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A N

HUMBLE TESTIMONY

UNTO THE

GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD,

IN HIS DEALING WITH

SINFUL CHURCHES AND NATIONS:

OR,

The only way to deliver a Sinful Nation from utter ruin

BY

IMPENDENT JUDGMENTS.

IN A

DISCOURSE

On the words of our Lord Jesus Christ,

LUKE xiii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

*Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew
my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins.
Isa. lviii. 1.*

BY JOHN OWEN, D. D.

In publico discrimine omnis homo miles est.

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TO THE READER.

THE ensuing discourse contains the substance of sundry sermons preached in a private congregation. Some, who heard them, considering the subject-matter treated of, and the design in them, with respect unto the present state of things in this nation, did judge that it might be convenient and seasonable to make them more public, for the use and benefit of others. But knowing how remote I was for any such intention in their first composition, and how naked they were of all ornaments that might render them meet for public view, I was unwilling, for a season, to comply with their desires. Neither was it their importunity, (which as they did not use, so I should not in this case have valued), but their reasons, that prevailed with me to consent that they might be published by any that had a mind thereunto, which is all my concernment therein. For they said, that whereas the land wherein we live is filled with sin, and various indications of God's displeasure thereon, yet there is an unexampled neglect in calling the inhabitants of it unto *repentance*, for the diverting of *impendent judgments*. The very heathen, they

a 2 said.

faid, upon lefs evidence of the approaches of Divine vengeance than is now amongst us, did always solemnly apply themselves to their deities, for the turning it away. Wherefore, this *neglect* amongst us they supposed to be of such ill abode, as that the weakeft and meanest endeavour for *relief* under it might be of some use; and of that nature I cannot but esteem this discourse to be.

They added, moreover, that whereas, on various accounts, there are continual apprehensions of *public calamities*, all mens thoughts are exercised about the ways of deliverance from them. But whereas they fix themselves on various and opposite ways and means for this end, the conflict of their counsels and designs encreaseth our danger, and is like to prove our ruin. And the great cause hereof is, a general *ignorance* and *neglect* of the only true way and means whereby this nation may be delivered from *destruction* under the displeasure of God. For if their thoughts did agree and center therein, as it would insensibly work them off from their present mutual destructive animosities; so also it is of such a nature as would lead them into a coalescence in those counsels, whose fruit would be the establishment of *truth* with *righteousness* and *peace*. Now this way is no other but *sincere repentance*,

repentance, and *universal reformation* in all sorts of persons throughout the nation.

That this is the only way for the saving of this nation from *impending judgments* and *wasting desolations*; that this way will be effectual unto that end, when all others shall fail, is asserted and proved in this discourse, from the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, to confront the wisdom of politicians, who are otherwise minded, with a plain word of *truth* and *power*.

It was hoped also by them, that some intimation of their duty might be hereby given unto those, who, having the ministerial oversight of the generality of the people, to divert their minds unto the petty differences and contests, whilst the fire of Gods displeasure for sin is ready to devour their habitations. And the truth is, if they persist in their negligence, if they give not a public evidence, at this season, of their zeal for *repentance* and *reformation of life*, among all sorts of persons, going before them in their example and endeavours, unto the promotion of them, I understand not how they will give an account of their trust and duty to God or men.

And therefore, were I worthy to give advice to any of my brethren in the ministry, who are in the same condition with myself, as unto outward circumstances, it should be
this

this only; namely, that whilst others do seek to obstruct them in the whole discharge of their duty, and to deprive the Church of the benefit of their labours, they would, by their own personal example, by peculiar endeavours in their congregations, among all that hear them, and on every occasion, so press the present calls of God unto *repentance*, and so promote the work of a *visible reformation*, as eminently to help in saving of the nation from *approaching judgments*, and therein, of them also who design their trouble; and I doubt not, but most of them are already engaged and forward herein.

This shall be our testimony, and our peace, in whatever may befall us in this world.

Let us not satisfy ourselves, that our congregations are in so good a posture, as that they may continue for our lives; and so be like ill tenants, who care not if their houses fall upon the expiration of the term of their interest in them. That reparation is required of us, which may make them serve for succeeding generations.

And when any church is so inobservant of its own decays, as to be negligent of endeavours for proportionable reformation, if, after a while, any will deliver their own souls, it must be by a departure from them that *hate to be reformed*.

It is a fond imagination, that churches may render their communion useleſs and dangerous only by hereſy, tyranny, and falſe worſhip. An evil, worldly, corrupt converſation in the generality of their members, contrary to the doctrine of the goſpel, not oppoſed and contradicted by a conſtant endeavour for *ſincere reformation*, is no leſs ruinous unto the being of churches, than any of theſe other evils.

On theſe, and ſuch like conſiderations, I was not unwilling that this plain diſcourſe ſhould be expoſed to public view; hoping that it might ſtir up others, of greater abilities and opportunities, more effectually to purſue the ſame deſign, I do not think it needful to make any apology for the plainneſs both of the matter and ſtile in this ſmall treatiſe.

The leaſt endeavour to attire a diſcourſe of this nature, with the ornaments of ſpeech or language, is even ridiculous; it is more fit to bear the furrows of ſighs and tears, than to be ſmoothed and flouriſhed with the oily colours of elegance and rhetoric.

And as for the obvious plainneſs of the matter contained in it, it is ſuited, as I judge, unto them whoſe good is principally deſigned therein. Plain men have ſinned as well as others, though, it may be, not unto ſo high a degree, nor in ſuch an outrage of exceſs.

However,

However, on many considerations, they are likely first to suffer, unless *impudent judgments* are diverted by *repentance*.

I do but a little plead with every man for himself, and in his own cause. Neither, however wise or learned men may be, is it meet, in this case, to treat them otherwise. It is to no purpose to make a fine speech unto such as are falling into a lethargy; nor to discourse learnedly of the art of navigation, unto them that are ready to perish in a storm; they must be plain words and plain things that are forcible in this case. And these by whom they are despised, from any principle of self-elation, give but an uncomfortable indication of what will be the issue of their dangers.

AN HUMBLE TESTIMONY, &c.

LUKE xiii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

There were present at that season, some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

And Jesus answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?

I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them; think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

IT is a part and duty of spiritual wisdom, as also an evidence of a due reverence of God, to take notice of *extraordinary occurrences* in the dispensations of his providence; for they are instructive warnings, and of great importance in his government of the world. In them the *voice of the Lord crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see his name*. And there is a mark left on them, as profligate persons, who will not see when his hand is so lifted up. An example of this wisdom is given us here in our blessed Saviour; who, on the report that was made unto him of some severe *providential accidents*, then newly fallen out, gives an exposition of the mind of God in them, with an *application* of them unto the present duty of them that heard him, and ours therein.

Some things may be observed in general, to give

light into the context, and the design of our Saviour in this holy discourse.

I. THE *time* when the things mentioned did fall out, and wherein our Saviour passed this judgment on them.

1. It was a time of *great sin*; of the abounding of all sorts of sins: the *nation*, as such, in its rulers and rule; the *church*, as such, in its officers, order and worship; and the generality of the *people*, in their personal capacities, were all overwhelmed in provoking sins. *Hypocrisy, oppression, cruelty, superstition, uncleanness, persecution, impenitency, and security*, all proceeding from unbelief, had filled the land, and defiled it. We have a sufficient account of this state of things in the *story of the gospel*; so as that it needs no other confirmation. Yea, so wicked were the *people*, and so corrupt the *church-state*, and so impenitent were the generality of them therein, that it suited the righteousness and holiness of God, to revenge on that generation not only their own sins, but the sins also of all wicked persecutors from the foundation of the world; a thing which he doth not do but on high provocations; Luke xi. 50, 51. "That the blood of all the prophets, which
" was shed from the foundation of the world, may
" be required of this generation; from the blood of
" Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished
" between the altar and the temple: verily I say
" unto you, it shall be required of this genera-
" tion."

There is in this *commination* an appearance of severity beyond the rule established, Exod. xx. 5. There God declares, that as he is a *jealous God*, which title he assumes to himself with respect unto the highest provocations, that he "will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate him." But here the vengeance and punishment due unto the
sins

sins of *an hundred generations*, is threatened to be inflicted on that which was present.

Something in our passage may be spoken for the vindication of Divine Justice herein; seeing we may be more concerned in that *Divine commination* than the most are aware.

1. The case here is *particular*. That in the commandment respects the common case of all *false worshippers*, and their posterity; but this respects *persecution unto blood and death* of the true worshippers of God. Now though God be very much provoked with the sins of *false worshippers*, yet he can either bear with them, or pass over their sins with lesser punishments, or at least for a long season; but when they come to *persecution, and the blood* of them who worship him in spirit and in truth, in his appointed season he will not spare them; their own, and the iniquities of their predecessors, shall be avenged on them, which will be the end of the *Antichristian church state*, after all its present triumph.

