

1 PET. iii. 19.

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.

IN the former discourse we have had a just view of heaven, and the spirits of just men made perfect, the inhabitants of that blessed region of light and glory.

In this scripture we have the contrary glass, representing the unspeakable misery of those souls or spirits which are separated by death from their bodies for a time, and by sin from God for ever; arrested by the law, and secured in the prison of hell, unto the judgment of the great day.

A sermon of hell may keep some souls out of hell, and a sermon of heaven may be the means to help others to heaven: the desire of my heart is, that the conversations of all those who shall read these discourses of heaven and hell, might look more like a diligent flight from the one, and pursuit of the other.

The scope of the context is a persuasive to patience, upon a prospect of manifold tribulations coming upon the Christian churches, strongly enforced by Christ's example, who both in his own person, ver. 18. and by his spirit in his servants, ver. 19. exercised wonderful patience and long-suffering as a pattern to his people.

This 19th verse gives us an account of his long-suffering towards that disobedient and immorigerous generation of sinners, on whom he waited an hundred and twenty years in the ministry of Noah.

There are difficulties in the text. * Estius reckons no less than ten expositions of it, and saith, "It is a very difficult scripture in the judgment of almost all interpreters;" but yet I must say, those difficulties are rather brought to it, than found in it. It is a text which hath been racked and tortured by popish expositors, to make it speak Christ's local descent into hell, and to confess their doctrine of *purgatory*; things which it knew not.

But if we will take its genuine sense, it only relates the sin and misery of those contumacious persons, on whom the Spirit of God waited so long in the ministry of Noah; giving an account of,

1. Their sin on earth.

2. Their punishment in hell.

1. Their sin on earth, which is both specified and aggravated. (1.) Specified; namely their disobedience. They were sometimes disobedient and unpersuadable; neither precepts nor examples could bring them to repentance. (2.) This their disobedience is

* *Locus hic omnium pœne interpretum judicio difficillimus.* Estius.

aggravated by the expence of God's patience upon them for the space of an hundred and twenty years, not only forbearing them so long, but striving with them, as Moses expresseth it; or waiting on them, as the apostle here; but all to no purpose; they were obstinate, stubborn, and impersuadable to the very last.

2. Behold, therefore, in the next place, the dreadful, but most just and equal punishment of these sinners in hell; they are called *spirits in prison*, i. e. the souls now in hell *.

At that time when Peter wrote of them, they were not entire men, but *spirits*, in the proper sense, i. e. separated souls, bodiless, and lonely souls: whilst in the body, it is properly a soul; but when separated, a spirit, according to scripture-language, and the strict notion of such a being.

These spirits, or souls in the state of separation, are said to be in a *prison*, that is, in hell, as the word elsewhere notes, Rev. xx. 7. and Jude, ver. 6. Heaven and hell are the only receptacles of departed, or separated souls.

Thus you have, in a few words, the natural and genuine sense of the place, and it is but a wasting time to repeat and refel the many false and forced interpretations of this text, which corrupt minds, and mercenary pens have perplexed and darkened it withal: That which I level at, is comprised in this plain proposition.

Doct. That the souls or spirits of all men who die in a state of unbelief and disobedience, are immediately committed to the prison of hell, there to suffer the wrath of God due to their sins.

Hell is shadowed forth to us in scripture by divers metaphors; "for we cannot conceive spiritual things, unless they are so clothed and shadowed out unto us *." Augustine gives this reason for the frequent use of metaphors and allegories in scripture, because they are so much proportioned to our senses, with which our senses have contracted an intimacy and familiarity; and therefore God, to accommodate his truth to our capacities, doth as it were, this way embody it in earthly expressions, according to that celebrated observation of the Cabbalists,—*Lumen supremum nunquam descendit sine indumento*;—the pure and supreme light never descends to us without a garment or covering. In the Old Testament, the place and state of damned souls are set forth by metaphors taken from the most remarkable places and exemplary acts of vengeance upon sinners in this world; as the overthrow of the giants by the flood, those prodigious sinners that fought against heaven, and

* Psal. xxxi. 6. Eccl. xii. 7. Acts vii. 50.

† *Spiritualia capere non possumus, nisi adumbrata.*

were swept by the flood into the place of torment. To this Solomon is conceived to allude, in Prov. xxxi. 16. "The man that wanders out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead;" in the Hebrew it is, he shall remain with the *Rephaims*, or giants. These giants were the men that more especially provoked God to bring the flood upon the world; they are also noted as the first inhabitants of hell, therefore from them the place of torment takes its name, and the damned are said to remain in the place of giants.

Sometimes hell is called Tophet, Isa. xxx. 33. This Tophet was in the valley of Hinnom, and was famous for divers things. There the children of Israel caused their children to pass through the fire to Moloch, or sacrificed to the devil, drowning their horrible shrieks and ejaculations with the noise of drums.

In this valley also was the memorable slaughter of eighteen hundred thousand of the Assyrian camp, by an angel, in one night.

There, also, the Babylonians murdered the people of Jerusalem at the taking of the city, Jer. vii. 31, 32. So that Tophet was a mere shambles, the public chopping-block, on which the limbs of both young and old were quartered out, by thousands. It was filled with dead bodies, till there was no place for burial. By all which it appears, that no spot of ground in the world was so famous for the fires kindled in it to destroy men, for the doleful cries that echoed from it, or the innumerable multitudes that perished in it; for which reason it is made the emblem of hell. Sometimes it is called a "lake of fire burning with brimstone," Rev. xix. 20. denoting the most exquisite torment, by an intense and durable flame.

And in the text, it is called a *prison*, where the spirits of ungodly men are both detained and punished. This notion of a prison gives us a lively representation of the miserable state of damned souls, and that especially in the following particulars.

First, Prisoners are arrested and seized by authority of law; it is the law which sends them thither, and keeps them there; the mittimus of a justice is but the instrument of the law, whereby they are deprived of liberty, and taken into custody. The law of God which sinners have both violated and despised, at death takes hold of them, and arrests them. It is the law which claps up their spirits in prison, and in the name and authority of the great and terrible God, commits them to hell. All that are out of Christ, are under the curse and damning sentence of the law, which now comes to be executed on them, Gal. iii. 10.

Secondly, Prisoners are carried, or haled to prison by force and constraint; natural force backs legal authority: the law is executed by rough and resolute bailiffs, who compel them to go, though

never so much against their will; this also is the case of the wicked at death: Satan is God's bailiff, to hurry away the law-condemned souls to the infernal prison. The devil hath the power of death, Heb. ii. 14. as the executioner hath of the body of a condemned man.

