

SERMONS AND ESSAYS

BY THE

TENNENTS

AND THEIR CONTEMPORARIES,

COMPILED FOR THE BOARD.

by S. D. Alexander.

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GILBERT TENNENT.

GILBERT TENNENT was the eldest son of the Rev. William Tennent, Sen., the founder of the Log College. From an original document, a small memorandum book, kept by his father, we learn that he was born in the County of Armagh, Ireland, on the 5th of Oct., 1703. He was therefore thirteen or fourteen years old when his father immigrated to this country. He received his education under his father's roof, before the founding of the Log College, and when this school was opened, he assisted his father in teaching.

His first religious impressions of any permanency, were experienced soon after his arrival in this country. And during the several years in which he was under serious concern, besides his other studies, he pursued a course of theological reading. But having doubts as to his spiritual condition, he was fearful of entering the holy ministry; and commenced the study of medicine, which he prosecuted for the space of a year. But about this time, it pleased God to reveal himself to him with so much clearness and comfort, that all his doubts, and sorrows, and fears were dispelled; and the Sun of Righteousness arose upon him with healing under his wings. And no sooner was he satisfied of his saving interest in Christ, than he felt himself called to seek the ministry, which he had before been deterred from thinking of. After due preparation and study, he was licensed to preach the gospel, by the Presbytery of Philadelphia, in May, 1726. After his licensure, he preached for several Sabbaths in New Castle on the Delaware.

Declining a call to this church, he soon after accepted one from the Presbyterian Church of New Brunswick, and in the autumn of 1726 was ordained by the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

From his first entrance on the public work of the ministry, the preaching of Gilbert Tennent was very popular and attractive, with all classes of hearers. He possessed uncommon advantages as a preacher. In person, he was taller than the common stature, and well proportioned in every respect. His aspect was grave and venerable, and his address prepossessing. His voice was clear and commanding, and his manner in the pulpit was exceedingly earnest and impressive. His reasoning powers, also, were strong, and his language often nervous, and indeed sublime. No one could hear him, without being convinced that he was deeply in earnest. His style was copious and sometimes elegant. Indeed, in the vigour of his age few preachers could equal him.

In the winter of 1740 and 1741, Mr. Tennent visited Boston with Mr. Whitefield, where he spent three months, preaching almost every day with extraordinary power and success.

In May, 1743, Mr. Tennent was called to a new church in Philadelphia, formed from those who were converted under the preaching of Mr. Whitefield. This call he accepted, and exercised his ministry with great fidelity and diligence for twenty years. The only interruption to his pastoral labours in Philadelphia was occasioned by a mission to Great Britain, in conjunction with the Rev. Samuel Davis of Virginia, for the College of New Jersey.

For about three years before his death, Mr. Tennent became very infirm, so that he was unable to go through the duties which devolved upon him as the pastor of a large city congregation. His death occurred in the year 1764.

SERMON I.

THE JUSTICE OF GOD.

BY THE REV. GILBERT TENNENT.

“He is the rock; his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.”—DEUT. xxxii. 4.

MOSES introduces his song in this chapter with the most solemn and commanding magnificence, and yet with the softest charms of language. He summons the attention of the inanimate creation, partly to reprove the stupidity of Israel, and partly to bear witness to the truth of what he was about to deliver to them in the following song, either for their instruction or warning, as well as to witness to the justice and equity of the divine proceedings against that unhappy nation: “Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.”

In the second verse, the devout penman of this song wishes that the instructions contained in it, may be refreshing to and effectual upon his beloved nation, as the rain and dew upon the earth: “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew.” These words may be considered as a prayer of Moses, as if he had said, O that it might do so! Thus Bishop Patrick un-

derstands the words. In the next verse, he signifies his intention to make known the glory of God, and therefore excites them to ascribe *greatness* to him; which intention he performs in the words of our text, wherein we have a representation of the divine glory and greatness apparent in the perfection of his works and equity of his government, in a variety of particulars, viz: 1. He is called a Rock, to signify the stability of his nature, the firmness of his counsels, the immutability of his promises, and the almightiness of his power; in all which respects he is a secure shelter and unshaken foundation for our resort and confidence.

