

THE
THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF THE
REV. THOMAS SCOTT,
AUTHOR OF A COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE.

CONTAINING
THE FORCE OF TRUTH,—TREATISE ON REPENTANCE,—GROWTH IN GRACE,
SERMON ON ELECTION AND FINAL PERSEVERANCE,—SERMONS ON SELECT
SUBJECTS,—ESSAYS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN RELIGION, AND
THE NATURE AND WARRANT OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

EDINBURGH:
THOMAS NELSON AND PETER BROWN.

M.DCCC.XXXI.

SERMON IV.

NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE DIVINE LOVE.

1 JOHN IV. 8.

God is Love.

THE sacred writers do not inculcate holy practice from such considerations as are commonly suggested by moralists and philosophers. The beauty of virtue, its utility to mankind, and its benign effects on the health, peace, interest, and reputation of the possessor, may be mentioned with propriety as subordinate recommendations: but the authority, command, example, and glory of God, constitute the primary motives and ultimate object of genuine holiness; and every duty should be enforced by the encouragements and obligations of the gospel. “Beloved,” says the aged apostle, “let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not, knoweth not God: for GOD IS LOVE.—In this was manifested the love of God towards us; because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” Let us then,

I. Inquire how such compendious propositions as that of the text should be understood.

II. Illustrate the truth and importance of it, from the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with mankind.

III. Point out certain perverse inferences which are frequently deduced from it.

IV. And Lastly, make some practical use of the subject.

I. In what manner ought we to understand such compendious propositions as that of the text?

There is a peculiar curse, as it were, connected with indolence and levity in the grand concerns of religion. If a man will trifle in matters of the last importance, and if instead of carefully examining the meaning of an expression, as it stands in the context, and forms a part of a consistent revelation, he only attend to the mere sound of the words, allowing his prejudices and passions to interpret them, he will surely be taken in a snare, and perhaps left to wrest the Scriptures to his own destruction. The diligent and faithful servant will not only consider a few words of the commands or directions of his master, but he will observe the whole of them, weigh their import, and endeavour fully to understand them. This is the proper use of reason in respect of divine revelation. We are neither authorized nor qualified to sit in judgment on the testimo-

ny of God, to reject any part of it as useless or injurious,—to propose alterations, or to make additions. All such attempts are both absurd and presumptuous in the extreme. But our rational powers are the gift of God, to whom we are accountable for our use of them: and as we should soberly examine what ground we have to believe the Scriptures to be a divine revelation; so we ought to study them with diligence and teachableness; and depending on the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit, endeavour to find out the real meaning of every proposition contained in them.

We meet with several comprehensive declarations in the sacred oracles, which should always be explained by comparing them with such passages as more fully state and unfold the doctrines of Christianity. The apostle John, in another place, says, that “God is light:” James affirms, that “He is the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning:” and Paul declares, that “Our God is a consuming fire.” Now, a man would not think of inferring from this last expression, that the Lord cannot exercise mercy, but must punish and destroy all sinners without exception; and this may show us, that limitations are also implied, when it is said, that GOD IS LOVE.

“Thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy;” if then the Lord’s name be *holy*, he is *holiness* as certainly as he is *love*. The same might be shown in respect of all his perfections; except that love takes the lead, as it were, in all the displays which he makes of his glorious character.

We discourse indeed on such subjects like children; we are wholly incapable of conceiving aright of the divine nature; the attributes of the Deity doubtless exist and operate with a simplicity that we cannot explain, and probably there is not that entire distinction between the effects of mercy, justice, truth, and holiness, in the divine nature and conduct, which appears to our contracted minds. Yet it may encourage us, under this our conscious incapacity, to reflect that the Lord himself speaks to us in our own language; as more conducive to our benefit, though less flattering to our pride. Philosophers, it is true, frequently reject the style of Scripture, and attempt to prove, that there cannot be anything in the divine nature which can properly be called wrath, indignation, or avenging justice. But, whatever there may be in such speculations, when cautiously managed, or whatever use may be made of them, in teaching us to exclude from our thoughts concerning the infinite God, every idea which originates from the corrupt passions of our fallen nature, it is evident that this is not the best method of addressing mankind; neither the most intelligible, impressive, or useful: for it is not the style of the only wise God himself. In speaking to us, he has seen good to adopt that kind of language, which is commonly used by the unlearned, that is by an immense majority of the human species.

