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THE  
HOPE OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

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“THE wicked is driven away in his wickedness,” says the wisest of men; “but the righteous hath hope in his death.” Men will leave the world according to their conduct in it; and be happy or miserable hereafter, according to their improvement of the present state of trial.

“THE WICKED IS DRIVEN AWAY IN HIS WICKEDNESS”—he dies as he lived: he lived in wickedness, and in wickedness he dies. His wickedness sticks fast upon him, when his earthly enjoyments, his friends, and all created comforts leave him for ever. The guilt of his wickedness lies heavy upon him, like a mountain of lead, ready to sink him into the depth of misery. And the principles of wickedness which he indulged all his life, still live within him, even in the agonies of death; nay, they now arrive at a dreadful immortality, and produce an eternal hell in his breast. He leaves behind him not only all his earthly comforts, but all the little remains of goodness he seemed to have while under the restraints of divine grace; and he carries nothing but his wickedness along with him. With this dreadful attendant he must pass to the tribunal of his Judge. To leave his earthly all behind him, and die in the agonies of dissolving nature—this is terrible. But to die *in* his wickedness—this is infinitely the most terrible of all.

He once flattered himself, that though he lived in wickedness, he should not die in it. He adopted many resolutions to amend, and forsake his wickedness, towards the close of life, or upon a death-bed. But how is he disappointed. After all his promising purposes and hopes, he died as he lived, in wickedness. This is generally the fate of veterans

in sin. They are resolving and re-resolving to reform all their lives ; but after all, they die the same. They purpose to prepare for death and eternity ; but they have always some objections against the present time. They have always something else to do to-day, and therefore they put off this work till to-morrow ; to-morrow comes, and instead of reforming, they die in their wickedness—to-morrow comes, and they are in hell. Oh that the loiterers of this generation would take warning from the ruin of thousands of their unhappy ancestors who have perished by the dread experiment.

And are not some of you in danger of splitting upon the same rock ? Are not some of you conscious, that if you should die this moment, you would die in your wickedness ? And yet you have little fear of dying in this manner : no ; you purpose yet to become very good, and prepare for death before you die. So thousands who are now in hell purposed as strongly as you. The time for repentance was still an *hereafter* to them, till it was irrecoverably past. They were snatched away unexpectedly by the sudden hand of death, and knew not where they were, till they found themselves in eternity, and thus they had no time for this work ; or their thoughts were so much engrossed with their pains, that they had no composure for it ; or they found their sins, by long indulgence, were become invincibly strong, their hearts judicially hardened, and all the influences of divine grace withdrawn ; so that the work became impossible. And thus they died in their sins. And if any of you be so foolhardy as to imitate them in their delays, you may expect to die as they did.

“ The wicked is *driven* away in his wickedness ”—*driven* away in spite of all his reluctance. Let him cling to life never so fast, yet he must go. All his struggles are vain, and cannot add one moment to his days. Indeed, the wicked have so little taste for heaven, and are so much in love with this world, that if they leave it at all, they must be *driven* out of it—*driven* out of it, whether they will or not. When they hope for heaven, they do in reality consider it but a shift, or a refuge when they can no longer live in this their

favorite world. They do not at all desire it, in comparison with this world. Here they would live for ever, if they could have their will. But let them grasp never so hard, they must let go their hold. They must be driven away, like chaff before the whirlwind—driven away into the regions of misery—into the regions of misery, I say; for certainly the happiness of heaven was never intended for such as are so disaffected to it, and prefer this wretched world, with all its cares and sorrows, before heaven itself.

This is the certain doom of the wicked. But *who are they?* Though the character be so common among us, yet there are few that will own it. It is an odious character; and therefore few will take it to themselves. But there is no room for flattery in the case; and therefore we must inquire, Who are the wicked? I answer, all that habitually indulge themselves in the practice of any known wickedness—all that neglect the God that made them, and the Saviour that bought them—all that live in the wilful omission of the known duties of religion and morality—all that have never known by experience what it is to repent and believe; in a word, all that are in their natural state, and have never felt a change of spirit and practice so great and important, that it may be called with propriety, a new birth, or a new creation—all such, without exception, are wicked. They are wicked in reality, and in the sight of God, however righteous they may be in their own eyes, or however unblamably some of them may conduct themselves before men.