Thirdly, Prisoners are chained and bolted in prison, to prevent their escape; so are damned spirits secured by the power of God, and chained by their own guilty and trembling consciences in hell, unto the time of judgment, and the fulness of misery; not that they have no torment in the mean time: alas! were there no more but that fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation, spoken of by the apostle, Heb. x. 27. it were an inexpressible torment; but there is a farther degree of torment to be awarded them at the judgment of the great day, to which they are therefore kept as in chains and prisons.

Fourthly, Prisons are dark and noisome places, not built for pleasure, as other houses are, but for punishments; so is hell, Jude, ver. 6. "Reserved in everlasting chains under darkness," as he there describes the place of torments, yea, *outer darkness*, Matth. viii. 12. extreme or perfect darkness. Philosophers tell us of the darkness of this world, *Non dantur puræ tenebræ*, that there is no pure or perfect darkness here, without some mixture of light; but there is not a glade of light, not a spark of hope or comfort shining into that prison.

Fifthly, Mournful sighs and groans are heard in prisons, Psal. xcvii. 11. Let the "sighing of the prisoners come before thee," saith the psalmist. But deeper sighs and more emphatical groans are heard in hell, "There shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," Matth. viii. 12. Those that would not groan under the sense of sin on earth, shall howl under anguish and desperation in hell.

Sixthly, There is a time when prisoners are brought out of the prison to be judged, and then return in a worse condition than before, to the place from whence they came. God also hath appointed a day for the solemn condemnation of those spirits in prison. The scriptures call it "the judgment of the great day," Jude, ver. 6. from the great business that is to be done therein, and the great and solemn assembly that shall then appear before God.

But I will insist no longer upon the display of the metaphor; my business is to give you a representation of the state and condition of damned souls in hell, and to assist your conceptions of them, and of their state.

It is a dreadful sight I am to give you this day; but how much better is it to see, than to feel that wrath? The treasures thereof

shall shortly be broken up, and poured forth upon the spirits of men.

You had in the former discourse, a faint umbrage of the spirits of just men in glory; in this you will have an imperfect representation of the spirits of wicked men in hell: and look, as the former cannot be adequate and perfect, because that happiness surpasseth our knowledge; so neither can this be so, because the misery of the damned passeth our fear.

The case and state of a damned spirit will be best opened in these following propositions.

Proposition 1. That the guilt of all sin gathers to, and settles in the conscience of every christless sinner, and makes up a vast treasure of guilt in the course of his life in this world.

The high and awful power of conscience belonging to the understanding faculty in the soul of man, was spoken to before, as to its general nature, and that conscience certainly accompanies it, and is inseparable from it, was there shewed; I am here to consider it as the seat or centre of guilt, in all unregenerate and lost souls. For, look, as the tides wash up, and leave the slime and filth upon the shore, even so all the corruption and sin that is in the other faculties of the soul settle upon the conscience; "Their mind and conscience (saith the apostle) is defiled," Tit. i. 15. it is as it were, the sink of a sinner's soul, into which all filth runs and guilt settles.

The conscience of every believer is purged from its filthiness by the blood of Christ, Heb. ix. 14. his blood and his spirit purify it, and pacify it, whereby it becomes the region of light and peace: but all the guilt which hath been long contracting, through the life of an unbeliever, fixes itself deep and fast in his conscience; "It is written upon the tables of their hearts, as with a pen of iron," Jer. xvii. 1. i. e. guilt is as a mark or character fashioned or engraven in the very substance of the soul, as letters are cut into glass with a diamond.

Conscience is not only the principal *engagee*, obliged unto God as a judge, but the principal director and guide of the soul, in its courses and actions, and consequently, the guilt of sin falls upon it, and rests in it. The soul is both the spring and fountain of all actions that go outward from man, and the term or receptacle of all actions inward; but in both sorts of actions, going outward, and coming inward, conscience is the chief counsellor, guide, and director in all, and so the guilt which is contracted either way, must be upon its head. It is the bridle of the soul to restrain it from sin; the eye of the soul to direct its course; and therefore is principally chargeable with all the evils of life. Bodily members are but instruments, and the will itself, as high and noble a faculty or power

as it is, moveth not until the judgment cometh to a conclusion, and the debate be ended in the mind.

Now, in the whole course and compass of a sinner's life in this world, what treasures of guilt must needs be lodged in his conscience? What a magazine of sin and filth must be laid up there? It is said of a wicked man, Job xx. 11. "His bones are full of the sins of his youth;" meaning his spirit, mind, or conscience, is as full of sin, as bones are of marrow: yea, the very sins of his youth are enough to fill them: and Rom. ii. 5. they are said "to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath," which is only done by treasuring up guilt; for wrath and guilt are treasured up together in proportion to each other. Every day of his life vast sums have been cast into this treasury, and the patience of God waiteth till it be full, before he calls the sinner to an account and reckoning, Gen. xv. 16.

Prop. 2. *All the sin and guilt, contracted upon the souls and consciences of impenitent men in this world, accompany and follow their departed souls to judgment, and there bring them under the dreadful condemnation of the great and terrible God, which cuts off all their hopes and comforts for ever.*

"If you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins." John viii. 24. And Job xx. 11. "His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." No proposition lies clearer in scripture, or should lie with greater weight on the hearts of sinners: nothing but pardon can remove guilt; but without faith and repentance there never was, nor shall be a pardon, Acts x. 43. Rom. iii. 24, 25. Luke xxiv. 46, 47. Look, as the graces of believers, so the sins of unbelievers follow the soul whithersoever it goes. All their sins who die out of Christ, cry to them when they go hence, *We are thy works, and we will follow thee.* The acts of sin are transient, but the guilt and effects of it are permanent; and it is evident by this, that in the great day, their consciences, which are the books of records, wherein all their sins are registered, will be opened, and they shall be judged by them, and out of them, Rev. xx. 12.

Now, before that general judgment, every soul comes to its particular judgment, and that immediately after death: of this I apprehend the apostle to speak in Heb. ix. 27. "It is appointed for all men once to die, but after that the judgment." The soul is presently stated by this judgment in its everlasting and fixed condition. The soul of a wicked man appearing before God, in all its sin and guilt, and by him sentenced, immediately gives up all its hope, Prov. xi. 7. "When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish; and the hope of the unjust man

“perisheth.” His strong hope * perisheth, as some read it, i. e. his strong delusion : for, alas, he took his own shadow for a bridge over the great waters, and is unexpectedly plunged into the gulph of eternal misery, as Mat. vii. 22.

This perishing, or cutting off of hope, is that which is called in scripture *the death of the soul*, for so long the soul will live, as it hath any hope. The deferring of hope makes it sick, but the final cutting off of hope strikes it quite dead, i. e. dead as to all joy, comfort, or expectation of any for ever, which is that death which an immortal soul is capable to suffer : *The righteous hath hope in his death* ; but every unregenerate man in the world breathes out his last hope in a few moments after his last breath, which strikes terror into the very centre of the soul, and is a death-wound to it.

