

THE
THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF THE
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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 SE-
LECT SUBJECTS,—ESSAYS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN RELI-
GION, AND THE NATURE AND WARRANT OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

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SERMON IX.

FINAL RETRIBUTION OF BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS.

ROMANS, II. 5-9.

Who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.

IN meditating on the solemnities, discoveries, and consequences of that great decisive day, when the Lord shall come to be our Judge, we were obliged to pass over in a general manner, several important particulars relative to the subject: and especially we reserved for a separate discourse, the consideration of the manner in which all men will be judged according to their works, and receive according to what they have done, whether it be good or evil. The present will therefore be an appendix to the preceding discourse, as intended to illustrate its interesting truths, and to render them more perspicuous and impressive. In the passage before us, the apostle does not undertake to decide a controverted point of doctrine, to state the method of a sinner's justification; or to account for that difference of character which actually subsists among the descendants of fallen Adam. These subjects he hath fully discussed in other parts of his writings: but here he takes occasion from his subject to show, that the opposite conduct of the righteous and the wicked will terminate in future happiness or misery. He considers some persons more favoured by providence than others, as the Jews had every way the advantage of the Gentiles: but he intimates that they generally abused those advantages to their deeper condemnation: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" The more kind, patient, and merciful the Lord is, the baser our rebellion and ingratitude must appear; the greater cause have we to repent, and the more abundant motives and encouragements. But if men presume on his lenity, supposing that he will not or cannot punish, and so encourage themselves in sin, they "despise the riches of his goodness and mercy:" and "after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds." The treasures which they perhaps covetously and dishonestly accumulate on earth, must be left to their survivors: but the vast accessions, which impenitent sinners daily make to their load of guilt, and the heavy

wrath of God against them, are laid up for *themselves*, to be their future and eternal portion. For at the great day of righteous retribution, God “will render unto every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.”—In discoursing on these words, I shall endeavour,

I. To describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to show the doom reserved for each of them.

II. Compare the statement thus made with several other important Scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

III. Explain more precisely the rules of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles: and,

IV. Make some particular application of the subject.

I. Then I shall endeavour to describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to show the doom reserved for each of them.

The apostle’s reasoning throughout this whole epistle proves, that he was speaking of sinners under a dispensation of mercy. He therefore considers a man, thus circumstanced, proposing to himself the acquisition of glory, honour, and immortality. Such a purpose would imply a belief of the Scriptural doctrine, concerning the perfections and government of God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of righteous retribution: with a persuasion that eternal happiness is attainable even by sinners, in the way which the Lord hath revealed. At the same time the man is convinced, that the blessing must be sought with diligence and self-denial, and that it ought to be preferred before all other objects whatever. Thus, “while there be many that say, Who will show us any good,”—“seeking every man his gain from his quarter,” pursuing worldly pleasures, honours, and distinctions, or wasting their lives in sloth and dissipation; he “seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” and “labours for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” He is now become a candidate for “glory, honour, and immortality and nothing, inferior to an endless inheritance and unfading joys, can satisfy the vast desires of his heart. Whatever he renounces, ventures, or suffers, he resolves to seek “a kingdom that cannot be moved.” He feels the force of our Lord’s questions, “What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” He does not, however, merely seek deliverance from wrath and misery; he is also athirst for happiness in the enjoyment of God, “and of those pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore.” He attends to religion, not that he may be seen of men, or acquire reputation; nor is he solely intent on pacifying an uneasy

conscience: but as a reasonable creature, formed for an immortal existence, he aims, in this introductory scene, to insure felicity in the world to come. He “believes that God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him and therefore he seeks his favour as “the one thing needful,” and endeavours to render all other objects and pursuits subservient to this grand concern.

It is evident that men of this stamp are very scarce; and that most of those who are called Christians, are wholly strangers to this habitual purpose and conduct. The few who answer the description, are not confined to any single sect, but are scattered about in the visible church, as “men wondered at” for their singularity and preciseness. Now, at whatever period of life, any man is thus brought “to seek glory, honour, and immortality,” he enters on a new state, and constitutes a new character; “being made free from sin, he becomes the servant of God, has his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

These persons seek the desired good, “by patient continuance in well-doing.” A sinner cannot be said *to do well*, until he humbles himself before God for his transgressions, mourns for them in true repentance, confesses them with self-abhorrence and a sincere purpose of forsaking them, and seeks mercy in the way which God appointed, for the glory of his own name and the honour of his violated law. A rebel can do nothing well, so long as he vindicates and persists in his rebellion, refuses mercy because the terms of it are too humiliating, and is wholly averse to submission and renewed allegiance. The prodigal son when he came to himself, and determined to return home, and humbly crave his father’s forgiveness, began to do well. The proud morality, formal devotion, or ostentatious liberality of an impenitent sinner, will never meet the approbation of that God, who sent his Son into the world, “not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Humble penitents, and they alone, begin to answer to the character described by the apostle.