We must therefore continue to discourse of the divine attributes, as distinct

though harmonious: and when we read that “God is love,” we must suppose that a different instruction is intended, than when we are told, that “Our God is a consuming fire.” The declaration that the Lord is “a holy and just God,” has a different meaning from the encouraging assurance, that “He is merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.” Yet these distinct attributes perfectly harmonize in the divine character, and only *seem* to limit each other: for the Lord is infinite in wisdom, justice, holiness, goodness, mercy, and truth; exactly as if each attribute subsisted alone in his incomprehensible nature.

We must not, however, imagine, when it is said that God is love, or truth, or vengeance, that these properties are so essential to him, that they cannot but act to the utmost in all possible cases; as fire cannot but burn, whether the effects be useful or destructive; or as water must rush downward, when obstructions are removed, whether it fertilize or deluge the country.—We should remember that the Lord acts with most perfect freedom, and unerring wisdom, “according to the counsel of his own will.” It is therefore impossible that any divine attribute could have been exercised in a greater degree, or in a different manner than it hath been; because the works of the Lord’s power, and the effects of his justice and love, have been exactly as many and great, as infinite wisdom determined they should be.

We may perhaps discover a faint illustration of the subject, in the conduct of two affluent persons, both apparently very liberal. The one not duly estimating the real value of riches, or the true ends of generosity, scatters abroad, with a lavish hand, till he exhausts the very resources of his bounty; while his indiscriminate liberality often encourages vice, and does more harm than good to society. The other considers his wealth as an improvable talent: he gives and spends only when he judges that it will answer some good purpose; he frequently rejects importunate applications, but on other occasions he is bountiful without waiting to be solicited. He studies to exercise beneficence in consistency with justice, and to retain the ability of permanent usefulness. He aims to render his liberality subservient to the best interests of mankind, and uniformly to discountenance sloth, profligacy, and ungodliness.—And thus, while he seems to limit his bounty, he renders it more abundantly and durably useful, by regulating it with prudence and discretion.—In like manner, the wisdom and justice of God may appear to restrain the exercise of his love: but they only direct it in that manner, which is most worthy and honourable to his name, and render it impossible that anything should be done of a contrary nature and tendency.

It may therefore suffice in general to observe, that the Lord, in communicating good, and exercising mercy, acts freely and according to his own perfections, and not by constraint, or reluctantly; that loving-kindness is his peculiar honour, which adds lustre to all his other attributes; that he delighteth in

goodness and mercy, and rejoiceth in his boundless power of communicating felicity; that he is not in any respect less holy, just, and true, than if he had shown no mercy; and that it is impossible he should communicate more happiness, upon any other plan, than he actually will communicate in that way which his infinite wisdom hath devised, whatever ignorance or presumption may imagine or assert.

II. Then we proceed to illustrate the truth and importance of the doctrine contained in the text, from the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with the human race.

This will be rendered very evident, by considering a gradation of events, in which the Lord hath exercised love and mercy to the full extent of the explanation already given; yea, far beyond all that ever could have entered into the heart of man to conceive, had it not been revealed.

Let us then endeavour to realize, as far as such poor worms are able, the infinite and self-existent God, from all eternity possessed of such essential glory and felicity, as were incapable of increase or diminution.

Thus circumstanced, he could have no other possible inducement but love, or a disposition to delight in communicating happiness, in creating the universe, and producing a vast variety of beings capable of life and enjoyment. The inanimate creation was formed perfectly good, and exactly suited to the use and benefit of living creatures. The numerous orders of these, from the invisible animated atom, to the bright Seraph before the throne, were all made complete in their kind, adapted to the place and design of their existence, and capable of a measure of enjoyment: and, except as sin has deranged the original constitution of infinite love, no creature is left destitute of a degree of happiness equal to its capacity. In meditating, however, on this subject, we must recollect that “the creation groaneth and travaileth in pain,” through the sins of man. Man’s cruelty and tyranny add immensely to the sufferings of innocent animals, and he is punished in them, as his property and the subjects of his original dominion.

