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DIVINITY.

The following Discourse taken from THORNTON'S "Advantages of Early Piety," is particularly intended for the benefit of our young readers; their attentive perusal, is therefore earnestly solicited. We shall probably hereafter give other sermons, or extracts from the same work. Concerning these discourses, the Author in his Preface has said—

"With the hope of exciting the youthful mind to seek an acquaintance with religion, and an enjoyment of its blessings, the following Discourses were addressed to the people among whom it is my lot to labour; and from the influence of the same motive they are now committed to the press."

"I can truly say, it gave me great pleasure to deliver these Discourses to my young friends; and it will doubtless be a pleasure, if the God of all grace should render them of the smallest advantage to those who read them."

THE FEAR OF THE LORD, A PRESERVATIVE FROM RUIN.

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the sources of death.—Prov. xiv. 27.

The noted Caesar Borgia said, in his last moments, "I had provided in the course of my life for every thing, except death: and now, alas! I am to die, though entirely unprepared." Is such the fruit of folly and vice? Is this the end of an invidious course? How weighty and important then, is the counsel of Solomon! "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

To you, my young friends, I would now particularly address myself. I feel deeply concerned to promote your eternal welfare. That God, who searches the heart, is my witness, how much pleasure it would afford me, to undertake any labours that would do you good. I know the innumerable dangers that beset your path, and the carelessness and levity which generally prevail among the young. I know how easily you are apt to be drawn on by the giddy multitude, in those ways that issue in ruin. I would therefore address you with all the faithfulness and earnestness of one who has to watch for your souls, and to give up his account at the bar of an omniscient Judge. With the tenderness and affection of a friend, I would take you by the hand, and lead you to that blessed and all-sufficient Saviour, whose yoke is easy, and whose favour is life. Thus I openly avow to you my design. It is not to cast a damp upon your spirits, or a gloom over your minds; but to bring you acquainted with true religion, which will prove a fence to guard you from danger, and a clue to guide you to solid and lasting happiness. Let me then intreat your serious attention to the subject of the present discourse.

I. What are we to understand by the fear of the Lord mentioned in the text?

There is a natural fear, which urges us to flee from danger. This appears in children, before they can discern the difference between moral good and evil. They are afraid of fire, of fierce animals, of thunder, or of any terrible object.

There is a guilty fear, which often follows the commission of daring crimes. How painful must be the condition of those persons, who have nothing before them but dark prospects; and nothing within, but the stings of a troubled conscience! We need not wonder, that they should dread to be left alone, or tremble at the approach of death. Such a guilty slavish fear seized Cain the murderer; Belshazzar, the impious king of Babylon; and Pashar, the false prophet, Gen. iv. 13. Dan v. 6. Jer. xx. 3, 4.

The fear, however, mentioned in my text, differs greatly from the terror which guilt produces. It is a holy principle, that sets us against all sin. It resembles the fear which a dutiful child feels towards a loving parent, rather than that which a slave feels towards a cruel master. The fear of the Lord can dwell only in an enlightened mind, a tender conscience, and a renewed heart.

The mind must be enlightened. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." In this wretched state are all by nature. Those who hate knowledge, do not choose the fear of the Lord. When the apostle Paul, in Rom. iii. 9, &c. gives a full picture of the character of wicked men, he begins by saying, there is none that understandeth; and he ends by declaring, there is no fear of God before their eyes. But those who have that anointing which teacheth all things, begin to see the truth and importance of religion, and to feel a deep and serious concern about their everlasting state. They have the Holy Spirit, as a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Slavish terror prevails most under the thick and dismal gloom of ignorance and superstition; but holy reverence can spring up in that soul only, which enjoys the cheering rays of divine light.

The fear of the Lord dwells in a tender conscience. Sin is of a hardening nature. It steels the soul to resist every serious impression. Hence Paul speaks of the conscience being seared as with a hot iron. Where this is the case, is it not vain to expect to make any deep impression? As soon might you cause a wooden weapon to penetrate a brazen wall; or with a pen of straw write letters upon a flint. A tender conscience cannot endure iniquity. The least known sin gives it pain; just as the smallest particle of sand renders the eye uneasy, till it is worked or wept out. The sincere and enlightened Christian, therefore, not only avoids gross crimes, but flees from the very appearance of evil.

Now, it cannot be denied, that youth is a season more favourable to this tenderness of conscience, than any other. When repeated acts of sin and folly begin to grow into firm, deep-rooted habits, all warnings end, and counsels lose their effect.

