

T H E

AMERICAN PREACHER;

O R, A

COLLECTION OF SERMONS

FROM SOME OF THE

MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,

NOW LIVING,

IN THE UNITED STATES,

O F

DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS

IN THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

VOLUME I.

ELIZABETH-TOWN, (NEW-JERSEY)

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M.DCC.XCI.

P R E F A C E.

TO THOSE, who have seen the plan and circular letter sent abroad for the execution of this work, little information will be necessary; but for the information of those, who have not seen them, it may not be improper, or out of place, to say—that the following were the objects in view, and those which were published as the foundation and intention of the work.

“ I. To bring into public view many excellent discourses now in manuscript, promising great benefit to the interests of Religion.

“ II. To unite in one work some of the best performances of the day, as a specimen of the pulpit talents of the time.

“ III. By uniting the several most important religious denominations in one work, to open the door for the more extensive exercise of CHRISTIAN CHARITY among CHRISTIAN BRETHERN.

“ IV. To afford Christian families a compendium of Christian instruction.

“V. To prevent the farther importation of printed Sermons, by encouraging the publications of our own country.”

SUCH were the real, and, we trust, justifiable reasons, by which the public were invited to encourage the plan.

BESIDES the influence the plan itself might be supposed to claim, it was supported by the following recommendation.

“HAVING *duly considered the plan of the*
 “AMERICAN PREACHER, *now offered for*
 “*the approbation of the public, we take the*
 “*liberty of signifying our concurrence in the*
 “*same: not doubting but it may well execute*
 “*the objects it proposes.*”

WILLIAM LIVINGSTON, *Governor of*
the State of New-Jersey.

GEORGE CLINTON, *Governor of the*
State of New-York.

WILLIAM SAMUEL JOHNSON, *President*
of Columbia College, and one of the Se-
nators of the United States.

ELIAS BOUDINOT, *L. L. D. Member*
of Congress.”

THE success of the plan and circular letter, is sufficiently testified by the existence

of the work in its present form, as well as by the respectable list of subscribers who have supported it.

It is not pretended that all the preachers of the Gospel in the United States, who are justly entitled to distinction, both for the purity of their doctrines, and elegance in style; are among the number of those who have supported this work: but we believe, that those who appear in the following pages, will be pronounced to have well supported the cause they were so indulgent as to undertake.

SUCH has been the reception of our plan in the present instance, that we feel ourselves justified in announcing to the public, a FOURTH VOLUME; and, in a word, a SUCCESSION of volumes, so long as the present disposition to encourage the work shall continue.

IN support of this plan we plead an inclination, more fully, to execute the objects just now recited, as giving origin to the work: and we add, a desire:

I. To form such a collection of discourses, as may amount to a system of Christian faith and practice.

II. BY this system to raise an opposition to error and heresy of every kind.

III. To direct the present prevailing disposition to liberality in matters of religion, into a proper channel; and open the door for Christian communion, upon principles ACKNOWLEDGED and UNDERSTOOD.

IV. To lay a foundation for the universal agreement of the Christian Church, when the high prospects of futurity shall be unfolded.

WE pretend not to a spirit of prophecy, but find a willingness to hazard a conjecture, that, under the supreme and superintending providence of God, some such small beginnings or dawnings of light, may, eventually, be considered as announcing the approach of MERIDIAN DAY.

WE are not backward to say, that such religious union, and influence as this work labors to accomplish, will add no small DIGNITY and SUPPORT to the POLITICAL INTERESTS of our country. To the influence of law, it will add the energy of conscience and moral duty; to the subject, it will administer safety and protection from the encroachments of arbitrary power; and to

all under its influence, will shed the richest of CIVIL and SOCIAL blessings.*

WITH the deepest veneration, we DEDICATE our labors, and those of our brethren, to the GOOD PROVIDENCE of ALMIGHTY GOD, and to the PATRONAGE of the PIOUS of every denomination, into whose hands this work may come—trusting, that those who favor it, will, in the perusal, find their

* “ A transient view of those states and kingdoms, which have made the most striking figure in the history of the world, and which have been most renowned for the felicity of their government, will convince us that Religion was by them, always, considered as a matter of great importance to CIVIL SOCIETY.

“ The greatest politicians, and most celebrated legislators of antiquity, depended much on this, to give sanction to their laws, and make them operate with vigor and facility.”

