

fluences, are nowhere promised to men after death, but are invariably represented as having their sphere of activity within the present dispensation of grace : (4) in the kindred fact that the Church, the Sacraments, Christian fellowship and influence, and the other administrative forces incorporated with the Gospel, are never represented as being utilized or available beyond the grave, but always as belonging to an earthly and temporary economy of salvation : (5) in the Biblical offer of forgiveness, which, with the possible exception of Matt. xii: 32—an exception which is possible only, and which, on closer scrutiny, turns out to be in harmony with the uniform teaching elsewhere—is always limited to the present life, and is in no case promised after death : (6) in the obvious and invariable teaching of the Bible that our present life is in every case a solemn, responsible stewardship, for whose administration every soul is summoned at death to a strict, impartial, and decisive account : and (7) in the kindred teaching, scattered everywhere through the Scripture, but specially concentrated in the utterances of our Lord Himself, that both reward and retribution immediately follow in each instance upon the use or the misuse of such earthly stewardship, and that such reward and retribution are alike unchangeable and without end.

(1.) Two points in this Biblical response to the dogma in question deserve especial notice. The first relates to the amazing series of inferences derived from the obscure, perplexing passage in I. Peter, respecting the preaching to the spirits in prison. It is needless to refer to the various interpretations of this text; whether it describes a personal ministration or a ministry through Noah; whether it is a ministry in incarnate form or in spirit; whether it contemplated simply the antediluvian world, or included all who died prior to the Advent, or comprehended the entire multitude of the dead; whether it was a ministry of grace or a proclamation of triumph—a revelation of glory. In the presence of these and other like perplexities as yet unsolved by the most careful exegesis, and perhaps insoluble with such light as is now obtainable, is it not an astounding evolution which derives from this obscure text, and its possible corollary in 1 Peter iv: 6, the notion that our Lord, during the few hours between His death and His resurrection, went into the world of the dead, and there set up an economy of grace which was a duplicate, substantially, of that instituted by Him during His incarnate life on the earth—an economy which has continued down to the present time, with essentially the same truths, appeals, incentives, warnings, that characterize the Gospel among men; and which may continue for long periods until every soul among the dead has heard of Christ and had full opportunity to receive Him, and possibly until all the dead have actually received Him, and have been converted and saved through Him? The astounding quality of this hypothesis grows upon us, & we strive