'Tis granted, and no plainer truth appears,
Our most important are our earliest years;
The mind, impressible and soft, with ease
Imbibes and copies what she hears and sees;
And thro' life's labyrinth, holds fast the clue
That education gives her, false or true.

COWPER.

The fear of the Lord dwells in a renewed heart.

Our nature is deeply corrupted. Human endeavours may check, but Divine power only can thoroughly change it. Now it is one of the promises of God's gracious covenant, "A new heart will I give them, and a new spirit will I put within them." Wherever the soul is thus prepared, the incorruptible seed of truth takes root, and yields abundant fruit. This pleasing subject may be seen at large unfolded, Jer. xxxii. 39, 40. "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and for their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Here we see godly fear is more promoted by the promises, than the threatenings; by the drawings of love, than the courges of wrath. It is a principle that takes its rise from free, abounding grace. The hand of God puts it in the heart, and keeps it alive there, as the vital spring of evangelical obedience. "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear." Heb. xii. 28.

No form of words is more frequently used in the Scripture to describe the people of God, than the language of the text. It is declared that Job was a perfect and an upright man, who feared God and eschewed evil. Of Hannaniah it is said, he was a faithful man, and feared God above many. Obadiah, even at a time when true religion exposed its

professors to the greatest danger, boldly dared to assert, I fear the Lord from my youth.

And now, my young friends, by what spirit are you actuated? Who is among you that feareth the Lord? I hope there are some of this character; but too many, alas! are of an opposite stamp. Certainly, you do not fear the Lord, who boldly take his name in vain. Some of you, probably, learned to swear almost as soon as you learned to speak, and now can scarcely open your mouths without pouring out horrid oaths. It is certain you do not fear God, who mispend the sacred day; and give those precious hours to vain amusements, which ought to be devoted to spiritual concerns. It is very evident that you do not fear God, who rush on into sin and danger, as the eager horse rushes into the battle. Let it never be forgotten, that "The fear of the Lord is to depart from evil." If you are still hardened, and urged on in evil ways, O that the arrows of divine truth might this day find their way to your hearts! And perhaps, even at this moment, the mind of some rash, presumptuous, unhappy youth, may be pierced with a deep conviction of guilt and danger, and whose pungent feelings poured into words, would be, What shall I do to be saved? Should such an one hear my voice, I would point him to that precious and Almighty Saviour, who snatches from the borders of despair the chief of sinners. O look up to the throne of grace, for the enlightening, softening, and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit! Then will you live and walk in the fear of the Lord, and dwell safely.

II. How does the fear of the Lord become a preservative from final ruin?

1. Let it be constantly remembered, that the most dreadful destruction hangs like a dark gathering tempest over the heads of the wicked. They may talk of their goodness, and boast aloud of their pleasure; but they will find it an evil thing, and bitter, that they have departed from the Lord, and that his fear was not in them. The whole weight and measure of future punishment is, in my text, expressed in one awful word—death. Big with meaning, it includes whatever is elsewhere spoken at large of the thunder of God's resistless power, and the vials of his tremendous wrath. When Jehovah says, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die—If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die;" it implies much more than that event which comes alike to all. It is something infinitely more terrible than that stroke which will stop the pulse, take away the breath, and for ever close the eyes to all things under the sun. When a wicked man dies, he not only loses all his earthly treasures and delights, but is at once cut off from the joys and hopes of heaven, and consigned to the intolerable woes and agonies of hell. The workers of iniquity will not fail of receiving their reward. And what is it? The wages of sin is death. Dreadful recompence! To bid an eternal farewell to all the bright glories above; to feel the anguish of a guilty conscience gnawing the soul, without one interval of ease; to sink under the sentence of condemnation into the blackness of darkness, and the burning lake for ever; this is the second death! O the madness of rushing into such a depth of misery, through eagerness to gratify the passions and lusts of the flesh, or to follow the mischievous customs of an evil world! Yet, are there not among you of this character? "Yes; you are lifting your souls unto vanity; but these vanities are your all. You pursue them with the utmost vigour and intenceness of mind, and have great many fond and foolish schemes for pleasure and happiness yet to come. But if God cut you off in the prime of your life, and the flower of your hopes, in that very day all your thoughts will perish. And how will you be confounded, to see all the beautiful and enchanting scenes which now charm you, to the neglect of God and religion, vanished like the shadowy glories of a dream, and your souls left naked and destitute upon an inhospitable shore, where, in all your distress, there will be no eye to