

SERMON VI.

In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.—2 THESS. i. 8.

THE apostle had spoken of the different retributions, conjunctly and together; now he cometh to speak of them severally and apart.

He beginneth with the wicked; and speaketh, first, of their judgment, in the text; secondly, their punishment: ver. 9, 'Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.'

In his coming to judge them, there is—

1. The manner. The terribleness of his coming to them, *ἐν πυρὶ φλόγος*, 'in a flame of fire.' His coming to the righteous is described by light, to the wicked by fire. To them he cometh shining as the sun, to these as lightning or burning fire.

2. The end, to take vengeance on them, or doom them to destruction.

3. They are described by a double character, 'Those that know not God, and that obey not the gospel,' &c.

Which may be understood copulatively or disjunctively.

[1.] Copulatively, of the same men diversely described, that they neither know God, nor obey Christ; for those are the two great points that are discussed in the judgment, God and Christ. And look, as it is life eternal, John xvii. 3, to know God and Jesus Christ, &c., that God is to be known, loved, obeyed, worshipped and enjoyed, and the Lord Jesus as our redeemer and saviour to bring us home to God, and to procure for us the gifts of pardon and life, which life is to be begun here, and perfected in heaven; this is the sum of what is necessary to life eternal; so on the contrary, not to know God nor to obey the gospel is the way to eternal death and destruction.

[2.] Distributively and disjunctively, of two sorts of persons—of heathens or pseudo-christians.

(1.) The heathens are fitly described to be those that know not God; as 1 Thes. iv. 5, 'Not in the lust of concupiscence, as the Gentiles which know not God.' By the light of nature an infinite eternal power was discovered to them, but they knew him not so as to worship him and serve him: Rom. i. 20, 21, 'But became foolish in their imaginations.' So they shall be condemned by the light of nature, which they approved not. Though there be no saving knowledge of God out of Christ, yet they had so much knowledge as left them without excuse.

[2.] The false christians are fitly described in the other expression: 'That obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.' For they that have heard of the gospel shall be judged by the gospel, according to the dispensation they have lived under. Now the true christians are always described by their obedience; they do so believe the gospel as to live accordingly: Heb. v. 9, 'He became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;' and Acts v. 32, 'And so is the Holy Ghost, which he hath given to them that obey him.' But the wicked and carnal are described by their disobedience: 1 Peter ii. 7, 8, 'Unto you that obey, he is precious; but to the disobedient, the

stone which the builders disallowed.' And again, 'They stumbled at the word, being disobedient, whereunto they were also appointed.' Some will not be persuaded to believe and obey the gospel; those are included in the last expression.

Doct. That Christ will in a terrible manner come to render vengeance on all those who regarded not to know God and obey the gospel.

1. I shall speak of the terrible manner of his coming.

2. I shall speak of the twofold rule of proceeding in the judgment, upon the light of nature and the gospel, and who shall be judged by the one, and who by the other.

3. Examine the force of these expressions, 'know not God,' and 'obey not the gospel.'

I. For the terrible manner of his coming, implied in the words 'in flaming fire.' A terrible day it will be certainly to those who do not expect it and prepare for it. This fire serveth—

1. To set forth the majesty of the judge. When the Lord Jesus appeared to Moses, he appeared to him in a burning fire: Acts vii. 30, 'The angel of the Lord appeared in a flame of fire in a bush.' So when he gave the law, he gave it out of the midst of the fire: Deut. v. 22, 23, 'And the mountain round about him did burn with fire.' Then the people cried out, 'This great fire will consume us; we shall die if we hear the voice of God any more.' So when Christ is now revealed, he shall be encompassed about with a flaming fire: Ps. l. 3, 'Our God shall come, a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.' As fearful and terrible as he showed himself in giving the law, so terrible shall he be in the execution of it, judging the impenitent; so that this flame of fire becometh the glory of his divine presence.

