

T H E
AMERICAN PREACHER;

OR,

COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE

MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

OF

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE EDITORS of the AMERICAN PREACHER, in compliance with the request of a very sincere friend to this work, think proper to explain to the public the true purport of the Fifth Article, inserted in the preface to the first volume. The object, aimed at, is entirely political, and has reference simply to the economy of the UNITED STATES, in furnishing themselves with books as productions of their own, rather than to be dependant on foreign importation. The idea was intended to be sufficiently explained in the last clause of the article—"by encouraging the publications of our own country."

The Editors are so far from an inclination to shut the door against the introduction of literary or religious improvement from any country, that they intend, themselves, in due time, to solicit, and hope to receive CONTRIBUTIONS to this work from all countries where Christianity prevails, and where its Ministers may be disposed to build with us on the foundation already laid.

In execution of the plan, already adopted, as it respects the United States, the Editors would inform their Reverend Brethren of the different denominations of the Christian Church, that the door continues open for the reception of such CONTRIBUTIONS as they may be disposed to make for the promotion of this work.

The whole contribution will be held as a SACRED DEPOSITE, from which this work will be selected, from time to time, in such manner as will be judged to give weight, order, and dignity to the SUCCESSIVE VOLUMES.

On the first day of January next, by the leave of Providence, a selection will be begun for the FOURTH VOLUME, which may be expected out in the course of the ensuing year.

AUGUST, 1791.

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THE DANGER OF LOSING THE SOUL.

B Y

JOHN RODGERS, D. D.

One of the Ministers of the United Presbyterian Churches, New-York.

MATTHEW 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?

WE have already considered the value of the soul, in a few particulars. Let us now proceed to consider,

II. The *nature* of the loss sustained, by those who lose their souls, in the sense of the text.

By the *loss* of the soul here, we are not to understand, its annihilation, its ceasing to exist, but its exclusion from God, and its banishment into a state of misery. The loss of which we treat, is not the loss of existence, but the loss of happiness; and which, considering the nature of the soul, is a much heavier loss than even existence itself; for it

would be better not to be, than to be in a state of insupportable and endless misery. And this loss is,

1. An *entire* loss. It is the loss of every thing that can, in the least, contribute to its comfort; Yea it is the loss of the very *capacity* of enjoying happiness in God, the only possible source of happiness to us, after this world is gone. For the person who loses his soul, in the sense of my text, loses every trace of moral goodness, and is in the same state of depravity with the devils themselves. But how affecting a case this! In this world, when a man loses his fortune, he has perhaps his honor left; if he loses both, he may still have his health left; if he loses all these, he may yet have friends; if these too are lost, he may have a God to sweeten all the sorrows of life. But to lose the soul, is to lose *all*; to have nothing left, but an existence in circumstances infinitely worse than non-existence; and what adds to the misery, is, that—

2. It is an *irreparable* loss.

There are few losses we sustain in this life, but may be repaired, in a greater or less degree. If a merchant loses by one voyage, he may gain by another; if a farmer loses by one crop, he may gain by another; if we lose one friend we may get another; and so with a variety of the other blessings of this life. But the man who loses his soul, has no possible method of repairing his loss, left. In this life, this mediatorial hour, God is upon treating

terms with us; but when life is ended, and the soul once lost, there is no method of repair; the treaty of peace is then for ever broken off, and all hope lost. From hence it follows, that it is

3. An *eternal* loss.

The misery it entails shall be commensurate with eternity itself. I am not insensible, my brethren, that there have been some few, now and then, in different ages of the church, who have taught the final restoration of the whole human race, to a state of happiness, in some period or other of their existence; and that this sentiment has been lately revived in our land.

Our time does not admit of our entering into a particular consideration of this doctrine, so unfounded in scripture, and so unfriendly in its tendency, to the interests of piety and morality. I shall only make the two following remarks upon it at present.