It is also worthy of observation, that no rational creature has ever been deprived of that adequate felicity allotted to it, except in the case of transgression; at least we have no intimation of such a fact, either in the works or in the word of God. None has been degraded to an inferior situation, rendered uncertain in respect of the future, or distressed by terror, bitterness, or vanity. On the contrary, we have every reason to conclude, that the capacities of all obedient creatures continually expand; that their enjoyment proportionably increases; and that they all will become more and more blessed to all eternity. In these things surely GOD IS LOVE.

If the case of infants should be thought an exception, seeing they suffer and die without personal criminality, we may observe, without entering upon an

intricate controversy, that all who believe the Bible, must allow the human race to have become sinful and mortal by the fall of Adam: and they who reject revelation, will not find less difficulty than others, in accounting for the present condition of mankind. If, then, every branch fell when the root was overthrown: “if we are born in sin, and the children of wrath;” it behoves us to be silent on this subject, and to wait for the clearer light of the great decisive day. For indeed it is highly probable, that the case of infants will not only then appear consistent with the divine justice, in respect of their present sufferings, but one grand display of the divine mercy and goodness, in the felicity by which these sufferings were succeeded.

The Lord having created various orders of rational creatures, hath manifested his love, by condescending to become their moral Governor. Infinite wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth, are indispensably requisite in the Sovereign of the universe. Such a government must be infinitely perfect, and of the highest possible advantage to all creatures. “The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice,” for nothing, but enmity and rebellion, can be dissatisfied with this arrangement. The law, also, being holy, just, and good, was dictated by perfect love. Like a wise and kind father, the Lord requires us to love him with all our hearts, and to love others as ourselves; every other requirement may be readily resolved into these two great commandments; and if they were universally obeyed, universal harmony and felicity would be the consequence. Yet this is the law, against which the corrupt passions of man’s heart rise in desperate enmity!—Who then can deny that GOD IS LOVE?

But the law is enforced by an awful sanction, and it denounces an awful curse against every transgressor: what then shall we say to this? It would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that the punishments threatened in the law, and inflicted by the justice of God, result from love directed by infinite wisdom: not love of the individuals, whose final condemnation is determined, but enlarged benevolence to universal being through eternal ages. This however would carry us too far from our subject: it must therefore suffice to observe, that in the government of accountable creatures, who act voluntarily, and are influenced by motives, the denunciation of punishment must form a part of the system: and if this punishment be only inflicted on the disobedient, and do not exceed the heinousness of their crimes; while it tends to retain multitudes in obedience, and preserve the universe from the effects of general rebellion, it must prove a public benefit, and consist with wise and holy love. That must be the most beneficent plan, which secures the greatest, most extensive, and permanent advantages to the most excellent part of moral agents: and the philosophical notion, that the felicity even of sinful creatures is the ultimate end proposed to himself by the Governor of the world, is not more repugnant to Scripture, than to the common sense and opinion of mankind in similar cases. A wise ruler of a nation, in proportion as he loved his people, would be care-

ful, by good laws impartially executed, to restrain the ill-disposed from injuring their fellow-subjects, and disturbing the peace of the community: and if this made it necessary to punish with death some individuals, these would be considered as suffering for the public good: and provided they deserved their doom, it would not be deemed an impeachment of his paternal love to his people. On the contrary, the prince, who under the plea of clemency should neglect to punish evildoers, and to protect his peaceable subjects, might indeed be the favourite of the fraudulent and rapacious, but his conduct would be reprobated by all honest men.