REESE: *On the Influence of Religion in Civil Society.*

“ Our holy Religion, by regulating and composing the passions, enlightening and exalting the mind, and purifying and meliorating the heart, conduces in a high degree to the peace and well-being of social life: It makes good men—from thence, the transition is easy and natural to regular citizens and obedient subjects. Where private virtue cannot be found, it is in vain to look for public: and laws are of little efficacy without good example.”

Governor PATTERSON'S *Answer to the Congratulatory Address of the Presbytery of New-Brunswick.*

“ Another important consequence of this discovery, is an enlarged liberality of sentiment among men. The liberality to which I refer, is discernable in the spirit of religious toleration, which spreads like a flood over the face of the earth. This toleration, when it becomes universal, cannot but accomplish matters of the highest importance to the WORLD. Truth and reason will then burst with irresistible energy from the dark clouds of superstition and bigotry—dispel the mists of error and absurdity, and bring the GREAT FAMILY OF THE WORLD, to an uniformity of religious belief and worship.”

ALFRED: *On the Progress of true Principles of Freedom, and good Government.*

attention amply rewarded; and, in the end, enjoy the high prospects it permits them to entertain.

WE return our grateful acknowledgments to those REVEREND GENTLEMEN who have contributed to the execution of this work thus far—not doubting, that the contemplation of having added something to the support of the great truths of the gospel—of having administered instruction to the ignorant, warning to the impious, and edification to the saints—but above all, the contemplation of having laid a foundation for the progress, unity, and perfection of the kingdom of the Redeemer, will afford higher reward for their services, than it is in our power to give.

In behalf of the interests of this work,
 subscribe
 to the cause of truth, a friend,
 and to the public,
 a devoted servant—

DAVID AUSTIN.

Elizabeth-Town,
 Jan. 1, 1791.

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B Y

J O H N R O D G E R S, D. D.

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

P R O V. xxiii. 17.

Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

THERE is scarce any thing that has a more immediate influence upon our duty or our comfort, than the due government of the passions. When they are properly directed, they serve as powerful springs of right action; but unguided by reason, and revelation, they are the fruitful sources of vice, guilt and ruin.

Hence the wise and virtuous, in all ages, have employed themselves in forming rules for their regulation. But it has been found more easy to prescribe, than to reduce these rules to practice.

Herein, then, the religion of Jesus has the advantage over every other system of morality, in that

it not only prescribes the most just and proper rules for this end ; but provides the assistance that is requisite to enable us to comply with them.

This is the special business of the spirit of grace, in the œconomy of man's salvation ; and directed and assisted by him, we are enabled to *be, and walk, in the fear of the Lord all the day long*, agreeably to the precept in our text.

To enable you to understand and improve this important precept, in a proper manner, I shall endeavor, by the aids of this spirit,

I. To shew you what it is to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

II. Enquire why we should study thus to be in the fear of the Lord.

I. I am briefly to shew you what it is to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

Fear is a passion of the human mind, and stands opposed to hope. It is that passion, by which the author of nature guards us against danger ; and in this view, when properly directed, is of singular use in the conduct of life. It always has for its object some evil, real or supposed ; and, in the words of our text, with many other places in sacred scripture, its immediate object is *the evil and danger of sinning against God ; and the just displeasure of God, in consequence of offending him*. To fear these, is to fear the Lord in the best sense of the

phrase. This is the sense in which the churches are said, to *walk in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*. And in the same sense, *the fear of the Lord, is said to be the beginning of wisdom*.

But, to give you a fuller view of this grace, I beg your attention while I briefly observe ;

1. That it implies a *humble reverence for God*.—A sense of his being, perfections and character ; *that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him*. That he is a God of *purser eyes than to behold evil*. There is no view of God that contributes more to form the human heart to a true fear of him, and a devout reverence for him, than a believing view of the holiness of his nature. This is the case of the Angels themselves, as we learn from Isaiah vi. 1—3. *I saw also, the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims ; each one had six wings ; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts ; the whole earth is full of his glory !*