May you make an impartial inquiry into a matter so important; and if you find the character of the wicked is yours, believe it, you must share in the dreadful doom of the wicked, if you continue such.

But “THE RIGHTEOUS HATH HOPE IN HIS DEATH.” To have hope in death, is to have hope in the most desperate extremity of human nature. Then the spirits flag, and the heart sinks, and all the sanguine hopes of blooming health and prosperity vanish. Then all hopes from things below—

all expectations of happiness from all things under the sun, are cut off. All hopes of escaping the arrest of death are fled, when the iron grasp of its cold hand is felt. Even in these hopeless circumstances, the righteous man hath hope. The foundation of his hope must be well laid, it must be firm indeed, when it can stand such shocks as these. It is evident, the objects of his hope must lie beyond the grave; for on this side of it all is hopeless. His friends and physician despair of him; and he despairs of himself as to all the prospects of this mortal life. But he does not despair of a happier life in another state. No; he hopes to live and be happy, when the agonies of death are over; and this hope bears him up under them.

This hope I intend to consider as to its *objects*, its *grounds and evidences*, and its various *degrees and limitations*.

I. The OBJECTS of the righteous man's hope in death. And here I shall only mention his hope of support in death—of the immortality of his soul—of the resurrection of his body—and of perfect happiness in heaven.

1. The righteous man has an humble hope of *support in death*. He has repeatedly intrusted himself into the faithful hands of an almighty Saviour, for life and death, for time and eternity; and he humbly hopes his Saviour will not forsake him now—now, when he most needs his assistance. This was St. Paul's support under the prospect of his last hour: "I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." 2 Tim. 1:12. As if he had said, Finding my own weakness, I have committed my all into another hand; and I have committed it to one whose ability and faithfulness have been tried by thousands as well as myself, and therefore I am confident he will keep the sacred deposit, and never suffer it to be injured or lost. This was also the support of the psalmist: "Though I walk," says he, "through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Psalm 23:4. Yea, it was upon this support St. Paul leaned, when he braved death in that

triumphant language: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded," says he, "that death"—that separates our souls and bodies—that separates friend from friend—that separates us from all our earthly comforts, and breaks all our connections with this world—even death itself "shall never separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus." Rom. 8:35-39. What a faithful friend, what a powerful guardian is this, who stands by his people, and bears them up in their last extremity, and makes them more than conquerors in the struggle with the all-conquering enemy of mankind. How peculiar a happiness is this, to be able to enjoy the comfort of hope in the wreck of human nature. How sweet to lean a dying head upon the kind arm of an almighty Saviour—how sweet to intrust a departing soul as a deposit in his faithful hand. O, may you and I enjoy this blessed support in a dying hour; and may we make it our great business in life to secure it. In that gloomy hour our friends may weep, and wring their hands around our beds, but they can afford us no help—no hope. But Jesus can, as thousands have known by experience. Then he can bring home his promises to the heart; then he can communicate his love, which is better than life; and by his Holy Spirit bear up and encourage the sinking soul. Blessed Jesus, what friend can compare to thee?

"Jesus can make a dying bed  
 Feel soft as downy pillows are,  
 While on his breast I lean my head,  
 And breathe my life out sweetly there."

2. *The immortality of the soul* is an object of the righteous man's hope. He is not like a Bolingbroke, and other infidels, who having made it their interest that there should be no future state, consider immortality as an object of fear, and therefore try to reason themselves out of the belief of it, and choose to ingulf themselves in the abyss of annihilation. That man has indeed a terrible consciousness of his demerit,



who dares not trust himself for ever in the hands of a just and gracious God, but wishes to escape out of his hands, though it were by resigning his being. It is not the force of argument, that drives our infidels to this. Demonstration and certainty were never so much as pretended for it. And after all the preposterous pains they take to work themselves up to the gloomy hope, that when they die they shall escape punishment by the loss of all the sweets of existence; yet, if I may venture to guess at, and divulge the secret, they are often alarmed with the dreadful *may-be* of a future state. In their solemn and thoughtful moments their hope wavers. They are men of pleasure; they are merry, jovial, and gay, and give a loose to all their licentious passions and appetites. But how short, how sordid, how brutal the pleasure; how gloomy, how low, how shocking their highest hope. Their highest hope is to be as truly nothing, in a few years or moments hence, as they were ten thousand years ago. They are men of pleasure, who would lose all their pleasures if they were angels in heaven, but would lose none of them if they were swine in the mire.