Prop. 3. *The souls of the damned are exceedingly large and capacious subjects of wrath and torment ; and in their separate state their capacity is greatly enlarged, both by laying asleep all those affections whose exercise is relieving, and thoroughly awakening all those passions which are tormenting.*

The soul of man being by nature a spirit, an intelligent spirit, and, in its substantial faculties, assimilated to God, whose image it bears ; it must, for that reason, be exquisitely sensible of all the impressions and touches of the wrath of God upon it. The spirit of man is a most tender, sensible, and apprehensive creature : the eye of the body is not so sensible of a touch, a nerve of the body is not so sensible when pricked, as the spirit of man is of the least touch of God's indignation upon it. “A wounded spirit who can bear ?” Prov. xviii. 14. Other external wounds upon the body inflicted either by man or God, are tolerable ; but that which immediately touches the spirit of man, is insufferable : who can bear or endure it ?

And as the spirit of man hath the most delicate and exquisite sense of misery ; so it hath a vast capacity to receive, and let in the fulness of anguish and misery into it : it is a large vessel, called, Rom. ix. 22. “A vessel of wrath fitted to destruction.” The large capacity of the soul is seen in this, that it is not in the power of all the creatures in the world to satisfy and fill it : it can drink up, as one speaks, all the rivers of created good, and its thirst not quenched by such a draught ; but after all, it cries, Give, give. Nothing but an infinite God can quiet and satisfy its appetite and raging thirst.

And as it is capable and receptive of more good than is found in all the creatures, so it is capable of more misery and anguish than

* *Etiam spes valentissima*, i. e. Even the strongest hope.

all the creatures can inflict upon it. Let all the elements, all men on earth, yea, all the devils and damned in hell, conspire and unite in a design to torment man; yet when they have done all, his spirit is capable of a farther degree of torment; a torment as much beyond it, as a rack is beyond a hard bed, or the sword in his bowels is beyond the scratch of a pin. The devils indeed are the executioners and tormentors of the damned; but if that were all they were capable to suffer, the torment of the damned would be, comparatively, mild and gentle to what they are. Oh, the largeness of the understanding of man, what will it not take into its vast capacity!

But add to this, that the damned souls have all those affections laid in a deep and everlasting sleep, the exercises whereof would be relieving, by emptying their souls of any part of their misery; and all those passions thoroughly and everlastingly awakened, which increase their torments.

The affections of joy, delight, and hope, are benumbed in them, and laid fast asleep, never to be awakened into act any more. Their hope, in scripture, is said to *perish*, i. e. it so perisheth, that, after death, it shall never exert another act to all eternity. The activity of any of those affections would be like a cooling gale, or refreshing spring, amidst their torments; but as Adrian lamented himself, *Numquam jocos dabis*, Thou shalt never be merry more.

And as these affections are laid asleep, so their passions are roused, and thoroughly awakened to torment them; so awakened, as never to sleep any more. The souls of men are sometimes jogged and startled in this world, by the works or rods of God, but presently they sleep again, and forget all: but hereafter the eyes of their souls will be continually held waking to behold and consider their misery; their understandings will be clear and most apprehensive; their thoughts fixed and determined; their consciences active and efficacious; and, by all this, their capacity to take in the fullest of their misery, enlarged to the uttermost.

Prop. 4. *The wrath, indignation, and revenge of God poured out as the just reward of sin, upon the so capacious souls of the damned, are the principal part of their misery in hell.*

In the third proposition I shewed you, that the souls of the damned can hold more misery than all the creatures can inflict upon them. When the soul suffers from the hand of man, its sufferings are but either by way of sympathy with the body; or if immediately, yet it is but a light stroke the hand of a creature can give: But when it hath to do with a sin-revenging God, and that immediately, this stroke cuts off the spirit of man, as it is expressed, Psal. lxxxviii. 16. The body is the clothing of the soul. Most of the arrows shot at the soul in this world, do but stick in

the clothes, i. e. reach the outward man: But in hell, the spirit of man is *the white* at which God himself shoots. All his envenomed arrows strike the soul, which is, after death, laid bare and naked to be wounded by his hand. At death, the soul of every wicked man immediately falls into the hands of the living God; and "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," as the apostle speaks, Heb. x. 31. Their punishment is "from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," 2 Thes. i. 9. They are not put over to their fellow-creatures to be punished, but God will do it himself, and glorify his power, as well as his justice in their punishment. The wrath of God lies immediately upon their spirits, and this is the "fiery indignation which devoureth their adversaries," Heb. x. 27. A fire that licks up the very spirit of man. Who knoweth the power of his anger! Psal. xc. 11. How insupportable it is, you may a little guess by that expression of the prophet Nahum, chap. i. 5, 6. "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burnt at his presence; yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him."

And, as if anger and wrath were not words of a sufficient edge and sharpness, it is called fiery indignation and vengeance, words denoting the most intense degree of divine wrath. For indeed his power is to be glorified in the destruction of his enemies, and therefore now he will do it to purpose. He takes them now into his own hands. No creature can come at the soul immediately, that is God's prerogative, and now he hath to do with it himself in fury, and revenge is poured out. "Can thy hands be strong, or thy heart endure when I shall deal with thee?" Ezek. xxii. 14. Alas! the spirit quails and dies under it. This is the hell of hells.

What doleful cries and lamentings have we heard from God's dearest children, when but some few drops of his anger have been sprinkled upon their souls, here in this world! But alas! there is no comparison betwixt the anger or fatherly discipline of God over the spirits of his children, and the indignation poured out from the beginning of revenges upon his enemies.

Prop. 5. *The separate spirit of a damned man becomes a tormentor to itself by the various and efficacious actings of its own conscience, which are a special part of its torment in the other world.*

Conscience, which should have been the sinner's curb on earth, becomes the whip that must lash his soul in hell. Neither is there any faculty or power belonging to the soul of man, so fit and able to do it as his own conscience. That which was the seat and centre

of all guilt, now becomes the seat and centre of all torments. The suspension of its tormenting power in this world is a mystery and wonder to all that duly consider it. For certainly should the Lord let a sinner's conscience fly upon him with rage, in the midst of his sins and pleasures, it would put him into a hell upon earth, as we see in the doleful instances of Judas, Spira, &c. But he keeps a hand of restraint upon them, generally, in this life, and suffers them to sleep quietly by a grumbling or seared conscience, which couches by them as a sleepy lion, and lets them alone.

