

2. Let this convince you of the ill that is in sin. There is more ill in the least sin than the greatest sufferings. Therefore never say, in compliance with a temptation, It is but a little one ; for the least sin will make you eternally miserable in hell : and can ye account that a little evil which exposes to God's curse here and hereafter ?

3. Inexpressibly terrible is the deserving of many sins, and gross sins, when the least of them deserve God's wrath. If one do so, how great must that wrath be, which thousands and millions deserve ? If an idle word deserves God's wrath and curse, what must deliberate lying words deserve, but a deep footing in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

4. Let believers admire free grace, pardoning mercy, and atoning blood, Psal. xxxii. 1 ; that secures them from bearing the desert of their sin. Let them live to the Lord, by whom they live. Think not little of your sins, O believer, though there be now no condemnation for you, being in Christ Jesus, Rom. viii. 1 ; for every one of your sins deserves, though they cannot bring on, God's wrath and curse. Yet tremble at the thoughts of sin ; for ye are like the three children in the fiery furnace, compassed with a fire of sin that would burn you up, but the effect of it is stopped by the mediation of Christ.

Lastly, Sinners, be convinced of your absolute need of Christ. Ye must be in him, else ye are ruined for ever. Can ye bear that wrath which incensed justice will inflict on all that are out of Christ ? Can ye get free of it without him ? Wherefore be alarmed, and exhorted to flee from the wrath that is to come, by fleeing to the Lord Jesus who delivereth all his people from it.

OF THE MEANS OF SALVATION IN GENERAL.

HEB. ii. 3.—*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ?*

A SINNER having heard that sin deserves God's wrath and curse, the question that natively follows is, What way one may escape them ? This is answered by the weighty question in the text, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ?* Which we may take up in these two things. (1.) There is no escaping for sinners, if they neglect the great salvation ; they perish without remedy. (2.) They that do not neglect it, shall surely escape. Here let us consider,

1. The danger sinners are in by their sin. They are in hazard of

perishing under God's wrath and curse; for that is the just recompense of every sin, Heb. ii. 2; of God's wrath consuming them, and his curse binding them down under it for ever. He intimates, that all are liable to God's wrath and curse, while he says, *How shall we escape, &c.*

2. The way how they may escape; namely, by not neglecting, but falling in with the great salvation. The words intimate, (1.) That there is a possibility of escaping; sinners are not shut up hopeless under the curse. (2.) The way of escape is not by fleeing from the Judge, and the execution of his sentence: nay, he is omniscient and omnipresent; one cannot outwit him, or get away from his sight, or out of his reach. Nor is it by resisting for he is omnipotent, and none can outbrave him, nor make head against him. But he may escape by falling in with the means of escape appointed by himself, and required by him to be made use of by us. He has provided us with a salvation, a great one; i. e. the gospel, which teaches the way of eternal salvation. He requires us, not to neglect it, but to improve it for our escape. It is neglected by unbelief, impenitency, and not using the means prescribed. On the contrary, then, he requires of us faith and repentance, which are the substance of the gospel, Acts xx. 21; 'testifying to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ;' and he requires of us the use of the means by which the salvation held forth in the gospel is obtained, Prov. viii. 34; 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors:' for surely they neglect and slight the gospel, who do not believe, repent, or use the ordinary means of obtaining the salvation.

The text affords the following doctrine.

Doct. 'Whoso would escape God's wrath and curse must not neglect, but fall in with the great salvation,' or, 'To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.'

For explaining this, I shall shew,

I. The necessity of faith in Jesus Christ, in order to one's escaping the wrath and curse of God.

II. The necessity of repentance, in order to the same end.

III. Answer the question, Are faith and repentance in men's power, since God requires them of them?

IV. Shew the connexion betwixt faith and repentance, and escaping the wrath and curse of God.

V. The necessity of the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.

VI. Deduce an inference or two.

I. I shall shew the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ, in order to one's escaping the wrath and curse of God due to him for sin. It is absolutely necessary; no man can escape God's wrath and curse without it. For,

1. There is no pleasing God without it, Heb. xi. 6. The reason is, because he is only pleased with Jesus Christ, and those who are in him or united to him, Matth. xvii. 5. If one should weep for his sins till no moisture were left in his body, fast his flesh to a skeleton, and watch ever so carefully against his sin, if he have not faith, he is a lost man; he cannot please God, but must lie for ever under his displeasure.

