

THE  
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS  
OF  
TRUE BELIEVERS.

IX. IN RELATION TO THEIR WORK IN THIS LIFE, AND THEIR JOURNEY TO  
THE OTHER WORLD.\*

THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF THE CHRISTIAN'S WORK.

ECCLESIASTES ix. 10.

*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.*

As no man had more access to know what might be made of this present life, than Solomon ; so none gives us more mortifying accounts of it than he. He shews it to be short, uncertain, and mixed with a variety of ungrateful events. And thereupon he calls us to make the best use of it we may, and that it will bear. (1.) He will have us to take the comforts of this life, in the favour of God, ver. 7—9. "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart ; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white ; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity : for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun." (2.) To ply the business of life while life lasts. So there are comforts to be had in life, and there is business to be done in it. Happy are they who taking the

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one, do the other. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," &c.

In these words we have two things.

1. An exhortation to ply the business of life, while life lasts. No man was born to be idle, nor sent into the world to sleep or dream away a lifetime, but to be doing, and doing good. And here is,

(1.) The business of life, "Whatsoever thy hand shall find to do with thy might," Heb. The work we have to do is a work of many pieces, as much as to fill up every minute of our short time; and no part of it is to be neglected, *Whatsoever thy hand shall find to do*. It is determined two ways what we have to do. (1.) What God gives us opportunity for, what our hand shall at any time find to be laid to hand by our Creator. He is our great Master, and appoints every one his particular work, by his word and providence: he lays it to our hand by giving us opportunities. And so it is restrained to that which is good. (2.) What God gives us ability for. He gives might, strength of body and mind, comforts and conveniencies of life, as talents that we are to trade with. And we are not to abuse these, but use them for the ends he gives them for.

(2.) The activity to be used in this business of life. *Do, do it*. Neglect not this your work, put it not off with delays, but do you timely and seasonably, while the time and season lasts. It is but a short time, and therefore we must husband it well.

2. A motive to press the exhortation. Do, for your doing time will be done shortly: and then if your work be not done, ye will be for ever undone. And,

(1.) Our life in the world is but a journeying to the grave, the state of the dead. Before we begin to walk alone, we begin to go to it, even from the womb: and in that journey there is no stopping; sleep we or wake we, we are always going the other step towards it. And when a man is in his prime, going and living at all ease, he is still going thither. (2.) There is no doing there; if your work be not done ere you come there, it will never be done. This is the world for working, and that is the world for the reward of our work.

The scope of the text may be gathered up in the two following doctrinal observations.

DOCT. I. It nearly concerns all men diligently to improve their opportunities and abilities in doing their work accordingly, while life, opportunities, and abilities last with them.

DOCT. II. Our life in this world is a journey, a going to the grave,

to the state of the dead, where there is no doing of our work any more.

Each doctrine shall be handled in order.

Doct. I. It nearly concerns all men diligently to improve their opportunities and abilities in doing their work accordingly, while life, opportunities, and abilities last with them.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. What is the work to be done, while life, opportunities, and abilities last with us.

II. What are those opportunities and abilities which are to be diligently improved in doing our work.

III. Improve the subject.

I. Our first business is to shew what is the work to be done, while life, opportunities and abilities last with us. In the general, there is a threefold work laid to our hand.

1. Work for ourselves, for our own good and welfare, Psal. xlix. 18. *Men will praise thee, when thou dost well to thyself.* I put this in the first place, not that it is our chief work, more than ourselves are to be our chief end: but that fallen man will never work for God aright, till once he begin to work for himself, laying his own salvation to heart. We have all work to do for ourselves; work for this life, and for eternity. It is duty to see to the former, according to our opportunities and abilities; but not as most men do, to make it our all, the whole business of our life; for it is but the least part of what we have to do, Luke xi. 41, 42. We may say in this case, as Matth. xxiii. 23. "Wo unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: for ye pay tithes of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

2. Work for God, for his honour and glory in the world; 1 Cor. vi. 20. *Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.* God is our Maker, and he made us for himself; therefore we should live, move, and be for him, Matth. v. 16. If we are Christians, redeemed by the blood of his Son, this is a new tie to this work, Phil. i. 21. *To me to live is Christ.* This is little minded by most men, who never consider for what use they are in God's world, or in Christ's church: what they are doing for God, wherein they are serviceable to him in promoting his glory in the world. Yet as God is our chief end, this is our chief work, and it will be enquired into at the day of accounts; and what we did with our opportunities and abilities for glorifying of him.

3. Work for our neighbours, for their good and welfare : according to the apostle's direction, Phil. ii. 4. *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.* God has made men in society, and knit them together by the bond of a common human nature : and Christ has knit his people together by the additional tie, *one faith, one Spirit, &c.* ; and has so bound every man to see the good of mankind, and every Christian the good especially of fellow-Christians, Gal. vi. 10. He gives men opportunities and abilities to benefit their fellow-creatures, and it ought to be a question to every one of us, what use we are for in the world, towards the good of mankind ? what benefit God's creatures, our fellows, have by us ? what advantage Christ's members receive at our hand ? This will be taken special notice of in the awful day of accounts, as appears from Matth. xxv.

God commands men to see to the temporal welfare of others. 1 Cor. x. 24. *Let no man seek his own ; but every man another's wealth,* And as the poor are to look for the welfare of the rich, so the rich are under the same obligation to seek the good of the poor, as their fellow-creatures, and fellow-Christians. And therefore either masters or tenants depopulating grounds, and laying field to field, to the prejudice of the poorer sort, their mean of living is no doubt a crying oppression in the ears of the Lord of hosts, and will bring a curse on the selfish and unmerciful men who do it, Is. v. 8—10. *May not I do with mine own what I will ?* is a saying competent to JEHOVAH, who is absolute Lord of the creatures, as having made them of nothing ; but to no man under heaven, no not the highest monarch, who in all his dealings is under the law of loving his neighbour as himself, and has but a limited power over what is his own.

