inadvertently did, he was forward and desirous to make the most ample satisfaction. It would hardly be expected that one so rigid with respect to his own faith and practice could be so generous and catholic in his sentiments of those who differed from him in both, as he was. He was strict, not bigoted; conscientious, not squeamishly scrupulous. His clear and extensive knowledge of religion enabled him to discern where the main stress should be laid, and to proportion his zeal to the importance of things, too generous to be confined to the interests of a party as such. He considered the visible kingdom of Christ as extended beyond the boundaries of *this* or *that* particular denomination, and never supposed that his declarative glory was wholly dependent on the religions which he most approved. Hence he gloried more in being a Christian than in being a *Presbyterian*, though he was the latter from principle.

He sought truth for its own sake, and would profess his sentiments with the undisguised openness of an honest Christian, and the inoffensive boldness of a manly spirit; yet, without the least apparent difficulty or hesitation, he would retract an opinion on full conviction of its being a

mistake. I have never known one who appeared to lay himself more fully open to the reception of truth, from whatever source it came, than he; for he judged the knowledge of truth only to be real learning, and that endeavoring to defend error was but laboring to be more ignorant. But, until fully convinced, he was becomingly tenacious of his opinion.

The unavoidable consciousness of native power made him bold and enterprising. Yet the event proved that his boldness arose, not from a partial, groundless self-conceit, but from true self-knowledge. Upon fair and candid trial, faithful and just to himself, he judged what he could do; and what he could do, when called to it he attempted; and what he attempted, he accomplished.

It may here be properly observed, that he was chosen by the Synod of New York, at the instance of the trustees of New Jersey College, as a fit person to accompany the Rev. Mr. Gilbert Tennent to Great Britain and Ireland, in order to solicit benefactions for the said college. As this manifested the high opinion which both the synod and corporation entertained of his popular talents and superior abilities, so his ready compliance to undertake that service, hazardous and difficult in itself, and precarious in its consequences, which required him to overlook his domestic connections, however tender and endearing, manifested his resolution and self-denial. How well he was qualified as a solicitor, is witnessed by the numerous and large benefactions he received.

As his light shone, his abilities to fill the President's chair in this college, then vacant, was not doubted by the honorable board of trustees. He was accordingly chosen, and earnestly invited to accept the charge of the society. Yet he once and again excused himself, not being convinced that he was called in duty to leave his then important province. But repeated application at length prevailed to make him apprehend that it was the will of God he should accept the call; yet, lest he should mistake in so important a case, he withheld his express consent until the reverend Synod of New York and Philadelphia gave their opinion in favor of the college. This determined his dubious mind. He came and undertook the weighty charge.

His manner of conducting the college did honor to

himself, and promoted its interests. Whatever alterations in the plans of education he introduced were confessedly improvements on those of his predecessors. Had I never had other means of intelligence, save only my knowledge of the man, I should naturally have expected that all his public appearances would have been conducted with spirit, elegance, and decorum; that his government would be mild and gentle, tempered with wisdom and authority, and calculated to command reverence while it attracted love, and that his manner of teaching would be agreeable and striking.

But I propose not these as mere conjectures. The learned tutors of the college, the partners of his counsels and deliberations for its good, and these young gentlemen, once his care and charge, who judged themselves happy under his tuition, all know more than I shall speak.

You know the tenderness and condescension with which he treated you; the paternal care with which he watched over you; the reluctance with which he at any time inflicted the prescribed punishment on a delinquent; and how pleased he was to succeed in reforming any abuse by private and easy methods. But his persuasive voice you will hear no more. He is removed far from mortals, has taken his *aërial flight*, and left us to lament that "a great man has fallen in Israel!" He lived much in a little time; "he finished his course," performed sooner than many others his assigned task, and in that view might be said to have died mature. He shone like a light set on a high place, that burns out and expires.

He went through every stage of honor and usefulness compatible to his character as a dissenting clergyman; and while we flattered our fond hopes of eminent services from him for many years to come, the fatal blow was struck; our pleasing prospects are all at an end, and he is cut down like a tree that has yielded much fruit, and was laden with blossoms even in its fall.

This dispensation, how mysterious, how astonishing, nay, how discouraging does it seem! Why was he raised by divine Providence in the prime of life to so important a station, and amidst useful labors, while he was fast increasing in strength adapted to his business, quickly snatched away? This is a perplexing case, and the more so that it so soon succeeded the yet shorter continuance

of the venerable Edwards. Were they set in so conspicuous a point of view, only that their imitable excellences might be more observable? or was Nassau-hall erected by divine Providence for this among other important purposes, that it might serve to adorn the latter end of some eminent servants of the living God, itself being adorned by them? In this view, the short presidency of a Dickinson, a Burr, an Edwards, and a Davies, instead of arguing the displeasure of the Almighty will evidence his peculiar favor to this institution, which I know was planned and has been carried on with the most pious, benevolent, and generous designs. Now one more shining orb is set on our world. Davies is departed, and with him all that love, zeal, activity, benevolence for which he was remarkable. This the church, and this the bereaved college mourns. For this we hang our once cheerful harps, and indulge the plaintive strains. Yet we are not to lament as those who are hopeless, but rather with humble confidence to "pray the Lord of the harvest," with whom is "the residue of the spirit," that he would send forth another Davies to assist our labor and forward his work.

Nor should the decease of useful laborers, the extinction of burning and shining lights, only send us to the throne of grace for supplies, but excite us to greater diligence and activity in our business as we have for the present the more to do.

Finally, This dispensation should lessen our esteem of this transitory disappointing world and raise our affections to heaven, that place and state of permanent blessedness. Thither ascends, as to its native home, all the goodness that departs from earth; and the more of our pious friends that go to glory, so many more secondary motives have we to excite our desires of "departing and being with Christ," which is far better than any state under the sun; for there in addition to superior felicity, "we shall come to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are written in heaven—and to the spirits of just men made perfect."