There cannot be a more lively description of reverence and godly fear, than that given us in the conduct of the seraphim, verse 2. You will please to observe, each one of these adoring spirits had six wings. *With twain they covered their faces—* struck with the majesty of God, and unable to be-

hold his glory; *and with twain they covered their feet*—as unworthy to stand in his sacred presence, though immaculate, and the highest order of rational creatures known to us; *and with twain they did fly*—importing the alacrity, cheerfulness and expedition, with which they execute the divine commands. And the source of this reverence, humility and obedience, we have, verse 3. It was the view they had of the holiness of the divine nature. *For one cried unto another, and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*

A like effect of the like view of this same attribute, we have in the conduct of the four living creatures, and the four and twenty elders; of whom we read in the 4th chapter of the Revelation of St. John, from the 8th to the 11th verse.—

A knowledge of the greatness and majesty of God, has also no small instrumentality in promoting this temper. This appears in the case of the prophet Jeremiah, x. 6, 7. *Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O king of nations? To the same purpose are the words of the Psalmist; For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.*

He is also a God of strict and invariable justice. A God *who will punish iniquity, transgression and sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty, without an interest in the atonement of the Mediator.*

If you add to all this, that Jehovah is an all-seeing and a heart-searching God, you will easily perceive, that this reverence, this godly fear justly becomes us. And few of the divine attributes have a more powerful influence on this temper, than his omniscience, when properly understood and realized. That *the eyes of the Lord run to and fro, throughout the whole earth—discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart; and, that there is not any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.* That no darkness can hide from him. That the shades of midnight, and the blaze of noon, are the same thing to him. A sense of our being always under the immediate eye of this God, from whom nothing can be hid, naturally tends to beget and cherish this fear of the Lord in our hearts; to fill us with that reverence for his majesty, that enters so deeply into the duty enjoined in our text. On the other hand—ignorance of God, and inattention to these perfections of his nature, especially to his omniscience and omnipresence, are among the most fruitful sources of that irreverence for him, which stands opposed to the grace I describe. The language of the sinner's heart and life is—*How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not, and he walketh in the circuit of Heaven.* He may not, indeed, venture to say it with his lips, but he daily saith by his practice, *the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God*

of *Jacob regard it*. And, by the by, this irreverence for God, is the true source of that rude and unworthy practice of profane swearing. A practice that insults all the laws of politeness, and renders the man unfit for genteel society, while it violates the most sacred obligations of piety and morality.

2. The fear of the Lord implies, *an habitual care lest we offend him*. This is the genuine effect of that reverence for God, of which you have just heard. The more it prevails in the heart, the more will it govern and influence the life.—The true source of this care is, a sincere love to God, and a desire to please him. The man who does not love God, and desire to please him, will not be careful, on just principles, to guard against giving him offence. Why does the dutiful child fear to offend a kind and tender parent? Is it not because he loves him? Because his honor lies near his heart? Thus in the case before us, the more we love God and his law, the more cautious and tender shall we be, lest we sin against him.—And this circumspection serves, not only as a guard against the commission of sin; but it has a powerful influence also upon the performance of duty. It stimulates the man who fears the Lord, to a conscientious and faithful discharge of the whole of his duty, to the utmost of his power. It guards him against omitting it in the season thereof; and engages him to attend, not only to the matter, but to the manner of his performing it.

In a word, this habitual care, this circumspection of conduct, that we do not omit our duty to God, our neighbor, or ourselves; that we perform it in the proper time and manner; and that we do not knowingly and wilfully sin against God, is literally to *be in the fear of the Lord all the day long*; and is one principal thing the Holy Spirit intends by the precept in our text.

3. This fear of the Lord has for its object, *the just displeasure of God, as due to us for sin.*

That we have sinned against God, and hereby merited his highest displeasure, are melancholy truths, that we do not, cannot admit of a doubt. And hence those numerous evils that have so universally overspread this world of ours; such as sickness and pain, war and famine, poverty, disgrace, and death itself; and together with these, our being justly liable to be *punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* Moral and natural evil are inseparably connected, and the latter never fails to follow the former, in a greater or less degree. And since we are sinners, and conscious to ourselves that we are so, we justly fear the divine displeasure due to us therefor. Thus the Psalmist—*My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.* Not to fear the judgments of God in this situation, would be unpardonable stupidity, or a profane contempt of God. And this fear has its influence too on the purity of the life, as it tends to guard us against sin, and is, therefore, one thing

implied in the text—*Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*

But it is necessary to distinguish here, between that slavish fear of God's judgments, that destroys our peace of mind, and hereby incapacitates us for the duties and enjoyments of life; and that which only serves to guard us against sin. The former is that of which we read, 1 John iv. 18. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* It is a slavish fear of God's wrath, a despairing horror of his judgments, of which the apostle there speaks. This is that, which persons under the power of a melancholy habit of body and mind, sometimes have; and which also is the fear of those who despair of the mercy of God in Christ. But this is not the fear which I at present describe. It is only that fear of the divine displeasure against sin, that serves to awaken our attention to its evil nature, and, thereby, guard us against committing it.