He commands men also to seek the spiritual good of their neighbours, Rom. xv. 2. *Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.* And that so much the more as their souls is preferable to their bodies. Hence it is, that as soon as the grace of God reaches one's own heart, he is in a mighty concern to get other brands plucked out of the fire, and to share of that grace he partakes of, as did the woman of Samaria, John iv. It is Cain-like to be unconcerned for the spiritual good of others : sure it is devilish to go about to ensnare and entrap others into sin, and wrestle against their soul's good.

And thus we may take up our work we have to do with our opportunities and abilities while they last, in these two particulars.

*First, Salvation-work, Phil. ii. 12. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* We came into the world lost sinners ; there

is a possibility of our salvation; and we may get it, if we will improve our opportunities and abilities for that end. These opportunities are confined to the narrow compass of the time of this life; and in that time God lays that work to our hands. And it concerns us all timely to ply it, for we must do it now or never. There is no working of that work in the grave, when the candle of life is blown out at death; as the tree falls, it must lie for ever. There are many pieces of salvation-work that we must do, while doing-time lasts with us. The chief whereof are these,

1. We must consider our ways, and come to ourselves by a sound conviction of sin, the sin of our nature, hearts, and lives. This is a work not to be delayed, lest opportunity and ability slip, Hag. i. 7. *Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.* Ability may be taken from us in this life, and we rendered incapable of a solid thought. In the other world the opportunity is gone. There indeed men will consider their ways, but it will be out of time. Now is the time for that work of consideration while in life and health. Ply it then, and see your ruined natural state, till it cause you to cry, *What shall I do to be saved?* Some go rambling through the world in a profane life, and in a moment slip down to the grave, never considering till it be out of time. Some go sleeping and dreaming through the world in ignorance or formality, and never lift their eyes till in hell. But all that shall be heirs of salvation, take thought of their soul's state in time.

2. We must come to Christ and unite with him by faith; for without that there is no salvation. Heb. xi. 6. Here is work, most necessary work for us, to embrace Christ for all his salvation, as held out to us in the gospel; to flee for refuge to the Redeemer's blood, and take shelter under that covert; to get from under the covenant of works and its curse, to be personally instated in the covenant of grace, and savingly interested in the blessings of it, John vi. 29. *This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.* There is now an opportunity for it; Christ is offering himself and his covenant: delay it, and the opportunity may slip you for ever, Matth. xx. 10. In the other world there is no beginning to believe unto salvation.

3. We must get out our pardon of all our sins under the broad seal of heaven. A necessary work; for without it ye will perish in your sins, Matth. v. 25. A man whose life being by the law adjudged to be taken from him, depended entirely on the king's pardon, would lose no time of suing for his pardon, lest it should come too late. Now is the time wherein heaven's pardon is to be had, and in a little that time will be gone. In death there is no pardon

to be had, no removing of the curse. Yet how do men trifle in this matter, as if the pardon were to wait till they were ready to receive it ?

4. We must be born again, become new creatures, get new hearts and a new nature, and be renewed in all the faculties of our souls after the image of God. Here is work to do, Ezek. xviii. 31. "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?" This is absolutely necessary work, John iii. 3. For *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* And now is the season of the new birth : but when death comes it is gone. There is a mighty change in the grave indeed whither we are going, but there is no saving change there. The bodies that lie down there full of the sins of their youth, will rise with them again : and the sinful souls that parted with them at death, will meet them again in no better plight at the resurrection. Ye must be born again now or never.

5. We must repent of our sins. This is a work absolutely necessary, Luke xiii. 3. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* Heaven's gates are bolted against impenitent sinners. We must turn from our sins unto God, with hatred of, and hearty sorrow for them, otherwise we will die, we will perish in them, Ezek. xviii. 31, above cited. And now is the season for repentance ; there is no repenting in the grave. In the other world impenitent sinners will doubtless change their minds, they will regret from the heart their graceless careless way ; and they will wish a thousand times that they had seen to themselves in time : but their repentance there will be their torment ; it will be out of time, not kindly, and will not be accepted.

6. We must mortify our lusts. This is not easy work, but it is absolutely necessary, Rom viii. 13, "For, (says the apostle,) if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die : but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." We must either be the death of our lusts, or they will be the death of our souls. If one of them go, our life must go for its life ; even that lust which is most dear to us, and which we can most hardly part with, must be mortified, Matth. v. 29. and that work must be done now or never. When death comes, there is no more possibility of mortification ; there is a bar drawn for ever betwixt damned sinners and sanctifying influences. The state of the damned is inconsistent with the fulfilling of some lusts ; but however they may be kept from them, to their torment, there can be no kindly mortification of lusts there ; but, on the contrary, sin in the ruined soul will come to its perfection.

7. We must live to righteousness, in works of holy obedience. This is work to fill our hands every minute of our time, and necessary work, John xv. 14. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Luke vi. 46, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" They who are now idle in life, will labour under the weight of wrath for ever, without hope of an end of their toil. Now Christ shapes out our work for us, and takes a proof of our obedience to him. If we neglect it now, there will be no time hereafter for it; for the other world is that wherein men receive the reward of their works, and working time is over there, John ix. 4.

8. We must persevere in grace and good works to the end. This is work absolutely necessary, for such only shall get the heavenly crown, Matth. xxiv. 13. "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Rev. ii. 10. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." There is a danger of never entering on the way of the Lord, and a danger of apostasy and breaking off from it, when once a perein is entered, Heb. x. 38, 39. If death catch us either of these ways, there is no mending of the matter for ever. That is a step off the way that can never be recovered.

9. *Lastly*, We must die well. This is a necessary piece of our work, our last work, on which much depends. If it be marred, there is no coming back to mend it, Job xiv. 14, "If a man die, shall he live again?" To die well is to die in the Lord, Rev. xiv. 13; to die in faith, Heb. xi. 13; to die in union with Christ, in peace and favour with God, within the compass of the well-ordered covenant. It is not a business to lay by the thoughts of till the time of it come: but the business of our life should be to learn to die: and we should often be essaying it.