2. *His work is perfect.* "His work of creation was so; all that he made in its original constitution was very good; his works of redemption and providence shall be so, when the mystery of God is finished." "God's works are true and cannot be blamed," saith Ainsworth upon the place: "God never recalls his counsels, but perfects them. God's work is called perfect, because he fulfilled what he promised to the fathers."

3. *All his ways are judgment; i. e.,* saith Henry, "The ends of his ways are all righteous, and he is wise in the choice of the means in order to those ends." By *God's ways*, we are to understand all God's providential administrations towards intelligent creatures, and by *judgment*, prudence, and justice. Hos. xiv. 9.

4. *He is a God of truth; i. e.,* as Mr. Pool observes in his Synopsis, "Faithful in his promises; whose word we may depend upon, for he cannot lie."

5. *Without iniquity*—he is perfectly free from all moral blemish and defect. “He deceives none that confide in him, and wrongs none that apply for justice, and is hard upon none that cast themselves upon his mercy.”

6. *Just and right is he.* God is holy and equal in his distributions; as he is just in himself, so he is just in all his dealings with mankind; none can with reason accuse him of insincerity, unrighteousness, or levity.

Now that attribute or perfection of God which is principally represented in our text, by a beautiful variety of expressions, is his justice; this, therefore, is the subject of our meditations. That God is just, the Scriptures prove many ways, particularly, 1. *Metaphorically and figuratively*, when he is therein called a consuming fire, an angry lion, a man of war. Deut. iv. 24. Isa. xxxviii. 13.

2. *Affectively*, by attributing to him zeal, anger, jealousy, fury. Num. xi. 10. Exo. xx. 5; xxxii. 10. The aforesaid affections suppose justice in creatures, and though they be passions in them, they are in God but an act of immutable justice.

3. *Effectively*, by showing that he renders to every one according to his works. 1 Sam. xxvi. 23.

4. *Negatively*, by removing from him all injustice and iniquity, all respect of persons; and in a word, all the causes and effects of injustice. “Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the almighty pervert justice?” Job viii. 3. Dan. ix. 13. Rom. iii. 4.

5. *Positively*, by affirming and extolling his justice, by calling him a revenger, holy, right. Jer. xii. 1. Ps. xi. 7.

For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright. To these we may add the words of our text, than which nothing can be more full and express: "He is a rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he;" and also that of the Psalmist, Ps. cxix. 137, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments." And does not reason confirm the same truth? For, 1st, if God be not just, whence is there any justice? Either there would be no justice at all, or if there was any, it would not proceed from God; or if it did, it must proceed from one who had none; each of which particulars is absurd. Besides, 2d, inasmuch as the Lord is governor of the whole universe, he would degenerate into a tyrant if he was not just; and, 3d, seeing Jehovah is judge of all the earth, how could he judge aright without being just himself? Neither can it be otherwise but that God should be just, seeing that he is absolutely perfect. All confess justice to be an excellency, involving no imperfection in it, and therefore it cannot be wanting to that being, who is absolutely and infinitely perfect.

In discoursing upon this divine attribute of God's justice, I propose to consider its nature, kinds, properties, displays, and in the fifth place, to answer some objections, and then proceed to the improvement. And,

1. Justice in its general nature may be said to be *an agreement with right and rule*. It is opposed to crookedness and obliquity, by which any thing declines from

its proper rule. Crookedness in morals is the same with sin; which the apostle John calls "a transgression of the law." 1 John iii. 4. Or, as the original word *anomia* may be rendered, a being without the law, or a wandering from the law. Justice, therefore, does coincide with rectitude or uprightness: "Lo, this only I have found, that God hath made man upright." Eccl. vii. 29. So that justice includes two things in it especially, viz: right, and an agreement with that right. 1st, I say, it includes right or that which belongs to every one: "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Luke xx. 25. "Knowing the judgments of God, that they that do such things are worthy of death." Rom. i. 32. It is from this right that the very name of justice is derived. And, 2nd, it includes an *agreement with this right*, and in this the form of justice consists; and the contrary to this, viz: a disagreement from right, constitutes the form of injustice. From this general description it is evident that justice admits of no degrees, for the thing either agrees with the rule of right or not; if the former, it is just, if the latter, it is unjust. Undoubtedly the justice of God, as well as of creatures, consists in an agreement with right, but with this difference, that the creatures have their rule of right prescribed by another; whereas the divine nature is a rule of right to the Almighty.

