

HELL

by Thomas Boston (1676 – 1732)

Then He shall say unto those on the left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed ones, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" Matthew 25:41

INTRODUCTION

Were there no other place of eternal lodging but heaven, I should here have closed my discourse of man's eternal state; but as in the other world there is a prison for the wicked, as well as a palace for saints, we must also inquire into that state of everlasting misery; which the worst of men may well bear with, without crying—'Are you come to torment us before the time?' since there is yet access to flee from the wrath to come; and all that can be said of it comes short of what the damned will feel; for 'who knows the power of God's anger?'

The last thing which our Lord did, before He left the earth, was, 'He lifted up his hands, and blessed his disciples' (Luke 24:50, 51). But the last thing He will do, before He leaves the throne, is to curse and condemn His enemies; as we learn from the text which contains the dreadful sentence wherein the everlasting misery of the wicked is declared. In which, three things may be taken notice of—

1. The 'quality' of the condemned—'you cursed.' The Judge finds the 'curse of the law' upon them as transgressors, and sends them away with it, from His presence, into hell, there to be fully executed upon them.
2. The 'punishment' which they are sentenced to, and to which they were always bound over by virtue of the curse. And it is twofold—the punishment of 'loss', in separation from God and Christ—'Depart from Me;' And the

punishment of 'sense'—in most poignant and extreme torments—Depart from Me 'into fire.'

3. The 'aggravations' of their torments—a. They are ready for them, they are not to expect a moment's respite. The fire is prepared and ready to catch hold of those who are thrown into it.

b. They will have the society of devils in their torments, being shut up with them in hell. They must depart into the same fire, prepared for Beelzebub, the prince of devils, and his angels; namely, other reprobate angels who fell with him, and became devils. It is said to be prepared for them; because the demons sinned and were condemned to hell before man sinned.

This speaks further terror to the damned, that they must go into the same torments, and place of torment, with the devil and his angels. They hearkened to his temptations, and they must partake in his torments—his works they would do, and they must receive the wages, which is death.

In this life they joined with devils, in malice against God and Christ, and the way of holiness. And in eternity, they must lodge with them.

Thus all the goats shall be shut up together—for that name is common to devils and wicked men, in Scripture (Lev. 17:7), where the word rendered devils properly signifies hairy ones, or goats, in the shape of which creatures, devils delighted much to appear to their worshipers.

c. The last aggravation of their torment is the eternal duration thereof; they must depart into 'everlasting' fire. This is what puts the top-stone upon their misery, namely, that it shall never have an end.

DOCTRINE—THE WICKED SHALL BE SHUT UP UNDER THE CURSE OF GOD, IN EVERLASTING MISERY, WITH THE DEVILS IN HELL!

After having proved that there shall be a resurrection of the body and a general judgment, I think it is not needful to insist on proving the truth of future punishment. The same conscience there is in men of a future judgment, bears witness also of the truth of future punishment. (And that the punishment of the damned shall not be annihilation, or a reducing them to nothing, will be clear in the progress of our discourse.) In treating of this awful subject I shall inquire into these four things—

- I. The curse under which the damned shall be shut up.
- II. Their misery under that curse.
- III. Their society with devils in this miserable state.
- IV. The eternity of the whole.

I. THE "CURSE" UNDER WHICH THE DAMMED SHALL BE SHUT UP IN HELL—

It is the terrible sentence of the law by which they are bound over to the wrath of God, as transgressors. This curse does not first come upon them when standing before the tribunal to receive their sentence; but they were born under it, they led their lives under it in this world, they died under it, and rose with it out of their graves. And the Judge finding the curse upon them, sends them away with it into the pit, where it shall lie on them through all the ages of eternity.

By nature all men are under the curse. But it is removed from the elect by virtue of their union with Christ. It abides on the rest of sinful mankind, and by it they are devoted to destruction, and separated to evil.

Thus shall the damned forever be persons devoted to destruction! separate and set apart from the rest of mankind, unto evil, as vessels of wrath! set up as marks for the arrows of divine wrath! and made the common receptacle and shore of eternal vengeance!

This curse has its first-fruits on earth, which are a pledge of the whole lump that is to follow. Hence it is, that temporal and eternal miseries on the enemies of God, are sometimes included under one and the same expression in the threatening. What is that judicial blindness to which many are given up, 'whom the god of this world has blinded' (2 Cor. 4:4), but the first fruits of hell and of the curse? Their sun is going down at noon-day, their darkness increasing, as if it would not stop until it issue in utter darkness.

Many a lash in the dark, does conscience give the wicked, which the world does not hear of—and what is that but the never-dying worm already begun to gnaw them? And there is not one of these but they may call it Joseph, for 'the Lord shall add another'; or rather Gad, for 'a troop comes.'

These drops of wrath are terrible forebodings of the full shower which is to follow. Sometimes they are given up to their vile affections, that they have no more command over them (Rom. 1:26). So their lusts grow up more and more

towards perfection, if I may so speak.

As in heaven grace comes to its perfection, so in hell sin arrives at its highest pitch; and as sin is thus advancing upon the man, he is the nearer and likelier to hell.

There are three things that have a fearful aspect here—

1. When everything that might do good to men's souls, is blasted to them; so that their blessings are cursed—sermons, prayers, admonitions, and reproofs, which are powerful towards others, are quite ineffectual to them.

2. When men go on in sinning still, in the face of plain rebukes from the Lord, in ordinances and providences. God meets them with rods in the way of their sin, as it were striking them back; yet they rush forward. What can be more like hell, where the Lord is always smiting and the damned always sinning against Him?

3. When everything in one's lot is turned into fuel for one's lusts. Thus, adversity and prosperity, poverty and wealth, the lack of ordinances and the enjoyment of them, do all but nourish the corruptions of many. Their vicious stomachs corrupt whatever they receive, and all does but increase noxious humors.

But the full harvest follows, in that misery which they shall forever lie under in hell; that wrath which, by virtue of the curse, shall come upon them to the uttermost—which is the curse fully executed. This black cloud opens upon them, and the terrible thunderbolt strikes them, by that dreadful voice from the throne, 'Depart from me, you cursed', which will give the whole wicked world a dismal view of what is in the bosom of the curse.

1. It is a voice of extreme indignation and wrath, a furious rebuke from the Lion of the tribe of Judah! His looks will be most terrible to them; His eyes will cast flames of fire on them; and His words will pierce their hearts, like envenomed arrows! When He will thus speak them out of His presence for ever, and by His word chase them away from before the throne, they will see how keenly wrath burns in His heart, against them for their sins!

2. It is a voice of extreme disdain and contempt from the Lord. Time was when they were pitied, admonished to pity themselves, and to be the Lord's; yet they despised Him, they would have none of Him—but now they shall be

buried out of His sight, under everlasting contempt!

3. It is a voice of extreme hatred. Hereby the Lord shuts them out of His affections of love and mercy. 'Depart, you cursed.' I cannot endure to look at you; there is not one purpose of good to you in My heart; nor shall you ever hear one word more of hope from Me.

4. It is a voice of eternal rejection from the Lord. He commands them to be gone and so casts them off forever. Thus the doors of heaven are shut against them; the gulf is fixed between them and it, and they are driven to the pit.

Now, were they to cry with all possible earnestness—'Lord, Lord, open to us;' they will hear nothing but—'Depart, depart you cursed ones.' Thus shall the damned be shut up under the curse.

Application—Let all those who being yet in their natural state, are under the curse, consider this, and flee to Jesus Christ in time, that they may be delivered from it. How can you sleep in that state, being under the curse!