*Secondly*, Our generation-work, Acts xiii. 36, "This is the work we have to do for God and the generation in which we live, that we may be useful not for ourselves only, but for our God and fellow-creatures, Rom. xv. 7. It is remarked of Noah, that he was perfect in his generations. There are, by the wise dispensation of God, several generations of men in the world, one after another; one goes off the stage, and another succeeds. Each generation has its work assigned it by the sovereign Lord; and each person in the generation has his also. And now is our time of plying of ours. We could not be useful in the generation that went before us; for then we were not: nor can we personally in that which shall come after us; for then we shall be off the stage. Now is our time; let us ply it, and not neglect usefulness in our generation. This work may be reduced to these two general heads.

1. The duties of our station and particular calling and relations in the world, 1 Cor. vii. 24. Every relation has a train of duties belonging to it, and God lays these duties on us as members of society, for his glory and the good of others. That is the room which we have to fill up in the world, by a conscientious performance of the duties incumbent on us, as placed on such and such a station and relation. That is to say, if one is a minister, he is faithfully to ply his ministerial work; if a husband, a wife, a parent, &c. they are faithfully to ply the work proper to such relations. For there is no doing of these duties in the grave, nor making up the defects there. Then all relations are dissolved, and the difference of stations is no more. So that these things must be done now or never.

2. Duties of special opportunities and abilities, Gal. vi. 10. Sometimes the Lord puts in a man's hand a special opportunity of some service, good work: which opportunity if he lets it slip, he may possibly never have it again all his life, as Saul in the case of the Amalekites, and as Esau's case, Heb. xii. 17. So it is men's wisdom and duty to strike the iron while it is hot, to do the good they have opportunity to do, lest if they miss the tide, they never have access to repair the defect. Sometimes God gives men abilities, that if they will, they can do such a good thing. If they fall not in with it seasonably, the time may come, when, if they never so fain would, it is beyond their power, Heb. xii. 17.

He that takes heed to these two particulars, does the work of his generation.

II. I proceed to shew what are those opportunities and abilities which are to be diligently improved in doing our work, the work of our salvation and generation. These are all the advantages for working, which the Sovereign Lord and Master puts in our hands, with a charge to improve them in doing good with them, Luke xix. 12, 13. All is from him, and he has put them in our hand for his own service: and if we misimprove them, either by doing ill with them, or doing no good with them, our accounts will be with grief and not with joy; for he that gave us them will call us to an account for them, Luke xvi. 2. He gives us these opportunities and abilities, not to lay by us for no use, and far less to put them to an ill use; but to do with them for his glory, and our own and others' good.

1. The time of life is given men to do their work with, and should be improved accordingly, John ix. 4. *I must work the works of him that sent me, says Christ, while it is day.* He might have cut us off from the womb, and then we would have had no time to do any thing: he might ere now have laid us in the dust, and then our opportunity of working had been over. But we are still in life, and



our great business is to make ready for eternity. It is a precious time, an uncertain time, the only time for working. What use are we making of it? why should we trifle it away, which when once gone can never be recalled? How sad will it be, if our glass is run, while our work is undone?

2. The day of the gospel; precious gospel-seasons are given us for that end. These make the day of salvation, which need to be well improved while they last, 2 Cor. vi. 2. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* Every sabbath, sermon, communion, &c. is a fair opportunity for peace with God, seeing to and advancing the soul's interest, In these the market of free grace is opened, and heaven's peace and pardon are proclaimed to rebels. These precious seasons will not last as to us, Christ will call in his ambassadors, and how soon his last call to us may come, we know not, Luke xiv. 24.

3. Seasons of the Spirit's blowing are to be thus improved, Cant. iv. *ult.* Sometimes the power of God comes along with ordinances, and Christ has sensibly his hand at the hole of the lock of sinners' hearts; convictions fasten on them, by the word or providences, and there is an unusual moving in the sinner's soul. O the need of striking in with these, to work out our salvation! Then is a fair gale for Immanuel's land, in which should the sinner set off for the port of heaven, he might surely at length arrive there. But the opportunity may soon be over, John iii. 8, and not returning, then lies wind-bound, and cannot move. So that many miss of heaven for altogether by misimproving it.

4. Fair occasions of doing good, and of service to God, Gal. vi. 10. Sometimes the Lord gives men a fair opportunity of such a piece of service to him; and by his providence invites men to embrace it, and act for him; then they should bestir themselves in a special manner. These opportunities are many times long kept open, and yet not embraced, but delayed from time to time, till in end they go out of their hands; the sheet is taken up to heaven, and the door is shut, Matth. xxv. 10. And then there is no doing with them more.

Next, The abilities to be thus improved, while they last with us, are,

1. Soundness of mind. God has made man a reasonable creature, given him judgment and reflection, a reasoning faculty and a memory; which are improved by education and use. These may be of good use, while assisted with the revelation made in the word. And they are to be diligently improved for our main concern and interest. But alas! how often are they thrown away on men's lusts, and confined to worldly interests! Now no man has a tack of

these; they may be taken from him while life lasts; and yet without them there is no doing our work. The most solid man or woman God can smite with madness, or take the exercise of their reason from them; and then the party's state must stand, for any visible mean, where it was before that came on; they are not capable of altering it to the better.

2. Strength and health of body. All the duties of religion are best done when one is in health and strength; for then the body is not a clog to the soul. And several of the duties of religion can hardly be done without it. A man cannot rise out of a sick-bed, and go to a sermon or a communion table, go about the worship of God in his family, &c. Yet alas! what a deal of work is laid up for the sick-bed and death-bed, when men are most unfit for doing any thing? And in the mean time youth, health, and strength are spent in pursuit of the world and lusts. But labour to make better use of them, some good use of them to eternity; for ere long ye will not have them to make use of at all: and it will be little comfort to think, that when ye had them, ye squandered them away in vanity, but laid them not out in your salvation and generation work.