Thus much for the nature of that fear of the Lord of which we here read.

It only remains under this head that we enquire, what it is to be in the fear of the Lord *all the day long.*

And this in general means, that we should live under the habitual influence of this holy temper. That we should carry it with us into all the duties of the religious and social life, whether of a more

private or public nature; that we carry it with us into all the busineses and amusements of common life; into all companies and circumstances. We are hereby taught that there is no situation, in which we can be; no employment in which we may be engaged, but what we should constantly act under the influence of this fear of the Lord. It should rise with us in the morning, go forth with us, attend us through all the various scenes of the day, and lie down with us at night. And this should be the case with us, through all the days and nights of our appointed time. Thus, *be thou in the fear of the Lord, all the day long*; the whole day of life; for the night of death will shortly come, and put a final period to it. This, is the sense in which, *happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.*

This leads us to enquire—

II. Why should we study to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long?

My business, under this head, is to mention some of the many reasons, why we should be particularly attentive to this duty. And let it suffice, briefly, to touch upon the four following at present.

1. *It is an excellent guard against the commission of sin*; that sin which constitutes our depravity, and which is the fruitful source of all our misery. This appears, at first sight, from what has been said of its nature. Can the man, knowingly and delibe-

rately, sin against God, who has a suitable sense of his being, his perfections, his character and his government upon his spirit? No, the very idea of his being under the immediate eye of that God, who serves as a solemn witness to all his transactions; a holy and a just God, to whom he must shortly give an account of all the deeds done in the body; would check his career and deter him from sin. Think you, my brethren, that the debauchee who gives himself up to idleness and profane company; who wastes whole days, and it may be nights, in the tavern, at the gaming table, or in places of a still more infamous character, that he can have the fear of God before his eyes? Verily no. It is because he is destitute of this principle, that the sinner restrains prayer before God; that he dares to take his sacred name, in a profane manner, in his unhallowed lips; that he dares to get drunk; commit uncleanness; lie; profane the sabbath of the Lord; steal, or otherwise defraud his neighbor. The fear of the Lord would effectually engage him to forsake these and every other vicious course. It would strip temptation of its charms, and disarm it of its force.

Hence the fear of the Lord, and departing from evil, are used as phrases of the same import. *Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* And we read, *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.* And, *by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* This is the sense in which *the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.*

It not only deters us from sin, and guards us against it; but, as has been already suggested, it excites and stimulates us to study a thorough conformity in heart and life, to the approving will of God. Hence the apostle exhorts us to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.*

2. It greatly assists us in the right performance of duty. I mean here the duties we owe, more immediately, to the most high God. These, my brethren, are numerous and important. They are secret, private and public. They are to be performed in the closet, the family and the sanctuary; nor is it possible for us to be the true disciples of Christ, without a conscientious attendance upon them. And you will further please to observe, God justly requires they should be performed in a humble and devout, a spiritual and sincere manner. This our Lord teaches us with great care. *God is a spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* But to all this, the fear of the Lord, as already described, greatly contributes. For in proportion as this fear, or reverence towards God, prevails in us, will the heart be fixed upon him, the glorious object of our worship, in every duty. In proportion hereto, we shall be guarded against those vain and wandering thoughts that eat out the very soul of our duties, and degrade them into empty formality. God requires with great solemnity, *my son, give me thine heart.* A precept that particularly

binds us in this case of duty ; for our God looketh at the heart principally, in all our approaches to him ; and, indeed, he has a special respect to it, in all our conduct.