2. It is the great duty of the gospel, whereby one is made partaker of the remedy provided, and without which neither your persons nor performances can be accepted. 'It is the work of God,' John vi. 29; 'the command of God,' 1 John iii. 23. Your persons will ever be under condemnation without it, John iii. 18. And all your other duties will be but ciphers in God's account, multiply them as ye will, if faith be not at the head of them.

3. It is that which enters one into the covenant of peace; unites him with Christ, and by which he comes to partake of all saving benefits. If ye would escape God's wrath, ye must be within the covenant; ye must believe, that is, consent to the marriage-covenant, John vi. 35. There is no escaping wrath without being in Christ, and united to him, Rom. viii. 1. That union is by faith, Eph. iii. 17. We must be justified, and that is by faith, Rom. v. 1; and sanctified, which is also by faith, Acts xv. 9.

4. Salvation and damnation turn upon this very point. Here is the decision of the case, Mark xvi. 16; 'He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' Unbelief will undoubtedly ruin you, Psal. ii. ult. 'Kiss ye the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.' Unbelief is a rejecting of Christ; and they cannot escape who refuse the remedy of sin, Luke xix. 27; 'Those mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.'

II. I proceed to shew the necessity of repentance, in order to one's escaping this wrath and curse. No adult person can be saved without it. As for infants dying in their tender years, and such others who are not capable of actual faith and repentance, in so far as the Spirit dwells in them, they have the seed of those graces, and shall undoubtedly be saved.

1. The word of God certifies us, that whosoever does not repent shall perish, Luke xiii. 5. Your souls, then, lie at stake. The sinner is gone away from God, and so is come under the curse. His soul is left in pawn that he shall return; so if he do not return the pawn is lost, and lost for ever.

2. Heaven's door is bolted against all impenitent sinners; it is not so wide as to let in a sinner with a burden of unrepented-of guilt upon his back, Rev. xxi. 27; 'There shall in nowise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.' So heaven ye cannot see, and hell ye cannot escape, if ye repent not. It is the call of the gospel to you; which, if it be not obeyed, see the effect, 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. '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.' To this narrow point the matter is brought, Repent or perish, Ezek. xviii. 30, 31; 'Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?'

3. Repentance is the other duty of the gospel; thereby signifying, that without repentance there is no possibility but we must perish under God's wrath and curse. John the Baptist preached repentance, so did Christ himself, the apostles, &c. How can one think then to escape without it?

4. True faith does always bring along with it true repentance, Zech. xii. 10. 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.' It is the great gift which Christ is exalted to give, Acts v. 31; as he is a Saviour. So impenitent sinners have no part in Christ, nor in his salvation, Matth. i. 21; and therefore they must perish.

III. I proceed to consider the question, Are faith and repentance in men's power, since God requires them of them? *Ans.* They are not. For God's demands of us are the measure of our duty, but not of our strength, which reaches not to these. For,

1. They are the gifts of God, and the operations of his special grace, Eph. i. 19. Acts v. 31. And where sovereign pleasure does not determine to give and work them, the party lies under the power of unbelief and impenitency. Hence it is God's grace and good-will which makes one differ from another; not man's free-will. Hence

says our Lord, 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight,' Matt. xi. 25, 26.

2. Sinners by nature, and in themselves, can do nothing which is good, and therefore cannot believe nor repent, John xv. 5. 'Without me ye can do nothing,' 2 Cor. iii. 5. 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God.' In particular they cannot believe, John vi. 44. 'No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him.' They cannot repent, Jer. xiii. 23. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.' They are dead in sin, and must be quickened, yea, created in Christ Jesus to good works. They are in bondage to sin and Satan, 2 Tim. ii. 26; therefore cannot come to Christ, nor turn to God, till effectual grace bring them forward, Acts xxvi. 18. 'Open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.'

Object. How then can God require them of us?

Ans. 1. God gave man this power, and he has lost it by his own fault, Eccl. vii. 29. 'God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.' If a debtor squander away his substance, the creditor has still a right to require what he owes him: so, though man has lost his power to perform, God has not lost his right to require the duty.

2. Men will not believe their own impotency. They will promise, resolve, and delay to believe and repent, as if these duties were in their own power; they will slight the motions of God's Spirit; yea, they are throwing away the remains of natural light and strength, that have escaped out of the ruins of the fall. So that God may very justly require these of them, to convince them, and stir them up to seek grace.