Blessed be God, this gloomy hope is not the hope which the religion of Jesus inspires. No; he "hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." 2 Tim. 1:10. He opens to the departing soul the endless prospects of a future state of being—a state where death shall no more make such havoc and desolations among the works of God; but where every thing is vital and immortal. Hence, the righteous man hath hope in his death. He has not made it best for him that his religion should be false. He is not driven to seek for shelter in the gulf of annihilation; nor to combat with the blessed hopes which reason and revelation unitedly inspire, as his worst enemies. He wishes and hopes to live for ever, that he may for ever enjoy the generous pleasure of serving his God, and doing good to his fellow-creatures. The belief of immortality is not, indeed, peculiar to the righteous: it is the belief of mankind in general, except a few infidels here and there, who are to be regarded as monsters in human nature. But this is not so properly the

object of hope, as of fear, to multitudes. They wish it were false, though they cannot believe it is so. They have no joy and peace in believing this; but, like devils, they "believe and tremble." James 2:19. But to the righteous man, this is properly an object of hope: the prospect is pleasing to him. If it were a dream, which, blessed be God, it is not, it is a pleasing dream. If it were a delusion, it is a harmless and profitable delusion. It inspires him with noble pleasures, and excites him to glorious deeds while life lasts; and if it must be entirely given up in death, he will sleep as easy as the most stanch unbeliever upon earth who lived in the expectation of so terrible a doom. Thus we might argue even upon the worst supposition that can be made. But we are left in no such uncertainty. This is not a pleasing error, but a pleasing truth; nay, I had almost said, a pleasing demonstration. Such it proves to the righteous man; for O, how pleasing to the offspring of the dust, to claim immortality as his inalienable inheritance. How transporting to a soul just ready to take its flight from the quivering lips of the dissolving clay, to look forward through everlasting ages of felicity, and call them all its own—to sit and prognosticate and pause upon its own futurities—to defy the stroke of death, and smile at the impotent malice of the gaping grave. O, what a happiness, what a privilege is this. And this is what the righteous man in some measure enjoys.

3. The righteous in death has the hope of the *resurrection of his body*. This glorious hope we owe entirely to revelation. The ancient philosophers could never discover it by their reason; and when it was discovered by a superior light, they ridiculed it as the hope of worms. But this is a reviving hope to the righteous in the agonies of death. Those old intimate friends, the soul and body, that must now part, with so much reluctance, shall again meet and be united in inseparable bonds. The righteous man does not deliver up his body as the eternal prey of worms, or the irredeemable prisoner of the grave; but his hope looks forward to the glorious dreadful morning of the resurrection, and sees the

bonds of death bursting, the prison of the grave flying open, the mouldering dust collected, and formed into a human body oncè more—a human body most gloriously improved. This prospect affords a very agreeable support in death, and enables the righteous to say with Job, though I die, “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” Job 19:25, 26. “This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” 1 Cor. 15:53–55. This is an illustrious victory indeed; a victory over the conqueror of conquerors and of all the sons of Adam. And yet, thus victorious shall the frail dying believer be made over that terror of human nature.

4. *The perfect and everlasting happiness of heaven is an object of the righteous man’s hope in death.* He hopes to drop all his sins and their attendant train of sorrows behind him; and to be perfectly holy and consequently happy for ever. He hopes to see his God and Saviour, and to spend a happy eternity in society with him, and in his service. He hopes to join the company of angels, and of his fellow-saints of the human race. He hopes to improve in knowledge, in holiness, and in capacities for action and enjoyment, in an endless gradation. He hopes to see the face of his God in righteousness, and to be satisfied when he awakes with his image. Psa. 17:15. In short, he hopes to be as happy as his nature will possibly admit, through an endless duration. O, what a glorious hope is this. This has made many a soul welcome death with open arms. This has made them desirous “to be with Christ, which is far better.” Phil. 1:23. And this has sweetly swallowed up the sensations of bodily pain. Indeed, without this, immortality would be an object of terror, and not of hope: the prospect would be insupportably dreadful. For who can bear the thought of an immortal duration spent in an eternal banishment from God and all happiness. and in the sufferance of the most exquis-

