

death, how are our hearts rent in pieces with pity and sorrow for them? What cries, tears, and wringing of hands, discover the deep sense we have of their misery! O Christians, is all the love you have for your relations spent upon their bodies? Are their souls of no value in your eyes? Is spiritual death no misery? Doth it not deserve a tear? The Lord open your eyes, and duly affect your hearts with spiritual death and soul miseries.

Consider, my friends, and let it move your bowels, (if there be bowels of affection in you,) whilst they remain spiritually dead, they are useless and wholly unserviceable unto God in the world, as to any special and acceptable service unto him, 2 Tim. ii. 21. they are incapable of all spiritual comforts from God; they cannot taste the least sweetness in Christ, in duties, or in promises, Rom. viii. 6. they have no beauty in their souls, how comely soever their bodies are; it is grace, and nothing but grace that beautifies the inner man, Ezek. xvi. 6, 7. The dead have neither comfort nor beauty in them: they have no hope to be with God in glory; for the life of glory is begun in grace, Phil. i. 6. their graves must be shortly made, to be buried out of the sight of God for ever in the lowest hell, the pit digged by justice for all that are spiritually dead: the dead must be buried. Can such considerations as these draw no pity from your souls, nor excite your endeavours for their regeneration? then it is to be feared your souls are dead as well as theirs. O pity them, pity them, and pray for them; in this case only, prayers for the dead are our duty: who knows but at the last, God may hear your cries, and you may say with comfort, as he did, "This my son was dead, but is alive; was lost, but is found; and they began to be merry," Luke xv. 24.

SERMON XXXII.

The Condemnation of Unbelievers, illustrated and applied.

JOHN iii. 18.

—*But he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

CHRIST having discoursed with Nicodemus in the beginning of this chapter, about the necessity of regeneration, proceeds to shew in this following discourse, the reason and ground why regeneration and faith are so indispensably necessary, viz. because

there is no other way to set men free from the curse and condemnation of the law. The curse of the law, like the fiery serpents in the wilderness, hath smitten every sinner with a deadly stroke and sting, for which there is no cure but Christ lifted up in the gospel, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," ver. 14. Neither doth Christ cure any but those that, believingly, apply him to their own souls. The result and conclusion of all you have in my text; "He that believeth in him is not condemned; but "he that believeth not is condemned already," &c. In this clause which I have pitched upon we find these three parts;

1. The sin threatened, viz. Unbelief.
2. The punishment inflicted, viz. Condemnation.
3. The immediate relation of the one to the other; "he is condemned already."

First, Let us take into consideration the sin which is here threatened, viz. *unbelief*; the neglecting or refusing of an exalted and offered Jesus. Unbelief is two-fold, viz. *negative* or *positive*. *Negative* unbelief is the sin of the Heathens, who never had the gospel among them, nor the offers of Christ made to them; these cannot believe on him of whom they have not heard. *Positive* unbelief is the sin of men and women under the gospel, to whom Christ is actually opened and offered by the preaching of the gospel; but they make light of it, and neglect the great salvation: Receive not Christ into their hearts, nor consent to the severe and self-denying terms upon which he is offered. This is the sin threatened.

Secondly, The punishment inflicted, and that is *condemnation*: a word of deep and dreadful signification; appearing, in this text as the hand-writing upon the plaister of the wall unto Belteshazzar, Dan. v. 5. a word whose deep sense and emphasis are fully understood in hell. *Condemnation* is the judgment, or sentence of God, condemning a man to bear the punishment of his eternal wrath for sin; the most terrible of all sentences.

Thirdly, The immediate relation or respect this punishment hath to that sin of unbelief. The unbeliever is condemned already, i. e. he is virtually condemned by the law of God; his *mittimus* is already made for hell; he is condemned, as *a sinner*, by the breach of the first covenant; but that condemnation had never been his ruin except it had been ratified by the sentence of God, condemning him, as an *unbeliever*, for slighting and rejecting the grace offered in the second covenant. So that the believer is already virtually condemned by both, as he is a sinner, and as he is an unbeliever; as he hath transgressed the law, and as he hath refused the gospel; as he hath contracted sin the moral disease, and refused Christ the only effectual remedy. He is virtually condemned, and will be, sentimentally, condemned in the judgment of the

great day. Unbelief is his great sin, and condemnation is his great misery. Hence the observation will be this:

Doct. *That all unbelievers are presently, and immediately under the just and dreadful sentence of God's condemnation.* John xii. 48. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him. The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." John iii. 36. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Three things are to be opened in the doctrinal part of this point:

1. What unbelief, or the not receiving of Jesus Christ is.
2. What condemnation, the punishment of this sin, is.
3. Why this punishment unavoidably follows that sin.