IV. I proceed to shew the connection betwixt faith and repentance, and escaping the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin. Those who believe and repent shall certainly escape. God has said it, that they shall, John v. 24. '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,' Ezek. xviii. 30. 'Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.' Nay, they are got beyond it already, Rom. viii. 1. 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.' In the moment the sinner comes into Christ, he is no more liable to eternal wrath, nor to the

curse; for he is not under the law, but under grace: and the utmost he is liable to, is fatherly chastisements, Psal. lxxxix. 30,—33. Thus faith and repentance have the connection of appointed means prescribed by God himself, which, by his blessing, are rendered subservient to this great end, of obtaining salvation. Faith is the hand that receives Christ and his righteousness, as the all of salvation, John i. 12; and repentance unto life consists in that godly sorrow for sin, flowing from faith, which is the exercise of all who are concerned about the salvation of their souls, Jer. l. 4. 2 Cor. vii. 11.

V. I shall now shew the necessity of using all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to his people the benefits of redemption.

1. God has peremptorily required this, Luke xiii. 24. ‘Strive to enter in at the strait gate,’ namely, that we strive in the appointed means of grace and salvation. And so he has particularly enjoined us the conscientious performance of each of them.

2. We have no ground to expect grace or salvation but in the use of the means, Prov. viii. 34. ‘Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors,’ Prov. ii. 3.—5. ‘If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding: if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as hid treasures: then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.’ ‘Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,’ Rom. x. 17.

3. The neglect of the means is a contempt of the thing. If we would be healed, we would lie at the pool. If not, we say we care not for cure.

And there is required here, not a careless or merely superficial use of the outward means, but a diligent one; that is an embracing of every opportunity that God in his providence gives us for attending upon them, a careful improvement of them, and a looking earnestly to him for his blessing upon them, without which they will not contribute to our spiritual advantage, 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

Quest. What is our ability in this point? *Ans.* The use of outward means is not beyond our reach. One may without saving grace, read, hear, pray, and consider his case. And by these one may attain the highest pitch of preparation for the grace of God, in legal convictions, fears, sorrows for sin, and natural (though not saving) desires of grace. Therefore do what ye can; it may be, while ye are doing what ye can, God will do for you what ye cannot do for yourselves, Acts viii. 22.

Quest. Has God promised to save and convert those who do what

is in their power in the use of means? *Ans.* We dare not say it. But, 1. It is possible. 2. It is probable.*

I shall conclude with two inferences.

Inf. 1. Then as ever ye would escape God's wrath and curse due to us for sin, repent and believe. Come to Christ; turn from your sins unto God. There is no safety otherwise, but this way ye shall be safe. No sin of your's will ruin you, if you believe and repent; and nothing will save you if you do not.

2. Be diligent in the use of the means of salvation. They are laid before you, while they are by the sovereign disposal of Providence, kept from others. Neglect them not, as ye would be found to reject the counsel of God against yourselves. And satisfy not yourselves in the bare use of them, but seek grace and salvation in them from Jesus Christ, they being the appointed means of grace.

OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN ^v. 12.—*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name.*

FAITH in Jesus Christ being the main thing required for one's escaping the wrath and curse of God, we come now to speak of it particularly, from these words. In which we have, (1.) The nature, (2.) The fruit of faith, viz. the privilege and dignity of adoption into God's family. Passing the latter, [See vol. i.]

We may take notice of the former, viz. the nature of faith, *As many as received, &c.* Wherein consider,

1. What it is in the general. It is a saving grace, for by it one becomes a child of God, and so an heir of heaven.

2. What it is in particular, (1.) The object of it is Christ, he, his name, his person, with his benefits. The acts of it, saving the sinner, are, [1.] *Receiving* him; this is explained to be *believing*. Now, *receiving* implies an offer of him made to the receiver, which is done in the gospel. [2.] *Resting* on him; for it is not a mere believing him, by an historical assent to his word, but a believing on his name, which imports a fiducial recumbency or relying on him, as one who believes another is said to rest on his word. (2.) The subjects of it are many; not all, but some, namely, the elect of God, quickened

* See all this illustrated in *Human Nature in its Fourfold State, State ii. head 3.* under the title, *Objections answered.*