ite pain? But a happy immortality, what can charm us more? I now proceed,

II. TO THE GROUNDS AND EVIDENCES of such a hope.

It is a hope *peculiar* to the righteous; and it is a hope that shall never be disappointed, nor put to shame. This, alas, is not the common popular hope of the world. Job speaks of the hope of the hypocrite, Job 8 : 13 ; 27 : 8 ; and One greater than Job tells us, that many will carry their false hopes with them to the very tribunal of their Judge. When he assures them he never knew them, they hardly think him in earnest. "Strange! dost thou not know us? Have we not eaten and drunk in thy presence, and hast thou not taught in our streets?" Luke 13 : 26. St. Paul also tells us, that while some are crying peace and safety, and apprehend no danger, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. 1 Thess. 5 : 3. This is likewise evidently confirmed by observation; for how often do we find in fact, that many not only hope for immortality, but for immortal happiness, who give no evidence at all of their title to it, but many of the contrary? Here, then, is a very proper occasion for self-examination. Since there are so many false hopes among mankind, we should solicitously inquire whether ours will stand the test. To assist us in this inquiry, let us consider what are the peculiar grounds and evidences of the righteous man's hope.

Now it will be universally granted, that God best knows whom he will admit into heaven, and whom he will exclude; that it is his province to appoint the ground of our hope, and that constitution according to which we may be saved; that none can be saved but those who have the characters which he has declared essentially necessary to salvation; and that none shall perish who have those characters. And hence it follows, that the righteous man's hope is *entirely regulated by the divine constitution, and the declarations of that holy word* which alone gives us certain information in this case. This, I say, is the grand test of a true hope; it expects what God has promised, and it expects it

in the way and manner established by him. It is an humble, submissive hope: it does not expect happiness, as it were, in spite of Him who is the author of it; but it expects happiness just in the manner which he has appointed.

Now, what has God appointed to be the ground or foundation of our hope? St. Paul will tell you, No other foundation can any man lay than that which is already laid, which is JESUS CHRIST. 1 Cor. 3:11. God himself proclaims, by Isaiah, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a Stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." Isaiah 28:16. Jesus Christ, then, is the only sure ground of hope, appointed by God himself. Or, in other words, the free mercy of God, which can be communicated only through Jesus Christ, or for his sake, is the only sure ground of hope for a sinner. It is upon this, and not upon his own righteousness, that the righteous man dares to build his hope. He is sensible that every other foundation is but a quicksand. He cannot venture to hope on account of his own merit, either in whole, or in part. It is in the mercy, the mere mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, that he trusts. He is gratefully sensible, indeed, that God has wrought many good things in him, and enabled him to perform many good actions; but these are not the ground of his hope, but the evidences of it: I mean, he does not make these any part of his justifying righteousness, but only evidences that he has an interest in the righteousness of Christ, which alone can procure him the blessings he hopes for. Which leads me to add,

That the evidence of this hope is the righteous man's finding, upon a thorough trial, that *the characters which God has declared essentially necessary to salvation, do belong to him.* Has God declared that the regenerate, that believers and penitents, that they who are made holy in heart and life, and none but such, shall be saved? Then is my hope true and sure when I hope for salvation, because I find these characters belong to me. I know the God of truth will keep his word; and therefore, poor and guilty and unworthy as I am, it is no presumption for me to hope for ever-

lasting happiness from him, if I find myself to be such as he has promised everlasting happiness to.