2. All those who, from the beginning of the world, suffered unto blood on the account of religion, suffered *in the cause of Christ*, for their faith in him, and confession of him; namely, as he was promised unto the church. Unto him and his office did Abel, *by faith*, bear testimony, in the bloody sacrifice that he offered. So it is said that Moses, in his danger for killing the Egyptian, bare the *reproach of Christ*, because he did it in faith of the promised Seed, which was Christ. They were therefore all slain in the cause of Christ: And whereas *this generation* was to *slay Christ* himself, and did so, they did therein approve of, and justify *all the blood* that was shed in the same cause from the foundation of the world; and made themselves justly liable unto the punishment due unto it. Hence our Saviour tells them, Matth. xxiii. 35. That *they*, the men of that generation, *slaw Zechariah*, who was actually slain many hundred years before.

3. Our blessed Saviour mentions Abel and Zechariah

riah particularly. This *Zechariah*, called the son of Barachias, was undoubtedly the *Zechariah* mentioned 2 Chr. xxiv. 20, 21, 22. For concerning those two alone it is observed, that the one *dead*, and the other *dying*, cried for vengeance. So God testifieth of the blood of Abel, Gen. iv. 10. And *Zechariah*, when he died, said, *the Lord look upon it, and require it*. Hence the Apostle affirms, that *Abel, being dead, yet speaks*, Heb. xi. 4.; that is, his blood did so, it did so then, and it spake *for vengeance*, as he intimates, chap. xii. 24. It did so before, and until the destruction of Jerusalem: For in the rejection and absolute destruction of that *apostatized church* and people, the blood of all that suffered under the Old Testament was expiated; *Abel's* blood cries no more; nor doth God look any more on the blood of *Zechariah*, to require it.

But the *same voice* and cry is now continued by another sort of men; namely, those who have suffered in the *cause of Christ* since his coming, according to the promise, Rev. vi. 9. 10. And this *cry* shall be continued until the appointed time doth come for the utter destruction of the *Antichristian apostatized church-state*.

4. When a *sinful church or people* have passed the utmost bounds of Divine patience and forbearance, they shall fall into such *abominable crying sins* and provocations, as shall render the utmost vengeance beneath their deserts. So Josephus affirms of this generation, after they had rejected and slain the Lord Christ, that they fell into such an hell of provoking abominations, that, 'if the Romans had not come and destroyed them, God would have sent fire and brimstone upon them from heaven, as he did on Sodom.'

And we may, by the way, observe from hence.

It is a dangerous thing to live in the times of declining churches, when they are hastening unto their fatal period in judgments; such as will inevitably befall them all and every one.

And

And it is so, for these three reasons ;

1. Because such times are *perilous*, through temptations from the abounding of *the lusts of men*, in all uncleanness and wickedness. So the apostle states it, 2 Tim. iii, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. If any think they are free from danger, because as yet they feel no evil, whilst *the lusts of men* professing Christian religion visibly and openly abound and rage in the world, they will be mistaken.

2. Though destruction do not immediately befall them, yet when they have passed the time of Divine patience, designing their *reformation*, they shall precipitate themselves into *bloody abominations*, as did the church of the Jews.

3. Judgment shall at length overtake them, and God will revenge on them the sins and provocations, especially the *persecutions and blood* of them that went before them, and led them into their apostacy. So when he shall come to destroy *Mystical Babylon*, or the Antichristian church-state, it is said, that "in her was found the blood of the prophets, " and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the " earth, Rev. xviii. 24. Even the blood of saints, that was shed by *Pagan Rome*, shall be avenged on *Antichristian Rome*, after she hath espoused the cause, and walked in the way of the other, justifying in her own practice what they had done.

II. It was a *time wherein judgments were near approaching* ; so our Saviour himself affirms it to have been, Luke xix. 42, 43, 44. *Hadst thou known in this thy day.* They had now but a *day*, and that now almost ready to expire, though they saw it not, nor would believe it. But the *day of their desolation* approached continually, and when the apostle wrote his epistle to the Hebrews, was making its entrance upon them, chap. x. 25. *ye see the day approaching.* And we may hence learn that,

1. *In the approaching of desolating judgment on a sinful provoking church or nation, God is pleased to*

give previous intimations of his displeasure, as well in the works of providence, as by the rule of his word; such were those here so interpreted by our Saviour in such a season.

This, I say, is the ordinary process of Divine Providence; and, it may be, no nation, heathen or Christian, ever utterly perished without *Divine warnings* of their approaching desolation: some indeed seem to be taken away with a sudden surprisal, as God threateneth, Psa. lviii. 9, 10, 11. But this is from their own security, and not for want of warnings; so the old world, before the flood, had warnings sufficient of their destruction, by the preaching of Noah, and the building of the ark, by which he *condemned the world*, Heb xi. 7. or left them inexcusable to Divine vengeance. Yet they took no notice of these things, but were surpris'd with the flood, as if they had never heard or seen any thing that should give them warning of it, as our Saviour declares, Mat. xxiv. 38, 39. and when the time comes of the destruction of Mystical Babylon, she shall say in that *very day* wherein her judgements come upon her, *I sit as a queen, and shall see no sorrow*; notwithstanding all her warnings in the pouring out of the vials of previous judgments, Rev. xviii. 7, 8.

2. *It is the height of security in such a time and season, either to neglect the consideration of extraordinary providences, or to misinterpret them as unto any thing but tokens of approaching judgments, if not prevented.*

Nothing can be questioned herein without an arraignment of the Divine wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the interpretation and application that he makes of these accidents. No doubt but they were neglected and despised by the most, as common things; to take any great notice of such occurrences, is esteemed *pusillanimity*, or superstition. So it is by many at this day, wherein all things, as we shall see afterwards, are filled with *tokens of divine displeasure*: But things will come shortly unto another account;

count; in the mean time it is safe to follow this *divine example*, so as to find out sacred warnings in such providential occurrences.

2. The *providential accidents* spoken of are two, and of two sorts.

1. The first was that wherein *the bloody cruelty of men* had an hand; the *Galileans*, whose blood *Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices*. When this was done, on what occasion, and what was the number of the persons so slain, the scripture is silent. However, it is certain that it was done at *Jerusalem*; for, sacrifices might not be offered any where else. Thither came the *Galileans* with their sacrifices; that is, either the *beasts* which they brought to the priests to offer for them; for they might not offer sacrifices themselves,—or the *pascchal lamb*, which they might slay themselves.

Whilst they were engaged in this work, *Pilate*, the *bloody Roman governour*, on what occasion or provocation is unknown, came upon them, and slew them in a *cruel manner*, intimated in that expression, that *he mingled their blood with their sacrifices*. And this providence is the more remarkable, in that it fell out whilst they were engaged in their sacred worship; which carries an indication of Divine severity. And it may be there was, as it is in the ruin of mankind every day, occasion taken for it, from the difference that was between two wicked governors, *Pilate* and *Herod*, unto whose jurisdiction these *Galileans* did belong, in whose blood *Pilate* thought to revenge himself on his enemy. However they both combined at last in the killing of Christ, as others use to do in the world; and so made themselves friends, leaving their example to their successors.

2. The other was a *mere effect of divine providence*, the death of *eighteen men* by the fall of a tower in *Siloam*; that is, a place of *waters*, and a running stream in *Jerusalem* itself. And our Lord Jesus Christ declares herein, not only that all such accidents

dents are disposed by the providence of God, but that he *speaks in them* for our instruction.

Both these, as they were *warnings*, as we shall see, so they were *figures* of the approaching destruction of the city and people: for that, in the first place, is the perishing here intended, as is manifest in the ensuing *parable*, wherein the church state of the Jews is compared unto a *barren fig-tree*, which was to be cut down and destroyed. And accordingly that destruction did befall them, partly by the *bloody cruelty of the Romans*, and partly by the fall and ruin of the *temple*, towers, and walls of the city, both included in the word, *likewise*; *ye shall likewise perish*, or in like manner. But although they were of various kinds, and men might evade the consideration of them on several pretences; the one being nothing but the *tyrannical fury of Pilate*, the other only a somewhat *unusual accident*, yet our Lord Jesus Christ finds out the hand and counsel of God in them both, and declares the same language to be spoken in them both. Signs of the same event are *doubled*, to shew the certainty of it, like Pharaoh's dreams.

And we may observe, that,

First, *All sorts of unusual accidents, or effects of providence, in a season of sin and approaching judgments, are of the same indication, and ought to have the same interpretation.*

So is the same application made of both these different *signs* and *warnings* by our Saviour; they have, saith he, the same language, the same signification. There was nothing at this time more hardened the Jews unto their utter ruin, than the *false application* they made of *providential signs* and warnings, which were all multiplied among them, as *boding* their good and deliverance, when they were all tokens of their approaching ruin. For when such things are rejected as *warnings*, calling to repentance and reformation, as they were by them, on a presumption that they were signs of God's appearance on their behalf, they became to be nothing but certain *fore-*
runners.

runners of greater judgments, and infallible tokens of destruction; and so they will be to them likewise by whom they are yet despised.