But let me pass to the second, and speak of *the kinds of justice*. And here it may be observed that justice may be considered under a threefold view, viz: as relating to God's *will, word, and deeds*. And, 1. Justice, as it relates

to the will of God, is thus described by Wendeline, viz: "That it is that whereby God is just in himself and without himself gives to every one their own by a constant will." "Justice in man," saith Mr. Leigh, "is a settled will to do right in everything to every person." Thus God hath a settled will to do right,—“shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” This constant will of God to render to every one his own, coincides with the divine essence, and may be called his *essential justice*, and is no other but the essential rectitude of his nature. And that justice of God which respects his words and deeds, may be called his *declarative or relative justice*, because it is a manifestation of the former, and respects the transactions of God with creatures. But

2. The justice of God, as it relates to his words, is called truth, faithfulness, and constancy; because it agrees with the rectitude of his nature to speak so and no otherwise. Faithfulness may be called justice, because it is a doing justice to his word.

3. The justice of God, as it respects his deeds, is twofold, viz: of *dominion* and *jurisdiction*. And, 1st, God's justice of dominion, or, as some divines term it, his disposing justice, is that whereby Jehovah, as the sole Monarch and supreme Lord of all, disposes and governs every thing in a just order; and in particular he disposes his own actions according to the rule of equity, requiring and prohibiting nothing but what is fit for intelligent creatures, in right reason, to do and forbear. In a word, this justice of dominion consists in governing reasonable creatures

agreeable to the original rectitude of their natures. 2nd, God's justice of jurisdiction consists in prescribing to reasonable creatures their proper due, and in governing them accordingly: and this the Almighty doth by three things: 1. By prescribing *laws*, which are rules tending to direct mankind in their duty to God and man, agreeable to his own sanctity, attended with rewards and punishments. "There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy." James iv. 12. 2. By establishing his laws by proper *sanctions* of rewards and punishments promised and threatened (Deut. xxx. 15); now the sanction consists in promises and threatenings. And, 3. By *fulfilling the sanction*, and that both as to the reward and punishment: the former is called *remunerative*, and the latter *vindictive*. And, 1st, "The remunerative justice of God is a most ready will to perform God's promises," as Wendeline observes; when God rewards the obedience of his creatures with a free reward, proceeding from his own pure and abounding goodness, not for any worth or condignity in his people's works, as the Papists vainly dream, but for the sake of his gracious promise, by which he makes himself a debtor to them. "Who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuing in well doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life. But to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, indignation and wrath." Rom. ii. 6, 7, 8. "When we have done all that is commanded, we must say that we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was (but) our duty to

do." Luke xvii. 10. "Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things." Rom. xi. 35, 36. Although there be no intrinsic worth in man's obedience to merit the glory or reward promised, yet God having promised it to the creature, and having a right and power to confer it, it is just and right in him to perform his own word. And certainly, he would wrong his truth if he did not. When happiness, in Scripture, is represented as a reward, it is only to encourage or excite to obedience, by showing the inseparable connection between grace wrought in us, and glory conferred upon us. It cannot intend any merit in our works; for if we ourselves be less than the least of God's mercies, then the best actions put forth by us must be so; for, as Dr. Ridgely observes, "The action cannot have more honour ascribed to it than the agent." Being God's creatures, we have derived all from him, and consequently can offer him no more than his own. And being corrupt criminals, our services are defective, and so cannot merit good at the hand of God; nay, on the contrary, for our transgressions we merit his wrath. And therefore in respect of us, the reward of happiness is wholly gracious; but indeed in respect of Christ, who has fully answered the demands of law for his people, by his obedience and suffering, and thereby, according to the covenant transaction between his Father and him, completely purchased for them everlasting life, it may be called an *act of divine justice*. Hence it is said, "That he might be just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus." Rom. ii. 26. But