Jesus Christ is 'now' saying unto you—'Come you cursed, I will take the curse from off you, and give you the blessing.' The waters of the sanctuary are now running, to heal the cursed ground; take heed to improve them for that end to your own souls, and fear it as hell to get no spiritual advantage thereby.

Remember that 'the miry places,' which are neither sea nor dry land, are a fit emblem of hypocrites; 'and the marshes,' that neither breed fish, nor bear trees, but the waters of the sanctuary leave them, as they find them, in their barrenness, 'shall not be healed,' seeing they spurn the only remedy. 'They shall be given to salt,'—left under eternal barrenness, set up for the monuments of the wrath of God, and concluded forever under the curse! (Ezek. 47:11).

Let all CURSERS consider this, whose mouths are filled with cursing themselves and others. He who 'clothes himself with cursing,' shall find the curse 'come into his affections like water, and oil into his bones' (Ps. 109:18), if repentance prevent it not. He shall get all his imprecations against himself fully answered, in the day wherein he stands before the tribunal of God—and shall find the killing weight of the curse of God, which he now makes light of.

II. THE MISERY OF THE DAMNED, under that curse—

It is a misery which the tongues of men and angels cannot sufficiently express.

God always acts like Himself—as no favors can be compared to His, so also His wrath and terrors are without a parallel.

As the saints in heaven are advanced to the highest pitch of happiness, so the damned in hell arrive at the height of misery.

Two things here I shall soberly inquire into—the punishment of 'loss', and the punishment of 'sense', in hell. But since these also are such things as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, we must, as geographers do, leave a large void for the unknown land, which that day will discover.

A. THE PUNISHMENT OF 'LOSS' WHICH THE DAMNED SHALL UNDERGO IS SEPARATION FROM THE LORD. 'Depart from me, you cursed.' This will be a stone upon their grave's mouth, as 'the talent of lead' (Zech. 5:7,8), that will hold them down forever.

They shall be eternally separated from God and Christ. Christ is the way to the Father—but the way, as for them, shall be everlastingly blocked up. The bridge shall be drawn, and the great gulf fixed; so shall they be shut up in a state of eternal separation from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

They will be 'locally' separated from the man Christ and shall never come into the seat of the blessed, where He appears in His glory; but they will be cast out into outer darkness (Mt. 22:13).

They cannot indeed be locally separated from God, they cannot be in a place where He is not; since He is, and will be present everywhere—'If I make my bed in hell,' says the psalmist, 'behold you are there' (Psalm 139:8). But they shall be miserable beyond expression, in a 'relative' separation from God. Though He will be present in the very center of their souls, (if I may so express it), while they are wrapped up in fiery flames, in utter darkness—it shall only be to feed them with the vinegar of His wrath, and to punish them with the emanations of His revenging justice.

They shall never more taste of His goodness and bounty, nor have the least glimpse of hope from Him. They will see His heart to be absolutely alienated from them, and that it cannot be favorable towards them; that they are the party against whom the Lord will have indignation forever. They shall be deprived of the glorious presence and enjoyment of God—they shall have no part in the beatific vision; nor see anything in God towards them but one

wave of wrath rolling after another! This will bring upon them overwhelming floods of sorrow for evermore.

They shall never taste of the rivers of pleasures which the saints in heaven enjoy; but shall have an everlasting winter and a perpetual night, because the Sun of Righteousness has departed from them and so they are left in utter darkness. So great as heaven's happiness is, so great will their loss be—for they can have none of it forever.

1. This separation will be AN INVOLUNTARY SEPARATION. 'Now' they depart from Him. They will not come to Him, though they are called and entreated to come.

But 'then' they shall be driven away from Him, when they would gladly abide with Him. Although the question 'What is your beloved more than another beloved?' is frequent now among the despisers of the Gospel, there will be no such question among all the damned; for then they will see that man's happiness is only to be found in the enjoyment of God, and that the loss of Him is a loss that can never be balanced.

2. IT WILL BE A TOTAL AND UTTER SEPARATION. Though the wicked are, in this life, separated from God, yet there is a kind of interchange between them—He gives them many good gifts, and they give Him, at least, some good words; so that the peace is not altogether hopeless.

But 'then' there shall be a total separation, the damned being cast into utter darkness, where there will not be the least gleam of light or favor from the Lord; which will put an end to all their fair words to Him.

3. IT WILL BE A FINAL SEPARATION. They will part with Him, never more to meet, being shut up under everlasting horror and despair. The match between Jesus Christ and unbelievers, which has so often been carried forward, and put back again, shall then be broken up forever; and never shall one message of favor or goodwill go between the parties anymore.

This punishment of loss, in a total and final separation from God, is a misery beyond what mortals can conceive, and which the dreadful experience of the damned can only sufficiently unfold. But that we may have some conception of the horror of it, let these following things be considered—

(1) God is the chief good; therefore, to be separated from Him, must be the

chief evil. Our native country, our relations, and our life, are good, and therefore to be deprived of them we reckon a great evil; and the better anything is, so much the greater evil, is the loss of it. Wherefore, God being the chief good, and no good comparable to Him, there can be no loss so great as the loss of God.

The full enjoyment of Him is the highest pinnacle of happiness the creature is capable of arriving at. To be fully and finally separated from Him, must then be the lowest step of misery which the rational creature can be reduced to. To be cast off by men, by good men, is distressing; what must it then be, to be rejected of God, of goodness itself?

(2) God is the fountain of all goodness, from which all goodness flows to the creatures and by which it is continued in them, and to them. Whatever goodness or perfection, natural as well as moral, is in any creature—it is from God, and depends upon Him, as the light is from, and depends on, the sun. For every created being, as such, is a dependent one.

Wherefore, a total separation from God, wherein all comfortable communication between God and a rational creature is absolutely blocked up, must of necessity bring along with it a total eclipse of all light of comfort and ease whatever. If there is but one window, or open place, in a house, and that be totally shut up, it is evident there can be nothing but darkness in that house.

Our Lord tells us (Matt. 19:17), 'There is none good but one, that is, God.' Nothing good or comfortable is originally from the creature—whatever good or comfortable thing one finds in one's self, as health of body, peace of mind—whatever sweetness, rest, pleasure, or delight, one finds in other creatures, as in food, drink, arts and sciences—all these are but some faint rays of Divine perfections, communicated from God unto the creature, and depending on a constant influence from Him for their being; which failing, they would immediately be gone—for it is impossible that any created thing can be to us more or better than what God makes it to be.

All the rivulets of comfort we drink of, within or outside of ourselves, come from God as their spring-head. If the course of which towards us being stopped, of necessity they must all dry up. So that when God goes, all that is good and comfortable goes with Him, all ease and quiet of body and mind (Hos. 9:12), 'Woe also to them, when I depart from them.'

When the wicked are totally and finally separated from Him, all that is comfortable in them, or about them, returns to its fountain—as the light goes away with the sun, and darkness succeeds in the room thereof. Thus, in their separation from God, all peace is removed far away from them, and pain in body and anguish of soul, succeed to it.

All joy goes, and unmixed sorrow settles in them. All quiet and rest separate from them and they are filled with horror and rage. Hope flies away, and despair seizes them. Common operations of the Spirit, which now restrain them, are withdrawn forever, and sin comes to its utmost height. Thus we have a dismal view of the horrible spectacle of sin and misery, which a creature proves when totally separated from God and left to itself; and we may see this separation from God to be the very hell of hell.