All such persons will likewise credit the testimony of God concerning his Son, and the way of acceptance through his atonement and mediation. Whatever modern reasoners may plausibly advance concerning the *innocence of error*, and the small importance of doctrinal truth: the inspired writers uniformly consider unbelief as springing from an evil heart; and false doctrines, as *damnable heresies*, and *strong delusions*, which God permits as the punishment of those who hate the truth, because they love sin.—“How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another?” “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light *because their deeds are evil.*” “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” John iii. 16–21, 36. This is a fair specimen of the Scriptural declarations on this subject; and as Christ “is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and

no man cometh to the Father but by him,” we may assuredly infer, that no one *does well*, according to the apostle’s meaning, who believes not in the Son of God, and refuses to seek eternal life as the gift of God in him.

The Lord hath instituted in his holy word, certain ordinances, as means of grace to our souls, and that in them we may render him the glory due unto his name. The characters of whom we speak, will certainly honour the Lord and seek his blessing, by a diligent and conscientious observance of these ordinances. They will also separate from bad company, avoid temptations and occasions of sin, exercise self-denial, and renounce all pleasures or interests, which interfere with the exercise of divine love and the obedience of faith; and they will prove the sincerity of their religious profession, by observing the directions, and copying the example of the Lord Jesus, and by walking in newness of life.

Numbers, like the stony ground hearers, show much earnestness in these things, and express great confidence and joy: yet they are partial in obedience, and continue but for a time. They readily perform such duties as are creditable, cheap, and easy; but they refuse to part with Herodias, or to cut off the offending right hand; they do not mortify constitutional or customary evils, reject unhallowed gain, venture the displeasure of rich and powerful friends, or attend to those things in religion, which would expose them to contempt, reproach and hardship.—Thus they maintain a religious profession, while exempted from peculiar trials; and many pass through life, unsuspected by themselves or others: but “if persecution or tribulation arise because of the word, by and by they are offended.”—On the contrary, they, of whom we now speak, have “received the good seed into an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience.” They are not partial in their religion, but show themselves the friends of Christ by doing whatsoever he commands them. They have indeed many infirmities, and may fall into sin through inadvertency; they may even live in some sinful neglect or practice, through ignorance or mistake; but cannot habitually commit known sin. They search out their faults; and as they discover any, repent of, and forsake them. “Their hearts are sound in the Lord’s statutes, and they shall never be ashamed.”

In this course of believing obedience, the disciples of Christ encounter many temptations, struggle with various discouragements, and are exposed to sharp trials. The contempt and hatred of the world, the assaults of the tempter, the peculiarities of their circumstances, dispositions, and habits, and the chastisements of their heavenly Father, combine to try their patience. Perseverance and constancy, in following the dictates of conscience, expose them to the charge of obstinacy and perverseness, or subject them to heavy losses and difficulties; while inward conflicts, permitted to humble and prove

them, sometimes make them ready to faint and despond.—Yet they “patiently continue in well-doing;” they submit to the will of God under afflictions, meekly bear injuries, wait the appointed time for the fulfilment of the Lord’s promises, and persevere in the path of upright obedience. They seek for blessings which cannot be expected in any other way: and are ready to say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”—Their religion resembles a river, which still continues to flow, though sometimes with a fuller current, and at others with a diminished stream: while that of the hypocrite resembles a land flood, now impetuously deluging the fields, and then wholly disappearing. But to those who thus “patiently continue in well doing,” and to them only, will the righteous Judge at last assign the eternal inheritance. “He that continueth to the end shall be saved.”