2. The *vindictive justice* of God is the Almighty's will to execute the threatenings of his law upon transgressors, by punishing or inflicting on them evils of suffering equal to their crimes. This is called wrath, hatred, revenge, and judgment. It is likewise termed God's "visiting iniquity." Jer. v. 9. His "setting his face against a person." Lev. xvii. 10. It is called the fire of God's jealousy, and those that are exposed to it, are said to fall into the hands of the living God. Some divines use the terms of rewarding and revenging justice, instead of remunerative and vindictive.

But here I would have it observed, that there is a less proper sense in which the word punishment is used in Scripture. Thus, when God corrects his people with his rod, this is often called punishment (Ps. lxxxix. 30, 33); and hence they are said to bear the indignation of the Lord, because they have sinned against him. Micah vii. 9. These afflictions are called *punishments*, because occasioned by sin and afflictive to sense; but they are not inflicted by God as a judge, with any demand of satisfaction, for that was made by Christ for those that believe in him; and surely, it is contrary to the nature of divine justice to require a double satisfaction for the same crimes! No! the afflictions of God's people spring from his fatherly love to them, and are sent either to prevent or correct sinful disorders. By these the Almighty humbles his people, by showing them the desert of their impieties; and by these he brings them nearer to himself, and deadens them more to a vain world, and all its varnished but empty

entertainments. Afflictions are the medicines which the great Physician uses to cure his people's manifold disorders.

But that what has been said, concerning the nature of divine justice, may be further explained and illustrated, let these things following be considered: 1st. That justice among men is two-fold, viz: either *commutative* or *distributive*. Commutative respects trade and bargains among equals, and consists in observing the rules of equity and right therein. Distributive is that which is exercised by a superior towards his inferiors, and consists in the conformity of their administrations to rule and law, and, therefore, comprises these four things in it, viz: 1. A *law* to which the acts of government should be conformed. A law, says Maresius, "est faciendorum et fugiendorum norma, sub ratione premii et poenae," i. e. "it is a rule of things to be done and avoided, on consideration of a reward or punishment." All justice, and especially distributive, has respect to a law; this is the foundation on which it is built, and the rule according to which it must be squared and accommodated.

Now the law that is the ground and foundation of justice among men, must have the following characters, viz: 1st, it must be bottomed upon natural equity, upon the nature, relation and reason of things, otherwise it will be a crooked rule, and so unworthy of observation. No human authority can alter the intrinsic goodness and badness of things; and therefore bad laws (in a moral sense) are but a recommending and enforcing iniquity by human

authority. And, 2d, the law must be enacted by competent authority and power; because legislation as well as the execution thereof, are acts of government, which those that exercise should have a right so to do, either originally or by delegation, the contrary to which tends to open a scene of confusion and blood. And hence it is well observed by some, that however just any act of government be in itself, yet it is unjust for those to meddle with it, that have no right thereto: e. g. for a judge to condemn one guilty of a capital crime to death, is just; but for a private person divested of authority to do it, is murder. And, 3d, the law must be promulgated, that it may be known, "for where there is no law, there is no transgression." Rom. iv. 15. But the

Second particular, that civil justice, or justice among men includes, is *Conformity* to the law in all administrations. When a judge does this, in all his inquiries and examinations respecting cases brought before him, he does his duty, and otherwise he perverts the ways of judgment. It is this kind of justice among men, that is an emblem or shadow of the justice of God, and therefore I have so long discoursed upon it. But to show the similitude, let me add a few words more, and inquire, what is God's declarative or relative justice, but his conformity to the law he has given his creatures in his transactions with them? Here observe, 1st, That the law which God gave to man to direct him in his service, is grounded on natural equity, or the nature and reason of things; which appears by the harmony of its precepts among themselves, and