Being separated from God, they are deprived of all good. The good things which they set their hearts upon in this world are beyond their reach there. The covetous man cannot enjoy his wealth there; nor the ambitious man his honors; nor the sensual man his pleasures—no, not a drop of water to cool his tongue (Luke 16:24,25).

No food or drink there to strengthen the faint; no sleep to refresh the weary—and no music, or pleasant company, to comfort and cheer up the sorrowful. And as for those holy things they despised in the world, they shall never more hear of them, nor see them.

No offer of Christ there, no pardon, no peace; no wells of salvation in the pit of destruction. In one word, they shall be deprived of whatever might comfort them, being totally and finally separated from God, the fountain of all goodness and comfort.

(3) Man naturally desires to be happy, being conscious to himself that he is not self-sufficient. He forever has a desire of something outside of himself, to make him happy; and the soul being, by its natural make and constitution, capable of enjoying God, and nothing else being commensurable to its desires, it can never have true and solid rest until it rests in the enjoyment of God. This desire of happiness the rational creature can never lay aside, no, not even in hell.

Now, while the wicked are on earth, they seek their satisfaction in the

creature. And when one thing fails, they go to another—thus they spend their time in the world, deceiving their own souls with vain hopes.

But, in the next world, all comfort in the creatures failing, and the shadows which they are now pursuing having all vanished in a moment, they shall be totally and finally separated from God, and see they have thus lost Him.

So the doors of earth and heaven both are shut against them at once. This will create them unspeakable anguish, while they shall live under an eternal gnawing hunger after happiness, which they certainly know shall never be in the least measure satisfied, all doors being closed on them.

Who then can imagine how this separation from God shall cut the damned to the heart! How they will roar and rage under it! How it will sting and gnaw them through the ages of eternity!

(4) The damned shall know that some are perfectly happy, in the enjoyment of that God from whom they themselves are separated; and this will aggravate the sense of their loss—that they can never have any share with those happy ones.

Being separated from God, they are separated from the society of the glorified saints and angels. They may see Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, but can never come into their company; being, as unclean lepers, thrust outside of the camp, and excommunicated from the presence of the Lord, and of all His holy ones.

It is the opinion of some, that every person in heaven or hell shall hear and see all that passes in either state. Whatever is to be said for this, we have ground from the Word to conclude that the damned shall have a very accurate knowledge of the happiness of the saints in heaven; for what else can be meant of the rich man in hell seeing Lazarus in Abraham's bosom?

One thing is plain in this case, that their own torments will give them such notions of the happiness of the saints, as a sick man has of health, or a prisoner has of liberty. And as they cannot fail of reflecting on the happiness of those in heaven, without any hope of attaining to contentment with their own lot, so every thought of that happiness will aggravate their loss.

It would be a mighty torment to a hungry man, to see others liberally feasting,

while he is so chained up as not to have one crumb to stop his gnawing appetite.

To bring music and dancing before a man laboring under extreme pains, would but increase his anguish. How then will the songs of the blessed, in their enjoyment of God, make the damned mourn under their separation from Him!

(5) They will remember that time was when they might have been made partakers of the blessed company of saints, in their enjoyment of God—and this will aggravate their sense of the loss. All will remember that there was once a possibility of it; that they were once in the world, in some corners of which the way of salvation was laid open to men's view—and may wish they had gone round the world, until they had found it out.

Despisers of the Gospel will remember, with bitterness, that Jesus Christ, with all His benefits, was offered to them—that they were exhorted, entreated, and pressed to accept, but would not; and that they were warned of the misery they now feel, and exhorted to flee from the wrath to come, but they would not hearken.

The Gospel offer slighted will make a hot hell, and the loss of an offered heaven, will be a sinking weight on the spirits of unbelievers in the pit.

Some will remember that there was a probability of their being eternally happy; that once they seemed to stand fair for it, and were not far from the kingdom of God; that they had once almost consented to the blessed bargain—the pen was in their hand, as it were, to sign the marriage contract between Christ and their souls; but unhappily they dropped it, and turned away from the Lord, to their lusts again.

Others will remember that they thought themselves sure of heaven, but, being blinded with pride and self-conceit, they were above ordinances, and beyond instruction, and would not examine their state—which was their ruin. But then they will in vain wish that they had reputed themselves the worst of the congregation, and curse the fond conceit they had of themselves, and that others had of them too.

Thus it will sting the damned, that they might have escaped this loss.

(6) They will see the loss to be irrecoverable—that they must eternally lie

under it, never, never to be repaired.

Might the damned, after millions of ages in hell, regain what they have lost, it would be some ground of hope; but the prize is gone, and never can be recovered.

There are two things which will pierce them to the heart—

1. That they never knew the worth of it, until it was irrecoverably lost—

Should a man give away an earthen pot full of gold for a trifle, not knowing what was in it until it was quite gone from him, and past recovery, how would this foolish action gall him, upon the discovery of the riches in it!

Such a one's case may be a faint resemblance of the case of despisers of the Gospel, when in hell they lift up their eyes, and behold that to their torment, that which they will not see now to their salvation.

2. That they have lost it for dross and dung—sold their part of heaven, and not enriched themselves with the price. They have lost heaven for earthly profits and pleasures, and now both are gone together from them.

The drunkard's cups are gone, the covetous man's gain, the voluptuous man's carnal delights, and the sluggard's ease are gone—nothing is left to comfort them now. The happiness they lost remains indeed, but they can have no part in it forever.

Application—Sinners! be persuaded to come to God through Jesus Christ, uniting with Him through the Mediator; that you may be preserved from this fearful separation from Him. Oh, be afraid to live in a state of separation from God, lest that which you now make your choice become your eternal punishment hereafter.

Do not reject communion with God, cast not off the communion of saints, for it will be the misery of the damned to be driven out from that communion.

Cease to build up the wall of separation between God and yourself, by continuing in your sinful courses. Repent rather, in the present time, and so pull the wall down, lest the topstone be laid upon it, and it stand forever between you and happiness.

Tremble at the thought of rejection and separation from God. By whomsoever men are rejected upon earth, they ordinarily find some pity; but, if you be

thus separated from God, you will find all doors shut against you.

You will find no pity from any in heaven; neither saints nor angels will pity those whom God has utterly cast off. None will pity you in hell, where there is no love, but only loathing—all being loathed of God, loathing Him, and loathing one another.

This is a day of losses and fears. I show you a loss you would do well to fear in time—be afraid lest you lose God; for if you do, eternity will be spent in roaring out lamentations for this loss.

Oh horrid stupidity! Men are in a mighty care and concern to prevent worldly losses; but they are in danger of losing the enjoyment of God forever and ever; in danger of losing heaven, the communion of the blessed, and all good things for soul and body in another world; yet they are as careless in that matter as if they were incapable of thought!

Oh compare this present day with the day our text aims at. Today heaven is opened for those who hitherto have rejected Christ; and yet there is room, if they will come. But in that day the doors shall be shut.

'Now' Christ is saying unto you, 'Come!' 'Then' he will say—'Depart!' seeing you would not come when you were invited. 'Now' pity is shown; the Lord pities you, His servants pity you, and tell you that the pit is before you, and cry to you, that you do yourselves no harm. But 'then' you shall have no pity from God or man.

B. THE DAMNED SHALL BE PUNISHED IN HELL WITH THE PUNISHMENT OF 'SENSE' AS THEY MUST DEPART FROM GOD INTO EVERLASTING FIRE.

