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 SELECT SUBJECTS,—ESSAYS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN RELIGION, AND THE NATURE AND WARRANT OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

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EDINBURGH:

THOMAS NELSON AND PETER BROWN.

M.DCCC.XXXI.

DISCOURSE

UPON

**REPENTANCE.**

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*And they went forth, and preached that men should repent.—*Markvi. 12.

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PREFACE.

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HE importance of the subject treated of, and the rank which it holds in the word of God, among the doctrines and duties of Christianity; the backwardness of mankind to attend to it, in proportion to that importance; and an apprehension that it is not insisted on, either from the pulpit or the press, so frequently and strenuously in our times, as it was in the days of the apostles; form, collectively, the reasons which induced me to this publication. Much ignorance, and various hurtful and perplexing mistakes and difficulties, about repentance, may be observed, both amongst professors of serious godliness and others; I therefore thought, that it might not be unseasonable or unprofitable, to publish a discourse upon the subject.

My first intention was only to send to the press the substance of a sermon which I had repeatedly preached; but the same reasons influenced me, upon mature consideration, to complete the design, as far as I was capable; though the size and price are both by that means increased.

Some passages may be judged to bear hard upon certain popular sentiments, and current species of religion. I have indeed very plainly spoken my mind respecting several things, which I am convinced are detrimental to the cause of pure religion; and I hope I have not transgressed the rules of meekness and candour. Even wise and good men, in their zeal for one part of divine truth, may drop unguarded expressions, which bear an interpretation injurious to another part of equal importance; and thus, undesignedly, by their reputation give sanction to error. This our artful and watchful enemy will be sure to observe, and make his advantage of, in opposing true religion; by which some may be deceived, others hardened, and religion itself exposed to contempt and reproach.

It behoves then other friends of religion, who are witnesses of such perversions, to oppose and obviate them; nor must the reputation of some, or the censure of others, among their fellow-servants, be regarded, when the glory of God, the interests of religion, and the salvation of souls are at stake. Were some pious men, now in glory, to return on earth, and witness the abuse that has been made of certain indiscreet expressions which they employed, they would be the first to approve every endeavour to counteract their fatal tendency. With all plainness and freedom I would plead the cause of truth and holiness; but would give no needless offence to any man. May that God, whom I would “serve with my spirit, in the gospel of his Son,” powerfully succeed this feeble attempt to promote his glory in the salvation of souls.

*Olney*, 2*nd February*, 1785.

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DISCOURSE

ON

REPENTANCE.

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INTRODUCTION.

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HE Christian Religion, as St. Paul preached it both to Jews and Gentiles, consists of “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,” and may therefore be properly called the religion of a sinner; for none but sinners need repentance, or faith in a Mediator, or that forgiveness of sins, which through him is preached to all that believe.

This consideration ought carefully to be attended to; Jesus Christ “came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance:” and if men lose sight of this peculiarity of the gospel, they will mistake in a fundamental concern; and be offended with those ministers, who alone address them in a Scriptural method. Our business, as preachers of the gospel, is not with men, merely as rational agents, but with men as sinners. We must not address them, as if they were newly entered on a state of trial; were as yet free from all blame; and were at last to stand or fall according to their future good or bad behaviour, and only needed to be instructed in their duty, and excited to perform it. This is not the state of the case. Even the most moral, re­spectable, and amiable of mankind are *sinners,—*condemnedsinners. In this light the word of God considers us; and informs us, (not “What good thing we may do to inherit eternal life,” but) “What we must do to be saved” from impending ruin; whither a sinner “may flee from the wrath to come.” And thus must the faithful minister address his hearers, calling upon them as sinners, to repent and believe the gospel.

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men.” Rom. v. 12. In consequence of the awful sentence, “Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return,” millions through successive generations have yielded to the stroke: all the former inhabitants of the earth are swept into the grave by one general execution: many are at this moment experiencing the agonies of death; numbers are bewailing their de­parted and departing friends and relatives.—We too feel the consequences of sin, in our own personal pains and sickness, which are the forerunners and earnests of our dissolution: we too must have the sentence executed upon us in all its rigour. The wisest cannot elude it, the strongest cannot resist its stroke, nor can the richest purchase exemption from it.