But as we are not capable of fully comprehending the plan of the divine government; and it would therefore be presumptuous to enter further upon such reasonings, let us turn our thoughts to another view of the subject.—The Lord hath shown that he is love, in his dealings with sinful men, by his patience and providential bounty. Could we possibly witness all the crimes of every description, with all their aggravations, which are perpetrated in this city during a single day; could we see the malignity of every sin, and conceive of them all as committed against *us* by persons on whom we had conferred the greatest favours; and did we possess the unrestrained power of executing vengeance, I am persuaded that our patience would be wearied out before evening.—But the Lord at once sees all the sins committed in the whole world, together with the desperate wickedness of the human heart; he abhors with unalterable and infinite hatred every kind and degree of unholiness; he is able at any moment to punish sinners with irresistible vengeance; he could sustain no loss, if he destroyed all the workers of iniquity, and he might do it consistently with most perfect justice. Yet he bears with the rebellions of mankind from age to age; he endures the provocations of guilty lands, during the course of revolving centuries, while their presumptuous ingratitude continually increases, he prolongs the lives of individuals to fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years, while they defy his justice, ridicule his works and word, or persecute to death his inoffensive worshippers! This is a very affecting illustration of the subject, and a convincing proof that GOD IS LOVE. “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed;” and besides the value of a reprieve to a condemned criminal, many of us are under unspeakable obligations to the long-suffering of our God, as he spared us during many years when we lived in unrepented sin, that he might at length make us partakers of his great salvation.

But, as if exemption from deserved misery were a small matter, the Lord confers on sinful men an exuberance of temporal comforts and benefits. From year to year he fills the earth with his riches: summer and winter, seed-time and harvest do not fail: things most necessary to the life of man are most plentifully bestowed; but the revolving seasons bring us a constant succession of valuable productions, to regale us with an agreeable variety of indulgence: and

though we too commonly abuse this bounty to the dishonour of the Giver, every sense is liberally gratified with its proper object. The Lord holdeth our souls in life; his arm protects us, and his providence watches over us; while perhaps we proudly refuse to supplicate his favour, or ungratefully neglect to acknowledge his mercy. He defends us from sickness or heals our infirmities; he corrects with gentleness, and seems in haste to relieve our distresses: he sometimes shows us the danger, that our deliverance may be the more affecting; but more frequently he spares us the alarm, though he knows this will render us less attentive to his kindness. In these, and various similar instances, “the Lord is loving unto every man:” “He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” “O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.”

These are, however, subordinate proofs that GOD IS LOVE: and the apostle did not so much as stop to notice them; but with a beautiful abruptness hastened to select the grand illustration and demonstration of his doctrine: “In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein was love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The Lord’s purpose of pardoning sinners, and advancing them to a higher degree of glory and felicity, than that from which they had fallen, is not considered as the grand proof that God is love; though the knowledge of him and of ourselves will convince us, that it is too vast for our capacities, and exceeds all computation: but *the means* of our recovery and reconciliation are represented as exhibiting a still more astonishing illustration of the subject. Could the blessings designed us have been honourably conferred by an act of sovereignty, without the intervention of a mediator and an atoning sacrifice, as a prince pardons and then prefers a man who hath been guilty of treason; the obligation would have been immense. But it appears that this was impossible, because the Lord cannot act contrary to his own perfections. When therefore the honour of his law and justice seemed to place an insurmountable barrier to the exercise of pardoning mercy; when he could have glorified himself in the destruction of our rebellious race, and in creating worlds replenished with nobler inhabitants; that he should form and accomplish the plan of saving us by the incarnation and sufferings of his only begotten Son, was most stupendous mercy! That he should do this unsolicited by sinners; yea, while they continued to harden their hearts in daring rebellion against him! That he should both purpose the design of reconciling the world to himself by the interposition of a surety; and when the whole creation could not supply any being, whose dignity, excellency, love, and power were adequate to the arduous and gracious undertaking, that he should so love the world, as to give his only, his well-beloved Son, to assume the nature and be-

come the brother of apostate man, that he might be his Redeemer, by a life of suffering obedience, and an agonizing death upon the cross! In this, says the apostle, is love! It is the grandest display, that ever was or ever will be made of God as Love! It exceeds and swallows up all the thoughts of men; and even of angels, who desire to look down into these things with unceasing admiration and rapturous delight!

Let it also be carefully observed, that the centre of these adorable wonders of divine mercy, is not fixed in the circumstance of Christ, as *incarnate*, dying on the cross for sinners; but in the *incarnation* of the only begotten Son of God, that he might thus suffer and die for them!