their direct tendency to promote the glory of God, and make the creature happy in his service; the contraries to which tend to dishonour God, debase our intelligent nature, and destroy our happiness. The moral law is but a transcript of his nature as it is imitable. And hence is the Apostle's just commendatory encomium concerning it: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good." Rom. vii. 12. And, 2d, That God had authority to enact laws, appears evidently from his creating all. As his infinite and eternal excellency makes him worthy of absolute sovereignty and dominion, so his producing all by his almightiness gives him an irrefragable right thereto. Human power is derived, delegated, and limited, but his is original and absolute. And, 3d, Almighty God having annexed the sanction of rewards and punishments to the law he has given his creatures, his truth stands engaged to execute the same upon suitable objects; which is likewise necessary to answer the designs of government. This execution, therefore, of the sanction of the law, or conformity thereto, in the dealings of God with his creatures, is his declarative justice, and with this even all his acts of sovereignty do really harmonize, which appears by considering,

3d. The properties of divine justice, which are these following, viz :

1. Divine justice is *impartial*; with him is no respect of persons in judgment: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done,

whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. v. 10. Justice will not spare for the sake of the multitude, greatness, or nearness of the guilty. Did not Sodom and Gomorrah perish by fire, and was not the whole antediluvian world drowned with water? And what vast multitudes of people may we suppose did the aforesaid cities, together with Zeboim and Admah, contain? And how much more the whole world before the flood? And yet all were destroyed by a sudden and terrible stroke of divine justice. And when the angels, those spirits of excelling dignity, sinned, did not divine justice cast them into an abyss of woe? And does it not still confine them in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day? When Adam, our federal head, had transgressed the covenant, was he not banished from that paradise of pleasure he before possessed, and kept out of it by a flaming sword? Divine justice scatters kings as snow in Salmon, and before its adverse edge, their pompous armies flee apace. Ps. lxxviii. 12, 14. And were not Moses and David, though so near and dear to God, punished with awful severity? Hence is that solemn and soul-affecting saying of the prophet: "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel. You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Amos iii. 1, 2. But divine justice is—

2. *Universal*, so that not one sin can escape severe punishment, either in the sinner, or surety: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Gal. iii. 10.

3. Divine justice is *inexorable*, no importunities can alter its course. When once a sinner's season of mercy expires, Jehovah refuses to be entreated. "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." Ez. xiv. 18, 20. This is twice repeated in that chapter, to show the infallible certainty and unspeakable importance of the truth delivered. The almighty cannot be corrupted or bribed. But that which further confirms this awful truth, is the

4th proposition, viz: The displays of divine justice. And here, to be as brief as I can, I shall only mention two instances thereof. The first of which was the sufferings our Lord endured when he stood in the sinner's room and place. How unspeakable were the tortures he endured in his sacred body, every part of which was put to exquisite pain! Deep furrows were made in his sacred back by cruel scourges, and his beauteous face exposed to contemptuous blows, yea, to shame and spitting, by the insulting herd; his venerable temples were pierced by thorns, his side and heart by a spear; the whole weight of his body hung upon a few sinewy and sensible parts in his crucifixion, and his name was treated with the greatest ignominy and scorn. But, as Mr. Flavel justly observes, "The soul of our Lord's sufferings was his sufferings in his soul." When he who knew no sin was made sin for us, his soul was made an offering for sin, his soul became sorrowful even unto death. How inconceivable must be the anguish which our Lord

endured in his soul, when in one instant of time, that whole weight of distress and pain, which was due to divine justice for all the sins of the elect world, were laid upon it, and in the meantime deserted by the Father in respect of his comfortable presence! This pressed a bloody shower from all the pores of our Lord's body in the garden of Gethsemane. This extorted that heart-rending outcry on the cross, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" No wonder the earth's foundation trembled, and the dead awoke out of their long and silent slumbers, and the sun itself, that glorious orb of light and beauty, put on a funeral robe of darkness and obscurity, to testify their surprise and sorrow on so awful an occasion, and to complete the train of mourners. But secondly,

The vindictive justice of God has a dreadful display in the torments of the damned, who are punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. As the damned are deprived of all the honours and comforts of the heavenly paradise, as they are burnt in a lake of fire, which is kindled by the breath of God, as by a river of brimstone; so their intolerable tortures, by God's inflamed jealousy, by their own guilty consciences, by wicked men and devils, will know no intermission and no end; "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." But I hasten to the

5th proposition, which was to answer some objections offered against the justice of God. And

1st. It is objected by the Socinians, that, according to

our doctrine, God punished the innocent in the room of the guilty, namely, our Saviour in the place of sinners.