Again. It greatly tends to invigorate the graces of the spirit in the soul, and to call them forth into lively exercise. The more this fear of God governs the man, the more active and vigorous will his graces be. For the same views of the perfections, character and Christ of God, that are the source of the one, will promote the other. Our time does not admit of shewing you, here, how this is to be effected. It must suffice, at present, to observe, that so it is ; and you will easily perceive, how a spirit of devotion is hereby promoted. For the proper exercise of faith, hope, love to God, and delight in him in duty, is that in which this spirit consists. But, the more this is in exercise, the more easy, delightful and spiritual will our duties be.

3. This fear of the Lord *excites us to the important duty of watchfulness, and greatly assists therein.* There is no duty of the Christian life more frequently and strongly enjoined in the sacred oracles, than this. You hear our Lord say, Matt. xxvi. 41. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* And again—*And what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch.* To this purpose are the words of the apostle—*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.—Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.* To

which accords his exhortation to Timothy—*But watch thou in all things.* And did our time admit of considering, here, the many snares to which God's own people are exposed in this life; snares that arise from the temptations of Satan, the allurements of the world, and the depraved tempers and passions of the human heart, you would easily perceive the utility, importance and necessity of this duty. There are none of all the duties of the Christian life, that have a more immediate and powerful influence on the peace of our own minds, or our conformity to God. It must, therefore, be a singular favor to be properly excited to it, and assisted in the exercise of it. But this is the office of that fear of the Lord, which our text enjoins, as appears from what has been said of its nature. For the man, who fears the Lord in the manner explained, will not only watch against every kind of sin, but also those circumstances of temptation that lead to it.

4. *God recommends this duty to our study and practice, by his divine authority.*—This he does by the high encomiums he bestows upon it, and that with this express view. It is *wisdom*, it is *understanding*. Thus in Job—*Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, is understanding.* And in Proverbs—*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*; or, as the Hebrew word will well admit of being rendered, it is the *principal, or grand constituent part of true knowledge.* And again—*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of*

wisdom ; and the knowledge of the holy, is understanding. The fear of the Lord is strong confidence ; and his children shall have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. Add to all this, the duty before us is matter of exprefs command, as in our text. *Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*

Need I say more to recommend it to your study and practice? Would you wish to enjoy the comforts that flow from the purity of heart, and innocence of manners, which it promotes?— Would you wish to live a life of holy and delightful intercourse with Heaven, and be useful in your day and generation? Would you wish to grow daily into a greater meetness *for the inheritance of the saints in light*? In a word, would you wish to die in peace, and go to be ever with the Lord? *Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.* And for this purpose I beseech you,

1. Study to acquire more and more of the knowledge of God ; the knowledge of his perfections, character and government ; especially as they are manifested in and through his son Jesus Christ. What has been already said shews the influence this knowledge has on this fear of the Lord. It is its true source. Thus it becomes *life eternal to know God, as the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.*

2. Be much and frequent in meditating upon the divine perfections. Call up their various and

numerous displays to your daily recollection, and dwell in familiar contemplation upon them. Thus your souls will be assimilated to them; acquire correspondent tempers and dispositions; the tempers and dispositions to which these displays of the attributes of God, are designed and calculated to form the human heart. This is one thing imported in having *our conversation in Heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.* And the so general neglect of this great duty of meditation, is one of the fruitful sources of that little improvement in the divine life, of which so many of God's people daily and justly complain; why they live and act so much beneath the dignity of their character, as the disciples of a holy Jesus; and often act so unworthy the just expectations of both their God and the world respecting them.

3. Be much in the great duty of prayer; especially be conscientious in observing the returning seasons thereof, private and social—This has a natural tendency to impress our spirits with that reverence for the divine perfections and character, that enters so deeply into the duty before us. And not only so, but in this way we are to seek, and in this way we may hope to obtain those influences of the spirit of grace, by which this fear of the Lord is most effectually maintained and promoted in the hearts and lives of men. My brethren, if you do not make conscience of this duty, in your closets and families, such of you as have families, you cannot live in the fear of the Lord. Therefore I

befeech you, *continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.*

Lastly, To the duty of prayer, add that of watchfulness. You have just heard the influence this duty has on our personal conformity to God; I need not repeat it. Watch, therefore, your own hearts; attend to what passes there.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Watch your lips, that you speak not unadvisedly therewith; watch your lives, that you do not offend against God's pure and holy law; *watch thou in all things, and thus be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*

May the Lord graciously enable each of us, thus to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord;* through riches of free grace in Christ our Lord. Amen.