2. This flame of fire is mentioned as the instrument of punishment on the wicked, who are said to be cast into a furnace of fire, Mat. xiii. 42, and Mat. xxv. 41, 'Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;' setting forth thereby the extremity of their pain and torment.

3. By this flame of fire is all the world burnt up. God having provided a more glorious mansion for his people to dwell in, will by a general conflagration destroy, or at least purge the world from the dross it hath contracted: 2 Peter iii. 10, 'The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.' A dreadful sight it will be for men to see the dissolution of the whole frame of nature, and the delight of their souls burnt up before their eyes; the Lord thereby testifying his displeasure against wicked men's placing their happiness in these things, and not in himself.

Therefore since the coming of Christ shall be with such majesty and terror, we should prepare ourselves accordingly; for that is the use the apostle makes of it: 2 Peter iii. 11, 'Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?' Surely we should live much to the glory of Christ in the world, and get more holiness of heart and life, that this day may not be terrible to us, but comfortable.

II. The persons brought into the judgment, and the distinct rule of proceeding, the light of nature and the gospel; for Christ will render vengeance to them that know not God, and obey not the gospel.

1. Some had no other discovery of God but what they could make out from the course of nature and some instincts of conscience, as mere pagans; these shall not be judged for not believing in Christ, but for not knowing God. The apostle telleth us, 'As many as have sinned without the law, shall perish without the law; as many as sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law,' Rom. ii. 12. The gentile world is judged by one rule, and the Jewish by another, so the christian by another. Those to whose notice no fame of Christ and the law of Moses could possibly arrive, they shall perish without the law, be condemned to perdition in the judgment; for in that context he speaketh of the righteous judgment of God. But by what rule? The light of nature written in their hearts, ver. 14, 15. Nature in some measure told them what was well or ill done, pleasing or displeasing to God. The law of nature taught them their duty, and the course of God's providence, that God was placable, and so invited them to repentance, Rom. ii. 4. Therefore among the gentiles—(1.) All atheists that denied God's being or bounty, his essence or providence, as if he cared not for human affairs, they are obnoxious to the judgment. (2.) All idolaters who corrupted the worship of God, prefer their own idols before the true and living God. (3.) All wicked men among the heathen, who, when they knew God, glorified him not as God, Rom. i. 21, but gave up themselves to abominable impurities, as well as idolatries against the light of nature, are obnoxious to Christ's vengeance; they knew not God, his nature and being. (4.) All those that despise God, resist his authority: Exod. v. 2, 'Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?'

But you will say, What is this to us?

I answer—Our doom is indeed to be debated according to another rule, which is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But yet that which is perfect doth not destroy that which is imperfect, but imply it rather, as the reasonable soul doth the sensitive and vegetative. And that which we are to learn from hence is—

(1.) That the ignorance of God doth excuse no man from judgment; for the cause of the condemnation of the wicked is that they know not God; and therefore it is a more bloody sin than we usually think it: Isa. xxvii. 4, 'It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour.' Whether foreign nations or God's own people, he will severely punish them for their ignorance in necessary things.

(2.) That it is not enough to know God, unless we know him as we ought to know him; as the heathen knew God, but glorified him not as God, did not worship him, and serve him, and trust in him. So christians: Titus i. 16, 'Professing to know God, in their deeds they deny him.' They live as if they knew not God; what could they do more or worse if there were no God?

(3.) That the more means there is to know God the greater is the crime if they do not his will; for sin is more aggravated by the clearness of the revelation made to us: Luke xii. 47, 'He that knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.' According to the degree of knowledge or means of knowledge, so is both our sin and punishment

greater ; for here God considers not *de facto*, what knowledge we have but *de jure*, what knowledge we might have or should have. So that though the first character doth more directly concern the heathens, yet we christians are concerned in it also.

2. Some having a discovery of Christ, and salvation by him, are judged by the gospel.

To evidence this to you, I shall show—(1.) Who may be said not to obey the gospel ; (2.) Who shall be judged by the tenor of the gospel dispensation.