Ans. Though our Saviour was personally innocent, yet he was, with his own consent, and by his Father's imputation, guilty. And, hence, he is said, to be "made sin for us;" he willingly became the sinner's surety, and so assumed their guilt, in order to satisfy for it, and save them from ruin; and to a willing person, who had a right to dispose of his own life, especially seeing so valuable an end was answered by it, as the salvation of sinners, no injury was done by his Father imputing him to death.

2d. It is objected that God sometimes punishes the sins of the parents in their children. Ex. xx. 5.

Ans. God never punishes the sins of the parents in innocent children. As to the sin of Adam, he being the federal head, or covenant representative of his whole offspring, they sinned in him. "But they, like *Adam*, (as the word should be rendered,) have transgressed the covenant." Hos. vi. 7. "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (*i. e.* in Adam). Rom. v. 12. And as to the sins of private parents, they are not punished in children unless they be propense to them or imitate them.

3d. It is objected that God is a respecter of persons in the affair of predestination, by dispensing unequal things to those that were in an equal state, choosing one and rejecting another, without any reason but his own pleasure.

Ans. To respect persons is when, in matters of judgment, equal things according to law and right are due to several persons, and yet we dispense unequal; but this is not the case with the Almighty. "Who hath given to him," saith the Apostle, "and it shall be repaid? for of him are all things." Rom. xi. 36. As to God's grace, he owes it to no creature as such. He is Lord of his own treasures, and may do with his own what he pleases. Rom. ix. 18, 21. And, therefore, such as favour the objection, do but reply against God, as the Apostle there observes. Predestination is but an immanent act of God, which produces nothing without himself, and, consequently, dispenses neither good nor evil, though it be the pattern according to which his providence dispenses all things in time. But if we consider God's providence which dispenses salvation and damnation, that does not confer unequal things upon those that are equal; but it confers unequal things upon those that are unequal, viz: believers and unbelievers; for Christ's sake, salvation to the former, and for sin's sake, damnation to the latter. If a prince of a number of rebels, who all, according to law, deserve death, purposes and passes an act of pardon upon some to show his clemency, and lets the law take place upon others to show his justice, where is the wrong? And that is the case; for God in his purposes looked upon men as fallen, and meriting his displeasure; he might have left the whole race to perish for their sins with the devils, who after their fall had never an offer of mercy. And because Jehovah has chosen some, when he might have condemned all, shall our eye be evil because God is good?

4th. It is objected, that God suffers the wicked to prosper, and the pious to be afflicted and oppressed.

Ans. This world is a time of probation, and not of recompense. The scales will turn at the conclusion of this short scene, this transient drama. Besides, the miseries of God's people are necessary physic to cure their maladies, to which end they are sanctified by the Spirit of God. Rom. viii. 29. They are also at times sweetened with the love of Christ, and shall soon expire, and then an everlasting salvation shall commence; whereas, on the contrary, the abused prosperity of the wicked tends but to secure and increase their destruction. But it is time to proceed to the improvement. And

1st. This subject speaks *terror* to all ungodly and Christless sinners of every kind. How deplorable is their case, "who must drink of the wine of the wrath of the Almighty, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation!" O! let the secure and impenitent transgressor think on the following particulars:

1. That God, upon the account of his justice and judgments, is called the "great and dreadful God." Dan. ix. 4. Likewise, "mighty and terrible." Deut. vii. 22. "With God," saith Job, "is terrible majesty." Job xxxvii. 22. 2. That the wages of every sin is death, and that you have been guilty of a prodigious multitude, attended with awful aggravations: sins against light and love, against law and gospel, mercy and judgments; your iniquities, for number, rival the stars, and for aggravation, are red as crimson. And, 3. That the justice of

God will not, can not pass by one of them, except ye repent, but will surely proportion pains equal to all their number and heinousness. For, as has been observed, it is *impartial, universal, inexorable*. And now, seeing every imagination of the thoughts of your hearts has been, since your birth until now, only evil continually, and all your words and actions evil; for a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, neither can he that is in the flesh please God, how dreadful must that wrath be which is proportioned to them all!