First—That all agree, men must be made *good*, before they can be made *happy*. The reigning power of sin, and happiness in the enjoyment of a God of unstained purity, are, at first sight, utterly incompatible with each other. But how is this goodness to be effected after death? The friends of universal salvation say, by the sinner's suffering in the future world, the punishment due to his sins in this. But this takes for granted, what is neither true, nor admitted, that punishment will cure

moral evil. It would be no difficult task to shew, that this is neither the nature, the design nor the tendency of suffering; nor is it in any instance the effect, unless rendered so by the spirit of grace.—The benefits which at any time arise from afflictions, which are readily admitted, flow wholly from this source.—They are, at best, but the means in his hand for effecting these good purposes. If punishment works this good effect, we must suppose, the devils are, at least, something better than they were near six thousand years ago, when they were cast into the prison of hell. But who supposes they are? Or if any do, what evidence have they that this is the case? You will please also to remember here, that while the sinner is suffering, in the future world, the punishment due to his sins in this, he is still sinning in that state, and, therefore, still becoming more depraved—more unlike God, as well as running deeper and deeper in debt to divine justice. He is, in every view, getting farther and farther from God and true goodness, instead of approaching nearer to them.

I have just hinted what deserves a more particular mention, and what, at the same time, merits your special notice—that the remedy God has provided and revealed in the gospel, for the cure of moral evil, and the recovery of the soul to true goodness, and the *only* remedy, is the spirit of God.

You have already heard, in a preceding discourse, that this was the interesting part he took

in the plan of our salvation, through a Mediator; and that agreeably to this, the renovation and the sanctification of the human heart, are uniformly ascribed to him, and to him *alone*, in the sacred oracles. To be regenerated is to be *born of the spirit*; and the after-progress of this good work in the soul, is *the sanctification of the spirit*, because effected by him. To ascribe, therefore, this good work to the efficacy of suffering is highly derogatory from the honor of the spirit, as the spirit of holiness; it is to ascribe that to inferior causes, that can only be effected by his almighty arm; and to give the glory to the creature, which is due alone to the Creator.

The *second* remark is, that the declarations of God, in his word, are most pointed and express against the doctrine of an universal restoration; or, in other words, they teach us, that the misery of the wicked in the future world, will be *everlasting*. Among the numerous instances of this kind I shall only mention the following.

Our Lord, in that brief but instructive account of the judgment of the great day, which you have in the 25th chapter of Matthew, from the 31st verse, introduces the judge as addressing the righteous in the following language: *Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* And the wicked he addresses in the words that follow. *Then shall he say also*

unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into EVERLASTING FIRE, prepared for the devil and his angels. And he concludes the whole account thus. And these shall go away into EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT, but the righteous into life eternal.

My brethren, it is necessary you should be informed here, that the words in this last verse, the one in the first clause, which teaches us the duration of the misery of the wicked, and that in the last clause, which teaches us the duration of the happiness of the righteous, which all agree to be eternal, are precisely the same in the original language. Can any then suppose, the Saviour, the leading trait of whose character, upon all occasions, was undisssembled faithfulness, would use the same words in the same verse, in two different senses, nay, in *opposite* senses, on a subject of such infinite moment to the souls of men, as the final issue of the general judgment, without giving the least hint of it? That in the one case he should mean a limited time, and in the other an endless eternity, and yet conceal these different meanings under the veil of the most profound secrecy and silence? How could such conduct be reconciled with common honesty? But this must be the case, upon the principles of the friends of universal salvation.—For nothing can be more express and unequivocal than the declaration of our Lord, that the misery of the wicked shall be of the same duration with the happiness of the righteous, and that both the one and the other shall be EVERLASTING.

You will please to observe, further, that these two states are contrasted with each other in the text before us, and contrasted in this very point of view, as to their *duration*. This appears from the face of the words, *These shall go away into EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT, but the righteous into life eternal.*

To say the nature of the subject suggests the different senses, in which we are to understand the original word here used, though our Lord gives no hint of it, is begging the question. This is the very thing that is denied, and which has never yet been proved.

I shall only add, we are assured in 2 Thessalonians i. 9. *That the wicked shall be punished with EVERLASTING destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* This is that which infuses the bitter ingredient, despair, into the cup of Jehovah's indignation. No hope—no hope—no hope through an endless eternity.

III. I am to consider the *danger* of thus losing the soul.

This danger is great, and arises from various sources; but all our time admits of, at present, is briefly to touch upon the few following.