[1.] All such may be said not to obey the gospel—

(1.) Who obstinately refuse to entertain the doctrine of Christ, and salvation by him, but oppose it rather. So it is taken, 1 Peter iv. 17, ‘If judgment begin at the house of God, what shall be the end of them who obey not the gospel of Christ?’ will not come under the faith and profession, but are enemies and persecutors of it.

(2.) Such as acknowledge and profess the belief of the doctrine of Christ, but are remiss and careless in christian practice, do not heartily give up themselves to Christ’s obedience, but live in their sensual lusts : Eph. ii. 2, ‘Walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience ;’ Eph. iii. 6, ‘Children of disobedience.’

(3.) Such as apostatise and revolt from it after they have known the way of righteousness, fall off from the christian profession and practice, and depart from the living God : Heb. x. 39, ‘We are not of them who draw back.’ All these may be said not to obey the gospel.

[2.] Who shall be judged by the tenor of the gospel dispensation ?

(1.) Certainly those who have lived in the clear sunshine of the gospel, and have heard of Christ, and the grace of God dispensed by him : Mark xvi. 16, ‘Go, preach the gospel to every creature ; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.’ There is the rule of God’s process ; they are condemned upon a double account—because of their sins against God, and their refusal of the remedy : John iii. 18, 19, ‘He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already,’ &c. In their natural estate they are under the wrath of God, and after they have heard of the offers of pardon and life, will not embrace the offered remedy, and give up themselves to the obedience of Christ, or suffer themselves to be drawn off from worldly vanities or fleshly lusts, that they may live unto God. If the end of all wicked men, even of those that have not so much as heard the gospel, shall be everlasting destruction, because they made not use of that natural knowledge they had of God, and those impressions of their duty which were left upon their hearts, Ps. ix. 17. If all that forget God shall be turned into hell, surely the danger will be greater of those who have the gospel clearly preached to them, and will not give obedience thereunto ; for to their other sins they add impenitency and unbelief, and so are liable to the vengeance of the gospel, as well as the curse of the law.

(2.) Those to whom the object of faith was but more obscurely propounded ; who are of several sorts.

(1st.) Those that lived before the flood and after the flood ; as Abel, Enoch, and Noah, are mentioned in the chronicle and history of faith,

as well as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And believers of a later stamp and edition, Heb. xi. And among unbelievers are reckoned all those who, through their obstinate incredulity, rejected the divine revelation made to them; as the world of the ungodly in Noah's time, who were disobedient when the Spirit of the Lord in him preached righteousness to them, or to God opening the way to life and salvation; as it is said, 1 Peter iii. 19, 20, 'By his Spirit Christ preached to the spirits now in prison, who were sometime disobedient in the days of Noah, when the long-suffering of God waited for them.' Now these, though they had but an obscure presignification of the seed of the woman, who should break the serpent's head, or that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, shall be condemned for not improving the gospel delivered to them, in such notions as God saw fit to convey it to them, not for want of explicit knowledge in all mysteries.

(2*d.*) Some lived under the legal administration of the covenant of grace. To whom two things were propounded, the duties of the law and some strictures and obscure rudiments, or the first beginnings of the gospel. Now they shall be judged according to the administration they were under; for the apostle telleth us, Rom. ii. 12, 'As many as have sinned under the law shall be judged by the law;' for the violating of the law of Moses, or neglecting the first dawns of grace, which God offered to their view, search, and contemplation. Indeed the law was more manifest; but the gospel was not so obscure but they might have understood God's willingness to be propitiated and reconciled; and therefore God will call them to account about not keeping his law, or not flying by faith and repentance to the mercy of God, which by divers ways and types of the Messiah was then revealed to them. The holy psalmist did so: Ps. cxxx. 3, 4, 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? but there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.' And the neglect of grace in others is inexcusable; and therefore they are condemned for not keeping the law, and for their unbelief and impenitency, which, though it be not so grievous a sin as theirs who lived under a clearer revelation, yet it sufficiently vindicateth the righteous judgment which is exercised upon them.