Secondly, *God is pleased sometimes to give warnings of approaching judgments, not only as unto the matter of them, that they shall be accompanied with severity; but also as unto the especial nature and manner of them;* so was it with these two signs, of blood by the sword, and death by the fall of the tower, representing, as in a glass, that common calamity which was to befall the city and nation. And I pray God, that the prodigious appearance of *fiery-meteors*, like swords, armies, and arms, with other things of the like nature, may not be sent to point out the very *kind* and *nature* of the judgments which are coming on England, if not diverted; for as unto these *signs*, not only the scripture, but all *beatben-stories* are filled with an account of them. Before the approach of desolating judgments, nature, the common parent of mankind, did always put forth itself in *irregular unusual actions*, in fiery meteors, comets, earthquakes, strange appearances in the air, voices heard, and the like.

The brute elements tremble at the approaches of God in his judgment against the inhabitants of the earth; so the prophet expresth it, Hab. iii. 10. *The mountains saw thee and they trembled, the overflowings of the water passed by, the deep uttered his voice, and lift up his hand on high.*

They are as it were cast into a posture of trembling and supplication. And *Æschylus*, an heathen poet, in *Justin Martyr*,

Τρέμει δὲ οὐρανὸς, καὶ γαῖα καὶ πηλοῦσις
 Βυβός τε θαλάσσης, κωρύων δ' ἄψ' ὄμορα,
 Ὅταν ἐπιβλέψῃ γοργοῖ σμμα Διόποτι.

When the dreadful eye of God (in his providence) is lifted up, all things tremble before it.

Thirdly, In the interpretation and application made of these severe accidents by our Saviour, in his divine wisdom, we may observe.

1. *Especial judgments, in such a season, befalling any, do not prove an especial guilt, or provocation in them.*

This our Saviour expressly denies, and that with respect unto both the instances insisted on, and that distinctly, verse 2, 3, 4. I do not hence absolutely establish a general rule as unto all times and persons. For,

1. The observation is here confined, and limited unto such a season as that under consideration; namely, a time of provoking sins in the generality of the people, and approaching judgments. In such a season, no assignation of especial guilt ought to be made on especial calamitous sufferings.

2. Some persons may be guilty of such *daring presumptuous sins*, that if they are overtaken with especial judgments in this world, it is the height of impiety not to own the especial revenging hand of God in their destruction; such was the death of *Herod*, Acts xii. 22, 23.

3. *Judgments on private men, in such a season, are warnings to the public.* This is intimated by our Saviour in this place; namely, that God uses a sovereignty herein, by singling out whom he pleaseth to make them examples unto others; this, saith he, was the sole reason, as far as you are concerned to judge or know, why God brought these fore destructions upon them; namely, that by these warnings he might call you to repentance. Yet I judge God doth not ordinarily exercise his sovereignty in this kind, unless it be when *all* have deserved to be destroyed; and then, as in the sedition and mutiny of *military legions*, they decimated them, or slew some for an example and terror unto others; so God calls out of a guilty multitude whom he pleaseth, to make previous instances of approaching judgments.

4. *Those who first fall under judgments, are not always the worst that judgments shall befall, nor are the first judgments usually the most severe;* so it is plain in these instances. And because we have instances

of

of this nature amongst us, we should consider how to make a right judgment concerning them; and these three things we may safely determine.

1. That those who suffered were sinners also, though they were not so only, or in an especial manner. This is necessary unto the vindication of the justice of God.

2. That he who hath made them warnings unto us, might have made us *warnings* unto them; herein his sovereignty and mercy towards us, who escape, is manifest.

3. That we also have an hand in that *guilt*, fore-running such providences, so far as there is any thing penal in them. For such private previous judgments are the effect of *public provocations* *.

Fourthly, Here is a sure rule given us of the interpretation of *severe providences*, in such a season as that here intended. Such I mean as we have had amongst us, in *plague*, and *fire*, and *blood*; and such as we have the signs and tokens of at this time in heaven and earth. For three things we are taught safely to conclude concerning them,

1. That they are *warnings* from God. This our Saviour plainly declares in the interpretation and application of these two instances.

2. That their voice and language is a call to *repentance and reformation*: *Except ye repent, &c.*

3. When they are neglected as *warnings*, calling to repentance, they change their nature, and become certain *signs* of approaching destruction. And in the observation of these rules of interpretation of providential severities, given us by our Saviour, we may be preserved from the excesses of neglecting, on the one hand, what is contained in them; and of rash judging of men or causes, on the other.

These things being premised for the opening of the words, the truth wherein we are instructed by them appears to be this.

When

* These things were spoken on the burning of several persons to death, in one of the late fires in London.

When a land, a nation, a city, a church, is filled with sin, so as that God gives them warnings or indications of his displeasure by previous judgments; or other extraordinary signs, if they are not, as warnings, complied with, by repentance and reformation, they are tokens of approaching judgments, that shall not be avoided.

This is that sacred truth which our Lord Jesus Christ doth here recommend to our observation. It is the *great rule of Divine Providence*, with the especial seal of our Lord Christ annexed to it; *I tell you nay, but unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.* When warnings for instruction are not received, they are tokens of destruction. This is a truth which none almost deny, and none almost believe. Had it been believed, many desolating judgments in former ages had been prevented, nations and cities should have abode in prosperity, which are now sunk into ruin, yea, into hell. See Luke xix. 41, 42, 43, 44. Mat. xi. 23. And were it believed in the days wherein we live, it would be the means of saving a *poor nation* from otherwise inevitable ruin. The state is so with us, that *unless we repent, we shall perish.* I do not prescribe unto the sovereignty of God in his providential administrations. He can, if he please, suffer all his warnings to be despised, all his calls neglected, yea, scoffed at, and yet exercise forbearance towards us, as unto a speedy execution of judgment. But wo unto them with whom he so deals; for it hath only this end, that they may have a space to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and so be fitted for eternal destruction, Rom ix. 22.

There is a threefold issue and event of the state we have described.

1. When a *sinful church or nation* so attend unto God's warnings in *previous judgments*, and other signs of his displeasure, as to comply with them, by repentance and reformation, this is a blessed issue, which

which will certainly divert all impendent judgments; as shall be afterwards declared.

2. When by reason of the neglect of them, and want of compliance with them, God doth bring distress and calamities upon a people in general, this is a sad event. But, however, under it God doth often preserve a seed and remnant, which, being brought through the fire, and thereby purged and purified, though but as a poor and afflicted people, yet they shall be preserved as a seed and reserve, for a better state of the church. See Zech. xiii. 8, 9. Isa. vi. 11, 12, 13. chap. xiv. 6. chap. xxiv. 13. Zeph. iii. 12. Ezek. v. 2, 12.

3. When God utterly forsakes a people, will regard them no more, but give them up unto idolatry, false worship, and all sorts of wickedness; when he says, *why should you be stricken any more? you will revolt more and more*: this is the forest of judgments. Wo unto them, saith the Lord, *when I depart from them*, Hosea ix. 12. Of such a people there shall be neither hope nor remnant, Ezek. xlvi. 11. Who would not rather see a nation suffering under some judgments, as the effects of God's displeasure, for the neglect of his warnings, whereby it may be purged, and purified, and restored, than to be left under idolatry and all manner of wickedness for ever?

But the way is here proposed for the avoidance of these evils. And these things will be more fully spoken unto afterwards.

I shall first give some evidences of the truth laid down, and then the reason of it, which will make way for what I principally intend.

I shall not insist on the *especial kind* of warnings or signs here mentioned, but only on the *general nature* of Divine warnings, by the word or otherwise, in such a season, as wherein an abounding of sin is accompanied with great evidences of approaching judgments.

1. According unto this rule was the dealing of
B
God

God with the *old world*, which is set forth unto us for an example. See 1 Pet. iii. 20. with ii. 5.

The men of the old world were a sinful, provoking generation. God gave them warning of his displeasure by the preaching of Noah, and other ways; during his ministry, the long-suffering of God waited for their *repentance* and *reformation*. For this was the end, both of the season and of the ministry granted unto them therein: But when it was not complied withal, he brought the flood on those ungodly men.

2. So he dealt with the church under the Old Testament. A summary account is given of it, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16, 17. After a contempt of all God's previous warnings, with a neglect of repentance and reformation, the time came when there was *no remedy*, but the city and temple must be destroyed, and the people be partly slain, and partly carried into captivity. Accordingly, there is a general rule established for all times and seasons, Prov. xxix. 1.

3. Neither have his dealings been otherwise with the churches of the New Testament. All those of the first plantation have been ruined and destroyed by the sword of God's displeasure, for impenitency under Divine calls and warnings.

4. God gave an eminent instance hereof in the ministry of Jeremiah the prophet; he gives him the law of his prophecy, chap. xviii. 7, 8. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Here is the whole of the truth laid down represented unto us. The nation and kingdom especially intended, was that of the people and church of the Jews. Concerning them it is supposed, that they were evil, that sin abounded amongst them. In this state God gave them warning by the ministry of
Jeremiah

Jeremiah, as he did otherwise also. The voice of these warnings was, that they should repent them of their evil, and reform their ways. On a supposition whereof he promises to remove the judgments which they had deserved, and which were impendent over them: upon their failure herein, he declares that fearful desolation should befall them, as it did afterwards, verse 16, 17. According to this rule the prophet persisted in his ministry. The sum of his sermon, was this; *It is a time of great sin and provocation; these and these are your sins; these are evident tokens of God's displeasure against you, and of the near approaching of desolating judgments. In this state repent, return and reform your ways, and you shall be delivered: in case you do not, utter destruction shall come upon you.*

But the princes, the priests, and generally all the people, set themselves against him herein, and would not believe his word.