But no sooner is the Christless soul turned out of the body, and cast for eternity at the bar of God, but conscience is roused, and put into a rage never to be appeased any more. It now racks and tortures the miserable soul with its utmost efficacy and activity. The mere presages and forebodings of wrath by the consciences of sinners in this world have made them lie with a ghastly paleness in their faces, universal trembling in all their members, a cold sweating horror upon their panting bosoms like men already in hell: But this, all this, is but as the sweating of the stones before the great rain falls. The activities of conscience (especially in hell) are various, vigorous, and dreadful to consider, such are its *recognitions, accusations, condemnations, upbraidings, shamings, and fearful expectations*.

1. The consciences of the damned will recognize, and bring back the sins committed in this world fresh to their mind: For what is conscience, but a register, or book of records, wherein every sin is ranked in its proper place and order! This act of conscience is fundamental to all its other acts: for it cannot accuse, condemn, upbraid, or shame us for that it hath lost out of its memory, and hath no sense of. *Son, remember*, said Abraham to Dives, in the midst of his torments. This remembrance of sins past, mercies past, opportunities past, but especially of hope past and gone with them, never to be recovered any more, is like that fire not blown, (of which Zophar speaks) which consumes him, or the glittering sword coming out of his gall, Job xx. 24, &c.

2. It chargeth and accuseth the damned soul; and its charges are home, positive, and self-evident charges: A thousand legal and unexceptionable witnesses cannot confirm any point more than one witness in a man's bosom can do, Rom. ii. 15. It convicts, and stops their mouths, leaving them without any excuse or apology. Just and righteous are the judgments of God upon thee, saith conscience: In all this ocean of misery, there is not one drop of injury or wrong. The judgment of God is according to truth.

3. It condemns as well as chargeth and witnesseth, and that with a dreadful sentence; backing and approving the sentence and judgment of God, 1 John iii. 21. every self-destroyer will be a self-condemner: This is a prime part of their misery.

———*Prima est haec ultio, quod se
Judice, nemo nocens absolvitur, improba quamvis
Gratio fallacis prætoris vicerit urnam.*

Juv. Sat. 13.

4. The upbraidings of conscience in hell are terrible and insufferable things: To be continually hit in the teeth and twitted with our madness, wilfulness, and obstinacy, as the cause of all that eternal misery which we have pulled down upon our own heads, what is it but the rubbing of the wound with salt and vinegar? Of this torment holy Job was afraid, and therefore resolved what in him lay to prevent it, when he saith, Job xxvii. 6. "My heart (i. e. "conscience) shall not reproach me so long as I live." O the twits and taunts of conscience are cruel cuts and lashes to the soul!

5. The shamings of conscience are insufferable torments. Shame ariseth from the turpitude of discovered actions. If some men's secret filthiunesses were but published in this world, it would confound them: what then will it be, when all shall lie open, as it will, after this life, and their own consciences shall cast the shame of all upon them? They shall not only be derided by God, Prov. i. 26. but by their own consciences.

Lastly, the fearful expectations of conscience, still looking forward into more and more wrath to come, this is the very sum and complement of their misery. What makes a prison so dreadful to a malefactor but the trembling expectation he there lives under of the approaching assizes? Much after the same rate, or rather after the rate of condemned persons preparing for execution, do these spirits in prison live in the other world. But alas! no instance or similitude can reach home to their case.

Prop. 6. *That which makes the torments and terrors of the damned spirits so extreme and terrible, is, that they are unrelievable miseries, and torments for ever.*

They are not capable either of,

1. A partial relief, by any mitigation, or
2. A complete relief by a final cessation.

1. Not of a partial relief by any mitigation; could they but divert their thoughts from their misery, as they were wont to do in this world, drink and forget their sorrows; or had they but any hope of the abatement of their misery, it would be a relief to them: But both these are impossible. Their thoughts are fixed and determined: to remove them (though but for a moment) from their misery, is as impossible as to remove a mountain: Their sin and misery is ever before them. As the blessed in heaven are

bono confirmati, so fixed and settled in blessedness, that they are not diverted one moment from beholding the blessed face of God, for they are ever with the Lord : So the damned in hell are *malo obfirmati*, so settled and fixed in the midst of all evil, that their thoughts and miseries are inseparable for ever.

2. Much less can their undone state admit the least hope of relief by a final cessation of their misery. All hope perisheth from them, and the perishing of their hope is the plainest proof that can be given of the eternity of their misery. For were there but the remotest possibility of deliverance at last, hope would hang upon that possibility : And whilst hope lives, the soul is not quite dead ; the death of hope is the death of a man's spirit : The cutting off of the soul from God, and the last act of hope to see or enjoy him for ever, is that death which an immortal soul is capable of suffering. "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," is that sentence which strikes hope and soul dead for ever. In these six propositions you have the true and terrible representation of the spirits in prison, or the state of damned souls. I have not mentioned their association with devils, or the dismal place of their confinement, which, though they complete their misery, yet are not the principal parts of it, but rather accessories to it, or rivers running into the ocean of their misery. The sum of their misery lies in what was opened before, and the improvement of it is in that which followeth.

Infer. 1. Is this the state of ungodly souls after death ? Then it follows, that *neither death nor annihilation are the worst of evils incident to man*. Aristotle calls death *the most terrible of all terribles*, and the schoolmen affirm annihilation to be a greater evil than the most miserable being : But it is neither so, nor so ; the wrath of God, the worm of conscience, are much more bitter than death. The pains of death are natural and bodily pains : The wrath of God and anguish of conscience are spiritual and inward : Those are but the pains of a few hours or days, these are the unrelieved torments of eternity.

And as for annihilation, what a favour would the damned account it ! Indeed, if we respect the glory of God's justice, which is exemplified and illustrated in the ruin of these miserable souls, it is better they should abide as the eternal monuments thereof, than not to be at all : but with respect to themselves we may say as Christ doth of the son of perdition, Mat. xxvi. 24. "Good had it been for them if they had never been born." For a man's soul to be of no other use than a vessel of wrath, to receive the indignation, and be filled with the fury of God ; surely an untimely birth, that never was animated with a reasonable soul, is better than they : For alas ! they seek for death, but it flies from them. The im-

mortality of their souls, which was their dignity and privilege above other creatures, is now their misery, and that which continually feeds and perpetuates their flame. Here is a being without the comfort of it, a being only to howl and tremble under Divine wrath, a being therefore which they would gladly exchange with the contemptible fly, or most loathsome toad, but it cannot be exchanged or annihilated.

Inf. 2. Hence it follows, *that the pleasures of sin are dear bought, and costly pleasures.* There is a greater disproportion betwixt that pleasure and this wrath, than betwixt a drop of honey and a sea of gall. Could a man distil all the imaginary pleasure of sin, and drink nothing else but the highest and most refined delights of it all his life, though his life should be protracted to the term of Methuselah's; yet one day or night under the wrath of God would make it a dear bargain. But,

1. It is certain sin hath no such pleasures to give you: They are embittered either by adverse strokes of providence from without, or painful and dreadful gripes and twinges of conscience within; Job xx. 14. "His meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him."