We need not enlarge on the reverse of this character. “To them who are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, the Lord will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;” yea “upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” Such persons, instead of believing the gospel, and in humble repentance embracing the promised salvation, contend against it, “contradicting and blaspheming.” They dispute against the strictness of the divine law or justice, and the sentence denounced against transgressors. They oppose their own reasonings against the express testimony of God, in respect of the mysteries of redemption; and venture to charge him foolishly, as if they were more wise and righteous than He.—Being thus “contentious, they do not obey the truth;” submit to God, repent of sin, believe in Christ, separate from the world, or walk in newness of life. For “they obey unrighteousness;” sin, in one form or other, has dominion over them; and their unbelief is the effect of a depraved heart and a rebellious will, which it tends reciprocally to confirm and render more desperate. To persons of this character, the righteous Judge will recompense “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish not regarding their outward privileges or distinctions, but deciding impartially according to their works for, “there is no respect of persons with God.” Let us then,

II. Compare this statement with several other important Scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

It is the uniform declaration of the sacred writers, that all men shall be judged according to their works: yet it is equally evident, that faith or unbelief determine a man’s state in the sight of God, as justified, or as under condemnation. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.” “He that believeth not is condemned already: because he hath not believed in the name

of the only begotten Son of God.” Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 18. v. 24. The same instruction is implied in the apostle’s vision, “the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works; and whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire.” Rev. xx. 12–15.

The prophet having shown, that the ways of the Lord are equal, was led to state the characters of the righteous, and the wicked; and then he adds, “when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive;—repent and turn from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin.” Ezek. xviii. The true penitent therefore will not be condemned, when judged according to his deeds; which he must be if the solemn process should be conducted according to the strictness of the law, without reference to the grace of the gospel, to which all these invitations and promises belong.

The atoning sacrifices of the Mosaic law, which typified the redemption of Christ, were offered upon Mount Zion: and David, inquiring who should ascend and worship with acceptance on that holy hill, draws a character which entirely accords with that given of a true believer in the new Testament. Psalm xv. Thus he shows us, *which of the professors of true religion*, will stand accepted in the day of judgment: but this has nothing to do with such as openly neglect or oppose revealed truth, or refuse the salvation of the gospel.

In perfect harmony with these Scriptures, our Lord describes his true disciples, “whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, my sister, and my mother.” “Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.” Matth. xii. 49, 50. Luke xi. 28. This word or will of God doubtless has peculiar relation to Christ, and the voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him:” and a moral or pharisaical decency of conduct most essentially differs from the obedience of faith. “He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son; he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” 1 John v. 10—12. The unbeliever, therefore, whatever his moral character may be, so far from doing the will of God, disobeys his express command, and deliberately affronts his veracity.

Our Lord closed his sermon on the mount with this remarkable passage, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me *in that day*, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful

works? and *then* will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rains descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” Matt, vii. 21–27. Luke vi. 46–49. This passage evidently refers to the day of judgment; but it mentions none except those who call Christ Lord, come to him, and hear his sayings. His professed disciples therefore are exclusively intended; and living faith is described as distinguishable from dead faith by its holy fruits. Disobedient professors will be condemned as hypocrites, or wicked and slothful servants; but avowed unbelievers as “enemies, who would not have the Son of God to reign over them.” Matt, xxv. 30. Luke xix. 21–27.

But the solemn description of the great decisive day, given us by the Judge himself, is most conclusive on the subject. Matt. xxv. 31–46. In this important scripture, acts of kindness shown to believers for the sake of Christ, are the only deeds mentioned, as the reason for the rejoicing words addressed to the righteous, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.” And no charge is brought against the wicked, but their omission of such duties, when the sentence is denounced, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” Yet it will then appear, that the righteous have performed many other good works of divers kinds, and that the wicked have been guilty of numerous other crimes and omissions. Why then did our Lord mention these things exclusively? Doubtless, because he supposed them to constitute the most conclusive evidence of genuine faith, or unbelief. Beneficence, not springing from love to Christ, nor exercised towards his disciples, his *brethren* or representatives, cannot be here intended, as many have inconsiderately imagined,—for who will say, that an indiscriminate liberality, connected with an ungodly licentious life, will entitle a man to the heavenly inheritance? Or if any should venture on such an assertion, would *they* also allow, that the want of this beneficence will expose a man to the awful doom here denounced, however free from vice, or adorned with other virtues, his character may have been? Or will any one maintain, that the liberality of infidels to one another, from any motive, answers to our Lord’s words, “I was hungry and ye gave *me* meat;—for as much as ye did it to the least of these *my brethren*, ye did it unto *me*?”—Indeed a measure of the same absurdities attaches to every other interpretation of this passage: except that which goes upon the following principles, gathered from the several parts of