I. The *state* in which we are *by nature*.

The sacred oracles uniformly represent this as a state of *spiritual death*. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* Every soul, by

reason of sin, is, *in a sense*, in a lost state already; that is, they have lost the favor of God; they are, *by nature, children of wrath*. They have lost the image of God. *Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.* From the former arises the necessity of being justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; and from the latter, the necessity of being renewed in the spirit of our mind. Agreeably to this, every unbelieving sinner is represented as under an *actual* sentence of condemnation to suffer the pains of eternal fire. *He that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

You will, therefore, perceive, that it is only for sinners to continue in that state, unpardoned and unrenewed, and they are inevitably lost to all eternity; and the danger there is, that they may continue in this state, appears,

2. From the *many obstructions* that lie in the sinner's way, to a recovery to the favor and image of God. I cannot stay to enumerate these, much less to illustrate them at large in this place. I shall only mention the following. The blindness of the human mind—the estrangement of the heart from God; nay more, its enmity against him—the un-

faithfulness of the conscience, and the various depravity of the affections; all these are properly of an internal nature—they are obstructions that arise from ourselves. But beside these, such is the power and influence of satan, the adversary of our souls, has in obstructing the sinners recovery to God, and affecting his ruin, that he is styled the *Prince of this World*. For the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me: And, also, the God of this world. In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. He is, for his cunning, called the *Old Serpent*, and for his malice, the *Devil and Satan*.

Now when you consider the power, the cunning, the malice, and the industry of satan and his accomplices, that are continually employed in ruining the souls of men, the danger of their being lost is greatly heightened.

Again. This world is another fruitful source of obstructions in the sinner's way to eternal life.—The corrupt opinions of the world—its vicious examples—its smiles—its frowns—its necessary and lawful cares—its riches—its honors—its amusements, with all its various pleasures, lawful and unlawful, all, *all* contribute, by reason of our depravity, to heighten the sinner's danger of losing his soul.

3. This danger appears from the *many ways in* and *by* which the soul may be lost. The principal

of these are, ignorance of God, and of spiritual and eternal things—carnal security, and indifference respecting the salvation of our souls—a presuming on the absolute mercy of God, without proper regard had to the atonement of Christ—hypocrisy and formality in religion—the imbibing of such false principles, as are incompatible with gospel-holiness, particularly the principles of infidelity—the neglecting of God's public ordinances, which never fails, if persisted in, to issue in the ruin of the soul—procrastination, or putting off the business of our souls to some future time; this is the usual, and, alas! too frequent bane of youth; to which we may add, the many ways of open profaneness; such as drunkenness—uncleanness in all its various forms—cursing and profane swearing—lying—dishonesty in dealing with each other—sabbath-breaking—contempt of God and sacred things, with every other species of vice; all and each of these may be considered as so many different paths which lead down to the chambers of eternal death—some more secret, and some more open; and which serve to illustrate the danger of losing the soul; which danger is not a little heightened by the consideration of the immediate and fatal influence some of these things must have, from their very nature, upon the ruin of the soul.

4. This danger appears, from the *great difficulty of recovering the soul from all these evils.*

Nothing less can effect it than the almighty arm of God, and to this it is uniformly ascribed in the sacred oracles. The bent of the soul, by nature, is against its own recovery, as appears from the internal obstructions in the way to it already mentioned.

The case of the sinner may be justly compared to that of a person deprived of his reason, who refuses to use the means prescribed for his recovery, however judicious; or who counteracts them to the utmost of his power, or both. The charge of our Lord against the Jews of old, is equally just with respect to every unbelieving sinner under the gospel. *Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life.* And besides this, all earth and all hell are opposed to the sinner's recovery to God, as you have heard in its place. If ever, therefore, it be effected, it must be by the arm of the LORD GOD OF HOSTS.— And now put all these considerations together, and your selves being judges, is not the danger of losing your precious souls great?

But it is time, I should finish the subject by a few practical reflections upon what has been said. And you will easily perceive, that,

1. whether we consider the value of the soul—the nature of the ruin to which it is exposed, or the danger it is in of falling into this ruin, all conspire to teach us the evil nature of sin—that sin which exposes this precious soul to all this ruin.—

My brethren, sin is not that trifle men in general esteem it. It has lost us the divine favor, and justly exposed us to the displeasure of heaven—it has lost us the divine image, and rendered us wholly unfit for the enjoyment of the God of holiness—it is the procuring cause of all the numerous and complicated evils of this life.—*For as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*

“If every individual of our race,” says a pious divine, “that has ever existed from Adam down to our day, were collected into one mighty heap, and an inquest held upon them, sin would be found to be the murderer.” But this is not all, for we are assured that those who persist in the ways of sin, *shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*—Must it not then be an evil and a bitter thing to sin against the Lord? Would to God that I could impress each one of you, and my own soul with yours, with a proper sense of the evil and destructive nature thereof, that we might be hereby excited to hate it in a suitable manner, to turn from it to God through his Son Jesus Christ, and to maintain a careful and constant guard against it.