2. It is certain the time of a sinner is near its period when he is at the height of his pleasure in sin: For look, as high delights in God speak the maturity of a soul for heaven, and it will not be long before such be in heaven; so the heights of delight in sin, answerably speak the maturity of such a soul for hell, and it will not be long ere it be there. Sin is now a big embryo, and speedily the soul travails with death.

3. According to the measure of delights men have had in sin, will be the degrees and measures of their torments in hell, Rev. xviii. 7. so much torment and sorrow, as there was delight and pleasure in sin.

4. To conclude, "the pleasures of sin are but for a season, as you read, Heb. xi. 25. but the wrath of God in hell is for ever and ever. There is a time when the pleasures of sin cannot be called pleasures to come, but the wrath of God that will still be wrath to come. Oh! consider for what a trifle you sell your souls. When Lysimachus parted with his kingdom for a draught of water, he said when he had drank it, *For how short a pleasure have I sold a kingdom!* And Jonathan lamented, 1 Sam. xiv. 43. "I tasted but a little honey, and I must die." Satan would not charm so powerfully as he doth with the pleasures of sin, if this point were well believed, and heartily applied.

Inf. 3. *What a matchless madness is it to cast the soul into God's prison, to save the body out of man's prison!*

Men have their prisons, and God hath his: But because the one

is an object of sense, and the other an object of faith, that only is feared, and this slighted all over this unbelieving world, except by a very small number of men, who tremble at the word of God. Now this I say is the height of madness, and will appear to be so in a just collation of both in a few particulars. (1.) Man's prison restrains the body only, God's prison soul and body, Mat. x. 28. The spirits of men (as my text speaks) are the prisoners there. Oh ! what a vast odds doth this single difference make ! A thousand times more than the captivating and binding of the greatest king or emperor differs from the imprisonment of a poor mechanic or vagrant beggar. (2.) In man's prison there are many comforts and unspeakable refreshments from heaven, but in God's prison none, but the direct contrary. You read of the apostles, Acts xvi. 25. how they sang in the prison : The Spirit of God made them a banquet of heavenly joys, and they could not but sing at it : Though their feet were in the stocks, their spirits were never more at liberty. Algerius dated his letters *from the delectable orchard of the Leonine prison ; where, saith he, flows the sweetest nectar*. Another tells us, Christ was always kind to him : but since he became a prisoner for him, he even overcame himself in kindness. *I verily think (saith he) the chains of my Lord are all overlaid with pure gold, and his cross perfumed*. But the worst terrors of the prisoners in hell come from the presence of the Lord, 2 Thes. i. 9. "God is a terror to them." (3.) The cause for which a man is cast into prison by men, may be his duty, and so his conscience must be at last quiet, if not joyful in such sufferings. So was it with Paul, Acts xxviii. 20. "For the hope of Israel am I bound with this chain : " This diffuses joy and peace through the conscience into the whole man. But the cause for which men are cast into God's prison, is their sin and guilt, which arm their own consciences against them, and make them, as you heard before, self-tormentors, terrors to themselves. What odds is here ! (4.) In man's prison the most excellent company and sweet society may be found. Paul and Silas were fellow-prisoners. In queen Mary's days the most excellent company to be found in England was in the prisons : Prisons were turned into churches. But in God's prison no better society is to be found than that of devils and damned reprobates, Mat. xxv. 41. (5.) In man's prison there is hope of a comfortable deliverance, but in God's prison none : Mat. v. 26. "Thou shalt not come out thence till thou hast paid the last mite." It is an everlasting prison.

Compare these few obvious particulars, and judge then what is to be thought of that man, who stands readier to cast himself into any guilt, than into the least suffering. What is it but as if a man should offer his neck to the sword, to save his hand ? The Lord

convince us what trifles our estates, liberties, and lives are to our souls, or to the peace and purity of our consciences.

Inf. 4. What an invaluable mercy is the pardon of sin, which sets the soul out of all danger of going into this prison! When the debt is satisfied, a man may walk as boldly before the prison door as he doth before his own: They that owe nothing fear no bailiffs. It is the law (as I said before) that commits men to prison, a mittimus is but an instrument of law; but the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in them that believe, Rom. viii. 4. Yea, they are made *the righteousness of God in him*, 2 Cor. v. 21. There can be no process of law against them. For who shall condemn when it is God that justifieth? Rom. viii. 33, 34. And that Divine Justice might be no bar to our faith and comfort, he adds, *It is Christ that died*; and yet farther, to assure us that his death had made plenary satisfaction to God for all our sins and debts, it is added, *yea, rather, that is risen again*: q. d. If the debts of believers to God were not fully paid and satisfied for by the blood of Christ, how comes it to pass that our Surety is discharged, as by his resurrection he appears to be! Oh believer! thy bonds are cancelled, the handwriting that was against thee is nailed to the cross, the blood of Christ hath done that for thee that all the gold and silver in the world could not do, 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. "It is a * counterprice fully answering to thy debts," Mat. xx. 28. And hence, to the eternal joy of thy heart, result three properties of thy pardon, which are able to make thine eyes gush out with tears of joy whilst thou art reading of it.

1. It is a free pardon to thy soul; though it cost Christ dear, it costs thee nothing. We have redemption, even "the remission of sins, according to the riches of his grace," Eph. i. 7. The project of it was God's, not thine; the price for it was Christ's blood, not thine; the glory and riches of free grace are illustriously displayed in thy forgiveness.

2. It is as full as it is free; a complete and perfect cause produceth a complete and perfect effect, Acts xiii. 39. "Justified from all things." Whatever thy sins be for nature, number, or circumstances of aggravations, they cannot exceed the value of the meritorious cause of remission. The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin.

3. It must be as firm as it is free and full, even an irrevocable pardon for evermore. Christ did not shed his blood at a hazard; the way of justification by faith, makes the promise sure, Rom. iv. 16. The justified shall never come again under condemnation.

* *Αντίτιμον* est pretium ex adverso respondens.

Oh the unspeakable joy that flows from this spring! Oh the triumphs of faith upon this foundation!

Is it not ravishing, melting, overwhelming, and amazing, to think thus with thyself! Here sit I with a joyful plenary free pardon of sin in my hand, whilst many, who never sinned to that height and degree I have, lie groaning, howling, sweating, and trembling under the indignation of God, poured out like fire upon their souls in hell. A greater sinner saved, and lesser damned. Oh how unspeakably sweet is that rest into which my terrified and disquieted soul is come by faith! Rom. v. 1. Heb. iv. 3. "We which have believed, do enter into rest." Oh blessed calm after a dreadful tempest! This poor breast of mine was lately panting, sweating, trembling under the horrors of wrath to come, terrified with the visions of hell. No other sound was in mine ears, but that of fiery indignation to devour the adversaries. Oh what price can be put upon my *quictus est*! What value upon a pardon, delivered as it were at the ladder's foot! Oh precious hand of faith that receives it! But oh the most precious blood of Christ which purchased it! If Satan now come with his accusations, the law with its comminations, death with its dreadful summons, I have in a readiness to answer them all.