First, What the sin of unbelief, or not receiving Christ, is. By unbelief, we are not here to understand the relics or remains of that sin in the people of God, which is mixed with their imperfect faith; for there is some unbelief still mingled with faith, in the best of hearts: He that can say, *Lord, I believe*, hath cause enough to cry out with tears, *help thou my unbelief*. However, this doth not bring the soul under condemnation, or into the state of wrath; the word condemns this unbelief in them, but doth not condemn their persons for this unbelief: But the unbelief here spoken of, is the neglecting or refusing to take Christ as he is offered in the gospel, and so is exclusive of the saving act and effects of faith.

First, It is exclusive of the saving act of faith, which (as hath been already declared) is the due receiving of Christ offered in the gospel, consenting to take him upon his own terms. This, the unbeliever will by no means be persuaded to do; he will be persuaded to accept the promises of Christ, but not to accept the person of Christ: He is willing to accept Christ in part, a divided Christ, but not to accept Christ entirely, in all his offices. He will accept the righteousness of Christ in conjunction with his own righteousness; but he will not accept the righteousness of Christ as the sole matter of his justification, exclusive of his own righteousness: he is willing to wear the crown of Christ, but cannot be persuaded to bear the cross of Christ. Thus Christ and unbelievers part upon terms; God will come down no lower, and the unbeliever will come up no higher; God will not alter his terms, and the unbeliever will not alter his resolution; and so Christ is refused, salvation neglected, and in effect the unbeliever chuseth rather to be damned, than to comply with the severe terms of self-

denial, mortification, and bearing the cross of Christ. Thus it excludes the saving act of faith.

Secondly, It is exclusive of the saving fruits and effects of faith. Faith produces love to God, but the unbeliever doth not truly love him; "But I know you (saith Christ to unbelievers) that the love of God is not in you," John v. 42. Faith purifies the heart of a believer, but the hearts of unbelievers are full of all impurity. The believer overcomes the world, the world overcomes the unbeliever: Faith makes the cross of Christ sweet and easy to the believer, unbelief makes Christ, because of the cross, bitter and distasteful to the unbeliever. Thus unbelief excludes both the saving act and fruits of faith, and consequently bars the soul from the saving benefits and privileges of faith, viz. justification and peace with God.

Secondly, Next let us consider the punishment of this sin, which is condemnation. Condemnation, in the general, is the sentence of a judge awarding a mulct, or penalty to be inflicted upon the guilty person. There is a twofold condemnation.

1. *Respectu culpæ*, In respect of the fault.

2. *Respectu pænæ*, In respect of the punishment.

First, Condemnation, with respect to the fault, is the casting of the person as guilty of the crime charged upon him; condemnation, with respect to the punishment, is the sentencing of the convicted offender to undergo such a punishment for such a fault; to bear a penal for a moral evil. This *forensic* word, *condemnation*, is here applied unto the case of a guilty sinner cast at the bar of God, where the fact is clearly proved, and the punishment righteously awarded. Thou art an unbeliever, for this sin thou shalt die eternally. Condemnation with respect to the fault, stands opposed to justification, Rom. v. 16. Condemnation with respect to the punishment, stands opposed to salvation, Mark xvi. 16. More particularly,

First, Condemnation is the sentence of God, the great and terrible God, the omniscient, omnipotent, supreme, and impartial Judge, at whose bar the guilty sinner stands. It is the law of God that condemns him now: he hath one that judgeth him, a great and terrible one too. It is a dreadful thing to be condemned at man's bar; but the courts of human judicature, how awful and solemn soever they are, are but trifles to this court of heaven, and conscience, wherein the unbeliever is arraigned and condemned.

Secondly, It is the sentence of God adjudging the unbeliever to eternal death, than which, nothing is more terrible. What is a prison to hell? What is a scaffold and an ax, to "go ye cursed into everlasting fire?" What is a gallows and a halter, to everlasting burnings?