(3*d.*) Some lived in Christ's time, when John the Baptist invited them to a gospel covenant, and our Lord himself set afoot the great salvation, and offered grace to believing penitents, confirming the dignity of his person and office by divers miracles, and that he had sufficient power to repeal the law of Moses, and erect the gospel kingdom foretold by the prophets. It was more dangerous then not to believe in the Son of God; for Christ telleth the Jews to slight him, appearing in so clear a light of miracles, was damnable: John viii. 24, 'If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.' But yet because the Spirit was not yet poured out, and Christ's person was veiled under much obscurity and abasement, their condition was not altogether so bad as it was afterward when the gospel kingdom was now solemnly published, and the Spirit did abundantly convince the world that it was a sin not to believe in Christ, John xvi. 9, and Christ was so plainly proved by his resurrection to be the Son of God, and the great prophet

and Messiah, and judge of the world. Therefore God gave them the morning market of the gospel: Acts iii. 26, 'Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning every one of you from his iniquity;' and did not cut off their estate till they rejected the gospel, as well as crucified the Lord of glory: 1 Thes. ii. 15, 16, 'Therefore wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.' It was a great sin before, a damnable sin not to receive them; but God considered their prejudices, and the judgment will be more or less grievous upon them according to the advantages and opportunities they had of knowing Christ to be the Saviour and Redeemer of the world.

(4th.) Since the pouring out of the Spirit, and the setting up of the gospel kingdom in the world, some know Christ by clear doctrine, others by hearsay and obscure fame. Take, for instance, the Turks and modern Jews. The Turks acknowledge one merciful and true God; they deny not Christ to be a great prophet, but they deny him to be the Son of God, the Saviour of the world and Redeemer of mankind, and wickedly prefer their false prophet Mahomet before him, and his fond superstition before the law of Christ. Now according as Christ is more or less perspicuously revealed to them, they shall have a more tolerable or heavy judgment, for the clearer is the revelation of the truth, the more culpable is the rejection or contempt of it; for there is no man that heareth of Christ suffering for sinners, and rising again from the dead, and ascending into heaven, but is bound more diligently to inquire into it, and to receive and embrace this truth so suitable to our desires and necessities. The Jews inherit the obstinacy of their ancestors, confess there was such a person as Jesus the son of Mary, who gave out himself in the country of Judea to be the Messiah, and gathered disciples, who from him are called christians; but they call him an impostor, question the miracles done by him as done by the power of the devil. Surely these shall be judged by the gospel, which is so proudly and obstinately contemned by them after so many disappointments, and so long an expectation of another Messiah.

(5th.) Among christians, the gospel is not alike clearly made known. To some Christ is more plainly and purely preached, without any mixture of errors that have any considerable influence upon the main of religion. Others are in that communion in which those doctrines are yet taught, which are indeed absolutely and indispensably necessary to salvation, but many things are added which are very pernicious and dangerous in their own nature; so that if a man could possibly be saved in that religion, he is saved as by fire, 1 Cor. iii. 13, and in a strange way of escape. As if one had poison mingled with his meat, it may be the vigour of his youth and the goodness of his digestion might work it out, but yet the man runneth a great hazard. As for instance, the papists acknowledge Christ for the Redeemer and Mediator between God and man, his two natures and satisfaction, but they intermingle doctrines that sorely weaken these foundations, and other practices that dishonour the nature of God, and the merit and intercession of our Saviour. Now the doom of the corrupters of the christian religion will be exceeding great, because they have poisoned

the waters of the sanctuary, and mangled Christ's ordinances, and perverted his truths to serve their avarice, ambition, and other human passions and interests. The apostle said, 2 Thes. ii. 10–12, 'Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, God shall send them strong delusions to believe a lie,' &c. However God may deal with the vulgar, who err in the simplicity of their hearts, we know not; but the condition of their leaders into this apostasy from the purity and simplicity of the gospel is exceeding dangerous.