I am not disposed to dispute what kind of fire it is into which they shall depart, to be tormented forever, whether a material fire or not. Experience will more than satisfy the curiosity of those who are disposed rather to dispute about it, than to seek how to escape it.

Neither will I meddle with the question, Where is it? It is enough that the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never quenched, will be found somewhere by impenitent sinners.

1. But, first, I shall prove that, whatever kind of fire it is—it is more vehement and terrible than any fire we on earth are acquainted with.

Burning is the most terrible punishment, and brings the most intense pain and torment with it. By what reward could a man be induced to hold but his hand in the flame of a candle for one hour?

All imaginable pleasures on earth will never prevail with the most voluptuous man, to venture to lodge but one half hour in a burning fiery furnace!

Nor would all the wealth in the world prevail with the most covetous man to do it. Yet, on much lower terms do most men, in effect, expose themselves to everlasting fire in hell, which is more vehement and terrible than any fire we on earth are acquainted with; as will appear by the following considerations—

(a) As in heaven, grace being brought to its perfection, profit and pleasure also arrive at their height there. So sin, being come to its height in hell, the punishment of evil also arrives at its perfection there.

Therefore, as the joys of heaven are far greater than any joys which the saints obtain on earth, so the punishments of hell must be greater than any earthly torments whatever—not only in respect of the continuance of them, but also in respect of vehemence and intenseness.

(b) Why are the things of another world represented to us in an earthly dress, in the Word, but because the weakness of our capacities in such matters, which the Lord is pleased to condescend unto, requires it. It being always supposed, that the things of the other world are in their kind more perfect than those by which they are represented.

When heaven is represented to us under the notion of a city, with gates of pearl and the street of gold, we do not expect to find gold and pearls there, which are so mightily prized on earth, but something more excellent than the finest and most precious things in this world.

When therefore, we hear of hell-fire, it is necessary we understand by it something more vehement, piercing, and tormenting, than any fire ever seen by our eyes.

And here it is worth considering, that the torments of hell are held forth

under several other notions than that of fire alone. And the reason of it is plain—namely, that hereby what of horror is lacking in one notion of hell, is supplied by another.

Why is heaven's happiness represented under the various notions of a treasure, a paradise, a feast, a rest, and so forth; but that there is not one of these things sufficient to express it?

Even so, hell-torments are represented under the notion of 'fire' which the damned are cast into. A dreadful representation indeed, yet not sufficient to express the misery of the state of sinners in them!

Therefore, we hear also of 'the second death', for the damned in hell shall be ever dying.

And the 'wine-press of the wrath of God', wherein they will be trodden in anger, trampled in the Lord's fury, pressed, broken and bruised, without end.

And 'the worm that does not die', which shall eternally gnaw them.

And 'a bottomless pit,' where they will be ever sinking.

It is not simply called 'a fire,' but the 'lake' of fire and brimstone, 'a lake of fire burning with brimstone'—which one can imagine nothing more dreadful.

Yet, because fire gives light; and light, as Solomon observes (Ecc.11:7), is sweet; there is no light there, but only darkness, utter darkness!

For they must have an everlasting night, since nothing can be there which is in any measure comfortable or refreshing.

(c) Our fire cannot affect a spirit, but by way of sympathy with the body to which it is united. But hell-fire will not only pierce into the bodies, but also go directly into the souls of the damned, for it is 'prepared for the devil and his angels,' those wicked spirits, whom no fire on earth can hurt.

Job complains heavily, under the chastisements of God's fatherly hand, saying, 'The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirit' (Job 6:4).

But how will the spirits of the damned be pierced with the arrows of revenging justice! How will they be drunk up with the poison of the curse of these arrows!

How vehement must that fire be which pierces directly into the soul, and makes an everlasting burning in the spirit, the most lively and tender part of a man, wherein wounds or pains are most intolerable!

(d) The preparation of this fire proves the inexpressible vehemency and dreadfulness of it. The text calls it, 'prepared' yes, 'the prepared fire,' by way of eminence.

As the three children were not cast into ordinary fire, but a fire prepared for a particular purpose which therefore was exceeding hot, the furnace being heated seven times more than ordinary, so the damned shall find in hell a prepared fire, the like to which was never prepared by human are.

It is a fire of God's own preparing—the product of infinite wisdom, with a particular purpose—to demonstrate the most strict and severe divine justice against sin; which may sufficiently evidence to us the inconceivably intenseness thereof.

God always acts in a peculiar way, becoming His infinite greatness, whether for or against the creature—therefore, as the things He has prepared for them that love Him are great and good beyond expression or conception, so one may conclude that the things He has prepared against those who hate Him are great and terrible beyond what men can either say or think of them!

The pile of Tophet is 'fire and much wood;' the coals of that fire are 'coals of juniper,' a kind of wood which, set on fire, burns most fiercely (Psalm 120:4); 'and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it' (Isa. 30:33).

**Fire is more or less violent, according to the substance of it, and the breath by which it is blown. What heart, then, can fully conceive the horror of coals of juniper, blown up with the breath of the Lord?
No, God Himself will be a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24) to the damned; intimately present, as a devouring fire, in their souls and bodies.**

It is a fearful thing to fall into a fire, or to be shut up in a fiery furnace, on

earth! But the terror of these vanishes, when we consider how fearful it is to fall into the hands of the living God, which is the lot of the damned! For 'Who shall dwell with devouring fire? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' (Isa. 33:14).

2. As to the second point proposed, namely, the properties of the fiery torments in hell—

(a) They will be universal torments, every part of the creature being tormented in that flame. When one is cast into a fiery furnace, the fire makes its way into the very heart, and leaves no member untouched.

What part, then, can have ease, when the damned 'swim' in a lake of fire, burning with brimstone? There will their bodies be tormented and scorched forever.

And as they sinned, so shall they be tormented, in all the parts thereof, that they shall have no sound side to turn to—for what soundness or ease can there be to any part of that body, which being separated from God, and all refreshment from Him, is still in the pangs of the second death, ever dying, but never dead?

But as the soul was chief in sinning, it will be chief in suffering too, being filled quite full of the wrath of a sin-avenging God.

The damned shall be forever under the deepest impressions of God's vindictive justice against them—and this fire will melt their souls within them, like wax.

Who knows the power of that wrath which had such an effect on the Mediator standing in the room of sinners (Psalm 22:14)—'My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of me.'

Their minds shall be filled with the terrible apprehensions of God's implacable wrath—and whatever they can think upon, past, present, or to come, will aggravate their torment and anguish.

Their will shall be crossed in all things for evermore. As their will was ever contrary to the will of God's precepts, so God, in His dealing with them in the other world, shall have war with their will forever. What they would like to have, they shall not in the least obtain. But what they do not want, shall be bound upon them without remedy.

Hence, no pleasant affection shall ever spring up in their hearts any more; their love of comfort, joy, and delight, in any object whatever, shall be plucked up by the root. They will be filled with hatred, fury, and rage against God, themselves, and their fellow-creatures, whether happy in heaven, or miserable in hell, as they themselves are.

They will be sunk in sorrow, racked with anxiety, filled with horror, galled to the heart with fretting, and continually darted with despair—which will make them weep, gnash their teeth, and blaspheme forever.

'Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matt. 22:13). 'And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent—and men blasphemed God because of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.' (Rev. 16:21).

Conscience will be a worm to gnaw and prey upon them; remorse for their sins shall seize them and torment them forever, and they shall not be able to shake it off, as once they did; for 'in hell their worm does not die.' (Mark 9:44,46).