And by three things they countenanced themselves in their unbelief and impenitency; that they should be delivered, although they did not *repent* and *reform* their ways.

First, By their privileges; that they were the only church and people of God, who had the temple and his worship amongst them: as if they should say, *the best reformed church in the world.* This they directly confront his ministry withal, chap. vii. 3, 4. They fear none of his threatenings, they despise his counsel for their safety, approve their ways and their doings, because they were the church, and had the temple for their security.

Secondly, By their own *strength for war*, and their defence against all their enemies. They gloried in their *wisdom*, their *might*, and their *riches*; as he intimateth chap. ix. 23.

Thirdly; By the help and aid which they expected from others, especially from Egypt. And herein they thought once that they had prevailed against him, and utterly disproved his rule of safety by *re-*

reformation only; for when the Chaldeans besieged the city, by whom the judgments he had threatened them withal, were to be executed, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, coming up against them, they departed from Jerufalem for *fear of his army*, chap. xxvii. 5, 11. Hereon, no doubt, they triumphed against him, and were satisfied that their own way for deliverance was better than that troublesome way of repentance and reformation, which he prescribed unto them. But he knew from whom he had his message, and what would be the event of the false hopes and joys which they had entertained: So he tells them, verse 9, 10, "Deceive not yourselves, " saying, the Chaldeans shall surely depart from us; " for they shall not depart: For though you had " smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans, that " fight against you, and their remained but wound- " ed men amongst them, yet should they rise up e- " very man in his tent, and burn this city with " fire." Which accordingly came to pass.

And so will it be with any other people, against all pleas and pretences to the contrary.

Let the case be stated according as it is laid down in the proposition, and explained in the instance of Jeremiah.

Suppose a church or people do abound with provoking sins; that, during the time of God's patience towards them, and *warning of them*, there are *signs and tokens* of his *displeasure*, and of impendent judgments; let them feed themselves so long as they please with hopes of deliverance and safety, unless they comply with the calls of God unto *repentance and reformation*, they will fall under desolating judgments, or be utterly forsaken of God for ever.

The grounds and reasons of this rule, and order in Divine dispensations, are many, plain, and obvious, which I shall not at large insist upon.

I shall only at present mention some of them, because

cause those of the most evidence and importance will accrue afterwards unto our consideration.

1. This rule of proceeding is suited unto *the righteousness of God, in the government of the world*, in the in-bred light of the minds of men. This notion, that *judgment, or Divine vengeance, will overtake impenitent sinners, who have been previously warned of their sin*, is that which we are not taught, which we do not learn from one another, which is not only the voice of Divine revelation, but that which is *born with us*, which is inseparable from our nature; the light and conviction whereof, neither with respect unto ourselves or others, we can avoid. This is the voice of nature in mankind: *Impenitent sinners, incurable by warnings, are the proper objects of Divine displeasure*. And the absolute impunity of such persons would be a great temptation unto atheism, as the suspension of deserved judgments on provoking sinners is with some at this day. But, ordinarily and finally, God will not act contrary unto the inbred notions of his righteousness the government of the world, which he himself hath implanted in the minds of men. But as for the times, seasons, and ways of the execution of his judgments, he hath reserved them unto his own sovereignty.

2. It is needful unto the *vindication of the faithfulness of God in his threatenings* given out by Divine revelation. By this he hath always, from the beginning of the world, testified unto his own holiness and righteousness, whereof they are the most proper expressions. Those first recorded of them are in the prophecy of Enoch, Jude 14, 15. And they have been since continued in all ages. But whereas the wisdom of God, acting in righteousness, hath been accompanied with patience and forbearance, in the accomplishing of these threatenings, there have been, and yet are mockers and scoffers at these Divine threatenings, as though they were a mere noise, of no efficacy or signification. So the apostle declares the thoughts of the minds of men profane

and ungodly, 2 Pet iii. 3, 4. Wherefore there is a *condecency* unto the Divine excellencies, that God in his own way and time should vindicate his faithfulness in all his threatenings.

3. God hereby manifests himself to be a God *bearing prayers*, regarding the cries of his poor and distressed witnesses in the world. When the world abounds in provoking sins, especially in blood and persecution, there is a conjunct cry unto God, of those that have suffered, and those that do suffer, in heaven and earth, for vengeance on obstinate impenitent sinners. See Luke xviii. 7, 8. with Rev. vi. 10. The voices of all those, I say, who have suffered unto death in foregoing ages for the testimony of Jesus, and are now in heaven, in a state of expectancy of compleat glory, with all those of them, whose sighs and groans under their oppressors, do at present ascend unto the throne of God, have the sense in them, by Divine interpretation, that *punishment be inflicted on impenitent sinners*; as is plainly expressed by our Saviour in that place of the gospel, affirming that he will avenge his elect speedily, who cry unto him day and night. Herein God will vindicate his glory, as the God that hears prayers.

4. A sense of this Divine truth is a great and effectual means of God's rule in the hearts of men in the world, setting bounds to their lusts, and restraining that superfluity of wickedness and villany, which would otherwise take away the distinction, as to sin, between the earth and hell. If men can at any time free themselves from the terror and restraining power of this consideration, that *vengeance is always approaching towards impenitent sinners*, there is nothing so vile, so profane, so flagitious, as that they would not wholly give up themselves unto it, Eccles. viii. 11. "Because judgment is not speedily executed against an evil work, the heart of the sons of men is wholly set in them to do evil." And God knows, that if impunity in this world should

should always accompany provoking sinners, the temptation would be too strong and powerful for the faith of weak believers, which he will therefore relieve by frequent instances of his severity.

In a successive continuation of *previous judgments* on impenitent sinners, there is an uncontrollable evidence given of the certainty of that *final judgment* which all mankind shall be called unto. So the apostle proves it, and intimates that it is a foolish thing, the effect of obstinacy in sin, if men do not learn the certain determination and approach of the eternal judgment, from the drowning of the old world, the conflagration of Sodom, with the like instances of Divine severity, 2 Pet. ii. 3.

My present enquiry hereon is, What is our own concernment in these things? what are we for our own good to learn by the *blessed instruction* given us by our Lord Jesus Christ, in his interpretation of the *providential occurrences* mentioned in the text?

And this I shall manifest by an impartial enquiry into the things ensuing.

1. When doth a church, a nation, a people, or city, so abound in sin, as to be immediately and directly concerned in his Divine warning? and what in particular is the case of the nation wherein we live, and our own therein?

2. Of what sort are those desolating judgments, which, in one way and sense or another, are impendent with respect unto such a church or nation, and consequently unto ourselves at this season?

3. What warnings, calls, and indications of Divine displeasure, and the approach of calamitous distresses doth God usually grant? and what he hath given, and is giving unto us at present?

4. What is the equity, and wherein it doth consist, of this Divine constitution here attested by our blessed Saviour, that in such a case repentance and reformation, and nothing else, shall save and deliver a church, a people, a nation from ruin?

5. Whereas this rule is so holy, just, and equal,
whence

whence is it that all sorts of men are so unwilling to comply with it, even in the utmost extremity, when all other hopes do fail and perish? and whence is it so amongst ourselves at this day?

6. What is required unto that reformation, which may save any nation, this wherein we live, from desolating calamities, when they are deserved?

7. From what causes at present such a reformation may be expected, and by what means it may be begun and accomplished, so as to prevent our utter ruin?

8. What is the duty, what ought to be the frame of mind in true believers, what their walk and work in such a season, that, in case all means of delivery do fail, they may be found of Christ in peace at his coming? for it is but yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry.

These things are necessary to be inquired into, that we may help to beat out the paths of truth and peace, the only ways that lead unto our deliverance. The nation is filled with complaints and fears, *mutual charges* on one party and another, as unto the causes of our present troubles and approaching dangers; various designs and contrivances, with vain hopes and vehement desires of this or that way or means of help and deliverance; cruel hatreds and animosities on differences in religion, designing no less than the extirpation of all that is good therein, do abound in it, by all means rending itself in pieces, wearying itself in *the largeness of its ways*, and yet says not, there is no hope. But, for the most part, the *true causes* of all our troubles and dangers, with the *only remedy* of them, are utterly neglected. The world is filled, yea, the better sort of men in it, with other designs, other discourses; we hear rarely of these things from the pulpits (which are filled with animosities about petty interests, and private difference, in the approaches of public ruin), nor in the council of those who pretend to more wisdom. Some shall

shall think they shall do great things by their wisdom and counsel; some by their authority and power; some by their number; some by owning the best cause, as they suppose; and with many such like notions are the minds of men possessed. But the truth is, the land abounds in sin, God is angry, and risen out of his holy place, judgment lies at the door, and in vain shall we seek for remedy or healing, any other way than that proposed. This therefore we shall enquire into.