This, brethren, is the only valid evidence of a good hope. And is this the evidence that encourages you in this important affair? Alas, the world is overrun with delusive hopes, that are so far from being supported by this evidence, that they are supported in direct opposition to it. God has declared, in the plainest and strongest terms, that no drunkard, nor swearer, nor fornicator, nor any similar characters, shall inherit his kingdom; and yet what crowds of drunkards, swearers, fornicators, and the like, will maintain their hopes of heaven, in spite of these declarations. He has declared, with the utmost solemnity, that "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." John 3:3. And yet what multitudes presume to hope they shall enter there, though they still continue in their natural state, and have no evidences at all of their being born again. God has declared, that "except we repent, we shall all perish," Luke 13:3-5, like the infidel Jews; and that "he that believeth not, shall be damned." Mark 16:16. And yet, how many hope to be saved, though they have never felt the kindly relentings of ingenuous, evangelical repentance, nor the work of faith with power wrought upon their hearts. What can be more plain than that declaration, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord?" Heb. 12:14. And yet multitudes that hate holiness in their hearts, hope to be saved, as well as your precise and sanctified creatures, as they call them. In short, the hopes of many are so far from being supported by the authority of the Scriptures, that they are supported only by the supposition of their being false. If the Scriptures be true, then they and their hopes must perish together; but if the Scriptures be false, then they have some chance to be saved, though it is but a very dull chance after all; for if they have to do with a lying, deceitful deity, they have no ground at all of any confidence in him: they must be anxiously uncertain what they should hope, or what they should fear from his hands. Hence, you see that we should vindicate the truth of God in these dec-

larations, even by way of self-defence ; for if the divine veracity fail in one instance, it becomes doubtful in every instance, and we have nothing left to depend upon. If they may be saved whom God has declared shall perish, then by a parity of reason, they may perish whom he has characterized as the heirs of salvation ; and consequently, there is no certainty that any will be saved at all. Thus, sinners, while establishing their own false hopes, remove all ground of hope, and leave us in the most dreadful suspense.

Let us regulate our hopes according to His declaration, who has the objects of our hope entirely at his disposal. When we pretend to improve upon divine constitutions, or, as we think, turn them in our favor, we do in reality but ruin them, and turn them against ourselves. Make that, and that only, the ground and evidence of your hope, which God has made such. Your hope is not almighty, to change the nature of things, or reverse his appointments ; but his constitution will stand, and you shall be judged according to it, whether you will or not. Do not make that the ground or evidence of your hope which he has not so made, or which he has pronounced the characteristic of the heirs of hell. You hope, perhaps, to be saved, though you live in the wilful neglect of some known duty, or in the wilful practice of some known sin. But has God given you any reason for such a hope ? You know he has not, but the contrary. You hope he will show mercy to you, because his nature is mercy and love, and he is the compassionate Father of his creatures ; or because Christ has died for sinners. But has he given you any assurances, that because he is so merciful—because he is so compassionate a Father—because Christ has died for sinners, therefore he will save you in your present condition ? You hope to be saved, because you are as good as the generality, or perhaps better than many around you. But has God made this a sufficient ground of hope ? Has he told you, that to be fashionably religious, is to be sufficiently religious ; or that the way of the multitude leads to life ? This may be your hope ; but is it the authentic declaration of eternal truth ? You know it is not, but quite

the contrary. I might add sundry other instances of unscriptural hope, but these may suffice as a specimen. And I shall lay down this general rule, which will enable you to make farther discoveries: namely, *Those hopes are all false which are opposite to the declarations of God in his word.* Certainly this needs no proof to such as believe the divine authority of the Scriptures; and as for infidels, it is not the design of this discussion to deal with them. You who acknowledge the Scriptures as the foundation of your religion, with what face can you entertain hopes unsupported by them, or contrary to them: hopes that must be disappointed if God be true; and that cannot be accomplished unless he prove a liar? Can you venture your eternal all upon such a blasphemous hope as this? But I proceed to consider,