We now therefore consider the Saviour as come into the world; his name, EMMANUEL, God with us; his humiliation, obedience, and sufferings accomplished. We next contemplate him rising from the grave, ascending into heaven, and in our nature appearing in the presence of God for us, as our High Priest and Advocate; exalted to the mediatorial throne, reigning over all creatures, and possessed of all power and fulness, for the salvation of every sinner who comes to God by him.

Had men known their real situation and character; and had it been intimated, that reconciliation to God, recovery to holiness, and admission to everlasting felicity might *possibly be attained*, by journeying to some remote inhospitable region, and performing certain arduous conditions: none would have acted *reasonably*, who hesitated to go in search of this invaluable advantage. In such a concern, all other pursuits ought to be relinquished or suspended, and every danger or hardship disregarded: no delay should be admitted, but all ought immediately to set out for the appointed place; and communicate the interesting report to others, till it had spread through the whole earth, as the most rejoicing tidings which ever reached the ears of sinful man.

But the Lord knew that we were not thus *reasonable*; but wholly indisposed to regard distant rumours, or to make convenient inquiries, about salvation. He therefore, according to the purposes of his boundless love, appointed a number of reconciled sinners to execute the ministry of reconciliation, by going abroad into the world, and preaching the gospel to every creature. He invested them with miraculous powers, and inspired them with holy affections; he prepared them for patient sufferings and unwearied labours, and sent them with the glad tidings of his grace to sinners of every description, language, or climate. He ordered them not only to state and confirm the truths of Christianity; but to warn, invite, persuade, expostulate, and beseech sinners in his name to be reconciled to God. In this embassy, the vilest blasphemer, oppressor, murderer, and persecutor is included: not even the hoary-headed profligate is excepted! All things are ready: all men everywhere are commanded to repent, and invited to believe in the Son of God: nor is it possible that a sinner can want anything, which is not promised to all who seek it by earnest prayer.

Miraculous powers have indeed long since been withdrawn; but the same ministry of reconciliation is continued: nor does anything at this day so much prevent the gospel from spreading throughout the earth, as the disinclination to receive it which is universally manifested. Every heart is closed against the divine message, by self-flattering prejudices and carnal affections; men of all nations and orders unite in opposing its admission among them; and the events, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, have in this respect taken place, again and again, as often as the unadulterated gospel of Christ has been sent to those parts of the world, which were before unacquainted with it.

This may suggest a proper answer to the objections of infidels against revelation, on the ground of its not having been universally vouchsafed. The Lord indeed is not bound to vouchsafe unmerited benefits to all, or any of his creatures: "May he not do what he will with his own?" The objection therefore is replete with blind presumption. Yet it may also be observed, that ministers are commissioned and instructed, to use their utmost endeavours, that the knowledge of the gospel may be rendered universal; and that numbers have been, and still are, ready, at any personal risk, to attempt it: but the lusts of men raise such barriers against them, as nothing but Omnipotence can surmount or remove. Even in this *Christian* land, the genuine religion of the Bible scarcely ever finds admission into any place, but in the midst of opposition, contempt, and reproach: and no man should attempt to preach it, without standing prepared for degradation of character, or exclusion from preferments which he might otherwise have expected. Many sincere friends to the truth are so influenced by this consideration, that they bring forward the peculiar doctrines of the gospel with a sparing and cautious hand, in hopes to insinuate them almost imperceptibly: and few of those who now glory in the cross of Christ, will deny, that once their hearts rose in aversion against that humiliating subject.

Yet still, our God, who is love, perseveres in sending his message to sinners, even forcing it upon their attention, and requiring his ministers to venture their scorn and resentment by their intrusions and importunity! And at last, when the carnal heart still persists in rejecting the gracious proposal, "of his great love wherewith he loved them, even when they were dead in sin, he quickens them by his grace; and makes them willing in the day of his power."