The first thing supposed in the proposition, before laid down, was taken from the *circumstance of the time* wherein, and with reference whereunto, our Lord Jesus Christ delivered the rule of *the necessity of repentance and reformation, unto an escape from total destruction*; and this was a time when *sin greatly abounded in the church and nation*. And this supposition is the foundation of the truth of the whole assertion; for in other cases it may not always hold. Our first enquiry therefore must be,

When a people or nation is so filled with sin, or when doth sin so abound among them, as, in conjunction with the things afterwards to be insisted on, to render their salvation or deliverance impossible without repentance and reformation? And it doth so,

1. When *all sorts of sin abound in it*. I do not judge that every particular sin, or kind of sinning, that may be named, or may not be named, is required hereunto; nor is it so, that there should be the same outrage in public sins; for instance, in blood and oppression, as there hath been at some times, and in some places of the world, the dark places of the earth being filled with habitations of cruelty; nor, is it so, that sin doth reign at that height, and rage at that rate, as it did *before the flood*, or in *Sodom*, or before the final destruction of *Jerusalem*, or as it doth in the *kingdom of antichrist*: for in that case there is no room or place either for repentance or reformation; God hides from them the things that concern their peace, that they may be utterly and irrecoverably

coverably destroyed. But this I will grant is required hereunto; namely, that *no known sin* that is commonly passant in the world, can be exempted from having a place in the public guilt of such a church or nation. If any such sin be omitted in the *roll of the indictment*, peace may yet dwell in the land. It would be too long, and not to my purpose, to draw up a catalogue of sins, from the highest *atheism*, through the vilest *uncleanness*, unto the lowest *oppression*, that are found amongst us. I shall only say, on the other hand, that I know *no provoking sin*, condemned as such in the book of God, whereof instances may not be found in this nation. Who dares make this a plea with God for it; namely, that *yet it is free and innocent from such and such provoking sins? produce your cause suitb the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob: let us stand up, if we can, and plead for ourselves herein.* But the only way whereby we may come to plead with God in this matter, is fully described, *Isai. xv. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.* It must be repentance and reformation, laying a ground for pleading and arguing with God for pardon and mercy, that must save this nation, if it be saved, and not a plea for exemption from judgments on the account of our innocency. This is that which, of all things, God most abhorred in the people of old, and which all the prophets testified against in them.

But yet, to speak somewhat more particularly unto the first part of the proposition, in reference unto ourselves.

There are four sins, or four sorts of sins, or ways in sinning, which, unless God prevent, will be the ruin of this nation.

1. The first is *atheism*, an abomination that these parts of the world were unacquainted with until these latter ages. I do not speak concerning *speculative, or opinionative atheism*, in them that deny the being of God, or, which is all one, his righteous government of the world; for it will not avail any man

man to believe that God is, unless withal he believe that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Yet of this sort, it is to be feared that there are many amongst us; yea some that make great *advantages of religion*, do live and talk as if they esteemed it all a fable. But I speak of that which is called *practical atheism*, when men live and act as if they were influenced by prevalent thoughts, that *there is no God*. Such the nation is replenished withal; and it exerts itself especially two ways,

1. In *curst oaths* and blasphemous execrations, whereby the highest contempt is cast on the Divine name and being. The most excellent Thuanus, giving an account of the *Parisian massacre*, with the horrible desolations that ensued thereon, ascribes it, in the first place, unto the *anger of God*, *revenging the horrid oaths and monstrous blasphemies, which, from the court, had spread themselves over all the nation*. Hist. lib. 53. Nor is it otherwise among us at present, though not generally amongst all, yet amongst many, and those unpunished.

2. *Boldness, confidence, and security in sinning*. Many are neither ashamed nor afraid to act, avow, yea, and boast of the vilest of sins. The awe that men have of the knowledge, conscience, and judgment of others, concerning their evil and filthy actions, is one means whereby God rules in the world for the restraint of sin. When the yoke hereof is utterly cast away, and men proclaim their sins like *Sodom*, it is the height of *practical atheism*. Nor, I think, did it ever more abound in any age, than in that wherein we live.

3. *The loss of the power of that religion* whose outward form we do retain. We are all *protestants*, and will abide to be of the protestant religion; but wherein? in the *confession*, and all the outward forms of the rule and worship of the church. But are men changed, renewed, converted to God by the *doctrine of this religion*? are they made humble, holy, zealous, fruitful in good works by it? have they experience

rience of the power of it in their own souls, in its transforming of them into the image of God? without these things it is of very little avail what religion men profess. This is that which is of evil *abode* to the professors of the *protestant religion* at this day through the world. The glory, the power, the efficacy of it, are, if not lost and dead, yet greatly decayed; and an outward *carcase* of it, in articles of faith and forms of worship, doth only abide. Hence have the reformed churches, most of them, *a name to live, but are dead*; living only on a traditional knowledge, principles of education, advantages and interest, in all which the *Roman religion* doth every way exceed them, and will carry the victory, when the contest is reduced unto such principles only. And unless God be pleased, by some *renewed effusion of his blessed Spirit from above*, to revive, and re-introduce a spirit of life, holiness, zeal, readiness for the cross, conformity unto Christ, and contempt of the world, in and among the churches which profess the *protestant religion*, he will, ere long, take away the *bedge of his protecting providence*, which now for some ages he hath kept about them, and leave them for a spoil unto their enemies. So he threateneth to do in the like case, Isai. v. 5, 6. such is the state described, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

4. *Open contempt and reproach of the Spirit of God in all his Divine operations*, is another sin of the same dreadful abode. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, that he who speaks against *the Holy Ghost*, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come, Matth. xii. 32. That is, those who persist in opposing or reproaching the holy Ghost, and his dispensation and operations under the New Testament, shall not escape vengeance and punishment *even in this world*; for so it befel that generation unto whom he spake. For, continuing to do despite unto the *Spirit of Grace*, wrath at length came upon them, *even in this world*, unto the utmost; which is the sense of the place. Now scarcely
where

where the name of Christ was known, did this iniquity more abound than it doth at this day amongst us. For not only is the Divine person of the Holy Spirit by some denied, and the substance of the preaching and writing of many is to oppose all his peculiar operations; but they are all made a scoff, a derision, and a reproach openly, and on all occasions every day. Especially as he is a spirit of *regeneration and supplication*, he is the object of multiplied sober blasphemies. This iniquity will be revenged.

4thly, *The abounding of uncleanness*, which, having broken forth from a corrupt fountain, hath overspread the land like a deluge. These sins, I say, among others, have such a predominancy among us, as to threaten perishing without repentance.

Secondly, It is required, *That all sorts and degrees of persons are concerned in the guilt of some of these provoking sins*. For destruction is threatened unto all, *you shall all likewise perish*; all, not universally, *pro singulis generum*, but generally, *pro generibus singulorum*. Therefore all must be some way guilty of them: And this they may be three ways.

1. *Personally*, in their own hearts, lives, and practices; which includes a great multitude.

2. *By not hindering* and preventing these sins in others, so far as their duty leads, and their power enables them unto. What number of *magistrates*, of *ministers*, of *parents*, of *masters* of families, are comprised herein, is evident unto all; especially *ministers*. See Mal. ii. 7, 8. Jer. xxiii. 14, 15.

3. *By not mourning for what they cannot help or remedy*: For it is such alone as shall be exempted from public calamities, Ezek. ix. And this in some measure takes us all in. And the due consideration hereof is necessary upon a double account:

(1.) It is so unto the manifestation of the glory of God, in public calamities and desolations. *When the sword slays suddenly, and destroys the righteous with*

the wicked; one way or other, in one degree or another, we have all of us an access unto the guilt of those things whereby such judgments are procured. Who can say he is innocent? who can complain of his share and interest in the calamities that are coming upon us? who can plead that he ought to be exempted? There will be at last an eternal discrimination of persons; but as unto temporal judgments, we must own the righteousness of God, if *we also fall under them*.

And, (2.) It is so, for the humbling of our souls under a sense of sin, which would better become some of us, than feeding on the *ashes of reserves* for exemption in the day of distress.

Some may suppose, that, by reason of their *personal freedom* from those public provoking sins which abound in the nation, that, on one account or other, by one means or other, they shall be safe, as in some high place, whence they may look down and behold others in distress and confusion. But it is to be feared their mistake will serve only to increase their surprisal and sorrow.

But yet farther, even the *practice of provoking sins*, abounds among all sorts of persons. I do not say that all individuals amongst us are guilty of them: for were it so, our case were irreparable, like that of Sodom, when there were not ten righteous persons to be found in it, that is, such as were free from the guilt of those sins, whose cry came up to heaven; for then there would be no room for repentance or reformation. But whereas there are several sorts and degrees of persons, some high and some low, some rulers, and some ruled, some rich and some poor, there is no order, sort, or degree, in court, city, country, church, or commonwealth, that are free from provoking sins: individuals of all sorts may be so, but no entire sort is so; and this farther entitles a nation unto the condition enquired after.

Thirdly, It is so, when *the world is full of such sins*

sins as are its own, as are proper to it; and the churches or professors, such as are peculiar unto them. If either of these were free from their several provocations, there might be yet room for patience and mercy. And these are distinct.

The sins of the world are, *the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life*; sensuality, luxury, uncleanness, covetousness, ambition, oppression, and the like, with security. In these things the nation is fertile towards its own ruin.