Surely it is, 1st, *Incomprehensible wrath*; the most fearful imagination cannot fully represent it by its most gloomy ideas. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath." Ps. xc. 11. 2d. It is *unavoidable wrath*. If we take the morning wings and flee to the uttermost ends of the earth, lo, there God's all-seeing eye will discern us, and his righteous arm arrest us. If we ascend to the top of Carmel, or descend into the deeps of the ocean, or seek to conceal ourselves with the curtain of obscurity, darkness and retirement, even there our persons and purposes will be open to the all-penetrating eye of God. "For the darkness is as the light to him, and the night shines as the day." Sinners, ye cannot escape by *policy*, for God is infinite in wisdom; nor by *power*, for he is infinite in strength, as Job observes, "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength, who hath hardened himself against God and prospered?" Job ix. 4. Nor can ye escape by *flight*, for Jehovah is omnipresent. 3d. It is *eternal wrath* (Matt. xxv. 46.); it will continue

as long as God endures ; never, never, never shall it know a period. O! this gives it a dreadful and heart-rending accent! And, 4th, It is *intolerable wrath*. If the Redeemer, who was personally innocent and supported by the Godhead, cried so dolorously under this wrath, how can your hands be strong, or your hearts endure, when a jealous God deals with you, and pours out the vials of his unmixed wrath upon you, who are full of real and crimson guilt, and shall have none to succour you? And do you think that that just God, who spared not his own beloved Son, when he but stood in sinners' place, but smote him dead by the sword of his justice, and made all the waves of his almighty vengeance beat upon him, and roll over him, will spare you who are covered all over with real and scarlet guilt? No, friends, "be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." He that sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. The intolerableness of the divine wrath, anger and hatred, as well as its terribleness, is represented in Scripture by a variety of bold and dreadful images of thought. I shall mention a few of them, and in the name of the great God charge the ungodly to think upon them: "For a fire is kindled in my anger, and shall burn to the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will drop mischiefs upon them. I will spend my arrows upon them." Deut. xxxii. 22, 23. "Which removeth the mountains and they know it not; which overturneth them in his anger; which shaketh the earth out of her place,

and the pillars thereof tremble; which commandeth the sun and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars." Job ix. 5, 6, 7. "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup." Ps. xi. 6. Elsewhere Jehovah threatens to wound the hairy scalp of the wicked, and tear them in pieces when there shall be none to deliver them. Hos. v. 14. That he will be to them as a lion and as a leopard, and meet them as a bear bereaved of her whelps, devour them like a lion and rend the caul of their hearts. Hos. xiii. 8. And with what magnificence and grandeur of diction does the prophet Nahum speak upon this solemn subject: "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." Nahum i. 2—7.

Now as the consideration of God's justice and wrath ministers terror to all the ungodly in general, so especially

and particularly to these following, viz: 1. Epicures, who indulge a sensual security, and put the evil day far from them. Surely such treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Surely the day of the Lord will be to them, as the prophet expresseth it, "cruel with wrath and fierce anger." Isa. xiii. 9. And, 2d. All unjust persons who are guilty of fraud in contracts, and dealings with men, or respecting of persons in judgment. "Woe to him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong." Jer. xxii. 13. Ps. lxxxii. 2, 5. 3d. All hypocrites, such as are unjust to God and their own souls, who cover their inward injustice with an outward show of piety. Such are an abomination to God, and may expect to be cut asunder by the sword of divine justice. Matt. xxiv. 50, 51. 4th. All murmurers, who call in question the justice of God in his judgments, and kick with the heel against the Most High, under frowns of providence. For this, the whole congregation of Israel fell in the wilderness, and never saw Canaan, two excepted. Num. xiv. 27—30. Now the use I would advise poor graceless sinners, of every age and order, to make of the justice of God, is to be excited by it to fly to Christ for security and defence. "He is a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the storm." Isa. xxxii. 2. 1st. He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. In Him God the Father has declared his righteousness (Rom. iii. 25); and Him he is willing to make righteousness to such as accept of him. 1 Cor. i. 30. Well, seeing divine justice must