III. THE VARIOUS DEGREES AND LIMITATIONS of a good hope in death.

A good hope is always supported by *evidence*; and according to the *degree* of evidence is the degree of hope. When the evidence is clear and undoubted, then it rises to a joyful assurance; but when the evidence is dark and doubtful, then it wavers, and is weakened by dismal fears and jealousies. Now, I have told you already, that the evidence of a good hope is a person's discovering, by impartial examination, that those characters which God has pronounced the inseparable characters of those that shall be saved, do belong to him; or that he has those graces and virtues which are at once his preparation for heaven, and the evidence of his title to it. Now different believers, and even the same persons at different times, have very different degrees of this evidence. And the reason of this difference is, that sundry causes are necessary to make the evidence clear and satisfactory; and when any of these are wanting, or do not concur in a proper degree, then the evidence is dark and doubtful. In order to be fully satisfied of the truth and reality of our graces, it is necessary we should arrive to some eminence in them; otherwise, like a jewel in a heap of rubbish, they may be so blended with corruption that it may be impossible



to discern them with certainty. Hence, the weak Christian, unless he have unusual supplies of divine grace, enters the valley of the shadow of death with fear and trembling; whereas he who has made great attainments in holiness, enters it with courage, or perhaps with transports of joy. It is also necessary to a full assurance of hope, that the Spirit of God bear witness with our spirit, that we are the sons of God, Rom. 8 : 16 ; or that he excite our graces to such a lively exercise, as to render them visible by their effects, and distinguishable from all other principles. And therefore, if a sovereign God see fit to withhold his influences from the dying saint, his graces will languish, his past experiences will appear confused and doubtful, and consequently his mind will be tossed with anxious fears and jealousies. But if he be pleased to pour out his Spirit upon him, it will be like a ray of heavenly light, to point his way through the dark shades of death, and open to him the transporting prospects of eternal day that lies just before him.

Another thing that occasions a difference in this case is, that an assured hope is the result of frequent *self-examination*; and therefore the Christian that has been diligent in this duty, and all his life laboring to make all sure against his last hour, generally enjoys the happy fruits of his past diligence, and enters the harbor of rest with a "full assurance of hope," Heb. 6 : 11 ; but he that has been negligent in this duty, is tossed with billows and tempests of doubts and fears, and is afraid of being shipwrecked in sight of the port.

It is also necessary to the enjoyment of a comfortable hope in death, that the mind be in some measure *calm and rational*, not clouded with the glooms of melancholy, nor thrown into a delirium or insensibility by the violence of the disorder. And according as this is, or is not the case, a good man may enjoy, or not enjoy, the comforts of hope.

These remarks will help us to discover with what limitations we are to understand the expression, "The righteous hath hope in his death." It does not mean, that every righteous man has the same degree of hope ; or that no righteous

man is distressed with fears and doubts in his last moments. But it means,

1. That every righteous man has *a substantial reason* to hope, whether he clearly see it or not. His eternal all is really safe; and as all the false hopes of the wicked man cannot save *him*, so all the fears of the righteous man cannot destroy *him*, though they may afford him some transient paugs of horror. He is in the possession of a faithful God, who will take care of him; and nothing shall pluck him out of his hands. He sees fit to leave some of his people in their last moments to conflict at once with death and with their more dreadful fears; but even this will issue in their real advantage. And what an agreeable surprise will it be to such trembling souls, to find death has unexpectedly transported them to heaven.

2. When it is said, "The righteous hath hope in his death," it means, that good men, in common, *do in fact enjoy* a comfortable hope. There never was one of them that was suffered to fall into absolute despair in this last extremity. In the greatest agonies of fear and suspicion, the trembling soul has still some glimmering hope to support it; and its gracious Saviour never abandons it entirely. And it is the more common case of the saints to enjoy more comfort and confidence in death, than they were wont to do in life. Many that in life were wont to shudder at every danger, and fly at the sound of a shaking leaf, have been emboldened at death to meet the king of terrors, and to welcome his fiercest assault. The soldiers of Jesus Christ have generally left this mortal state in triumph, though this is not an universal rule. And who would not wish and pray for such an exit, that he may do honor to his God and Saviour, and to his religion, with his last breath; that he may discover to the world, that religion can bear him up when all other supports prove a broken reed; and that his last words may sow the seeds of piety in the hearts of those that surround his dying bed? This every good man should pray and wish for, though it must be left in the hands of a sovereign God to do as he pleases.