Thirdly, Condemnation is the final sentence of God, the supreme judge, from whose bar and judgment there lies no appeal for the unbeliever, but execution certainly follows condemnation, Luke xix. 27. If man condemn, God may justify and save; but if God condemn, no man can save or deliver. If the law cast a man, as a sinner, the gospel may save him as a believer: but if the gospel cast him as an unbeliever, a man that finally rejects Jesus Christ, whom it offers to him, all the world cannot save that man. O then what a dreadful word is condemnation! All the evils and miseries of this life are nothing to it. Put all afflictions, calamities, sufferings, and miseries of this world into one scale, and this sentence of God into the other, and they will be all lighter than a feather.

Thirdly, In the next place, I shall shew you that this punishment, viz. condemnation, must unavoidably follow that sin of unbelief. So many unbelieving persons as be in the world, so many condemned persons there are in the world; and this will appear two ways.

1. By considering what unbelief excludes a man from.

2. By considering what unbelief includes a man under.

First, Let us consider what unbelief excludes a man from; and it will be found, that it excludes him from all that may help and save him. For,

First, It excludes him from the pardon of sin, John viii. 24. "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Now he that dies under the guilt of all his sins, must needs die in a state of wrath and condemnation for ever. "For the wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23. If a man be saved without a pardon, then may the unbeliever hope to be saved.

Secondly, Unbelief excludes a man from all the saving benefits that come by the sacrifice or death of Christ. For if faith be the only instrument that applies and brings home to the soul the benefits of the blood of Christ, as unquestionably it is, then unbelief must of necessity exclude a man from all those benefits, and consequently leave him in the state of death and condemnation. Faith is the applying cause, the instrument by which we receive the special saving benefit of the blood of Christ, Rom. v. 25. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." Eph. ii. 8. "By grace are ye saved through faith." So then if the unbeliever be acquitted and saved, it must be without the benefit of Christ's death and sacrifice, which is utterly impossible.

Thirdly, Unbelief excludes a man from the saving efficacy and operation of the gospel, by shutting up the heart against it, and crossing the main scope and drift of it, which is to bring up men

to the terms * of salvation. To persuade them to believe, this is its great design, the scope of all its commands, 1 John iii. 23. Mark i. 14, 15. John xii. 36. It is the scope of all its promises; they are written to encourage men to believe, John vi. 35, 37. So then if the unbeliever escape condemnation, it must be in a way unknown to us by the gospel; yea, contrary to the established order therein. For the unbeliever obeyeth not the great command of the gospel, 1 John iii. 17. Nor is he under any one saving promise of it, Gal. iii. 14, 22.

Fourthly, Unbelief excludes a man from union with Christ, faith being the bond of that union, Eph. iii. 17. The unbeliever therefore may as reasonably expect to be saved without Christ, as to be saved without faith. Thus you see what unbelief excludes a man from.

Secondly, Let us next see what guilt and misery unbelief includes men under, and certainly it will be found to be the greatest guilt and misery in the world. For,

First, It is a sin which reflects the greatest dishonour upon God, 1 John vi. 10. "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself. He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."

Secondly, Unbelief makes a man guilty of the vilest contempt of Christ, and the whole design of redemption managed by him. All the glorious attributes of God were finally manifested in the work of redemption by Christ; therefore the apostle calls him "the wisdom of God, and the power of God," 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. But what doth the careless neglect, and wilful rejection of Christ speak, but the weakness and folly of that design of redemption by him.

Thirdly, Unbelief includes in it the sorest spiritual judgment that is or can be inflicted in this world upon the soul of man; even spiritual blindness, and the fatal darkening of the understanding by Satan, 2 Cor. iv. 4. of which more hereafter.