Here is the law, the wrath of God, and everlasting burnings, the just demerit of sin upon one side, and a poor sinful creature on the other: But the covenant of grace hath solved all. An act of *oblivion* is past in heaven, "I will forgive their iniquities, and their sins and transgressions will I remember no more." In this act of grace my soul is included; I am in Christ, and there is no condemnation. Die I must, but damned I shall not be: My debts are paid, my bonds are cancelled, my conscience is quieted: let death do its worst, it shall do me no harm; that blood which satisfied God, may well satisfy me.

Infer. 5. *How amazingly sad and deplorable is the security and stillness of the consciences of sinners, under all their own guilt, and the immediate danger of God's everlasting wrath!*

Philosophers observe that before an earth-quake the wind lies, and the weather is exceeding calm and still, not a breath of wind going. So it is in the consciences of many, just before the tempest and storm of God's wrath pours down upon them. What a golden morning opened upon Sodom, and began that fatal day! Little did they imagine showers of fire had been ready to fall from so pleasant and serene a sky as they saw over their heads. How secure, still, and unconcerned are those to-day, who it may be shall rage, roar, and tremble in hell to-morrow! Cæsar hearing of a citizen of Rome who was deep in debt, and yet slept soundly,

would needs have his pillow, as supposing there was some strange, charming virtue in it.

It is wonderful to consider what shifts men make to keep their consciences in that stillness and quiet they do, under such loads of guilt, and threatenings of wrath, ready to be executed upon them. It must be strong *opium* that so stupifies and benumbs their consciences; and upon inquiry into the matter we shall find it to be the effect of,

1. A strong delusion of Satan.

2. A spiritual judicial stroke of God.

1. This stillness of conscience, upon the brink of damnation, proceeds from the strong delusions of Satan, blinding their eyes, and feeding their false hopes: He removes the evil day at many years imaginary distance from them, and interposeth many a fair day betwixt them and it, and in that interposed season, time enough to prepare for it; without such an artifice as this, his house would be in an uproar, but this keeps all in peace, Luke xi. 21. "By presuming he feeds their hopes, and by their hopes destroys their souls *." Some he diverts from all serious thoughts of this day, by the pleasures, and others by the cares of this life; and so that day cometh upon them unawares, Luke xxi. 34.

2. This stillness of conscience, in so miserable and dangerous a state, is the effect of a spiritual, judicial stroke of God upon the children of wrath. That is a dreadful word, Isa. vi. 10. "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes:" The eye and ear are the two principal doors or inlets to the heart; when these are shut, the heart must needs be insensible, as the † fat of the body is. There is a spirit of a deep sleep poured out judicially upon some men, Isa. xxix. 10. such as that upon Adam when God took a rib from his side, and he felt it not: But this is upon the soul, and is the same as to give up a man to a reprobate sense.

Infer. 6. *The case of distressed consciences upon earth is exceeding sad, and calls upon all for the tenderest pity, and utmost help from men.*

You see the labourings of conscience, under the sense of guilt and wrath, is a special part of the torments of hell, of which there is not a livelier emblem or picture, than the distresses of conscience in this world.

It must be thankfully confessed there are two great differences betwixt the terrors of conscience here, and there: One, in the

* *Presumendo sperant, et sperando percutunt.*

† Naturalists agree that fat not only makes animals unruly, but also, is void of sensation. *Glass.*

degrees of anguish, the other, in the reliefs of that anguish. The ordinary distresses of conscience here, compared with those of the damned, are as the flame of a candle to a fiery oven, a mild and gentle fire; or as the sparks that fly out of the top of a chimney, to the dreadful eruption of Vesuvius, or mount Etna. Besides, these are capable of relief, but those are unrelievable: Their hearts die, because their hope is perished from the Lord.

But yet of all the miseries and distresses incident to men in this world, none like those of distressed consciences; the terrors of God set themselves in array, or are drawn up in battalia against the soul, Job vi. 4. "Whilst I suffer thy terrors (saith Heman) I am "distracted," Psal. lxxxviii. 15. Yea, they not only distract, but cut off the spirit, as he adds, ver. 16. They lick up the very spirit of a man, and none can bear them, Prov. xviii. 14. for now a man hath to do immediately with God; yea, with the wrath of the great and dreadful God: And this wrath, which is the most acute and sharp of all torments, falls upon the most tender and sensible part, the spirit and mind which now lies open and naked before him to be wounded by it. No creature can administer the least relief, by the application of any temporal comfort or refreshment to it. Gold and silver, wife and children, meat and melody, signify no more than the drawing on of a silk stocking to cure the *paroxysms* of the *gout*.

All that can be done for their relief, is by seasonable, judicious, and tender applications of spiritual remedies: And what can be done, ought to be done for them. What heart can hear a voice like that of Job, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye "my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me;" and not melt into compassion over them? Is there a word of wisdom in thy heart, let thy tongue apply it to the relief of thy distressed brother. Whilst his heart meditates *terror*, let thine meditate his *succour*. It is not impossible but thou, who lendest a friendly hand to another, mayest, ere long, need one thyself; and he that hath ever felt the terrors of the Almighty upon his soul, hath motive enough to draw forth the bowels of his pity to another in the like case.

Alas for poor distressed souls, who have either none about them that understand, and are able and willing to speak a word in season to their weary souls, or too many about them to exasperate their sorrows, and persecute them whom God hath smitten. You that have both ability and opportunity for it, are under the strongest engagements in the world to endeavour their relief with all faithfulness, seriousness, compassion, and constancy. Did Christ shed his blood for the saving of souls, and wilt not thou spend thy breath for them? Shall any man that has found mercy from God, shew none to his brother? God forbid. A soul in hell is out of

your reach; but these that are in the suburbs of hell are not: The candle of intense sorrow is put to the thread of their miserable life; and should they be suffered to drop into hell, whilst you stand by as unconcerned spectators of such a tragedy, you will have little peace. Your unmercifulness to their souls will be a wound to your own.

Inf. 7. Be hence informed of the evil that is in sin; be convinced of the evil that is in it, by the eternal misery that followeth it.

If hell be out of measure dreadful, then sin must be out of measure sinful: the torments of hell do not exceed the demerit of sin, though they exceed the understandings of men to conceive them. God will lay upon no man more than is right. Sin is the founder of hell; all the miseries and torments there, are but the treasures of wrath which sinners, in all ages, have been treasuring up; and how dreadful soever it be, it is but the *οψωνία*, the recompense which is meet, Rom. vi. 23. * “The wages of sin is “death.”