3. When it is said, "The righteous hath hope in his death," it may mean, that the hope which he hath in death *shall be accomplished*. It is not a flattering, delusive dream, but a glorious reality; and therefore deserves the name. His "hope shall not make him ashamed," Rom. 5:5, but shall be fulfilled, and even exceeded. However high his expectations, death will convey him to such a state as will afford him an agreeable surprise; and he will find that it never entered into his heart to conceive the things that God hath laid up for him, and for all that love him. 1 Cor. 2:9.

This is the glorious peculiarity of the good man's hope. Many carry their hope with them to death, and will not give it up till they give up the ghost. But as it is ungrounded, it will end in disappointment and confusion. And O, into what a terrible consternation will it strike them, to find themselves surrounded with flames, when they expected to land on the blissful coasts of paradise—to find their Judge and their conscience accusing and condemning instead of acquitting them—to find their souls plunged into hell under a strong guard of devils, instead of being conducted to heaven by a glorious convoy of angels—to feel the pangs and horrors of everlasting despair succeed, in an instant, to the flattering prospect of delusive hope—to fall back to hell from the very gates of heaven. O, what a shocking disappointment, what a terrible change is this!

Therefore, now make sure work. Do not venture your souls upon the broken reed of false hope. But "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." 2 Peter, 1:10. Now, you may make a profitable discovery of your mistake; if your hope be ungrounded, you have now time and means to obtain a good hope through grace. But then it will be too late: your only chance, if I may so speak, will be lost; and you must for ever stand by the consequences. O, can you bear the thought of taking a leap in the dark into the eternal world; or of owing your courage only to a delusive dream? Why will you not labor to secure so important an interest, beyond all rational possibility of a disappointment? Have you any thing else to do which is of greater,

of equal, or comparable importance? Do you think you will approve of this neglect upon a dying bed, or in the eternal world?

Let this subject strengthen the hope of those whose hope will stand the Scripture test. You must die, 'tis true; your bodies must be the food of worms; but be of good courage, your almighty and immortal Saviour will support you in the hour of your extremity, and confer immortality upon you. He will also quicken your mortal bodies, and reunite them to your souls, and make your whole persons as happy as your natures will admit. Blessed be God, you are safe from all the fatal consequences of the original apostasy, and your own personal sin. Death, the last enemy, which seems to survive all the rest, shall not triumph over you; but even death itself shall die, and be no more. O, happy people, who is like unto you, a people saved by the Lord. Deut. 33:29.

Let me now conclude with a melancholy contrast: I mean, *the wretched condition of the wicked in a dying hour*. Some of them, indeed, have a hope, a strong hope, which the clearest evidence cannot wrest from them. This may afford them a little delusive support in death; but upon the whole, it is their plague: it keeps them from spending their last moments in seeking after a well-grounded hope; and as soon as their souls are separated from their bodies, it exposes them to the additional confusion of a dreadful disappointment. Others of them live like beasts, and like beasts they die; that is, as thoughtless, as stupid, about their eternal state, as the brutes that perish. O, what a shocking sight is the death-bed of such a stupid sinner. Others, who with a great deal of pains, made a shift to keep their consciences easy in the gay hours of health and prosperity, when death and eternity stare them in the face, find this sleeping lion rousing, roaring, and tearing them to pieces. They had a secret consciousness before, that they had no ground for a comfortable hope; but they suppressed the conviction, and would not regard it. But now it revives, and they tremble with a fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation. This is especially the usual doom of such as have lived under a faithful min-

istry, and have had a clear light of the Gospel and just notions of divine things forced upon their unwilling minds. It is not so easy for them as for others to flatter themselves with false hopes, in the honest, impartial hour of death. Their knowledge is a magazine of arms for their consciences to use to torment them. O, in what horrors do some of them die; and how much of hell do they feel upon earth.

Nay, this is sometimes the doom of some infidel profligates, who flattered themselves they could contemn the bugbear of a future state, even in death. They thought they had conquered truth and conscience, but they find themselves mistaken: they find these are insuppressible, victorious, immortal; and that, though with mountains overwhelmed, they will one day burst out like the smothered fires of *Ætna*, visibly bright and tormenting. Of this the celebrated Dr. Young gives us a most melancholy instance—an instance of a youth of noble birth, fine accomplishments, and large estate, who imbibed the infidel principles of deism so fashionable in high life, and debauched himself with sensual indulgences; who, by his unkind treatment broke the heart of an amiable wife, and by his prodigality squandered his estate, and thus disinherited his only son. Hear the tragical story from the author's own words.