Their memory will serve but to aggravate their torment and every new reflection will bring another pang of anguish (Luke 16:25), 'But Abraham said,' to the rich man in hell, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things.'

(b) The torments in hell are manifold. Imagine the case that a man were, at one and the same time, under the violence of the gout, stone, and whatever diseases and pains have ever met together in one body—the torment of such a one would be but light in comparison to the torments of the damned.

For, as in hell there is an absence of all that is good and desirable, so there is the convergence of all evils there; since all the effects of sin and of the curse take their place in it, after the last judgment. (Rev. 20:14), 'And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire.'

There they will find a prison they can never escape out of; a lake of fire, where they will be ever swimming and burning; a pit, of which they will never find a bottom. The worm that does not die shall feed on them, as on bodies which are

interred. The fire that is not quenched shall devour them, as dead bodies which are burned. Their eyes shall be kept in blackness of darkness, without the least comfortable gleam of light. Their ears shall be filled with frightful yellings of the infernal crew. They shall taste nothing but the sharpness of God's wrath, the dregs of the cup of His fury! The stench of the burning lake of brimstone will be the smell there. And they shall feel extreme pains for evermore.

(c) They will be most intense and vehement torments, causing 'weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth' (Matt. 13:42, 22:13). They are represented to us under the notion of pangs in childbirth, which are very sharp and acute.

So says the rich man in hell (Luke 16:24), 'I am tormented,' that is, as one in the pangs of child-bearing, 'in this flame.' Ah! dreadful pangs! Horrible travail, in which both soul and body are in pangs together! Helpless anguish, hopeless and endless!

The word used for hell (Matt. 5:22), and in various other places of the New Testament, properly denotes the valley of Hinnom, the name being taken from the valley of the children of Hinnom, in which was Tophet (2 Kings 23:10), where idolaters offered their children to Moloch. This is said to have been a great bronze idol, with arms like a man's—which being heated by fire within it, the child was set in the burning arms of the idol. And, that the parent might not hear the shrieks of the child burning to death, they beat drums in the time of the horrible sacrifice; whence the place had the name of Tophet.

Thus the intenseness of the torments in hell are pointed out to us.

Some have endured grievous tortures on earth with surprising obstinacy and undaunted courage. But men's courage will fail them there, when they find themselves fallen into the hands of the living God—and no escape to be expected forever.

It is true, there will be degrees of torments in hell—'It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for Chorazin and Bethsaida' (Matt. 11:21,22). But the least load of wrath there will be insupportable; for how can the heart of the creature endure, or his hands be strong, when God Himself is a consuming fire to him?

When the tares are bound in bundles for the fire, there will be "bundles" of

covetous persons, of drunkards, profane sweaters, unclean persons, formal hypocrites, unbelievers, and despisers of the Gospel, and the like.

The several "bundles" being cast into hell-fire, some will burn more vehemently than others, according as their sins have been more heinous than those of others—a fiercer flame shall seize the bundle of the profane, than the bundle of unsanctified moralists.

The furnace will be hotter to those who have sinned against light, than to those who lived in darkness (Luke 12:47,48), "That servant which knew his lord's will, and did not do it, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.'

But the sentence common to them all—(Matt. 13:30), 'Bind them in bundles to burn them,' speaks of the great vehemency and fierceness of the lowest degree of torment in hell.

(d) The torments will be uninterrupted. There is no intermission there—no ease, no, not for a moment. They 'shall be tormented day and night forever and ever'. Few are so troubled in this world, but sometimes they get rest. But the damned shall get none. They took their rest in the time appointed of God for their labor.

Storms are rarely seen, without some space between the showers. But there is no intermission in the storm that falls on the wicked in hell. There, deep will be calling unto deep, and the waves of wrath continually rolling over them. There, the heavens will be always black to them, and they shall have a perpetual night, but no rest (Rev. 14:11), "They have no rest day nor night.'

(e) They will be unpitied. The punishments inflicted on the greatest malefactors on earth draw forth some compassion from the spectators. But the damned shall have none to pity them.

God will not pity them, but laugh at their calamity (Prov. 1:26). The blessed company in heaven shall rejoice in the execution of God's righteous judgment, and sing while their smoke rises up forever and ever (Rev. 19:3), 'And again they said, Hallelujah! And her smoke rose up forever and ever.'

No compassion can be expected from the devil and his angels, who delight in

the ruin of the children of men, and are and will be forever void of pity. Neither will one person pity another there, where every one is weeping and gnashing his teeth, under his own insupportable anguish and pain.

There, natural affection will be extinguished—parents will not love their children, nor children their parents; the mother will not pity the daughter in these flames, nor will the daughter pity the mother; the son will show no regard to his father there, nor the servant to his master, where every one will be groaning under his own torment.

(f) To complete their misery, their torments shall be eternal! 'And the smoke of their torments ascends up forever and ever.' Ah! what a frightful case is this—to be tormented in the whole body and soul, and that not with one kind of torment, but many; all of these most acute, and all this without any intermission, and without pity from any!

What heart can conceive those things without horror? Nevertheless, if this most miserable case were at length to have an end, that would afford some comfort.

But the torments of the damned will have no end!

Application—

1. Learn from this the evil of sin. It is a stream that will carry down the sinner, until he is swallowed up in the ocean of wrath!

The pleasures of sin are bought too dear, at the rate of everlasting burnings. What did the rich man's purple clothing and sumptuous food avail him, when in hell he was encircled by purple flames, and could not have a drop of water to cool his tongue?

Alas! that men should indulge themselves in sin which will bring such bitterness in the end! That they should drink so greedily of the poisonous cup, and hug that serpent in their bosom that will sting them to the heart!

2. What a God He is with whom we have to do! What hatred He bears to sin, and how severely He punishes it!

Know that the Lord is most just, as well as most merciful, but do not think that He is such an one as you are! Away with the fatal mistake before it be too

late (Ps. 50:21-2), "You thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself—but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes. Now consider this, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

The fire prepared for the devil and his angels, dark as it is, will discover God to be a severe revenger of sin. See the absolute necessity of fleeing to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith; and also the same necessity of repentance, and holiness of heart and life.

The avenger of blood is pursuing you, O sinner! Haste and escape to the city of refuge! Wash now in the fountain of the Mediator's blood, that you may not perish in the lake of fire! Open your heart to Him, lest the pit close its mouth on you! Leave your sins, else they will ruin you; kill them, else they will be your death forever!

Let not the terror of hell-fire put you upon hardening your heart more, as it may do, if you entertain that wicked thought, 'There is no hope' (Jer. 2:25), which, perhaps, is more common among the hearers of the gospel than many are aware of. But there is hope for the worst of sinners, who will come to Jesus Christ!

If there are no good qualifications in you, as certainly there can be none in a sinful man, none in any man but what are received from Christ; know that He has not suspended your welcome on any good qualifications—take Him and His salvation freely offered to all to whom the Gospel comes. 'Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely' (Rev. 22:17). 'Him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37).

It is true, you are a sinful creature, and cannot repent; you are unholy, and cannot make yourself holy. No, you have attempted to repent, to forsake sin, and to be holy, but still failed of repentance, reformation, and holiness; and therefore, you said—'There is no hope. No, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.' Truly, no wonder that the success has not answered your expectation, since you have always begun your work amiss. But first of all honor God, by believing the testimony He has given of His Son, namely, that eternal life is in Him—and honor the Son of God, by believing in Him, that is—embracing and falling in with the free offer of Christ, and of His salvation from sin and from wrath, made to you in the Gospel; trusting in Him confidently for righteousness to your justification, and also for sanctification;

seeing 'of God he is made unto us' both 'righteousness and sanctification' (1 Cor. 1:30). Then, if you have as much credit to give to the Word of God, as you would allow to the word of an honest man, offering you a gift, and saying, 'Take it, and it is yours'; you may believe that God is your God, Christ is yours, His salvation is yours, your sins are pardoned, you have strength in Him for repentance and for holiness; for all these are made over to you in the free offer of the gospel.