The constant and extensive ravages of death are, in themselves, extremely affecting to the considerate spectator: but become more so when we reflect, that as certainly as when a malefactor is dragged from prison, and executed on a scaffold, he dies for breaking the laws of the land; so certainly, when asinner dies, he dies for breaking the law of God.

Had sin and death been hitherto equally unknown to mankind; and now in our days had sin first made its entrance: immediately upon man’s rebel­lion had we heard the sentence audibly and solemnly denounced, “Dust ye are, and to dust ye shall return;” had fevers, dropsies, palsies, apoplexies, consumptions, and other mortal diseases, on the one hand; with earthquakes, famines, and wars on the other, suddenly begun to spread desolation through families, villages, cities, and kingdoms among the guilty alone: should we behold at once multitudes dead, and multitudes in the agonies of death, the rest mourning over their beloved friends, and trembling for themselves; (like Egypt when there was not a house, in which there was not one dead;) the connection betwixt transgressing the divine law, and being punished with death, might be more affecting, but would not be more certain, than it now is; though it is seldom seriously laid to heart.

Or, were men in general free from sin; but from time to time one and an­other transgressed; who immediately upon transgressing was punished by death, according to the examples of vindictive justice recorded in the Scrip­tures: the connection would be more attended to, but not more certain than at present; when, “because sentence against an evil work is not executed *speedily,* the hearts of the sons of men are wholly set in them to do evil.” Eccles. viii. 11.

But as all have sinned, and all die, and things have gone on so for many generations, death is considered as a thing of course: we live in the midst of its devastations without horror, or uneasy reflections; and inquire little why it is so? or what the consequence will be? Like soldiers who grow inured to scenes of blood, and insensible to dangers through being familiar with them.

But this, solemn and alarming as it is, forms only a small part of the sen­tence of condemnation, which we lie under. Our Lord warns us, “not to fear them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but to fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.” In com­parison with this effect of divine wrath, the worst which men can do to us, is not, in the judgment of the Son of God, worthy of our fear. Yet the bare recital of those tortures, which the cruelty of man hath invented and in­flicted, in killing the body, is sufficient to chill our very blood: how dread­ful therefore must they have been to those who endured them! And what must that misery be, compared with which the other is not worth a fear? Yet to this awful destruction every sinner is condemned, for breaking the law, and rebelling against the authority of his Creator.

Imagine to yourselves a company of condemned criminals in a dungeon. A warrant arrives:—one is taken from them, they see him no more; know not what becomes of him; and do not readily believe any reports which reach them, of the tortures which he endured, and the pains he suffered; another is thus taken from them, and another. The remainder still suppose that their companions are only released from the miseries of a dungeon; and ex­pect their own turn merely as a similar deliverance. All this time, however, certain messengers from the king earnestly persuade them to submit, ask forgiveness, and accept of mercy. A few are prevailed upon, and dismissed; but the rest, seeing no difference betwixt those who are taken from them by a warrant, and those who are set at liberty with a pardon, persist in their obstinacy, and treat all persuasion with neglect and contempt.

This is the exact representation of the condition men are in. Death re­moves our friends and neighbours, one by one: we see not how they fare in another world; nor are we disposed to believe that “they lift up their eyes in hell, being in torments,” (though this is indeed the awful condition of all who die impenitent.) Our turn will shortly come; but we are seldom duly apprehensive about the consequences. “All things happen alike to all; as dieth the sinner, so dieth the righteous:” each is released from the evils of life; faith alone can follow the one to heaven, and the other to hell: but all men have not faith; therefore most treat with neglect and contempt the preachers of the gospel, who inform them of their danger, and in God’s name call upon them to repent, believe, and be saved.