III. To examine the force of these expressions, 'Know not God,' and 'Believe not the gospel.'

1. 'Know not God.' There is a twofold knowledge of God—speculative and practical.

[1.] The speculative knowledge. The bare sight of the truth, or some empty and cold opinions about God and religion; such may the heathen have, who, when they knew God, glorified him not as God, Rom. i. 21. Such may the Jew have: Rom. ii. 19, 20, 'And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them that walk in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law,' *μόρφωσιν τῆς γνώσεως ἐν τῷ νόμῳ*. Such may the formal christian have: 2 Tim. iii. 5, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' A map or model of gospel truth. There are different degrees of this speculative knowledge. Memorative, such as children have, who are taught to speak of divine mysteries by rote, as of God, Christ, heaven, hell, sin, righteousness; their memories are planted with notions about such things, but they are not affected with them; they do not understand the meaning, nor believe the certainty of those things wherein they are instructed. Another degree above this is an opinionative knowledge; when they do not only charge their memories with these notions, but have a kind of conscience and judgment about these things, and so bustle and contend about that way of religion in which they have been educated; yet wisdom entereth not upon the heart, Prov. ii. 10. This maketh men disputers, but not serious practisers of godliness: 'They receive not the love of the truth that they may be saved,' 2 Thes. ii. 10. There is beyond these a higher degree of speculative knowledge, when men have some kind of touch upon their hearts, but it is too slender and insufficient to stand out against temptations when they rise up in any considerable strength, or to master and subdue their lusts; they may escape the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, 2 Peter. ii. 20. Surely it is hard to conceive how so grand a truth as the nature of God or salvation by Christ should be understood or considered without some impression or touch upon the heart. It doth affect men in part, and produce some partial reformation, but sin prevaieth against it.

[2.] Practical and saving. We must know God so as to trust in him, Ps. ix. 10, know God so as to love him, 1 Cor. viii. 3, know God so as to obey him: 1 John ii. 4, 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, the truth is not in him.' So Jer. xxii. 16, 'He judgeth the cause of the poor and needy; was not this to know me, saith the Lord?' Our practices must speak out our knowledge, and what principles are rooted in our hearts; our actions give the world

a better knowledge of our thoughts and opinions than our words can. Well, then, all that know not God, so as to fear him for his majesty and power, to love him for his goodness, to trust in him for his wisdom, to imitate him for his holiness, to obey him for his authority, so as to seek to enjoy him and delight in him, they are obnoxious to Christ's judgment. Certainly that man hath no religion that hath no God, and he hath no God that preferreth his base lusts before obedience to his precepts.

2. 'That obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.' It is not enough to profess the gospel, but we must obey the gospel if we would be exempted from the terror of the judgment.

Now what is it to obey the gospel? To yield up ourselves to do the will of Christ revealed in the gospel. This obedience is necessary if we consider the gospel, or faith, or Christ.

[1.] The gospel, which is the sum of things to be believed and done. It hath its commands as well as the law, it is not all made up of promises. The three great commands of the gospel are repentance, and faith, and new obedience.

(1.) Repentance; that we should bewail our former failings, and be ready and willing to return to God. Now when men harden themselves in their sins, and reject all admonitions to the contrary, they do not obey the gospel: Isa. i. 19, 20, 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured by the sword.' Unbelief of divine promises and threatenings, and obstinate impenitency go together. Wilful disobedience to this great command of the gospel is the damning sin. Some are so obstinate in evil, that they cannot be persuaded by any means to relinquish it. When they will not be persuaded to accept of God's offers of mercy and grace in Christ, but love darkness more than light, John iii. 19, they are left to his vengeance.

(2.) Faith in Christ. Not to mind this is against God's preeminent command: 1 John iii. 23, 'This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.' It is not a slighting of grace only, but a high point of rebellion and disobedience to God. And so disobedience to this command maketh way for our disobedience to other commands: 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' Heb. ii. 3.