the Sacred Volume. There is no salvation for sinners, except by the mercy of God through Jesus Christ; no interest in this salvation without faith; no true faith, except that which worketh by love; no love to Christ is genuine which is not accompanied by special love to his disciples; and no love to the brethren is unfeigned, which does not influence a man to alleviate their distresses, supply their wants, and do them good, as he hath opportunity and ability. This love is the fruit of the Spirit: where the Spirit of Christ dwells, all the fruits of the Spirit will be produced: and “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his.” A detail of particulars would not have suited the majesty of our Lord’s description: the most prominent distinguishing feature of believers and unbelievers was selected; and thus an intimation was given of the rule of judgment, sufficiently clear to the humble student of Scripture, though others may mistake or pervert it. In this view of it the whole is obvious, and coincides with other testimonies of the sacred writers. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because *we love the brethren.*” 1 John iii. 14. “Seeing ye have purified your hearts though the Spirit, unto unfeigned *love of the brethren*; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again—by the word of God.” 1 Peter i. 22, 23. “If a brother or sister be naked, or destitute of daily food, and one of you say depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?” “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth; and hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him.” James ii. 15, 16. 1 John iii. 18, 19. So that love of the brethren, shown in active kindness, is uniformly required as evidence of our faith in Christ, and love to his name.

These reflections elucidate the following Scriptures also, and are confirmed by them. “Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead.” “The grace of God that bringeth salvation—teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Titus ii. 11–14.

One most solemn and affecting passage still remains to be considered: “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, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” 2 Thess. i. 5–12. We are here expressly informed, that at the day of judgment, all will be condemned who have not *known God*, and *obeyed the gospel*; but

how many persons of moral character and external respectability will be found in that company! No exceptions, however, are intimated; the saints, *even* those that believe, will alone stand accepted by the Judge; and all else will be punished with everlasting destruction from his presence.

I shall conclude this part of the subject, with the words which Christ spake to his servant John, “Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.—I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” Rev. xxii. 12–14. But to whom does the title and privilege of the Tree of Life belong? Surely to the true believer, who loves Christ, and keeps his commandments. “Ye are my friends,” says he, “if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

This view of the subject harmonizes the whole Scripture, and reconciles those parts which seem to be contrary to each other: but when this centre of unity is overlooked, men either “go about to establish their own righteousness,” or run into Antinomianism. These two extremes are the *Scylla* and *Charybdis*, the fatal rock or dreadful whirlpool of our perilous voyage. I have, therefore, endeavoured to mark out the safe passage between them; and may the Holy Spirit guide us at a distance from these and all other dangers, on the right hand and on the left! We proceed then,

III. To state more explicitly, and show more precisely, the rules of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles.

It is most evident, that the Scripture was intended principally for those who bestow pains to understand it: and this obvious reflection illustrates the propriety of the descriptions there given of the great decisive day: for they certainly relate almost exclusively to those who profess the religion of the Bible. We cannot therefore infer any thing from these descriptions, concerning those who have not been favoured with revelation, or have rejected it: though other Scriptures give some light on the subject. The holy law is the unalterable rule of right and wrong, in respect of all men however distinguished; nor is it possible, that God should judge of characters and actions by any other rule; for the law is the exact reflection of his infinite holiness, and he cannot deny himself. He can, however, pardon the guilty, and make allowance for unavoidable disadvantages. They who know not the will of God, and do it not, shall be beaten with few stripes: but they who know and refuse to do his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. Like xii. 47, 48. It will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who heard the doctrines and saw the miracles of Christ, and did not repent and believe the gospel.

The apostle therefore adds, a few verses after the text, “as many as have

sinned without law”, shall also perish without law.” They have indeed violated the perfect rule of duty: but as they had not the advantage of the written word, they will not be liable to so heavy a condemnation as wicked Jews and Christians: yet, as they acted against the dictates of their own reason and conscience, those remains of the law originally written in the heart, they “will perish without law.” For “being a law to themselves,” their consciences may indeed excuse some parts of their conduct, but they must condemn others; especially in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ: so that “every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.” Rom. iii. 19. All, except idiots, (who scarcely can be thought accountable), know far better than they practice, and might know much more, were not their hearts set against the truth through love of sin. All men must therefore be condemned according to this rule, and the number and aggravation of their crimes, compared with the measure of their advantages, is the standard by which their punishment will be ascertained, by the infinitely righteous Judge.

What the Lord may do *in mercy* to any of his sinful creatures, it does not become us to inquire, beyond what he hath seen good to reveal: but we have no ground to suppose that any who die without spiritual religion can be happy in another world; and neither Scripture nor history countenance the opinion, that the Lord gives his sanctifying Spirit, where he has not sent some measure of the light of revelation.—We are sure, however, that the state of pagans will be far better than that of wicked Christians so called. While we therefore rejoice in our privileges, we may tremble, lest they should increase our condemnation: and the state of the nations, who still sit in darkness and the shadow of death, should animate our endeavours, and excite our prayers for their conversion.