Believing on the Son of God, you are justified, the curse is removed. But while it lies upon you, how is it possible you should bring forth the fruits of holiness? But, if the curse is removed, that death which seized on you with the first Adam, according to the threatening (Gen. 2:17), is taken away. In consequence of which, you will find the bands of wickedness, now holding you fast in impenitence, broken asunder, as also the bands of death. So as you will be able to repent indeed from the heart—you will find the spirit of life returned to your soul, on whose departure that death ensued, so as thenceforth you will be enabled to live unto righteousness.

No man's case is so bad, but it may be mended this way, in time, to be perfectly right in eternity. And no man's case is so good, but, another way being taken, it will be ruined for time and eternity too.

III. THE DAMNED SHALL HAVE THE SOCIETY OF DEVILS IN THEIR MISERABLE STATE IN HELL—

For they must depart into "fire prepared for the devil and his angels." O horrible company! O frightful association! Who would choose to dwell in a palace haunted by devils? To be confined to the most pleasant spot of earth, with the devil and his infernal furies, would be a most terrible confinement. How would men's hearts fail them, and their hair stand up, finding themselves environed with the hellish crew!

But, ah! how much more terrible must it be, to be cast with the devils into one fire, locked up with them in one dungeon, shut up with them in one pit!

To be closed up in a den of roaring lions, girded about with serpents, surrounded with venomous asps, and to have the heart eaten out by vipers, altogether and at once, is a comparison too low to show the misery of the damned, shut up in hell with the devil and his angels!

They go about now as roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour. But then

they shall be confined in their den with their prey. They shall be filled with the wrath of God, and receive the full torment (Matt. 8:29), which they tremble in expectation of (James 2:19), being cast into the fire prepared for them.

How will these lions roar and tear! How will these serpents hiss! These dragons cast out fire! What horrible anguish will seize the damned, finding themselves in the lake of fire with the devil who deceived them! drawn there with the silken cords of temptation by these wicked spirits! and bound with them in everlasting chains under darkness!

'And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.' (Rev. 20:10)

O that men would consider this in time, renounce the devil and his lusts, and join themselves to the Lord in faith and holiness! Why should men choose such company in this world, and delight in such society, as they would not desire to associate with in the next world? Those who like not the company of the saints on earth will get none of it in eternity; but, as godless company is their delight now, they will afterwards get enough of it, when they have eternity to pass in the roaring and blaspheming society of devils and reprobates in hell! Let those who use to invoke the devil to take them, soberly consider that the company so often invited will be terrible at last, when come.

IV. THE ETERNITY OF THE WHOLE—

And, Lastly, Let us consider the eternity of the whole, the everlasting continuance of the miserable state of the damned in hell.

A. If I could, I would show WHAT ETERNITY IS, I mean, the creature's eternity. But who can measure the waters of the ocean? Or who can tell you the days, years, and ages of eternity, which are infinitely more than the drops of the ocean?

None can comprehend eternity but the eternal God. Eternity is an ocean whereof we shall never see the shore; it is a deep where we can find no bottom; a labyrinth from whence we cannot extricate ourselves, and where we shall ever lose the door. There are two things we may say of it—

1. It has a beginning. God's eternity has no beginning, but the creature's has. Once there was no lake of fire; and those who have been there for some

hundreds of years, were once in time, as we now are.

2. It shall never have an end. The first who entered into the eternity of woe is as far from the end of it as the last who shall go there will be at his entry. They who have launched out furthest into that ocean are as far from land as they were the first moment they went into it—and, thousands of ages after this they will be as far from it as ever. Wherefore eternity, which is before us, is a duration that has a beginning but no end.

It is a beginning without a middle, a beginning without an end. After millions of years passed in it, still it is beginning! God's wrath in hell will ever be the wrath to come! There is no middle in eternity! When millions of ages are past in eternity, what is past bears no proportion to what is to come—no, not so much as one drop of water, falling from the tip of one's finger, as compared to all the waters of the ocean.

There is no end of it—while God is, it shall be. It is an entry without an end to it, a continual succession of ages, a glass always running, which shall never run out.

Observe the continual succession of hours, days, months, and years, how one still follows upon another; and think of eternity, wherein there is a continual succession without end. When you go out at night and behold the stars of heaven, how they cannot be numbered for multitude, think of the ages of eternity; consider also, there is a certain definite number of stars, but no number of the ages of eternity.

When you see water running in a river, think how vain a thing it would be to sit down by it, and wait until it should run out, that you may pass over; observe how new water still succeeds to that which passes by you—and therein you have an image of eternity, which is a river that never dries up.

They who wear rings have an image of eternity on their fingers; and they who handle the wheel have an emblem of eternity before them—for to whichever part of the ring or wheel we look, one will still see another part beyond it; and on whatever moment of eternity you meditate, there is still another beyond it.

When you are abroad in the fields, and behold the blades of grass on the earth, which no man can reckon, think with yourselves, that, were as many thousands of years to come, as there are blades of grass on the ground, even

those would have an end at length; but eternity will have none.

When you look to a mountain, imagine in your hearts how long would it be before that mountain should be removed by a little bird coming but once every thousand years, and carrying away but one grain of the dust of it—the mountain would at length be removed that way, and brought to an end; but eternity will never end.

Suppose this with respect to all the mountains of the earth, no, with respect to the whole globe itself—the grains of dust of which the whole of it is made up are not infinite; and therefore the last grain would, at length, come to be carried away, as seen above—yet eternity would be, in effect, but beginning.

These are some crude emblems of eternity! And now add misery and woe to this eternity, what tongue can express it? What heart can conceive it? In what balance can that misery and that woe be weighed?

B. Let us take A VIEW OF WHAT IS ETERNAL, IN THE STATE OF THE DAMNED IN HELL—Whatever is included in the fearful torments of their state, is everlasting—therefore all the doleful ingredients of their miserable state will be everlasting—they will never end.

The text expressly declares the fire, into which they must depart, to be everlasting fire. And our Lord elsewhere tells us, that in hell, the fire never shall be quenched (Mark 9:43). He had an eye to the valley of Hinnom, in which, besides the before mentioned fire for burning the children to Molech, there was also another fire burning continually, to consume the dead carcasses and filth of Jerusalem—so the Scripture, representing hell-fire by the fire of that valley, speaks of it not only to be most intense, but also everlasting. Seeing, then, the damned must depart, as cursed ones, into everlasting fire, it is evident that—

(1) The damned themselves shall be eternal; they will have a being for ever, and will never be substantially destroyed or annihilated.

To what end is the fire eternal, if those who are cast into it be not eternally in it? It is plain, the everlasting continuance of the fire is an aggravation of the misery of the damned. But, surely, if they be annihilated, or substantially destroyed, it would be all the same to them, whether the fire be everlasting or not. No, but they depart into everlasting fire, to be everlastingly punished in it.

(Matt. 25:46), 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment.' Thus the execution of the sentence is a certain discovery of the meaning of it.