be satisfied for the wrong done by our offences, either by us, or a surety in our place, or else we must perish eternally: then, seeing we ourselves cannot satisfy, because we are poor, imperfect and finite creatures, let us hasten to Christ and receive him by faith, as the gospel offers him, that so we may be justified by faith, and securely rest on and rejoice in that Jesus, who has fulfilled the righteousness of the law for his people. Rom. viii. 3. But, 2d. This subject speaks comfort to all believers in every one of their troubles; for from this they may see that they are afflicted less than their iniquities deserve, that a Father's love is the spring of them, who chastens them lest they should be condemned with the world. And particularly we may draw comfort from this subject, under calumnies and wrongs, when we think that we have a witness in heaven, a just Judge there, who will uphold us in a good cause, and reward us according to our righteousness, and make it sooner or later to "shine forth as the light, and our judgment as the noonday." Ps. xxxvii. 6. Yea, in troubles of conscience God's justice yields support, when we consider that it was once satisfied by our Lord, and that it is contrary to its nature to require a double satisfaction. Hence is the Apostle's query, "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died." Rom. viii. 34.

But there are these following duties, which, from the consideration of divine justice, we should be exhorted to perform, viz: 1st. That we beware of depending upon our own righteousness, upon the one hand, with the Pharisee (Luke xviii. 11); and of the neglect of duty, on the other,

with the sluggard whose hands refuse to labour: "for without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Heb. xii. 14. 2d. Let us walk with humble reverence and child-like fear before the righteous God, as with a consuming fire, avoiding every appearance of evil, and continually, in all our religious services, eyeing Jesus the Mediator and Intercessor, who alone is able to cover their defects, and render them acceptable to his Father by his abundant righteousness; in whom alone we are complete, and safe from every impending storm. For when in him, the flaming sword of divine justice, which before kept us out of paradise, guards and assists our entrance into it. And, 3d. Let us glorify God on account of his justice of every kind, whether essential, declarative, judicatory, legislative, remunerative, or vindictive; for transcendent beauty shines therein. Let us say with the Psalmist, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." Ps. lxxxix. 24. And with Paul, "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." Rom. xi. 33. Such is the strictness of divine justice in all his proceedings, that it is compared to mountains, and to the abyss. "Thy righteousness is as the great mountains, thy judgments are a great deep." Ps. xxxvi. 6. And let us join with the inhabitants of heaven in celebrating the justice of God. "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people, in heaven, saying, Hallelujah, salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God, for true and righteous are his judgments." Rev. xix. 1, 2.

In fine, let us labour to imitate the justice and righteousness of God, by seeking the righteousness of Christ to our justification, in the manner before expressed; also by seeking the inherent righteousness, which it pleased God at first to implant in our natures by creation (Ecc. vii. 29), which we have lost by sin. I say, let us fervently and frequently cry to God by humble supplications, in the name of Christ, that he would be pleased to implant or infuse into our souls, by regeneration, the habits or principles of that righteousness; and, having the same implanted, let us exercise them in our whole practice. 1. Towards God, by rendering him his due, viz: ourselves, and all that honour, love, trust, and service which he requires in his word. And 2. Towards our neighbour, in all matters of government, judgment, and commerce, ruling without oppression, judging without respect of persons, and dealing without fraud, falsehood, or imposition. And 3. Towards ourselves, in a right improvement of the seasons of mercy, thereby securing our salvation; and also in not suffering ourselves to be wronged in our temporal interest. A great part of the image of God, and beauty of religion, consists in justice: and as the blessing of God rests upon such here, so they shall receive from the just Judge of heaven and earth a crown of righteousness hereafter, which shall never fade away. That this may be the happy lot of us all, may God grant, for Christ's sake! Amen.