We have slight thoughts of sin; *Fools make a mock of sin*: But if the Lord by the convictions of men’s consciences did but lead them through the chambers of death, and give them a sight of the wrath to come; could we but see the piles that are made in hell (as the prophet calls them, Isa. xxx. 53.) to maintain the flames of vengeance to eternity; could we but understand in what dialect the damned speak of sin, who see the treasures of wrath broken up to avenge it, surely it would alter our apprehensions of sin, and strike cold to the very hearts of sinners.

Cannot the extremity and eternity of hell-torments exceed the evil that is in sin? What words then can express the evil of it? Hell-flames have the nature of a punishment, but not of an atonement.

O think on this, you that look upon sin as the veriest trifle, that will sin for the value of a penny, that look upon all the humiliations, broken-hearted confessions, and bitter moans of the saints under sin, as frenzy, or melancholy, slighting them as a company of half-witted hypochondriac persons! Thou that never hadst one sick night, or sad day in all thy life upon the account of sin, let me tell thee that breast of thine must be the seat of sorrow; that frothy, airy spirit of thine must be acquainted with emphatical sobs and groans. God grant it may be on this side hell, by effectual repentance; else it must be there, in the extremity and eternity of sorrows.

Inf. 8. What enemies are they to the souls of men, who are Satan’s instruments, to draw them into sin, or who suffer sin to lie upon them!

When there were but two persons in the world, one drew the other into sin; and among the millions of men and women now in

the world, where are there two to be found that have in no case been snares to draw some into sin? Some tempt designedly, taking the devil's work out of his hands; others virtually and consequentially, by examples, which have a compelling power to draw others with them into sin. The first sort are among the worst of sinners, Prov. i. 10. the latter are among the best of saints; see Gal. ii. 14. whose conversation is so much in heaven, that nothing falls out in the course thereof, which may not further some or other in their way to hell.

Among wicked men, there are five sorts eminently accessory to the guilt and ruin of other men's souls. (1.) Loose professors, whose lives give their lips the lie; whose conversations make their professions blush. (2.) Scandalous apostates, whose fall is more prejudicial than their profession was ever beneficial to others. (3.) Cruel persecutors, who make the lives, liberties, and estates of men the occasion of the ruin of their consciences. (4.) Ignorant and unfaithful ministers, who strengthen the hands of the wicked, that they should not return from their wickedness. (5.) Wicked relations, who quench and damp every hopeful beginning of conviction and affection in their friends. Of all which I shall distinctly speak in the next discourse, to which, therefore, I remit it at present.

And many there are who suffer sin to lie upon others, without a wise and seasonable reproof to recover them.

O what cruelty to souls is here! The day is coming when they will curse the time that ever they knew you: It is possible you may repent, but then, it may be, those, whose souls you have helped to ruin, are gone, and quite out of your reach. The Lord make you sensible what you have done in season, lest your repentance come too late for yourselves and them also.

Inf. 2. How poor a comfort is it to him that carries all his sins out of this world with him, to leave much earthly treasure (especially if gotten by sin) behind him?

It is a poor consolation to be praised where thou art not, and tormented where thou art*; to purchase a life of pleasure to others on earth, at the price of thy own everlasting misery in hell. All the consolation, sensual, voluptuous, and oppressing worldlings have, is but this, that they were *coached to hell* in pomp and state, and have left the same *chariot* to bring their graceless children after them, in the same equipage, to the place of torments. There be five considerations provoking pity to them that are thus cast into a miserable eternity, and caution to all that are following after, in the same path

* *Quid prodest esse, quod esse non prodest. Tertul.*

First, That fatal mistake in the practical understanding and judgment of men deserves a compassionate lamentation, as the cause and reason of their eternal miscarriage and ruin. They looked upon trifles as things of greatest necessity, and the most necessary things as mere trifles; putting the greatest weight and value upon that which little concerned them, and none at all upon their greatest concernment in the whole world, Luke xii. 21.

Secondly, The perpetual diversions that the trifles of this world gave them from the main use and end of their time. O what a hurry and thick succession of earthly business and encumbrances filled up their days! So that they could find no time to go alone, and think of the awful and weighty concernments of the world to come, James v. 5.

Thirdly, The total waste and expence of the only season of salvation, about these vanishing, impertinent trifles, which is never more to be recovered, Eccles. ix. 10.

Fourthly, That these deluding shadows, the pleasures of a moment are all they had in exchange for their souls, a goodly price it was valued at, Mat. xvi. 26.

Fifthly, That by such a life they have not only ruined their own souls, but put their posterity, by their education of them in the same course of life, into the same path of destruction, in which they went to hell before them. Psal. xlix. 13. "Their posterity approve their saying."

Inf. 10. *How rational and commendable is the courage and resolution of those Christians who chuse to bear all the sufferings in this world from the hands of men, rather than to defile and wound their consciences with sin, and thereby expose their souls to the wrath of God for ever!*

That which men now call pride, humour, fancy, and stubbornness, will, one day, appear to be their great wisdom, and the excellency of their spirits. It is the tenderness of their consciences, not the pride and stoutness of their stomachs, which makes them inflexible to sin; they know the terrors of a wounded conscience, and had rather endure any other trouble from the hands of men, than fall by known sin into the hands of an angry God. Try them in other matters wherein the glory of God, and the peace or purity of their consciences are not concerned, and see if you can charge them with stubbornness and singularity, it was the excellency of the spirits of the primitive Christians, that they durst tell the emperor to his face, when he threatened them with torments; "Pardon us, O emperor, thou threatenest us with a prison, but

“God with hell*.” Do we call that ingenuity and good nature which makes the mind soft and tractable to temptations, and will rather venture upon guilt than be esteemed singular?

† Salvian tells us of some in his time, who were compelled to “be evil, lest they should be accounted vile.” And was that their excellency? May I not fitly apply the words of Salvian here: “O in what honour and repute is Christ among Christians, when religion shall make them base and ignoble!” He that understands what the punishment of sin will be in hell, should endure all things rather than yield to sin on earth. Indeed, if you that threaten and tempt others to violate their consciences, could bear the wrath of God for them in hell, it were somewhat; but we know there is no suffering by a *proxy* there; they tremble at the word of God, and have felt the burden of guilt, and dare not yield to sin, though they yield their estates and bodies to prevent it.

Inf. 11. How patiently should we endure the afflictions of this life, by which sin is prevented and purged?

The discipline of our spirits belongs to God the Father of spirits; he corrects us here that we may not be punished hereafter, 1 Cor. xi. 32. “We are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.” It is better for us to groan under afflictions on earth, than to roar under revenging wrath in hell. Parents who are wise, as well as tender, had rather hear their children sob and cry under the rod, than stand with halters upon their necks on the ladder, bewailing the destructive indulgence of their parents.