3. Worldly substance. That is given of God to be improved for his honour: and whatever your portion of it is, the Lord has so far made you his stewards, and but stewards of it, who must give an account to your Lord, how ye have used it. God calls us to honour him with it, Prov. ii 9; and assuredly the more any has of it, the more it is required of them to lay out themselves for the honour of God, as being thereby put in the greater capacity to do for the honour of God in the world, Luke xii. 48, *For unto whomsoever much is given of him shall be much required*: though ordinarily the quite contrary course is taken. And men had need to improve it, while they have it, for it is mighty uncertain, Eccl. xi. 2.

4. *Lastly*, Power, authority, honour, reputation and respect. These come from God, who makes the difference in condition that is among men; some more, some less honourable, some to rule, and some to be ruled, &c. Psal. lxxv. 6, 7. *For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.* And all these he gives to be improved for himself, who is the fountain of power and honour. The more a man has of them, the more access he has to act for God: hence a word for a good cause from some will be more effectual than a struggle made for it by others. Heavy then must be their accounts who make no conscience of doing the great work by these. They are uncertain, and soon fly away too; while people

have them, they would need to improve them, lest God be provoked to take from them, that which they would not use for his honour, but their lusts: *for, saith he, them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed,* 1 Sam. ii. 30.

I shall shut up this doctrine with an use of exhortation.

While life, opportunities, and abilities last with you, ply your great work, the work of your salvation and generation; and do not delay it, but timely do your work. For enforcing this exhortation, let me suggest the following motives.

*Mot. 1.* Your work is great, and attended with much difficulty; therefore *work out your salvation with fear and trembling,* Phil. ii. 12. If it were a trifling business that might be either done or not done as one thought fit; and when to be done, done easily; ye might perhaps cause it wait your time. But surely your time should wait your work, and be carefully applied to it, husbanding it well. For,

*1st,* It is necessary work, and must be done, or ye are for ever undone, Luke x. 42. *One thing is needful.* It is work for your own salvation, and God's glory: and these are of all the most needful. It is not absolutely necessary to your happiness, that ye be healthy, wealthy, in respect and honour in the world: but that ye be gracious, believing, patient, holy, &c. that ye live for God, and be useful for him. If ye sleep in your seed-time, ye will beg in harvest; if ye do not sow, ye will suffer for ever.

*2dly,* It is difficult work, and not easily done; hence says our Lord, Luke xiii. 24. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* Many doing people will fall short, because they do not their work in the right manner, Eccl. x. 15. Yea, they that do best will find enough ado to get through it safely, 1 Pet. iv. 18, and not to mar it. Consider,

(1.) It is heart-doing, doing with the heart, Prov. xxiii. 28. Among men if the work be done with the hands, whether it be with the heart or not, it is all a case. But though the tongue speak well, and the feet carry the man in good ways; yet if the heart be not at the work, the work is not done to purpose, Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

(2.) It is undoing work, work wherein ye have to undo much of what is done, like the pulling down what has been wrong put up, the opening out of a raveled hasp. (1.) Your own life is a raveled business, much disorder has been there; ye have woven your life into a web of sin and contrariety to the divine will: ye have that to open out again, by faith, repentance, and mortification; else ye will be swept away like the spider in his own web, with the besom of destruction, Ezek. xviii. 31. (2.) The way of the generation ye live in is a raveled business, a conspiracy against God: ye must do your

endeavour to undo that, and to bring it to rights. Ye must guard against being caught in their net, Acts ii. 40. *Save yourselves from this untoward generation.* Yea, ye must set yourselves to break and undo it, for God's honour and the good of others: and so ye must strive against the stream, or be carried headlong by it. And try it when ye will, ye will find it hard work; and many times ye will find ye come little speed, Jer. vi. 29. Yet ye must not give it over, 2 Pet. ii. 8. but bear up a testimony for God, Prov. xxvii. 4; and that is your generation-work, Luke xxi. 13.

(3.) It is counter-doing, doing a work wherein ye will find many doing against you, Matth. xi. 12. Apply yourselves to it when ye will, ye will find that it is a labouring in the fire, where ye will have much ado to carry on the work, over the belly of opposition. (1.) Satan will do against you, 1 Pet. v. 8. (2.) The evil world will join issue with him. (3.) Your own corrupt heart will join issue with both.

(4.) It is doing above your strength, your natural strength, 2 Cor. i. 8. We have work to do which our short arms cannot reach, and our natural abilities are not sufficient for. How then can it be done? Why, we must learn to fly on borrowed wings, and we must act with strength borrowed from the Mediator, 2 Tim. ii. 1. So there is no time to trifle.

*Mot. 2.* Ye have loud calls to your work, and it is dangerous to sit them, Psal. xc. 7, 8. Unless ye stop your ears, ye cannot miss to hear them. Ye have,

1. The call of the word. God has given you the Bible in your hands, and every page of it bids you be doing quickly. He sends his messengers with his message to the sluggards on their bed, and in the name of God it is sounded in your ears, 2 Cor. vi. 2, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Sit not the call, lest the opportunity slip.

2. The call of pinching need and necessity. The case of your bodily wants makes you to labour for the meet that perisheth; and doth not the need of your perishing souls call you aloud to see to them, that they be not lost? The case of the generation, wherein so much dishonour is done to God, calls you aloud to lay out yourself for God, Psal. cxix. 126.

3. The call of providence. If ye look to the conduct of providence towards yourselves and towards others, ye are warned to see to yourself in time. Many are dropping off into another world, and the living should lay it to heart.

4. The call of conscience. Heathens want not some checks that way, Rom. ii. 15. It is not to be thought, but those who live under

the gospel, have now and then the alarms from within, to get out of their bed of sloth. Is there not something within, that says ye have delayed long enough, and that more delay may be dangerous ?