“The sad evening before the death of that noble youth, I was there. No one was with him but his physician, and an intimate whom he loved and whom he had ruined by his infidel principles and debauched practices. At my coming in, he said,

“‘You and the physician are come too late. I have neither life nor hope. You would aim at miracles—you would raise the dead.’

“Heaven, I said, was merciful——

“‘Or I should not have been so deeply guilty. What has it not done to bless and to save *me*. I have been too strong for Omnipotence; I have plucked down ruin.’

“I said, ‘The blessed Redeemer——’

“‘Hold, hold! You wound me. That is the rock on which I split—I denied his name, and his religion.’

“ Refusing to hear any thing from me, or take any thing from the physician, he lay silent, as far as sudden darts of pain would permit, till the clock struck. Then, with vehemence, ‘ Oh, Time, Time, it is fit thou shouldst thus strike thy murderer to the heart. How art thou fled for ever! A month! oh, for a single week! I ask not for years; though an age were too little for the much I have to do!’

“ On my saying, we could not do too much—that heaven was a blessed place—

“ ‘ So much the worse. It is lost, it is lost! Heaven is to me the severest part of hell, as the loss of it is my greatest pain.’

“ Soon after, I proposed prayer.

“ ‘ Pray, you that can. I never prayed—I cannot pray—nor need I. Is not heaven on my side already? It closes with my conscience. It but executes the sentence I pass upon myself. Its severest strokes but second my own.’

“ His friend being much touched, even to tears, at this, with a most affectionate look he said, ‘ Keep those tears for thyself. I have undone thee. Dost thou weep for *me*? That is cruel. What can pain me more?’

“ Here his friend, too much affected, would have left him.

“ ‘ No, stay. *Thou* still mayest hope; therefore hear me. How madly have I talked! How madly hast thou listened, and believed! But look on my present state, as a full answer to thee and to myself. This body is all weakness and pain; but my soul, as if stung up by torment to greater strength and spirit, is full powerful to reason—full mighty to suffer. And that which thus triumphs within the jaws of mortality, is, doubtless, immortal; and as for a Deity, nothing less than an Almighty could inflict what I feel.’

“ I was about to congratulate this passive, involuntary confessor, on asserting the two prime articles of his creed, the existence of a God, and the immortality of the soul, extorted by the rack of nature; when he thus, very passionately,

“ ‘ No, no! let me speak on. I have not long to speak

My much-injured friend! My soul, as my body, lies in ruins—in scattered fragments of broken thought. Remorse for the past throws my thought on the future. Worse dread of the future strikes it back on the past. I turn, and turn, and find no ray. Didst thou feel half the mountain that is on me, thou wouldst struggle with the martyr for his stake, and bless heaven for the flames. That is not an everlasting flame; that is not an unquenchable fire.'

"How were we struck! Yet, soon after, still more. With an eye of distraction, with a face of despair, he cried out, 'My principles have poisoned my friend; my extravagance has beggared my boy; my unkindness has murdered my wife. And is there another hell? Oh, thou blasphemed, yet most indulgent Lord God, hell itself is a refuge, if it hides me from thy frown.'

"Soon after, his understanding failed. His terrified imagination uttered horrors not to be repeated, or ever forgot. And, ere the sun—which I hope has seen few like him—arose, the gay, young, noble, ingenious, accomplished, and most wretched Altamont expired."

Is not this tragical instance a loud warning to all, and especially to such as may be walking in the steps of this unhappy youth? "Men may live fools, but fools they cannot die." Death will make them wise, and show them their true interest, when it is too late to secure it. Ignorance and thoughtlessness, or the principles of infidelity, may make men live like beasts; but these will not enable them to die like beasts. May we live as candidates for immortality. May we now seek a well-established hope, that will stand the severest trial. And may we labor to secure the protection of the Lord of life and death, who can be our sure support in the wreck of dissolving nature. May we live the life, that we may die the death of the righteous; and find that dark valley a short passage into the world of bliss and glory.