Your chastisements, when sanctified, are preventive of all the misery opened before. It is therefore as unreasonable to murmur against God, because you smart under his rod, as it would be to accuse your dearest friend of cruelty, because he strained your arm to snatch you from the fall of a house or wall, which he saw ready to crush and overwhelm you in its ruins.

If we had less affliction, we should have more guilt. We see how apt we are to break over the hedge, and to go astray from God, with all the clogs of affliction designed for our restraint; what should we do if we had no clog at all? It is better for you to be whipped to heaven with all the rods of affliction, than coached to hell with all the pleasures of the world.

Christian, thy God sees, if thou do not, that all these troubles are few enough to save thee from sin and hell. Thy corruptions require all these, and all little enough. “If need be, ye are in heaviness,” 1 Pet. i. 6. If there be need for it, thy dearest

* *Ignosce imperator, tu carcerem minaris, Deus gehennam.*

† *Mali esse coguntur, ne viles habeantur.*

comforts on earth shall die, that thy soul may live; but if thy mortification to them render thy removal needless, thou and they shall live together. It is better to be preserved in brine, than to rot in honey. Sanctified afflictions working under the efficacy of the blood of Christ, are the safest way to our souls.

Inf. 12. How doleful a change doth the death of wicked men make upon them! from palaces on earth to the prison of hell.

No sooner has the soul of a wicked man stepped out of his own door at death, but the serjeants of hell are immediately upon it, serving the dreadful summons on the law-condemned wretch. This arrest terrifies it more than the hand-writing upon the plaster of the wall did him, Dan. v. 5. How are all a man's apprehensions changed in a moment! Out of what a deep sleep are most, and out of what a pleasant dream of heaven are some awaked and startled at death, by the dreadful arrest and summons of God to condemnation.

How quickly would all a sinner's mirth be damped, and turned into howlings in this world, if conscience were but thoroughly awakened! It is but for God to change our apprehensions now, and it would be done in a moment: but the eyes of most men's souls are not opened till death hath shut their bodily eyes; and then how sudden, and how sad a change is made in one day!

O think what it is to pass from all the pleasures and delights of this world into the torments and miseries of that world; from a pleasant habitation into an infernal prison; from the depth of security to the extremity of desperation; from the arms and bosoms of dearest friends and relations, to the society of damned spirits! Lord, what a change is here; had a gracious change been made upon their hearts by grace, no such doleful change could have been made upon their state by death: little do their surviving friends think what they feel, or what is their estate in the other world whilst they are honouring their bodies with splendid and pompous funerals. None on earth have so much reason to fear death, to make much of life, and use all means to continue it, as those who will, and must be so great losers by the exchange.

Inf. 13. See here the certainty, and inevitableness of the judgment of the great day.

This prison which is continually filling with the spirits of wicked men is an undeniable evidence of it: for why is hell called a prison, and why are the spirits of men confined and chained there but with respect to the judgment of the great day? As there is a necessary connexion betwixt sin and punishment, so betwixt punishing and trying the offender; there are millions of souls in custody, a world of spirits in prison; these must be brought forth to their trial, for God will lay upon no man more than is right;

the legality of their *mittimus* to hell will be evidenced in their solemn day of trial. God hath therefore "appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained," Acts xvii. 31.

Here sinners run in arrears, and contract vast debts; in hell they are seized and committed, at judgment tried and cast for the same. This will be a dreadful day, those that have spent so prodigally upon the patience of God, must now come to a severe account for all; they have past their particular judgment immediately after death, Eccl. xii. 7. Heb. ix. 27. By this they know how they shall speed in the general judgment, and how it shall be with them for ever, but though this private judgment secures their damnation sufficiently, yet it clears not the justice of God before angels and men sufficiently, and therefore they must appear once more before his bar, 2 Cor. v. 10. In the fearful expectation of this day, those trembling spirits now lie in prison, and that fearful expectation is a principal part of their present misery and torment. You that refuse to come to the throne of grace, see if you can refuse to make your appearance at the bar of justice; you that braved and brow-beat your ministers that warned you of it, see if you can out-brave your Judge too as you did them. Nothing more sure or awful than such a day as this.

Inf. 14. How much are ministers, parents, and all to whom the charge of souls is committed, bound to do all that in them lies to prevent their everlasting misery in the world to come!

The great apostle of the Gentiles found the consideration of the terror of the Lord as a spur urging and enforcing him to a ministerial faithfulness and diligence; 2 Cor. v. 11. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." And the same he presseth upon Timothy, 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2. "I charge thee therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine." O that those to whom so great a trust as the souls of men is committed, would labour to acquit themselves with all faithfulness therein, as Paul did, warning every one night and day with tears, that if we cannot prevent their ruin, which is most desirable; yet at least we may be able to take God to witness, as he did, that we are pure from the blood of all men.

Oh! consider, my brethren, if your faithful plainness and unwearyed diligence to save men's souls produce no other fruit but the hatred of you now; yet it is much easier for you to bear that, than that they and you too should bear the wrath of God for ever.

We have all of us personal guilt enough upon us, let us not add other men's guilt to our account : to be guilty of the blood of the meanest man upon earth, is a sin which will cry in your consciences ; but to be guilty of the blood of souls, Lord, who can bear it ! Christ thought them worthy his heart-blood, and are they not worth the expence of our breath ? Did he sweat blood to save them, and will not we move our lips to save them ? It is certainly a sore judgment to the souls of men, when such ministers are set over them as never understood the value of their people's souls, or were never heartily concerned about the salvation of their own souls.



MATTH. xvi. 26.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?

DIFFICULT duties need to be enforced with powerful arguments. In the 24th verse of this chapter, our Lord presseth upon his disciples the deepest and hardest duties of self-denial, acquaints them upon what terms they must be admitted into his service : “ If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and “ take up his cross and follow me.”

This hard and difficult duty he enforceth upon them by a double argument, viz. From,

1. The vanity of all sinful shifts from it, ver. 25.

2. The value of their souls, which is imported in it, ver. 26.

They may shift off their duty to the loss of their souls, or save their souls by the loss of such trifles. If they esteem their souls above the world, and can be content to put all other things to the hazard for their salvation, making account to save nothing but them by Christianity ; then they come up to Christ's terms, and may warrantably and boldly call him their Lord and Master ; and to sweeten this choice to them, he doth, in my text, balance the soul and all the world, weighing them one against the other, and shews them the infinite odds and disproportion betwixt them : “ What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and “ lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for “ his soul ?”

What is a man profited ?] There is a plain meiosis in the phrase ; and the meaning is, how inestimably and irreparably is a man damnified ! what a soul-ruining bargain would a man make !

If he should gain the whole world.] There is a plain hyperbole