(3.) New obedience. The whole moral law is adopted into the new covenant; for Christ redeemed us to God, and the kingdom of the Mediator is subordinate to the kingdom of the Father: Titus ii. 12, 'We should live soberly, righteously, and godly.' To neglect our duty is to disobey the gospel; though we own it in profession, we contradict it by practice; though we are not ashamed of the gospel, yet the gospel is ashamed of us, if we go on in our sinful ways.

[2.] Faith implieth obedience; for it is a hearty consent to take the blessedness offered for our happiness, the duty required for our work, and so hath an influence on our whole obedience: Rom. x. 16, 'But they have not all obeyed the gospel; for Isaiah saith, Who hath believed our report?' Rom. i. 5, 'We have received apostleship for the obedience of faith among all nations;' Rom. xvi. 26, 'The mysteries of the gospel are made manifest for the obedience of faith;' that

is, that we may subject ourselves to God : Acts vi. 7, ' Many of the priests were obedient unto the faith.' Not only believed, but performed the duties which faith calleth for.

[3.] Christ ; his example, his authority.

(1.) His example. He came from heaven to teach us how to obey God, most willingly, readily, and at the dearest rates : Heb. v. 8, 9, ' Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered : and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him ;' as the ἀποσφράγισμα, the best impression can be left upon us. He submitted to his Father's will in the hardest duties : Phil. ii. 8, ' Obedient to the death of the cross.' He took upon him the yoke of obedience, and that even to a shameful, painful, accursed death. What impression should this stamp and seal leave upon us ?

(2.) His authority and sovereignty. He is the Saviour of the body, and the head of the church. We receive him not only as a priest, but as our Lord and king : Acts v. 31, ' Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a prince and a Saviour.' Therefore we must not only look to be feasted with privileges, but mind our duty and obedience to him.

Use 1. Well, then, if you would have the comfort and not the terror of this day, you must obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ; that is the trial which christians must undergo. If you cry, Lord, Lord, and be workers of iniquity, he will not know you and own you. If you profess a religion which you abhor, all your worship is a lie, and all the confidence you build upon it is but a vain deceit : Rom. vi. 16, ' Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness ?' Alas ! many christians live as if they were baptized in the devil's name, and sworn to be his bondmen ; they give up themselves to worldly and fleshly lusts, as if their baptism were a protestation against Christ, and all respect to his laws. But let it not be so with you, beloved christians ; your glory and safety will be obedience to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray consider—

1. Whom you are to obey ; Jesus Christ, the Lord and sovereign of all. Here in his flesh they said, Mat. viii. 27, ' What manner of man is this, that even the winds and seas obey him ?' And will not you obey him ? It is Christ whom you call your Saviour, and shall he not be your Lord ? He made a plaster of his blood to cure your souls, and endured the curse, that by his obedience many might be made righteous, Rom. v. 19. Christ first obeyed himself, and hath set us so perfect a copy, whose life was religion exemplified, a visible commentary on God's law. He kept his Father's commandments, and abode in his love, John xv. 10, who did ever please God, therefore God was always with him.

2. Wherein you are to obey him. In a thankful acceptance of his benefits, which is faith ; and a hearty return to your obedience and happiness, which is repentance ; and all this verified in a godly, sober, righteous life, which is ordinarily called new obedience.

3. He is your judge. At the last day he will come and see what you have done with his precepts ; he will not be so terrible, but as

comfortable to the godly. *Euge, bone serve*—‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’

Use 2. What have we then to do but—

1. To study to know the Lord, that we may choose him for our portion, and love him, and be loved by him, serve him, and be happy with him, please him, and enjoy him: ‘Let us follow on to know the Lord,’ Hosea vi. 3. Here is the root and beginning of all godliness; if God were better known in his power, wisdom, and goodness, it would draw our hearts more to him, and produce more confidence, obedience, and love. The Lord is for the most part an unknown and a mistaken God in the world; the more you apply yourself to this, the more you will find. We know God for the most part as a man born blind does fire; he feels there is something that warmeth him, but knows not how to conceive of it. To press you to this, consider—

[1.] It is your glory and excellency: Jer. ix. 23, 24, ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me.’ To conceive aright of God, his nature, attributes, and works, is the perfection of man; to know things of so high a nature, the infinite and eternal God; to behold his wisdom, goodness, and power; to be led to him by all the creatures, and every act of his providence; to read his blessed name in every leaf of his sacred word. The dimmest knowledge of God is better than the clearest knowledge of all the secrets of nature.