2. How indebted are we to rich grace for a Saviour from the ruin, which the loss of these precious souls involves?—a ruin of which we are in so much danger. God might have passed by our race,

as he passed by the fallen angels, and have left us to perish in our unnatural rebellion against him, as he left them. But O! the riches of, redeeming love! Having laid his plan in the eternal councils of peace, he was pleased to execute it in the fullness of time, by *sending his Son* into our world, *made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of children.* Herein, indeed, is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And let Gethsemane tell—let the scenes of infamy and insult, through which the Saviour passed, from thence to mount Calvary, tell—and let Calvary itself, and the cross tell what the price of our redemption cost the Son of God. Here is love that many waters could not quench! Love that all the billows of Jehovah's wrath could not drown! Love stronger than death!—My brethren, let this love of God and his Son Christ, constrain you to estimate your souls in a proper manner, and flee from the wrath to come, upon the plan of the gospel.

3. This subject teaches us the precious nature of the ordinances of the gospel. I particularly mean here the institutions of God's public worship on the sabbath, the word and sacrament.—These are the means he has instituted and ordained for the recovery of lost souls to the divine favor, and their restoration to his holy image. *For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom*

knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. And you elsewhere read, that *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* The great truths taught in the faithful preaching of the word, and in the administration of the gospel-sacraments, are the means the holy spirit uses for these gracious purposes; they are the means by which he effects and promotes that change in the heart and life, in which gospel-holiness consist; and the duties there taught are the guide of the Christian's life.

I beseech you, therefore, my brethren, that you estimate these ordinances of God—these institutions of mercy, in a suitable manner; adore God for them—rejoice in them, as your inestimable privilege—make conscience of attending upon them from sabbath to sabbath; but above all, see that you improve them for the great purposes of your personal purity, your comfort in the ways of God, and for holding a delightful intercourse with the Father of your Spirits while here upon earth, that you may be prepared for dwelling with him in glory.

4. We are taught by this subject the solemn nature of the charge committed to those who have the care of souls.—This is the charge of gospel-ministers. Hence that apostolic injunction; *Obeys them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account; that they may do it with joy, and not with*

grief, for that is unprofitable for you. The value of the souls committed to their care, shews the importance of the charge. They are of more worth than a world. *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?*

It farther appears from the high danger sinners are in of losing these souls, as already illustrated, and from the awful nature of the loss when sustained. All these unite in shewing the necessity of watchfulness, diligence and faithfulness in the ministers of Jesus Christ. I beseech you then, my brethren, let us have your pity and your prayers, your countenance and your assistance in the discharge of our great trust. *Be ye helpers together by prayer for us.*

Parents also have a solemn charge in the souls of their children, and masters and mistresses in the souls of their servants. Be entreated then to instruct them with care—to watch over them—to pray for them and with them—and to set an example of piety and good morals before them.

I only add once more.

5. The important truths you have heard, loudly call upon sinners to awake out of their security—to shake off their sloth—to seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near. Think, O think of the numerous and pro-

bable ways by which men may lose their precious souls, and by which they are daily losing them, and that for ever!—And is there no danger of your losing your souls, in some one or other of these ways? Pause a moment upon this important question! It is too important to be trifled with, and too interesting to be delayed! Your souls—your precious souls are at stake!

These truths also call upon profane sinners of every class and description to break off their sins by repentance, and turn unto the living God, through his Son Jesus Christ. They address you, O sinners! in the following authoritative, yet tender language of inspiration. *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.—How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning? and fools hate knowledge. Turn ye at my reproof; behold I will pour out my spirit unto you—I will make known my words unto you. As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel!*

Do not wonder that the ministers of Jesus address you with solemnity and tenderness—that they mingle tears with their entreaties, when beseeching sinners to have mercy upon their precious souls. Indifference in such a case would be the height of absurdity in us, and the greatest cruel-

ty to you. *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. And may this be the effect of the present address, through the riches of free grace in Christ our Lord. Amen and Amen.*