*Mot. 3.* Ye have opportunities and abilities put in your hand for to do your work by them, Luke xix. 13. God gives you them to do with : why then should ye not improve them ? Consider, I pray you,

1. Opportunities and abilities are God's free gifts, given to be improved for him in his work. He does not light the candle of your life, and keep it burning, to put it under a bushel, or for you to use it against him. No wonder he is provoked in wrath to take away life, opportunities and abilities from them who make no good use of them.

2. Ye must give an account to God what ye have made of them. Luke xvi. 2 ; what use you have made of your years, your gospel-seasons, seasons of the Spirit's blowing, fair occasions of doing good presented to you : of your soundness of mind, strength of body, worldly substance, power and character. And it will be a heavy account, that so many years have been spent in God's world, and nothing done by the man for God and for his own soul ; that so much health, strength, &c. &c. has been enjoyed, and all expended on the things of the world, the pursuit of lusts, &c.

3. The more you have had of them, and not improved, the greater will your condemnation be, Luke xii. 47, 48. We are all in the case of servants intrusted by the master, where some have more, some less ; but the more one has, as on the one hand his conveniency for doing is greater, so on the other, the not improving of the greater trust will make the more heavy account.

*Mot. 4.* Ye are always doing something. Why, since it is so, will you not do your proper, great, and necessary work ? Man's life is a continued train of actions, and the soul of man, like a watch, goes as fast when she goes false, as when she goes true. So, properly speaking, there is no man who does nothing at all with his opportunities and abilities : but every body does something with them ; howbeit most men do not do their proper work with them. So men are guilty not only of not improving, but of misimproving, their opportunities and abilities. They do with them indeed, but they do not that with them which God specially gave them for.

1. Instead of doing their great work with them, they do next to nothing with them, like those, 2 Thess. iii. 11. *working not at all.* If we consider the business of most men's life, with the opportunities and abilities put in their hand for doing, ; we will find that their whole life is such an insignificant piece of folly, as the action of

that foolish emperor, who pretended to lead out an army to fight the enemy, and all he did was to cause them gather shells by the sea-side. In a word, their life is a continued trifling; always doing, but never doing any thing to the purpose. Their precious time and abilities are spent in labouring for the wind; and that they will find when they come to step into another world, and cast up the account of their gain, Eccl. v. 16.

How many may say, I have been busy managing my house, but neglected my heart; gained silver and gold, but no saving grace; seen many harvests cut down, but mine own seed for glory is not sown yet; I have been careful for my body, but my soul is yet lying in a bleeding, perishing case? This is but trifling to spend your time in caring for your body, and neglecting your soul.

(1.) Thy body is mortal, but thy soul immortal. If men were to die like beasts, they might live like beasts, eat, drink, sleep, and work. But thy soul will remain in life, when thy body dies: when thy tongue begins to falter in thy mouth, and thou canst scarcely speak an articulate word, it will be vigorous: when friends are closing thine eyes, it will be going off to compare before the tribunal of God.

(2.) Thy soul craves more than the body. While the body is living, a little will serve its back and belly: and when dead a few feet of earth, which none will grudge it. But nothing less than an infinite good, that is, God himself, can satisfy the soul. He was a fool who said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Luke xii. 19.

(3.) Thy soul is of far more worth than the body. It is a spiritual, immortal substance, not to be laid in the balance with the cottage of clay. The soul is the diamond in the ring, the jewel in the cabinet, the dignified honourable inhabitant in the cottage of clay, Matth. xvi. 26.

What do they then but trifle, who are busy about the many things, forgetting the one thing needful? They are, in their manner of life, like the spider, that spends its own bowels to make up its web: and when all is done, at one stroke of a besom the poor spider is either killed in its own web, or by it drawn to death.

2. Instead of doing their great work with them, they do worse than nothing with them, they do mischief with them, Hos. xi. 2. and xiii. 6. Hence Solomon remarks, that "the prosperity of fools destroys them;" and the apostle remarks, that "the gospel is the savour of death unto death to many." They who do not improve their opportunities and abilities for God's honour and their own salvation, cannot miss to improve them to God's dishonour and their

own destruction : for the soul of man is of nature too active to be doing nothing at all : so if it be not doing good, it will be doing evil, for it must be doing something. If the matter were weighed in an even balance, it would be found, that many are at as much pains to ruin their own souls, as might possibly serve to save them, if they would but turn their pains to run in another channel. Many a rack Satan puts men on in his service, which the way of duty would set men free from, Job xxiv. 15—17. Jeremiah testifies, *they weary themselves to commit iniquity*, Jer. ix. 5. See Psal. vii. 14. Hab. ii. 13.

Now, since ye are still doing something with your opportunities and abilities, why will ye not do what ye should do with them? Ye are running in a race, why do ye not run in the right way, rather than in the wrong? We may say in some sense, that God does not call you to do more work than ye do ; but other work, your great work.

*Mot. 5.* Your opportunities and abilities for doing will not last ; but they will be short-lived. We have a day, and it is but a day we have, Luke xix. 42. an hireling's day, that is soon over, Job vii. 1. Time runs with a rapid course, and carries with it all our opportunities and abilities for doing our work. Our life is but a vapour, that soon evanisheth ; a shadow that flees away, a handbreadth soon passed over. So,

1. You must now or never do your work, John ix. 4. Working-time will soon be gone. How can we be at ease, while so much time is over, and so little of our work by hand? Yet are not the shadows of the evening stretching out on many, while yet they have been in no due concern where to take up their eternal lodging?

2. If the work we have to do be sore, it will not be longsome. He that is tired with his journey may be refreshed, while he sees he is near the end. The saints' afflictions are but for a moment, their weeping but for a night : the watchmen will be called in from their posts.

*Mot. 6.* It is utterly uncertain to you when they shall come to an end. We are tenants at will, have no tack of our life, and know not how soon you may be called off, Matth. xxiv. 44, 46. So a moment's delay here may be an eternal loss. Our abilities may be at an end, before our time. However our time is uncertain as to the end of it, but, end when it will, there will be no more opportunity nor ability for doing.