Fourthly, Unbelief includes a man under the curse, and shuts him up under all the threatenings that are written in the book of God; amongst which, that is an express and terrible one, Mark xvi. 10. "He that believes not, shall be damned." So that nothing can be more evident than this, that condemnation necessarily follows unbelief. This sin and that punishment are fastened together with chains of adamant. The uses follow:

Inf. 1. If this be so, then how great a number of persons are visibly in the state of condemnation! So many unbelievers, so many

* i. e. Those things which accompany salvation. *Editor.*

condemned men and women. That is a sad complaint of the prophet, Isa. liii. i. "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is "the arm of the Lord revealed?" Many there be that talk of faith, and many that profess faith; but they only talk of and profess it: There are but few in the world unto whom the arm of the Lord hath been revealed, in the work of faith with power. It is put among the great mysteries and wonders of the world, 1 Tim. iii. 16. That Christ is believed on in the world. O what a great and terrible day will the day of Christ's coming to judgment be, when so many millions of unbelievers shall be brought to his tribunal to be solemnly sentenced! They are (as my text speaks) *condemned already*; but then that dreadful sentence will be solemnly pronounced by Jesus Christ, whom they have despised and rejected: Then shall that scripture be fulfilled, Luke xix. 27. "These mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them "hither, and slay them before me."

Inf. 2. Hence be informed how great a mercy the least measure of saving faith is: for the least measure of true faith unites the soul to Jesus Christ; and then "there is no condemnation to them that "are in Christ Jesus," Rom. viii. 1. Not one sentence of God against them. So Acts xiii. 39. "By him all that believe are justified from all things." The weakest believer is as free from condemnation as the strongest; the righteousness of Christ comes upon all believers without any difference. Rom. iii. 22. "Even the "righteousness of God, which is by faith of Christ Jesus unto all, "and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference." It is not imputed, as it is in inherent righteousness; one man hath more holiness than another: The faith that receives the righteousness of Christ may be different in degrees of strength; but the received righteousness is equal upon all believers: A piece of gold is as much worth in the hand of a child, as it is in the hand of a man. O the exceeding preciousness of saving faith!

Inf. 3. How dreadful a sin is the sin of unbelief, which brings men under the condemnation of the great God. No sin startles less, or damns surer: It is a sin that doth not affright the conscience as some other sins do, but it kills the soul more certainly than any of those sins could do: For, indeed, other sins could not damn us, were it not for unbelief, which fixes the guilt of them all upon our persons. This is the condemnation. Unbelief is the sin of sins; and when the Spirit comes to convince men of sin, he begins with this as the capital sin, John xvi. 9. But more particularly,

First, Estimate the evil of unbelief from its object. It is the slighting and refusing of the most excellent and wonderful person in heaven or earth: the vision of Christ by faith is the joy of saints upon

earth: the vision of Christ above is the happiness of saints in heaven. It is a despising of him who is altogether lovely in himself, who hath loved us and given himself for us.

It is a rejecting of the only Mediator betwixt God and man; after the rejecting of whom there remains no sacrifice for sin.

Secondly, Let the evil of unbelief be valued by the offer of Christ to our souls in the gospel: It is one part of the great mystery of godliness that Christ should be preached to the Gentiles, 1 Tim. iii. 16. That the word of this salvation should be sent to us, Acts xiii. 26. A mercy denied to the fallen angels, and the greatest part of mankind, which aggravates the evil of this sin beyond all imagination. So that in refusing or neglecting Jesus Christ are found vile ingratitude, highest contempt of the grace and wisdom of God; and in the event, the loss of the only season and opportunity of salvation, which is never more to be recovered to all eternity.

Inf. 4. If this be the case of all unbelievers, it is not to be admired, that souls under the first convictions of their miserable condition, are plunged into such deep distresses of spirit. It is said of them, Acts ii. 27. "That they were pricked at the heart, and cried out, men and brethren, what shall we do?" And so the jailor, "He came in trembling and astonished, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Certainly, if souls apprehend themselves under the condemnation and sentence of the great God in all tears and trembling, their weary days and restless nights are not without just cause and reason. Those that never saw their own miserable condition by the light of a clear and full conviction, may wonder to see others so deeply distressed in spirit. They may mis-judge the case, and call it melancholy or madness: but spiritual troubles do not exceed the cause and ground of them, let them be as deep and as great as they will: And, indeed, it is one of the great mysteries of grace and providence; a thing much unknown to men, how such poor souls are supported from day to day under such fears and sorrows as are able, in a few hours, to break the stoutest spirit in the world. Luther was a man of great natural courage; and yet, when God let in spiritual troubles upon his soul, it is noted of him, *ut nec vox, nec calor, nec sanguis superesset*; he had neither voice, nor heat, nor blood appearing in him.