The sins *peculiar unto churches and professors*, are intimated by our blessed Saviour, in his charge on the Asian churches, Rev. ii. 3. *decays in grace*, loss of faith and love, barrenness in good works, deadness, formality, coldness in profession, self-pleasing, pride, hypocrisy, want of zeal for God and delight in him, divisions among themselves, and conformity unto the world. And some of these things at present are so prevalent among us, that they can never be sufficiently bewailed.

It is no small evidence that the day of the Lord is nigh at hand, because the virgins are all slumbering; and it is not unlikely that *judgment will begin at the house of God*. All flesh hath corrupted its ways; and therefore the end of all, as to its present condition, is at hand.

Fourthly, It is so, when the sins of a people are accompanied with the *biggest aggravations that they are capable of in this world*; and those arise from hence, when they are committed against *warnings, mercies, and patience*. These comprise the ways and means which God in his goodness and wisdom useth to reclaim and recal men from their sins; and by whomsoever they are despised, "they treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgments of God," Rom. ii. 4, 5. What can save a people by whom the only remedies of their relief are despised? What warnings and previous judgments we have had in this nation, shall be afterwards spoken unto.

That there hath been no effect, no fruit of them, is evident unto all. Their language is, *except ye repent ye shall perish*. Who hath complied with the calls of God herein? what *reformation* hath been engaged in on this account? have we not turned a deaf ear to all the calls of God? who hath mourned, who hath trembled, who hath sought for an entrance into the chambers of providence in the day of indignation? By some these warnings have been despised and scoffed at, by some put off unto others as their concernment, not their own, by the most neglected, or turned into matter of common discourse, without laying them to heart.

And as for *mercies*, the whole earth hath been turned into a stage for the consumption of them on the lusts of men. The nation hath been soaked with *showers of mercies*, enough to have made it very fruitful unto God; but, through a vicious malignant humour in the hearts of men, there have been truly brought forth nothing but pride, vanity, gallantry, luxury, and security, in city and country every where. The pestilent deceitful art of sin hath turned the means of our conversion unto God, into instruments of rebellion against God. How will England answer for abused mercies in the day of visitation? and in all these things hath the patience also of God been abused, which hath been extended unto us, beyond all thoughts and expectations. And yet men of all sorts please themselves, as, if that they were over this or that difficulty, all would be well again, without any return unto God.

Fifthly, These things render impendent judgments inevitable, without repentance and reformation, *when they are committed in a land of light and knowledge*. Such the land hath been, and wherein yet there is any defect therein, it is a part of the sin and punishment of the nation. See Isa. xxvi. 10. From the light that was in it, it might well be esteemed a land of uprightness: but how it hath been rebelled against, hated, opposed, maligned and persecuted

fecuted in all the fruits of it, is rather, for the sake of some, to be bewailed, than declared.

And thus much may suffice to be spoken unto the first *supposition* in our proposition concerning the sins of a church, nation, or people, which unavoidably expose them unto desolating judgments, when God gives indication of their approach, unless they are prevented by repentance; and we have seen a little, and but a little of what is our concernment herein.

II. Our second enquiry is, *Of what sort those judgments are, which, in a time of great provocation, are to be looked on as impendent, and ready to seize on us.* And they are of three sorts,

First, Such as are *absolute, decretory, and universal.*

There is mention in the scripture of judgments *threatened*, which God hath as it were *repented him of*, and changed the actings of his providence, that they should not be inflicted. See Amos vii. 3, 6. And there are judgments threatened, which have been diverted by the *repentance of men*; as it was in the case of Nineveh. But, in this case, neither *will God repent*, nor *shall men repent*; but those judgments shall be universal and unavoidable: And of this sort we have three instances recorded in scripture, two are past, and one is yet for to come.

1. The first is that of the old world: It is said, that, upon their provocations, *God repented him that he had made man on the earth*; that is, he would deal with him as if he had done so, which must be by an universal destruction. He *would not repent* of the evil he had determined; but positively declared, that *the end of all flesh* was come before him. Nor *did man repent*; for, as our Saviour testifies, they continued in their security until *the day that Noah entered into the ark*, Matth. xxiv. Yet it may be observed, that after things were come to that pass, that there was no possibility of turning away the judgment threatened, yet God exercised *forbearance* towards them, and gave them the outward

means of repentance and reformation, 1 Pet. iii. 20. They had amongst them the ministry of Noah, *a preacher of righteousness,* and that continued for a long season in the patience of God.

[And let none please themselves, that they have the *outward means of the ministry* continued unto them; for, notwithstanding that fruit of God's patience, their destruction may be inevitable. For as God may grant unto them to satisfy his own goodness, and glorify his patience; so unto them, it may have no other end, but the hardening of them in their sin, and the aggravation of their sins, Isa. vi. 9, 10, 11, 12. And this example of the old world is frequently proposed, and that to Christians, to professors, to churches, to deliver them from security in a time of approaching judgments.]

2. The second instance hereof was in the Judaical church-state; the people, nation, temple, worship, and all that was valuable among them. This judgment also, in its approach, was such, as, with respect whereunto, *God would not repent, and man could not repent,* although a day, a time and space of repentance was granted unto them. So it is declared by our Lord Jesus Christ, Luke xix. 41, 42, 43, 44. They had a day, it was theirs in a peculiar manner, a day of patience and of the means of conversion, in the ministry of Christ and his apostles. Yet, saith he, *the things of thy peace are now hid from thee,* so as that they must irrecoverably and eternally perish. So is their state described by the apostle, 1 Thes. ii. 14, 15, 16.

But it may be said, If their destruction was so absolutely determined, that it was impossible it should be either longer suspended or diverted; unto what end did God grant *them a day, such a day of grace and patience;* which they could not make use of? I answer he did it for the manifestation of the glory of his grace, righteousness and severity; and that these two ways,

(1.) In the calling, conversion, and gathering of his elect

elect out of the perishing multitude of them that were hardened. During the continuance of that day of grace and patience among them, for about the space of forty years, all the elect of that generation were converted to God, and delivered from the curse that came upon the church and nation. For although I will not say but some of them might suffer, yea fall in the outward public calamities of that season, yet they were all delivered from the *wrath of God* in them, and saved eternally.

Hereof the apostle gives an account, Rom. xi. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. It is therefore, in a time of great provocations, no certain evidence that inevitable public judgments are not approaching, because the *word*, and other *means of grace*, are effectual to the conversion of some amongst us; for God may hereby be gathering of his own unto himself, that way may be made for the pouring out of his indignation on them that are hardened.

(2.) He did it that it might be an *aggravation of their sin*, and a space to fill up the measure of their iniquity; to the glory of his severity in their destruction; *towards them that fell, severity*. They had time to contract all the guilt mentioned by the apostle, 1 Thes. ii. 14, 15, 16. and were brought into the state and condition described by the same apostle, Heb. x. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30. See Isaiah vi. 10, 11, 12.

Of this judgment and destruction, that of the old world was a precedent and token; which was despised by those obdurate sinners, 2 Pet. iii. 5, 6, 7.

3. The third instance of a judgment of this nature, which is yet to come, is in the *destruction of Antichrist*, and the idolatrous kingdom of the great adulteress, and the persecuting beast. With respect hereunto also, *God will not repent, nor shall men do so*; so that it is inevitable. So it is declared; Rev. xviii. 8. This God hath determined, and it shall be accomplished in its appointed season; *for strong is the Lord God who judgeth them*, and none shall deliver

deliver them out of his hand. Because of the improbability of it, because of the great power of Babylon, in itself and in its allies, the kings and merchants of the earth, the Omnipotency of God is engaged to secure the church of its destruction; *strong is the Lord God who judgeth her*. She also hath her day, wherein she *will not*, wherein she *shall not* repent. When God begins to execute his plagues against her, none that belong unto her will repent of any of their abominations, Rev. ix. 20, 21. and chap. xvi. 9, 11. Yet is there *a day of patience* continued unto this idolatrous persecuting church, partly that they may *fill up the measure of their iniquities*; and partly that God may, by the word and means of grace, gather out all his people from amongst them, according unto his calls, Rev. viii. 14. And our slowness in coming forth from them, is probably one means of prolonging the day of her desolation. And now the Lord Jesus Christ seems to say unto his people, what the angel said unto Lot, when he led him out of Sodom, *make haste to escape, for I cannot do any thing until you are escaped*, Gen xix. 22. And I hope the time is approaching, wherein he will deal with his people as the angel dealt with Lot, v. 16. They are apt to linger, and know not how to leave the outward accommodation of the Babylonish state, nor clear themselves of innumerable prejudices received therein. But he, being *merciful unto them*, will at length lay hold on them by the word of his power, and take them out of the city, in a compleat relinquishment of that cursed state.

Now unto this sort of judgments, there are two things concurring,

1. That there is a *determinate decree* concerning them.

2. That there is a *judicial obduration* upon the people, whom they are determined against, *accompanying them*; that no calls to *repentance* or *reformation* shall be complied withal, so as to divert them. I am satisfied, upon such evidence as I shall give afterwards,

wards, that this is not the condition of England; howbeit, we have cause enough to tremble at the severest of Divine judgments.