*Mot. 7.* Our time when once gone can no more be recalled, no more than the candle burnt to snuff can be lighted again. It is bald in the hindhead, and there is no bringing of it back. As the tree falls, so it must lie.

*Mot. last.* If our great work be not done in time, we are undone for ever. If time is lost, our eternal salvation is lost.

DOCT. II. Our life in this world is a journey, a going to the grave, to the state of the dead, where there is no doing of our work any more.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

I. Consider this journey we are on.

II. Shew that there is no doing of our work any more, when once we are come to our journey's end, to the state of the dead.

III. Make some improvement of each head separately.

I. I shall consider this journey we are on. And here we may take a view of,

1. The point where we begin our journey. We begin it from the womb, from the first moment of our receiving life there. As soon as we become living souls in the womb, we begin our journey to the grave. For then we are sinful creatures, Psal. li. 5. and therefore dying creatures. So we are going this journey, before we can set a foot on the ground, yea before we see the light of this world.

2. The point where it is ended. The term to which we are going, is the grave, the state of the dead. The travellers never halt till they be there. That is the place where all men meet from all the different places of the world. It is *the house appointed for all living*, Job xxx. 23. Their baiting-houses by the way may be very different, as a palace, and a cottage, but the lodging-house at the end of the journey is one. They lie down alike in the dust.

3. The journeying or travelling itself is the motion between these two points: and that is our living in this world. What is our living here? It is not a rest; that is not to be expected here. It is a motion, a journeying motion. And it is just a journeying, a going from the womb to the grave; a coming from the womb of our mother woman, and going in again to the womb of our mother earth, Job i. 21. That is the life we have here.

4. The place we go through in our journey to the grave in this present world; where the sun rising and setting makes days and nights, where are so many springs and harvests, summers and winters in our time; and, what is of all most remarkable, where God sends his messengers to meet us in our journey, to direct us to the road, by which we may get safe to the journey's end. Many look on this world as their resting-place, Psal. xlix. 11. and so as their resting-place, Luke xii. 19. But it is but our journeying-place, which we travel through; like a town in a traveller's road, who comes in at the one end of it, and goes out at the other, Eccl. i. 4.



Therefore the godly take it so, *confessing that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth*, Heb. xi. 13.

5. The way we make in this journey is our time. Some have a longer, some a shorter way to their journey's end. But look back, and so much time as is over your head, so much way have ye made, and the nearer ye are to the end. Time goes, yea flies away, and as it goes, you quickly cut the way, so that it grows every moment shorter and shorter, and you are nearer the grave.

6. The several stages in our way, which accordingly are to some more, to others fewer, are to all but a very few, whereby we may know that it is not a long journey.

(1.) The first stage is infancy, that wherein the journey is begun. While we are in that first stage, we are going indeed to the grave, but poor we know not in the mean time whither we are going. Then we are under a necessity of dying, but know not that we must die, nor know we any thing of the state of the dead; and therefore can do nothing to prepare for it. Our concern in that stage is first confined to meat, and then extends to clothing, but no farther.

(2.) The second stage is childhood, wherein we are more advanced in our journey. Then do we begin to be informed, that there is such a thing as dying, as a heaven and a hell. But how rude are our notions of these things in that stage, and how unwelcome! They are like a dream to us, consisting of misshapen imaginations. How hard is it to be able to have any tolerable conception of the way to be saved, or so much as to conceive aright of the work we have to do! How little of the work can then be done till that stage be over? Things of the world are more natural; yet in that stage it is hard to ply to them, or to any thing but such trifles as will be the scorn of our riper years. So there are two stages over ere we have well begun to know where we are, and what we have to do. The morning is gone. ●

(3.) The next stage is youth, which is the forenoon of our day; the stage of our way, wherein we begin to know ourselves entering into this world. But how doth vanity and folly fill up that period of man's life, that the going through it is turned into a play or a dream, if not into a fit of madness in wickedness, casting off all bands, unless it be in some whom grace early reacheth. They think they have a great part of their way before them, and reckon it needless to be as yet much concerned about the journey's end, though two stages are over before that, and they will soon find themselves past that stage too. So true it is, that *childhood and youth are vanity*, Eccl. xi. 10.

(3.) The fourth stage is middle age, in which the foam of youth is

fallen, and the infirmities of old age have not yet overtaken the man, and is therefore called *the best estate*, Psal. xxxix. 5. Now he is in best case in point of wisdom and management. His thoughts are ripened, and his strength is fit for executing the product of these his riper thoughts. But how is he then wrapt up in a thicket of cares of this world, that often he cannot find the way out seriously to consider his latter end? But this also is soon over, and he quickly arrives at the

(5.) Last stage, old age. Then his sun is remarkably turned, it is fast declining, and he remembers the days of his youth and middle age as waters that pass away. They sometimes run full; but now that brook is dried up. If his judgment continues firm, yet he is ordinarily beset with infirmities of body, whereby he is rendered more unfit for action: and sometimes judgment and memory fail too. The tabernacle is going down, till at length it lie along on the earth, to rise no more till the heavens be no more. So the days come wherein men have no pleasure: and then quickly the mourners go about the streets; the man is at his journey's end.

These are the few stages in our way: but it is but a few that see them all. Some find the end of the journey in the first stage, some in the second, &c.

7. *Lastly*, The steps we make in our way on this journey. Every breathing we make, every pulse that beats, is a step in the way. Whether we sleep or wake, our breath and blood are going: and so we are going on toward the grave. Infinite wisdom has determined how often we shall breathe in and out the air, how often our blood shall go the round in our bodies, and what number of pulses it shall make. These are continued one on the back of another, as so many steps by which this journey is made. And at length the last pulse beats, the last breathing is made, whereby one gives up the ghost: and that is the last step, and so we are at our journey's end.

I shall now make some improvement of this first head.