Inf. 5. How groundless and irrational is the mirth and jollity of all carnal and unregenerate men? They feast in their prison, and dance in their fetters. O the madness that is in the hearts of men! If men did but see their *mittimus* made for hell, or believe they are condemned already, it were impossible for them to live at that rate of vanity they do: And is their condition less dangerous because it is not understood? Surely no; but much more dangerous for that,

O poor sinners, you have found out an effectual way to prevent your present troubles ; it were well if you could find out a way to prevent your eternal misery : But it is easier for a man to stifle conviction, than prevent damnation. Your mirth hath a two-fold mischief in it ; it prevents repentance, and increases your future torment. O what a hell will your hell be, who drop into it, out of all the sensitive and sinful pleasures of this world ! If ever man may say of mirth, that it is mad ; and of laughter, what doth it ! He may say so in this case.

Inf. 6. Lastly, what cause have they to rejoice, admire, and praise the Lord to eternity, who have a well-grounded confidence that they are freed from God's condemnation ? " O give thanks " to the Father, who hath delivered you from the power of darkness, and translated you into the kingdom of his dear Son," Col. i. 13. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad ; for if you be freed from condemnation, you are out of Satan's power, he hath no more any dominion over you. The power of Satan over men comes in by virtue of their condemnation, as the power of the *jailor*, or *executioner*, over the bodies of condemned prisoners doth, Heb. ii. 14. If you be freed from condemnation, the sting of death shall never touch you ; for the sting of death smites the souls of men with a deadly stroke, only by virtue of God's condemnatory sentence, 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56. " The sting of death is sin, and the " strength of sin is the law." If you be freed from condemnation now, you shall stand with comfort and boldness at the judgment-seat of Christ in the great-day ; and verily in this thing is the love of God perfected, 1 John iv. 17. O it is a privilege in which the grace, mercy, and love of God shine forth as clearly as the sun when it shineth in its full strength. And certainly you will find cause to lie at the feet of God, astonished and overwhelmed with the sense of this mercy, when you shall find yourselves free from the condemnation of God, whilst many others, as good as you were, are still under condemnation. Yea, yourselves freed, and many of your superiors in the world still under the curse, 1 Cor. i. 26. Yea, yourselves freed, and others that sat under the same means of grace, and had the same external advantages as you had, still in chains, 2 Cor. ii. 16. O brethren ! This is a marvellous deliverance ; look on it which way you will, your ransom is paid, and not a penny of it by you ; it cost you nothing to procure your pardon ; your pardon is full, and not one sin excepted out of it that you ever committed. You are freed, and Jesus Christ condemned in your stead to procure your discharge ; your pardon is sealed in his blood, and that for ever ; so that you shall never any more come into condemnation. " 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 to life,” John v. 24.

Let them that are so delivered, spend their days on earth in praise and cheerful obedience; and, when they die, let them not shrink away from death, nor be afraid to take it by the cold hand, it can do them no harm. Yea, let them close their dying lips with—*Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ.*

SERMON XXXIII.

Of the Aggravation of the Sin, and Punishment of Unbelief under the light of the Gospel.

JOHN iii. 19.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

OUT of the foregoing verse it was fully proved in our last sermon, that all christless and unregenerate men are no better than dead men, being *condemned already*. Our Saviour proceeds in this verse to aggravate the misery of those that refuse and despise him; yet farther, and to let them know, that those who remain in unbelief and the state of unregeneracy, must expect some greater and sorer wrath than other men; not only a simple condemnation, but an aggravated and peculiar condemnation, “This is the condemnation, that light is come,” &c.

In the words we find these three parts.

1. The aggravation of sin by the abuse of gospel-light, “Light is come,” &c.

2. The aggravation of misery, in proportion to that abuse of light, “This is the condemnation.”

3. The cause and occasion, drawing men into this sin and misery, “Because their deeds were evil.”

First, We have here the aggravation of sin by the abuse of gospel-light, “Light is come.” By light we are to understand the knowledge, discovery, and manifestation of Christ, and redemption by him in the gospel. He is the Sun of righteousness that arises in the gospel upon the nations, Mal. iv. 1. When he came in the flesh, then did “the day spring from on high visit us,” Luke i. 78. And the light may be said to come two ways; either,

First, In the means by which it is conveyed to us; or, *Secondly*,