But, beloved, though much grieved and discouraged by this neglect, we must not desist, nor would we despair of success. Let me beseech you then to keep in your mind these solemn and important truths, whilst with all se­riousness, earnestness, and tender compassion, I address you as condemned sinners, in danger of eternal misery. We must take God’s part against you, and vindicate his justice in that awful sentence which he hath denounced; but we can sympathize with you, and weep over you, and “long after you in the bowels of Jesus Christ.” We also were involved in the same guilt, and under the same condemnation; we were equally secure and obstinate in sin, and equally negligent of salvation. But being now, through God’s mercy, made sensible of our guilt and danger; and having upon repentance found forgiveness, and enjoying the hopes and first-fruits of eternal happiness, we are desirous our fellow-sinners should share our deliverance, and experience our felicity.

To be instrumental to the salvation of your souls, my fellow-sinners, is all to which the true minister of Christ aspires. However your minds may be blinded by “the god of this world,” we see your danger, and mourn over your delusion. Your fondness for perishing vanities, and disregard to your eternal interests, excite our compassion; and would excite our indignation and astonishment, had not we too been equally sottish. Of the worth of your souls, the danger to which they are exposed, the preciousness of salvation, and the happiness of being truly religious, we are deeply convinced. “We have believed, and therefore speak;” and though in ourselves unworthy and insufficient, yet being entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, “we are now ambassadors for Christ, and as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled unto God.”

The most high God hath prepared a royal feast; all things are ready, rich abundance of provisions, and plenty of room! We are sent to invite the guests, and are directed to “compel them to come in.” We would there­fore invite, exhort, expostulate, warn, persuade, and command, with all ten­derness and authority, and not take a denial. Blame not, I beseech you, our earnestness; be not disgusted or offended with our importunity; do not “pray us to have you excused;” do not overwhelm us with discouragement, and send us to give, with tears, an account of our ill success. Our love to your immortal souls, our longing after your everlasting happiness, constrain us to be thus troublesome and importunate. Nay, though you frown, insult, threaten, and persecute, we must persist, so long as there is a shadow of a hope. “We must not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” And at last “if ye will not hear, we must weep in secret places for your pride;” after His example, who wept over ungrateful Jerusalem.

To the true believer, careless sinners appear like intoxicated persons in a house which is on fire; who must be consumed in the flames, unless they can be induced to come forth, though themselves are utterly insensible of the danger. You may think yourselves secure, and make yourselves merry with our fears: but your awful infatuation, and imminent danger, are so manifest to us, that we must persist in our endeavours to convince you, so long as you are on this side of everlasting burnings. Thus Noah was treated by the inhabitants of the old world, and Lot even by his sons-in-law, with neglect and contempt when they warned them of their danger; but too late they found their warnings true; and so will you find ours, when death and judgment come, should you now slight them. “Because I called and ye re­fused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh,” saith the Lord himself. Prov. i. 24-26. But I would rise superior to such discouraging apprehen­sions, and expect better success in this feeble attempt to call sinners to re­pentance: humbly hoping that God will hear my prayers, and employ this discourse as his instrument in that blessed work.

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he preached, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The blessed Jesus also began to preach, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” “And the apostles went forth and preached that men should repent.” After the resurrection of Christ, they were commissioned to “preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Accordingly, Peter preached to the Jews, “Repent ye, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” Paul in like manner addressed the Gentiles; “God commandeth all men every where to repent;” and informed them, “that men should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

From these, and many other testimonies of the word of God, judge ye, beloved, of the importance and certainty of our subject. No matter of trivial concern which may safely be disregarded, or of doubtful disputation which may plausibly be gainsayed or questioned, now demands our attention. But a subject of equal evidence with the word of “God, who cannot lie,” and of importance proportioned to the interests of eternal ages.

Hear me then, I beseech you, with candour and attention; lay aside pre­judice and levity, whilst with all seriousness and plainness I discourse con­cerning, 1. The necessity of repentance. 2. The nature of repentance. 3. The encouragement given to repentance. 4. The proper season for re­pentance; and, 5. The means to be used in repenting.—For the love of thy soul, I beseech thee, sinner; and as thou wilt answer it at the day of judgement, I charge it upon thy conscience, to lay this matter home to thy heart, as in the sight of God; at the same time beseeching him to make thee partaker “of that repentance, which is unto salvation, not to be repented of.”