*Use I.* Of information. Is our life in this world a journey, a going to the grave? then,

1. This life is a transitory, passing thing, that will not last, but will soon be over, Job viii. 9. Form right notions of life from this; you will find it is but a short preface to a long eternity; an inconsiderable point between two extremes, the womb and the grave; so short, that Solomon passes it by in his assigning a time to every thing, Eccl. iii. 2.

2. The state of the dead, and what lies beyond it, is our state of continuance, which we are to be mainly concerned for. This life is our journeying; at the end of our journey we will find the place of

our abode. The grave is our long home, heaven or hell our eternal home. This world is but the passage, as through a strange country to our home. Therefore Job was in the right, to render himself familiar with it, chap. xvii. 14. *I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister.*

3. Man at his best estate is vanity. Consider him in his prime, when his health and strength are at their meridian, death is gaining ground of him: however stately he goes, he is going towards the grave, however little he thinks of it. While he riseth, he doth but swell like a bubble of water, which in a moment is broken and gone.

4. There is great need to see how we improve it, that we misspend it not, Matth. v. 25. We came into this world without any thought of our own, how to be provided for in it. But wo to us in the other world, if we take not thought while we are in the way.

*Use 2.* Of exhortation to several things. Is our life a journey to the grave, to the state of the dead? then,

1. Acquaint yourselves timely with the God and Lord of that land, and make up your peace and friendship with him, that when ye come there, ye may be treated as his friends, and not as his enemies, Job xxii. 21. *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.* For if that be neglected while we are in the way, sad will be our lot at the end of the journey, Matth. v. 25. God is now willing to be at peace with us in his Son, who is Lord of that land, *has the keys of hell and of death*, Rev. i. 18. and is now offering himself and his salvation to us, Rev. xxii. 17. yea offering himself in a marriage-covenant, Hos. ii. 16; Matth. xxii. 4. It will then be our wisdom, to see that our Maker, the Lord of that place, be our Husband now: and then be sure he will see well to us there.

2. Be sure to take the safe road in that journey; and beware of the road of destruction. All the world is on the journey; but they are divided into two companies, taking two different roads, the road of eternal life, and the road of eternal death. The safe road is the way of holiness, Isa. xxxv. 8. *An high way shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness, i. e. the holy way, viz. Christ the personal way*, John xiv. 6. and gospel holiness and obedience, the real way, Col. ii. 6. It is a strait way, that will not allow room for the sinful latitude which corrupt nature affects, and therefore ye will get but little company upon it. The road of destruction is the way of sin, the way of unbelief and unholiness. It is a broad way, and there the multitude goes: there go the profane, there the grossly ignorant, there the mere moralist, there the gross and closs hypocrite, Matth. vii. 13, 14. Take your marks of the way by the word, Psal. xvii. 4.

3. Associate yourselves with those on the safe road, and beware of chusing for your companions those on the broad way, Prov. xiii. 20; Psal. xvi. 3. Travellers desire company in their journey; but then they chuse those who are going their road, not those who are going a contrary one. If they do, one may conclude that they have left their road for love of company. And many sad instances of this there are on this journey, 1 Cor. xv. 33. Hence many sometimes hopeful, by the society they chuse, first turn untender, then loose professors, and at last apostates: and so fall from the threshold of heaven, down to the pit, Psal. cxxv. *ult.*

4. Beware of forgetting that ye are on a journey, travellers, strangers, and pilgrims in the world, Heb. xi. 13. This world that we go through is very charming to the corrupt heart; insomuch that many come to be so taken with it, that they think themselves at home in it. And so they mind nothing but building tabernacles in it, resting and solacing themselves therein. They seek no better home, they desire no better, Phil. iii. 19. and so they are ruined when they awake out of their dream, if they awake not timely. But see that ye count heaven your home, the world the place of your pilgrimage, and your present life your journey homeward.

5. Beware of loading yourselves in your journey, Heb. xii. 1. Men on a journey will be very loath to carry needless weights about them, but endeavour what they can to be as light and expedite as may be. But alas! most men on this journey think never to get enough on their back; and what is it? just a backful of thick clay, Hab. ii. 6. a defiling load of the world. Men lade themselves this way, still grasping at more and more of the world, laying field to field, till they are just overwhelmed with the business of this life, and by anxiety about the things of the world, and undue eagerness, whether they have little or much. They go best through the world, that lade themselves least with it, 2 Cor. vii. 29—31.

6. Take heed of carrying along with you such things as are apt to entangle you in the road, and cause you to fall, Heb. xii. 1. *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.* A metaphor taken from long garments, that cannot miss to retard one on a journey. Unmortified lusts are these entangling things, especially the predominant one. In our way there are many stumbling blocks, and these dispose us to fall over them. In it are many snares, and these catch men by their unmortified lusts, as thorns in the way catching hold of the traveller's loose garments. And many a mire are sinners by this means cast down in, who do not by faith, mortification, and watchfulness, gird up the loins of their mind.

7. Let not afflictions, crosses, and hardships in this world sink

too deep with you : for you are neither to stay with it nor them, 1 Cor. vii. 30. Ye are on a journey, not in your place of continuance. You need the less to value the frowns of a present world ; for ere long ye will be beyond them, and both the smiles and frowns of it will be buried in oblivion. The consideration of our short and uncertain time in the world, would be an excellent antidote against immoderate sorrow ; for we are here but as actors in a play, where it is no great matter whether one be the king or the peasant ; for in a little time the fable is ended, and each appears in the station he really is.