Secondly, The second sort of judgments are, such as are *deservedly threatened* and determined, yet so as that no judicial hardness doth absolutely go along with them, to make utterly void the preceding day of grace and patience, and all reformation impossible.

They cannot, they shall not be utterly removed by a total deliverance from them; but yet they may have many alleviations and mitigations, and be sanctified unto them whom they do befall. A full instance hereof we have in the Babylonish captivity, as an account is given us of it, 2 Kings xxiii. 25, 26, 27. "Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, never after him arose any like him. Notwithstanding, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his wrath wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and will cast off this city Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."

God had decreed and determined to cast off Judah and Jerusalem for their sin, to bring a wasting desolation upon them. When this judgment was approaching, Josiah endeavours a *thorough reformation* of all things in the land, religious, civil, and moral; yet would not God revoke his sentence of a great calamity on the whole nation. The secret reason hereof was, that the body of the people was *hypocritical* in that reformation, and quickly returned unto their former abominations, ver. 3, 10. "Judah hath not turned to me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord." See chap. iv. 18. Howbeit, this reformation of Josiah was accepted with God,

God, and had its influence into the mitigation or sanctification of the ensuing desolation.

And this sort of judgment is very different from that before insisted on. For,

1. It is but *partial*; there is a remnant always left among a people, that shall escape it. So was there in those days; there was an *escape* of it, a *remnant*, whom God delivered and preserved; which were as a blessing in the cluster, on the account whereof the whole was not utterly destroyed. This the scripture very much insists on, *Isai. lxxv. 6, 7. Zech. iii. 11, 12. Amos ix. 8, 9.*

2. As it is not *total*, so it is not *final*; even in the severity of his wrath, God designed the recovery of that people again in the appointed season, giving promises thereof unto them that feared him; and so it came to pass in the return of their captivity. See the history hereof *Jer. xxxi. 32.* God may have, for our sins, determined a desolating calamity on this nation; yet, if there be not a judiciary hardness upon us, it may only be *partial* and *recoverable*, not as it was with Israel, *1 Kings xiv. 10.* See *Jer. iv. 27. chap. v. 18. chap. xxx. 31, 32.*

3. It was *sanctified* and *blessed* unto them who were upright and sincere, and who endeavoured the removal of it by reformation, though they suffered in the outward calamity. The *good figs*, or those typified by them, were carried into captivity, but the dealing of God with them therein was in mercy, *Jer. xxiv. 5, 6, 7.* "I will (saith God) set mine eyes upon them for good; I will build them up, and not pull them down; and I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God." Whatever was their outward condition, those internal, spiritual mercies and privileges made it sweet and useful unto them; *the third part was brought through the fire, Zech. xiii. 8, 9.*

4. God makes this sort of judgment a means fully to *reclaim and reform* them, as many of those who

in general suffer under them. They are God's furnace, but not to burn; they purify and cleanse as silver is tried, and not burn up as stubble is consumed. So was that church, by their captivity, purged from their idols for ever. And many other differences of the like nature might be assigned.

And in the consideration of this sort of judgments lies our concernment. Who knows but that God, for our horrible neglect and *contempt* of the gospel, with all the *curfed immoralities* and abominations which have ensued thereon, and the cold dead frame of professors under various means of instruction, hath determined to bring a wasting calamity on this nation, and that he will not turn away from the fierceness of his wrath, but it shall overtake us? If there be a *judicial hardness* upon the land, so as that there is *no repentance, no reformation* endeavoured in this day of patience and forbearance which we yet enjoy, our desolation will be total, un sanctified, irrevocable; and though another people may be raised up to profess the gospel in the land, yet shall we be unconcerned in the mercy. So hath it been before in this nation, and in all the Christian nations of Europe. Wo unto us, if we thus betray the land of our nativity; if we thus give it up to be an hissing and astonishment! Hearken not unto vain words; this or that way we shall be delivered: it is the day of our trial, and who knows what will be the evening thereof? But, on the other hand, although a public calamity should be determined irrevocably against us, if we use the day of forbearance unto the ends of it, in repentance and returning unto God, we shall at length have all the advantages before mentioned: it will be but *partial*, it will be but *for a time*, it will be *sanctified*, it will *purify* the church, and restore it unto a more glorious state than ever before.

Thirdly, There are judgments which are *deserved* and *threatened*, but not *decreed* and *determined*. which may be absolutely diverted and escaped. This sort
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of judgments is frequently mentioned in the scripture, and so also are frequent deliverances from them, by the ways and means of God's appointment.

And concerning them we may observe,

1. That this *threatening of approaching judgments*, which yet may be averted, is a *declaration* of the ordinary rule of Divine justice, according whereunto a nation or people, without an interposition of sovereign mercy, ought to be destroyed.

God doth not threaten, he doth not give warnings, signs, or indications of approaching judgments, but when they are deserved, and may righteously be executed; nor is there any known rule of the word, to give an assurance of the contrary. All that can be said is, "Who knows but that the Lord may repent and turn from the fierceness of his wrath?"

2. The threatening of them is an ordinance of God, to call us unto the *use of such means* as whereby they may be prevented.

He foretels our destruction, that we may not be destroyed, as it was in the case of Nineveh; and this is the only symptom whereby we find out and discern the nature of threatened and impendent judgments. If the *consideration* of them be an ordinance of God, stirring us up to the diligent use of the means whereby they may be prevented, the design of God is, to give deliverance in the issue. If it doth not, they are inevitable. God holds the balance yet in his hand, and we know not which way we incline. The best prognostication we can take is from the frame of our own hearts under the threatenings of them.

Here lies the trial of this poor land and nation at this day: Judgment is *deserved*, judgment is *threatened*, judgment is *approaching*, *the clouds are the dust of his feet*. If *all sorts* of men turn not to God by *repentance*, if we are not humbled for our contempt of the gospel, and outrage against it, if we leave not our provoking sins, evil will overtake us; and we shall not escape. And yet, on the other hand, by a
due

due application unto him who holds the balance in his hand, *mercy may glory against justice*, and we may have deliverance.

Those great men, who suppose all things pervious unto their wisdom, and conquerable by their industry, who have a thousand *flattering* contrivances for the safety of a nation, cannot more despise these things, than I do all their counsels without them. And when they shall be at a loss, and shall find one disappointment following on the neck of another, those who attend unto the advice of God in this case, shall *find rest and peace* in their own souls. And as for them who *scoff* at these things, and say, *where is the promise of his coming?* (that is, in the way of judgment) *for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the creation*: there needs no regard unto God in these things; trouble us not with the *fooleries* of your *repentance and reformation*, God will laugh at *their calamity*, &c. Prov. i. 26. to the end.

This is the second thing we were to insist on for the clearing and confirmation of the *general proposition* before laid down.

III. Our third enquiry is, what *evidences* we have at present, or what *warnings* we have had of approaching judgments? For this also belongs unto the indispensable necessity of *repentance and reformation*, upon the approaching of troubles. And they are the ordinances of God unto that end; which, when they are despised, desolating judgments will ensue.

And we may unto this end observe these things.

1. *Ordinarily God doth not bring wasting, desolating judgments on any people, church, or nation, but that he gives them warnings of their approach.*

I say, he doth not *ordinarily* do so; for he may, if he please, surprise a wicked provoking generation of men with the most dreadful destructions; as he did *Sodom and Comorrah* of old: And very many daily are so surpris'd, as unto their *own apprehensions*;

though really God had given them *signs* of what was coming upon them, but they regarded them not, and so perished as in a moment. But ordinarily before he executes great and severe judgments, he gives such *indications, signs, and warnings* of their coming, as that men should be forced to take notice of them, unless they be absolutely hardened and blinded. So he dealt with *the old world*, in the *building of the ark*, and the ministry of *Noah*: so he dealt with the church under the Old Testament, in and by the ministry of the prophets. See Amos iii. 6, 7, 8. And so he hath done with all others, who have had any knowledge of him or of his ways. They that are wise may discern these things. Hosea the last, Mat. xvi. 3. Micah vi. 9. Dan. xii. 10. And in all heathen stories of the times that passed over them, we find remarks of strange indications of approaching desolations. And he doth it for two ends.

1. For the satisfaction of his own *goodness and love to mankind* in the exercise of patience and forbearance unto the utmost, Hosea vi. 4. as also for the manifestation of the glory of his justice, when he comes to execute the severity of his wrath. When men are surpris'd with public calamities, they shall not be able to say, would none tell us of their approach, would none give us warning of them? had we been told of the terror of the Lord in his judgments, we would have turned from our iniquities, that we might have escaped. In this case, it is usual with God in the scripture to call *heaven and earth to witness* against men, that he did warn them by various means of what would befall them in the end. This is our principal reason why this weak, but sincere *testimony for God* is published. And this shall be an aggravation of their misery in the day of their distress, when they shall seriously reflect upon themselves as unto their folly, guilt, and obstinacy, in despising the warnings which they had received; which is a great part of the punishment of the damned in hell, Ezek. xxxix. 23, 24.

2. God doth it for the end under consideration; namely, that they may be a *means to call a poor guilty people* unto that repentance and reformation, whereby impendent judgments may be diverted.