When therefore we affirm that GOD IS LOVE, we may apply it, to the love of the Father in giving his only Son to become our Saviour; to the love of the Son, in assuming our nature, coming into this sinful world, and dying on the cross for our sins, that he might be our all-prevailing Advocate; and to the love of the Spirit, in regenerating, sanctifying and comforting our hearts: that so "glory may be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end: Amen."

It would lead us too far to expatiate on the various instances of the Lord's

unspeakable love to his believing people; his condescending regard to their minutest concerns; his tender sympathy with them in all their trials; his readiness to forgive even their renewed offences, and restore to them the joy of his salvation; his providential care, in restraining their enemies, moderating their temptations, supplying their wants, and answering their prayers; his kind acceptance of their feeble services; the consolations he affords them, especially in trouble; and his marvellous interposition in rendering their sufferings most efficacious medicines, and the king of terrors a messenger of peace. These and many other topics might be enlarged on, to illustrate the proposition that GOD IS LOVE. But we must,

III. Proceed to mention some perverse inferences which are frequently made from the text. 'If GOD BE LOVE,' say some men, 'may we not conclude that he will not make his creatures miserable?' Now this strange inference not only contradicts the general tenor of Scripture, the divine revelation of which it supposes; but it is refuted by undeniable facts: for most certainly sinful creatures do suffer many and great miseries. Not to mention the instances recorded in the sacred volume, concerning the Lord's dealings with fallen angels and sinful men; can we live in the world, and not both witness and feel the effects of the divine displeasure against transgressors? Are not whole cities and nations desolated by the scourge of war; or by famines, pestilences, and earthquakes? Do not various diseases continually sweep immense multitudes into the grave, after enduring most excruciating pains? Are not the survivors bereaved of their choicest comforts, and penetrated with exquisite anguish? Is not the earth, in every part, filled with sighs, tears, groans, and bitter complaints? And are not all these afflictions the appointment of God, as punishments of sin, comprised in the first sentence denounced on fallen man,—“in sorrow shalt thou eat bread all the days of thy life,—till thou return to the ground:—for dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return?” Gen. iii. 16–19.

These sufferings are indeed turned into blessings to believers, and they are often useful in bringing sinners to repentance: but in themselves they are miseries, and frequently arise by natural consequence from men's vices;—so that it is most evident, that God doth punish sin with great severity. Hence we may learn, that we cannot judge concerning his conduct, from our own duty in apparently similar cases. In our private capacity, we ought not to inflict misery, or withhold relief when we are able to afford it, on account of any provocations whatever: but the duty of magistrates, in respect of malefactors, much more resembles the case under consideration. We should however frame to ourselves the most deplorable scenes imaginable; and then inquire, whether a benevolent man would not have prevented or relieved such miseries, if it had been in his power? And the answer to this inquiry must convince everyone, who does not deny the superintending providence of God, or blaspheme his

name, that we are incompetent judges on such subjects.

Yet many, who will not argue against these conclusions, would infer from the text, that God will not make any of his creatures finally and eternally miserable. But the deduction ought to be this: “GOD IS LOVE;” therefore he will not cause any creature to suffer, unless some wise, holy, and benevolent purpose can be answered by its sufferings.’ It would not consist with infinite love to give one moment’s *needless* uneasiness; and it may consist with infinite love to make sinners eternally miserable; if the glory of God, and the interests of the universe through eternal ages, render it indispensably necessary. Facts demonstrate, to all who allow God to be infinite in justice and goodness, that durable sufferings may be inflicted consistently with those perfections. Complicated and long continued miseries are very common; and death, the most dreaded of all temporal evils, cannot possibly be avoided. This seems to bring matters to extremities: for if the greatest punishment, which God hath threatened to inflict on sinners in this world, never fails to be executed; who can prove, or even probably conjecture, that the Lord will not accomplish his most tremendous denunciations of eternal misery? He is TRUTH as well as LOVE: and will any man seriously attempt to exalt his love by denying his Truth? He hath said, that “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven—in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction for “they shall go away into everlasting punishment.” Matt. xxv. 46. 2 Thess. i. 8. And surely “God is not a man that he should lie!—hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” Numb. xxiii. 19.