[2.] This will be our happiness: John xvii. 3, ‘This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.’ It is begun by saving knowledge, and is completed by the vision of God; it is the same God we know and love here and there, and with a knowledge and love of the same nature, but as to degrees it is more perfect; here we know him and see him as in a glass darkly, hereafter as in his glory, face to face.

[3.] What a shame it is not to know God, who hath so manifested himself to us in his works and word, and is so ready to manifest himself by his Spirit.

(1.) In his works within us or without us; for the apostle telleth us, Acts xvii. 27, 28, ‘He is not far from every one of us, for in him we live, move, and have our being;’ whose creatures we are, from whom we have all that we have; and shall we not often think of the God that made us? Look upon this body or this soul, whose image and superscription doth it bear? The work will show the workman. God is before thee, behind thee, round about thee, yea, within thee; and shalt thou not take some time to season thy heart with the thoughts of God? Everything that passeth before thine eyes proclaimeth an invisible God, an eternal power that made thee and all things else, Ps. xix. 1, 2. Shall the heavens above, and the earth beneath thee say, Remember God; nay, every creature and pile of grass thou treadest upon, Remember God; and shall we be so stupid that God shall not be in all our thoughts?

(2.) In his word and covenant. There God has provided and promised such plenty of knowledge, that he hath told us, Heb. viii. 11,

‘They shall not teach every man his brother, and every man his neighbour, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest.’ This grace shall be diffused among all sorts of people: Isa. xi. 9, ‘The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.’ As plentiful as water in the sea; and will you only be strangers in Israel, lose the benefit of the dispensation you are under?

(3.) How willing God is to manifest himself to us by his Spirit: ‘In thy light we shall see light;’ and God hath promised, Jer. xxiv. 7, ‘I will give them an heart to know me that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole hearts.’ You must take your lot and portion. God will not fail the waiting soul.

SERMON VII.

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.—2 THESS. i. 9.

IN the former verse the judgment is spoken of; here the punishment of the wicked. Which is set forth—

1. Generally, they shall be punished with everlasting destruction.

2. Particularly. Two branches of it are mentioned—(1.) The *pœna damni*, ‘From the presence of the Lord.’ (2.) The *pœna sensus*, ‘From the glory of his power.’ Some make them to be the two principal causes of their punishment, the face of the Lord, and his glorious power; the wrathful countenance of Christ shall bring this punishment upon them, and his power shall execute it; or the sentence shall come out of Christ’s mouth, and be put in execution by his power; as David, Ps. xvii. 2, ‘Let thy sentence come forth from thy presence;’ when he desired God to appear in the trial of his innocency. So the wicked shall then be condemned by Christ himself, who shall then appear in glory and sovereign power. But I rather stick to the former exposition, as noting the parts of their punishment.

[1.] ‘From the presence of the Lord.’ I interpret it, as Beza doth, they shall be cast out from the presence of Christ, *expulsi a facie Domini*; as also, Mat. xxv. 41, ‘Depart, ye cursed.’

[2.] And ‘from the glory of his power.’ That noteth the punishment of pain, expressed by fire, which signifieth the wrath of God. The wicked shall be punished by the immediate power of God.

Doct. That the punishment of the wicked at the last day shall be exceeding terrible and dreadful.

I will amplify it by going over the words of the text.

First, It is generally described; they ‘shall be punished with everlasting destruction.’ Where we have—(1.) The estate; (2.) The duration of it.