The worm, that dies not, must have a subject to live in—they, who shall have no rest, day nor night (Rev. 14:11), but shall be 'tormented day and night forever and ever' (Rev. 20:10). They will certainly have a being for ever and ever, and not be brought into a state of eternal rest in annihilation.

Destroyed indeed they shall be—but their destruction will be an everlasting destruction (2 Thess. 1:9); a destruction of their well-being, but not of their being. What is destroyed is not therefore annihilated—'Are you come to destroy us?' said the devil unto Jesus Christ (Luke 4:34). The devils are afraid of torment, not of annihilation (Matt. 8:29), 'Are you come here to torment us before the time?'

The state of the damned is indeed a state of death; but such a death it is as is opposite only to a happy life, as is clear from other notions of their state, which necessarily include eternal existence. As they who are dead in sin are dead to God and holiness, yet alive to sin—so dying in hell they live, but separated from God and His favor, in which is life (Psalm 30:5). They shall ever be under the pangs of death; ever dying, but never dead, or absolutely void of life.

How desirable would such a death be to them! But it will flee from them forever. Could they kill one another there, or could they, with their own hands, tear themselves into lifeless pieces, their misery would quickly be at an end. But there they must live, whom chose death and refused life; for there death lives, and the end ever begins.

(2) The curse shall lie upon them eternally, as the everlasting chain to hold them in the everlasting fire—a chain that shall never be loosed, being fixed forever about them by the dreadful sentence of the eternal judgment. This chain, which spurns the united force of devils held fast by it, is too strong to be broken by men, who being solemnly anathematized and devoted to destruction., can never be recovered to any other use.

(3) Their punishment shall be eternal. 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment.' They will be forever separated from God and Christ, and from the society of the holy angels and saints, between them an impassable gulf will be fixed—'And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been

fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

They shall forever have the horrible society of the devil and his angels. There will be no change of company forever in that region of darkness. Their torment in the fire will be everlasting—they must live forever in it.

Several authors, both ancient and modern, tell us of earth-flax, or salamander's hairs, that cloth made of it, being cast into the fire, is so far from being burnt or consumed, that it is only made clean thereby, as other things are by washing. But however that is, it is certain the damned shall be tormented forever and ever in hell-fire, and not substantially destroyed (Rev. 20:10). And indeed nothing is annihilated by fire, but only dissolved. Of whatever nature hell-fire is, no question, the same God who kept the bodies of the three children from burning in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, can also keep the bodies of the damned from any such dissolution by hell-fire as may infer privation of life.

(4) Their knowledge and 'sense' of their misery shall be eternal, and they shall assuredly know that it will be eternal. How desirable would it be to them to have their 'sense' forever locked up, and to lose the consciousness of their own misery—as one may rationally suppose it to fare at length with some, in the punishment of death inflicted on them on earth, and as it is with some insane people; but that agrees not with the notion of torment forever and ever, nor the worm that dies not.

No, they will ever have a lively feeling of their misery, and strongest impressions of the wrath of God against them. And that dreadful intimation of the eternity of their punishment, made to them by their Judge, in their sentence, will fix such impressions of the 'eternity of their miserable state' upon their minds, as they will never be able to lay it aside; but will continue with them evermore, to complete their misery.

This will fill them with everlasting despair; a most tormenting passion, which will continually rend their hearts, as it were, in a thousand pieces.

To see floods of wrath ever coming, and never to cease; to be forever in torment, and to know that there shall never, never be a release, will be the topstone put on the misery of the damned!

If hope deferred makes the heart sick' (Prov. 13:12), how killing will it be for hope to be rooted up, slain outright, and buried forever out of the creature's sight!

This will fill them with hatred and rage against God, their known irreconcilable enemy; and under it, they will roar forever, like wild bulls in a net, and fill the pit with blasphemies evermore.

I might here show the reasonableness of the eternity of the punishment of the damned—but, having already spoken of it, in vindicating the justice of God, in His subjecting men in their natural state to eternal wrath, I only remind you of three things—

1. The infinite dignity of the party offended by sin requires an infinite punishment to be inflicted for the vindication of His honor, since the demerit of sin rises according to the dignity and excellence of the person against whom it is committed.

The party offended is the great God, the chief good—the offender a vile worm; in respect to perfection, infinitely distant from God, to whom he is indebted for all the good that he ever had. This then requires an infinite punishment to be inflicted on the sinner; which, since it cannot in him be infinite in value, must needs be infinite in duration, that is to say, eternal.

Sin is a kind of infinite evil, as it wrongs an infinite God; and the guilt and defilement of it is never taken away, but endures forever, unless the Lord Himself in mercy remove it.

God, who is offended, is eternal; His being never comes to an end—the sinful soul is immortal, and the man shall live forever. The sinner, being without strength (Rom. 5:6) to expiate his guilt, can never put away the offence; therefore it ever remains, unless the Lord put it away Himself, as in the elect, by His Son's blood.

Therefore the party offended, the offender, and the offence, forever remaining, the punishment cannot but be eternal!

2. The sinner would have continued the course of his provocations against God forever without end, if God had not put a check to it by death. As long as they were capable of acting against Him in this world, they did it—and therefore justly will He act against them, while He is; that is, forever.

God, who judges of the will, intents, and inclinations of the heart, may justly do against sinners, in punishing, as they would have done against Him in sinning.

3. Though I put not the stress of the matter here, yet it is just and reasonable that the damned suffer eternally, since they will sin eternally in hell, gnashing their teeth (Matt. 8:12), under their pain, in rage, envy, and grudge (compare Acts 7:54; Psalm 112:10; Luke 13:28), and blaspheming God there (Rev. 16:21) while they are driven away in their wickedness (Prov. 14:32).

That the wicked be punished for their wickedness is just, and it is in no way inconsistent with justice that the being of the creature be continued forever—wherefore it is just that the damned, continuing wicked eternally, do suffer eternally for their wickedness.

The misery, under which they sin, can neither free them from the debt of obedience, nor excuse their sinning and make it blameless. The creature, as a creature, is bound unto obedience to his Creator; and no punishment inflicted on him can free him from it, any more than the malefactor's prison, irons, whipping, and the like, set him at liberty again, to commit the crimes for which he is imprisoned or whipped.

Neither can the torments of the damned excuse, or make blameless, their horrible sinning under them, any more than exquisite pains, inflicted upon men on earth, can excuse their murmuring, fretting, and blaspheming against God under them.

It is not the wrath of God, but their own wicked nature, that is the true cause of their sinning under it; for the holy Jesus bore the wrath of God without so much as one unbecoming thought of God, and far less any one unbecoming word.

Application

1. Here is a measuring rod—O that men would apply it! Apply it to your own time in this world, and you will find your time to be very short. A prospect of much time to come, proves the ruin of many souls. Men will be reckoning their time by 'years', like that rich man (Luke 12:19-20), when, it may be, there are not many 'hours' of it to run. But reckon as you will, laying your time to the measuring reed of eternity, you will see your age is as nothing.

What a small and inconsiderable point is sixty, eighty, or a hundred years, in respect of eternity! Compared with eternity, there is a greater disproportion than between a hair's breadth and the circumference of the whole earth.

Why do we then sleep in such a short day, while we are in danger of losing rest through the long night of eternity?

Apply it to your endeavors for salvation, and they will be found very scanty. When men are pressed to diligence in their salvation work, they are ready to say, 'To what purpose is this waste?'