The apostle adds, “as many as have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law.” The Jews rejected the gospel, and sought justification by the works of the law. Deists discard revelation, and rely on their own moral conduct to recommend them to God; and various descriptions of professed Christians form a complex law of works, out of the religion of the New Testament. But whatever system men favoured with revelation may adopt, if they put the event of the great decisive day, on their own works, as the ground of their confidence; they will be judged according to the holy law of God, and fall under its awful curse. Christ is become of none effect to them: they are fallen from grace, and become debtors to do the whole law.” Gal. v. 1–6. The advantages such men enjoy, the crimes they commit, their proud aversion to the humbling salvation of the gospel, and the degree of their enmity and opposition to the truth, will determine the measure of their guilt and punishment, according to the decision of unerring wisdom and infinite justice.

Some observations have already been made on the case of those, who

allow the doctrines of Christianity, renounce dependence on their own works, and profess to expect pardon, righteousness, and eternal life, as “the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Such persons, when the Lord shall come, will be judged according to this profession; and if their faith be shown to have been living and genuine, by its holy fruits, according to the discoveries which have been mentioned, they will, as justified believers, receive the reward of righteousness; and their future glory and felicity will be proportioned to the degree of their grace and obedience of faith. But if their conduct and dispositions have proved that they were not true believers, they will remain under the condemnation of the law, aggravated by their abuse of the gospel; and so have their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers.

IV. Then let us make some particular application of the subject.

It has been before remarked, that “we *must* all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ;” and let this reflection sink deep into every heart. Men voluntarily break the laws of their country, but dire compulsion takes place, when they are convicted and executed for their crimes. The young man, rejoicing in his vigour and flow of spirits, may give a loose to his passions; but let him remember, that “for all these things God will bring him into judgment.”—You may now forget God, but he will not forget you, or any of your works. You may affront his justice, and despise his mercy: but he will shortly say, “It is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will have no mercy on them.” Isaiah xxvii. 11. Now is the day of the Lord’s patience, but the day of wrath and perdition of ungodly men approacheth: now he invites you to draw near to his throne of grace: shortly he will summon you to his awful tribunal. “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” “Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many—shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door;” it will be for ever in vain for those that stand without, to cry, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” Now the Saviour pleads with you, in accents of tenderest love; “how long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.” But ere long, he will frown on the impenitent and unbelieving, and say, “Because I called and ye refused, I stretched out my hands and no man regarded; therefore shall ye eat the fruit of your own ways, and be filled with your own devices.”—“Oh that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end.” Prov. i. 19–31. Deut. xxxii. 29.

But will any of you, with this solemn season of discovery and decision

before your eyes, deliberately put the event of it upon the goodness of your hearts and lives? Is there not in your very soul an involuntary shrinking from so strict and awful a scrutiny? Do you not feel a disposition to say, “enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord?” “If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who may stand.” As you value your immortal souls, do not now insist on any plea, which you feel to be inadmissible in the great day of righteous retribution. Stand not on any distinction between your case and that of your fellow-sinners. Seek above all things an interest in the atonement and righteousness of Christ; and count all but loss that you may win him, and be found in him. Disregard the scorn and reproach of an unbelieving world; anticipating that day, when every eye shall see the despised Redeemer, and his favour be universally allowed of more value than ten thousand worlds.—“Let every one,” however, “that nameth the name of Christ, depart from all iniquity.” “If we say that we have faith, and have not works, will faith save us,” in the day when the Lord shall render unto every man “according to his deeds?” Alas! a dead faith, a presumptuous hope, and an unsound profession, will only increase the anguish and shame of final condemnation.

Even if we be true believers, negligence and loose walking will cloud our evidence, and weaken our warranted confidence: while the greatest possible encouragement is given to all genuine good works, by that very system which excludes boasting, and allows none of our services the least share in our justification before God. “Not a cup of cold water given to a disciple, from love to Christ, shall lose its reward.” He will accept every kindness to those whom we look upon as his brethren, even as if we had done it to him in person: and while we forgive injuries, love enemies, deny ourselves, endure hardships, or bear any cross, from love to his name, and desire to adorn and recommend his gospel; he notices our poor services, and will applaud and reward them before men and angels.—Nay, if he observe that we form plans and make attempts to promote his cause, and be serviceable to his people; even though he see good to disappoint our endeavours, he will kindly accept the zealous intention, and openly say, “Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.” “Let us not therefore be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not;” and “may we all find mercy of the Lord in that day of retribution,” and have an abundant entrance into his kingdom of everlasting glory and felicity.