8. Learn to fetch your comforts in your journey from the place ye are going to, the other world, Heb. xi. 13. And the doctrine of the gospel contained in the Bible is the storehouse of these comforts, and faith is the mean whereby to draw them out, Psal. xciv. 19. and xvii. 13. The believing meditation of the better world, is the best stay for the traveller's heart, under the toil and hardships of the way. There is such a thing as the traveller's song, to be sung by the way. David had learned it, and he tells you where, Psal. cxix. 54. *Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.*

9. Be not solicitious for great things in the world, but be content with what Providence lays to your hand, Jer. xlv. 4, 5. Being on a journey, it is no great matter though your accommodations be not pompous. Men on a road do not expect feasts, nor do they value them. A traveller's dinner is soon over ; he takes as he comes to, for he may not stay. O that we could learn the lesson, and labour to secure ease and fulness to ourselves in the place whither we are going, and keep up a holy indifference as to our entertainment on the road.

10. Correct your vain imaginations and conclusions, in all conditions of life, by a lively faith of his truth. In a time of prosperity, men are apt to be full of towering imaginations, Psal. xlix. 11 ; they feed themselves with golden dreams, put adversity far from their thoughts, still reckoning on to-morrow, and that to-morrow will be as this day. But correct the mistake ; ye are on a journey, and may be at the end of it ere ye are aware. In adversity the man is apt to say, It will never be over : but that is a mistake too ; for our sorrows as well as our joys here are short lived, and will soon be at an end.

11. *Lastly*, Let preparation for death be the main business of your life. For your abiding happiness and misery depends on what issue your journey takes : and now is the time, the only time to fix that point. He that lives in Christ shall die in him, and dying

in him be happy for ever. And he who gets not into Christ while he lives, will find the door shut when he is dead, and no more access to salvation. Therefore prepare in time. See to your state, that ye be in that respect fit to die; that ye be out of your natural state, and brought into a state of grace. And watch, and enure yourselves to a dying frame, that ye may be always as on the wing for your departure.

II. The next thing to be considered is, That there is no doing of our work any more, when once we are come to our journey's end, to the state of the dead.

There are two things that will set this in a clear light.

1. Then our day is gone, and the night is come, John ix. 4. The state of the dead is called a *night*, because the darkness of the night puts an end to working, as the light of the day gives an opportunity for it. When death is come, the sun of the gospel is set on the man; and to those who burnt day-light while they had it, God will not set up a new light in the grave, which is "the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness," Job ix. 21, 22.

2. Than the sentence for eternity is passed on men. The next step after death is to the tribunal of God, where men are judged and sentenced according to their deeds done in the flesh, Heb. ix. 27. So,

(1.) The time of God's patience with impenitent sinners is at an end. The door is shut, Matth. xxv. 10. The mercy and goodness of God opens a door of grace for sinners for term of life, long-suffering patience keeps it open during that time; but the term of life being expired, the door is shut, sinners can be waited on no longer, justice takes place.

(2.) Our probationary time is at an end, and our state is fixed unalterably for all the ages of eternity, Luke xv. 26. While men's life in this world lasts, they are on their trials for another world: but sentence being passed after death, they are brought to a fixed point of happiness or misery.

I shall conclude this subject with some improvement of this head.

USE I. Of information. Hence we may learn,

1. That the time of our life in this world is exceedingly precious; it is a golden spot, more to be valued by a guilty creature than all the wealth of the world, as being the opportunity, and the only opportunity for settling the business of our eternal salvation. Then the Lord is on a throne of grace for us, then is the time of his dispensing pardons, then is the time of the ship of the gospel lying in our harbour, bound for Immanuel's land, ready to take in passengers;

which if it once hoist sail, and set off to sea, the passengers are for ever left hopeless on the shore. O how inexcusable are men trifling away their precious hours!

2. That the moment of death is of vast consequence, inasmuch as it is the concluding point of our working time, the time of our trial, immediately succeeded by an unalterable state in eternal happiness or misery. For as the tree then falls, it must lie for ever. If one prays, communicates, &c. wrong at a time, he may have access to mend it: but once dying wrong, there is no helping of that.

3. Happy they who dispatch their work timely, while they are in the land of the living: for their work is done, before working time is over, Rev. xiv. 13. When they come to die, they have no more ado but to die, and that of itself is sufficient work to fill one's hand.

4. Sad is the case of those who misspend their time, whose life is at an end, before their great work for eternity is done. For their case is hopeless, since there is no doing of their great work then any more.

USE 2. Of exhortation. What ye have to do, do quickly, without delay. And,

1. Do your salvation-work without delay, Phil. ii. 12. Ye are by nature lost sinners, but by grace ye may be saved. But none can expect to be brought into a state of salvation in a morning dream. The work of faith, repentance, regeneration, and mortification, is not easy. Give yourselves no rest, till once ye are brought into a state of peace with God, till ye have once shot the gulf as to condemnation, and your eternal happiness be secured. Then will ye live holily and happily; and come death when it will, your great work is done, ye are habitually prepared for it. If otherwise, death may take you unawares, and in a moment make you for ever miserable.

2 Do the work of your generation without delay. Consider what is the work of your station and relation, the work for God and the good of others that providence puts an opportunity in your hand to do: and do it quickly; for if ye delay it, the opportunity may be for ever taken out of your hand. Consider,

(1.) To put off your great work to another time yet to come, is inconsistent with a sincere purpose of setting about it, 1 Pet. 2. 3. Who having burning coals in his bosom, would put off throwing them out till a more convenient season, another hour, or another minute? He that is not fit to-day, will be less so to-morrow.

(2.) The longer ye delay, the harder will your work be, when it comes to the setting to. Sin is like a water, the farther from the head, the deeper, and the harder to get over. The longer ye con-

tinue in sin, the heart grows harder, the understanding more blind, the will more perverse, and the affections more carnal.

(3.) *Lastly*, It is most foolish and unreasonable to delay. How can one delay a work till to-morrow, which must be done, else he is ruined for ever, when he is not sure of another hour? Jam. iv. 13. 14. "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow: for what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Remember what was said to the rich man, Luke xii. 20. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" I hope we are agreed about the necessity of your dispatching your great work: the only question is, When? God says, To-day. Reason says so too; for to-morrow is not yours. The conclusion then is, Do it immediately. Up then and be doing.