Alas! if it were to be judged by our diligence, what end it is that we have in view; as to the most part of us, no man could thereby conjecture that we have eternity in view. If we duly considered eternity, we could not but conclude, that, to leave no appointed means of God untried until we get our salvation secured—to refuse rest or comfort in anything, until we are sheltered under the wings of the Mediator—to pursue our great interest with the utmost vigor to cut off lusts dear as right hands and right eyes—to set our faces resolutely against all difficulties—and fight our way through all opposition made by the devil, the world, and the flesh. These are, all of them together, little enough for eternity.

2. Here is a balance of the sanctuary, by which we may understand the lightness of what is falsely thought weighty; and the weight of some things, by many reckoned to be very light.

Some things seem very weighty, which, weighed in this balance, will be found very light—

(a) Weigh the world, and all that is in it, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and the whole will be found light in the balance of eternity.

Weigh herein all worldly profits, gains, and advantages; and you will quickly see, that a thousand worlds will not compensate for an eternity of woe! 'For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Matt. 16:26). Weigh the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, with the fire that is everlasting, and you show yourself to be fools and madmen, to run the hazard of losing the one for the other.

(b) Weigh your afflictions in this balance, and you will find the heaviest of

them very light, in respect of the weight of eternal anguish. Impatience under affliction, especially when worldly troubles so embitter men's spirits that they cannot relish the glad tidings of the Gospel, speaks great regardlessness of eternity.

As a small and inconsiderable loss will be very little at heart with him who sees himself in danger of losing his whole estate; so troubles in the world will appear but light to him who has a lively view of eternity. Such a one will stoop and take up his cross, whatever it be, thinking it enough to escape eternal wrath.

(c) Weigh the most difficult and uneasy duties of religion here, and you will no more reckon the yoke of Christ insupportable.

Repentance and bitter mourning for sin, on earth, are very light in comparison of eternal weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth in hell! To wrestle with God in prayer, weeping and making supplication for the blessing in time, is far easier than to lie under the curse through all eternity! Mortification of the most beloved lust is a light thing in comparison with the second death in hell!

(d) Weigh your convictions in this balance. O how heavy do those lie upon many until they get them shaken off! They are not disposed to continue with them, but strive to get clear of them as of a mighty burden. But the worm of a bad conscience will neither die nor sleep in hell, though we may now lull it asleep for a time.

And certainly it is easier to entertain the sharpest convictions in this life, so that they lead us to Christ, than to have them fixed forever in the conscience, and to be in hell totally and finally separated from Him.

But, on the other hand, weigh sin in this balance, and, though now it seems but a light thing to you, you will find it a weight sufficient to turn up an eternal weight of wrath upon you.

Even idle words, vain thoughts, and unprofitable actions, weighed in this balance, and considered as following the sinner into eternity, will each of them be heavier than the sand of the sea! Time idly spent will make a weary eternity!

Now is your seedtime; thoughts, words, and actions, are the seed sown, eternity is the harvest. Though the seed now lies under the clod, disregarded by most men, even the least grain shall spring up at length; and the fruit will be according to the seed (Gal. 6:8), 'For he that sows to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption, (that is, destruction), but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.'

Weigh in this balance your time and opportunities of grace and salvation, and you will find them very weighty. Precious time and seasons of grace, Sabbaths, communions, prayers, sermons, and the like, are by many, now-a-days made light of; but the day is coming when one of these will be reckoned more valuable than a thousand worlds by those who now have the least value for them! When they are gone forever, and the loss cannot be retrieved, those will see the worth of them who will not now see it.

3. Be warned and stirred up to flee from the wrath to come! Mind eternity, and closely ply the work of your salvation. What are you doing, while you are not so doing? Is heaven a fable, or hell a false alarm? Must we live eternally, and shall we be at no more pains to escape everlasting misery? Will faint wishes take the kingdom of heaven by force? Will such drowsy endeavors as most men satisfy themselves with, be accounted fleeing from the wrath to come?

You who have already fled to Christ, up, and be doing. You who have begun the work, go on and loiter not, but 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling'. 'Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell'. Remember you are not yet ascended into heaven; you are but in your middle state.

The everlasting arms have drawn you out of the gulf of wrath you were plunged into, in your natural state; they are still underneath you, that you can never fall down into it again. Nevertheless, you have not yet got up to the top of the rock; the deep below you is frightful—look at it, and hasten your ascent.

You who are yet in your sinful state, lift up your eyes and take a view of the eternal state. Arise, you profane persons, you ignorant ones, you formal hypocrites, strangers to the power of godliness, and flee from the wrath to come!

Let not the young venture to delay a moment longer, nor the old put off this work any more—'Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;' lest He swear in His wrath that you shall never enter into His rest.

It is no time to linger in a state of sin, as in Sodom, when fire and brimstone are coming down on it from the Lord. Take warning in time. They who are in hell are not troubled with such warnings, but are enraged against themselves, because they slighted the warning when they had it.

Consider, I beg you, how uneasy it is to lie one whole night on a soft bed in perfect health, when we gladly would have sleep but cannot get it, sleep being departed from us. How often do we in that case, wish for rest! how full of tossings to and fro!

But ah! how dreadful must it be to lie in sorrow, wrapped up in scorching flames throughout eternity, in that place where they have no rest day nor night!

How terrible would it be to live under violent pains of the colic or stone for forty or sixty years together without any intermission! Yet that is but a very small thing compared with eternal separation from God, the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never quenched!

Eternity is an awful thought! O long, long endless eternity! But will not every moment in eternity of woe seem a month, and every hour a year, in that most wretched and desperate condition? Hence, 'ever and ever', as it were, a double eternity.

The sick man in the night, tossing to and fro on his bed, says it will never be day, and complains that his pain ever continues—it never, never abates. Are these 'petty time-eternities', which men form to themselves in their own imaginations, so very grievous? Alas! then, how grievous, how utterly insupportable, must a real eternity of woe, and all manner of miseries, be!

There will be space enough there to reflect on all the ills of our heart and life, which we cannot get time to think of now; and to see that all that was said of the impenitent sinner's hazard was true, and that the half was not told. There will be space enough in eternity to carry on delayed repentance, to lament one's follies when it is too late; and in a state past remedy to speak forth these fruitless wishes—O that I had never been born! that the womb had been my

grave, and I had never seen the sun!

O that I had taken warning in time, and fled from this wrath while the door of mercy was standing open to me! O that I had never heard the Gospel, that I had lived in some corner of the world where a Savior and the great salvation were not once named!

But all in vain. What is done cannot be undone; the opportunity is lost, and can never be retrieved; time is gone, and can never be recalled. Therefore, improve time while you have it, and do not willfully ruin yourself by stopping your ear to the Gospel call.

And now, if you would be saved from the wrath to come, and never go into this place of torment, take no rest in your natural state; believe the sinfulness and misery of it, and labor to get out of it quickly, fleeing unto Jesus Christ by faith.

Sin in you is the seed of hell—and if the guilt and reigning power of it be not removed in time, they will bring you to the second death in eternity.

There is no way to get them removed, but by receiving Christ as He is offered in the Gospel, for justification and sanctification—and He is now offered to you with all His salvation (Rev. 22:12,17), 'And behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that hears say, Come; and let him that is thirsty come. And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.'

Jesus Christ is the Mediator of peace, and the fountain of holiness—He it is who delivers us from the wrath to come. 'There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (Rom. 8:1).

The terrors of hell, as well as the joys of heaven, are set before you, to stir you up to a cordial receiving of Him, with all His salvation; and to incline you to the way of faith and holiness, in which alone you can escape the everlasting fire.

May the Lord Himself make them effectual to that end!