The grandest display of the love of God doth equally declare his justice and holiness: and will not men allow that he is love, unless he will, as it were, abdicate his throne, dishonour his name, and neglect the interests of his obedient subjects, in order to preserve impenitent rebels from deserved punishment? These reflections ought rather to convince us, that there is a malignity in sin, of which men are not aware; seeing God, who is love, so terribly threatens, and severely punishes his offended creatures, and yet rescues a penitent remnant in so stupendous a manner!

But some men will still contend that God will save all *sincere* persons, each in his own way; and support this anti-scriptural opinion by the words of our text.—Leaving at present the case of those, who never were favoured with the clear light of divine revelation: let it be observed, that if they who are fully informed, or might be, did they properly improve their advantages, will persist in neglecting the way of salvation revealed in the Scriptures, to depend on their moral virtues, rational schemes, or self-invented observances; if they treat the truth of God as a lie, and count that wisdom, which angels adore, to be foolishness; if they regard the stupendous love of God in giving his Son to be the Saviour of the world as needless; and then pretend that he will condemn

no man for unavoidable errors: let them look to it, for evil is before them. The whole Scripture declares such unbelief to be the offspring of pride, and the love of sin: and that such men continue under the unqualified sentence of final condemnation.

Sincerity is an ambiguous term: *sincerely* to hate infinite good and despise infinite excellency; and thus to be very *sincere* in fighting against God, and persecuting his saints, is surely very different from sincere repentance, faith in Christ, love of his people, and obedience to his commands. Yet men either *artfully or ignorantly* confound these distinct ideas; and then pretend that *sincerity* is all that is necessary to salvation.

But this short specimen must suffice; though many more false inferences from the text might be mentioned; the wise man has, however, summed them all up in one verse: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil." Eccles. viii. 11.

IV. Let us in the last place make some practical use of the subject.

The view of the unfathomable love of God, which hath been given, should increase men's abhorrence of sin, and dread of its consequences. The more glorious and excellent the Lord appears to be, the greater degree of odiousness must be contained in every transgression against him; and crimes committed under the clear light of the gospel, must on that account be peculiarly inexcusable. While therefore sinners should take warning to flee from the wrath to come, (for how will "they escape if they neglect so great salvation," and harden themselves in disobedience, because our God is merciful?) it is incumbent on us all to humble ourselves more and more for all our numberless offences, as most hateful and unreasonable, because committed against infinite goodness and excellency.

On the other hand, the subject is most delightfully suited to encourage the poor trembling penitent, how many or heinous soever his sins may have been. Poor desponding soul, remember that GOD is LOVE. Consider what he hath done to make way for the honourable exercise of his mercy. There were two obstacles in the way of our felicity; namely, his justice, and our proud obstinacy. He hath removed the former by "not sparing his own Son," but giving him a sacrifice for our sins; and he overcomes the latter when he "gives us repentance to the acknowledging of his truth." If then thou dost now submit to his righteousness, confess thy sins, and apply for salvation according to his merciful invitations; thou mayest assuredly expect a gracious reception; for he who commended his love to his enemies, by giving his own Son to die for them, cannot reject the weeping contrite supplicant, who pleads the all-prevailing name of Jesus, in humble faith, and fervent desires of finding mercy and grace through him.

Here again we may learn the standard of true excellency. The most shining characters, which genius hath selected to immortalize, have commonly been illustriously mischievous; and the unqualified admiration with which they are often mentioned, exceedingly misleads inexperienced youth. But GOD is LOVE; and the more we resemble and imitate him in this endearing attribute, the greater real excellency we unquestionably possess. Let us then be “followers of God,” and “walk in love,” after his pattern, in all the various displays of it which have been considered: then we shall certainly be known and approved as his children, and found meet for the eternal inheritance of his heavenly kingdom.

Finally, if we be conscious of having fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel, let us receive the trials allotted us, as the wise and holy appointments of divine love, let us not judge of the Lord’s dispensations by our feelings or reasonings, but by his holy word; and let us submit to his will, whatever he may withhold, take away, or inflict; assured that he manages all our concerns in that manner, which is most conducive to our eternal interests, and best suited to illustrate the riches of his paternal liberality.