Secondly, There are five ways whereby God giveth warning of the approach of desolating judgments, when a land is full of sin.

1st, He doth it by lesser *previous judgments and severities*: So was it in the instances in the *text*. The destruction of some by the sword, and the fall of a tower, was a *warning* to the whole nation of the approach of a public calamity, unless they repented. As particular instances are given us hereof in the scripture, so we have a general account of this method of divine providence, Amos iv. 1,—9. First, God sent the judgment of the *grasshoppers*, which ate up all the grafs of the land, and so occasioned a *famine*. This judgment being not improved unto repentance, he called *to contend by fire*, which devoured the *great deep*, and *did eat up a part*, or consumed their treasure, devouring a part of their substance. But when this also was neglected, then came the *plumb-line* of a levelling desolation.

2d, He doth it by *extraordinary and preternatural operations* in the works of nature: such as are *comets*, or *blazing stars*, *fiery meteors*, *dreadful phantisms or appearances in the air*, *voices*, *predictions of uncertain original*, *mighty winds*, *earthquakes*, *stopping the course of rivers*, and the like. An account of these things, as they were to fortel, and fore-signify the fatal destruction of Jerusalem, is given us by our Saviour; Luke xxi. 25, 26. And the story of the event in Josephus, is an admirable exposition of this prophecy of our blessed Saviour. See Rev. vi. 13, 14. The *frame of nature*, is as it were cast into a trembling disorder, upon the approaches of God in his wrath and fury, and puts itself forth in extraordinary signs of its astonishment; trembling for the inhabitants of the earth, and calling on them to repent, before the wrath of the terrible One do seize upon them. So

in the scripture, the seas, and rivers, mountains, and hills are represented as mourning, shaking, trembling at the presence of God, when he comes to execute his judgments. See Hab. iii. 6, 7, 8, 10. "He drove
 " afunder the nations, and the everlasting moun-
 " tains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow;
 " was the Lord displeas'd against the rivers? was
 " thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath
 " against the sea? The mountains saw thee, and they
 " trembled: the overflowing of the water pass'd by:
 " the deep utter'd his voice, and lift up his hands
 " on high."

The mountains, hills, seas, rivers, bowed, trembled, and *lifted up their hands*, as crying for compassion. See Psal. xcvi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. By these signs and tokens in heaven and earth doth God give warnings of his coming to judge the inhabitants of the earth. God doth not work these strange things in heaven above, and the earth beneath, that they should be gazed at only, and made a matter of talk; not that they should be subjects of some mens curiosity, and of the scorn of others. There is a voice in them all, a voice of God, and it will be to their hurt by whom it is not heard and understood.

3dly, He doth the same constantly by *the light of his word*. The general rule of God's ordinary dispensations of Providence is fully laid down in the scripture. *God hath magnified his word above all his name*: so as that no works of providence shall be unsuited to the rule of the word, much less contrary to it, or inconsistent with it. And if we were wise to make application of it unto present affairs and occasions, we should, in most instances, know in general what God is doing. Of old it was said, *Surely the Lord God will do nothing*, that is, in the way of judgments, *but he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets*, Amos iii. 7. What they had by immediate revelation, we may have in a measure by the rule of the word, and the declaration which God hath made therein, how he will deal with a sinful provoking people. So having threatened

threatened various sorts of judgments, the prophet adds, *Search you out of the book of the Lord, and read, no one of these shall fail*, Isai. xxxiv. 16. That this great means of Divine warnings may be useful unto us, we are to consider,

1. What are the stable rules given in the scripture concerning sin, repentance, impenitence, and judgments. Such rules abound in it: And no dispensations of providence shall interfere with them; God will not give such a temptation unto faith, that any of his works should be contradictions unto his word. And if we will learn our present condition from these rules, it will be an antidote against security.

2. Consider the instances recorded therein of God's dealings with sinful provoking nations and churches. This God himself directed the people of old unto, when they boasted of their church privileges, sending them to Shiloh, which he had destroyed. And when we find a record in the book of God, concerning his severity towards any nation in our circumstances, it is our duty to believe, that he will deal so with us also, in his time, unless we repent.

3. Always bear in mind our *infallible guidance*, as unto God's final dealing with impenitent sinners. This the whole scripture constantly, equally, universally witnesseth unto; that it shall be eternal destruction: and this will preserve us from distracting surprisals, when we find things fall out beyond our expectation in a way of severity.

4. Consider those signs, marks, and tokens of approaching judgments, which are set up in the world; which, who so doth wisely consider, he will not fail in his prognostication of future events. Among these, *abounding in sin with security*, in such persons, nations, cities and churches, as God is pleased by the gospel to take near unto himself in a peculiar manner, is the most eminent. For those signs are buoys fixed to shew when we shall certainly make

shipwerck, if we approach unto them. When these rules are observed, when they are diligently attended unto, and complied withal, so as that we receive instruction from them, I shall say with some confidence, that every believer shall know what God is doing in a way of judgment, so far as is necessary unto his guidance in his own duty, wherein he shall find acceptance, and not provoke God in the neglect of it.

4thly, God hath appointed the *ministry of the word* unto the same end. The principal end of the *ministry* under the gospel is, the dispensation of the word of *reconciliation*. But neither is yet this work, of giving *warning of approaching judgments*, exempted from that office and duty. Christ himself, in his ministry, preacheth here on this subject. They are *watchmen* and *overseers*; and their duty herein is graphically expressed, Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. When God placeth any as a *watchman* for a people, one part of his duty is to look diligently after the approach of dangers and evils; such I mean, as come on the account of sin, and thereon to awaken and stir up the people to take care of themselves, that they may not be destroyed. The *shepherd* is not only to provide good pasture for his sheep, but to keep them from danger. The watchman *bearkened diligently, with much heed, and he cried, A lion*, Isai. xxii. 7, 8. Having made a discovery of the approaching danger, he cries out to the people, to warn them of it. But if the *watchmen* are slothful, and sleepy, if they are dumb dogs, and cannot bark when evil cometh, if they are light and treacherous persons, blind guides, that have no vision; if they also are under a spirit of slumber and security, so as that the people are not warned by them of their danger; this is one of the most *severe tokens* of wrath approaching. It is a great warning, when God takes away the means of warning; when he says unto a people, *I will warn you no more*, by giving them such watchmen as are neither faithful,

nor able to warn them, and by taking away those that are.

5thly, God gives warnings hereof, by bringing a people into such a posture, condition, and circumstances, as do in their own nature tend unto ruin. Such are cross interests among themselves, incurable divisions, contrary and unsteady counsels, weakness in spirit and courage, mutual distrusts, effeminacy through luxury, with one or other insuperable entanglement; which are the ways and means whereby nations precipitate themselves into calamitous conditions. In general, as unto this previous warning of approaching judgments, God threatens to send among a people who are tending towards ruin, a *moth* and an *hornet*. The *moth* he threatens, Isai. li. 8. Hosea v. 12. Somewhat that shall *eat up* and devour the strength and sinews of the counsels of a nation, as a *moth* devoureth a garment. Whilst it lies still, it seems, it may be, to be sound and firm; hold it up to the light, and it appears full of holes, and is easily torn with the finger. So is it with a nation; whatever outward peace it seems to enjoy, when it is decayed in the wisdom and strength of its counsels, it is easily torn in pieces. And in like manner he sends the *hornet* unto the same end, Exod. xxiii. 28. Deut vii. 20. that is, that which shall vex, disquiet, and torment them, that they shall be ready every one to strike himself, or the next that he meeteth withal; as many of these *hornets* are at present among us.

These are some of the ways whereby God warneth a people, church, or nation of approaching judgments.

It concerneth us now to enquire how it is, how it hath been with us, with reference hereunto. And I say,

1. It is *not necessary* that God should use *all these ways of warning* of a sinful people, of approaching desolations, if not prevented by repentance: It is enough unto the ends of this dispensation of Divine wisdom

wisdom and goodness, if he make use of *some of them*, or of *any one of them* in an eminent manner. Wherefore if any of them have been wanting among us, yet if we have had others of them, it is sufficient to render us inexcusable, if we repent not. But,

2. The truth is, we have, upon the matter, *had them all*, and they have abounded amongst us.

We have had the *previous judgments of plague, fire, and war.*

Some may say, they were *desolating judgments* themselves; and so indeed they were. But whereas sin still aboundeth, and no reformation ensued upon them, in any places, among any sort of persons, they were but warnings of what is yet to come, if not prevented. And their language is, *except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.*

We have had a *multiplication of signs* in the heaven above, and in the earth beneath; such as all mankind have ever esteemed forerunners of public calamities; and the more they are despised, the louder is their voice to the same purpose. God hath continued hitherto his *word* amongst us, wherein the ordinary rule of his providence in these things is openly declared. And if those unto whom the declaration of the word of God in the dispensation of it is committed, have not faithfully warned the people of their danger, their blood may be found at their door. Herein at present lies our greatest strait; the efficacy of all other calls of God unto *repentance*, depends much on the application of them unto the souls and consciences of men in the *preaching of the word*. But whilst by some this work is despised, at least counted unnecessary; by some it is neglected utterly, and others, by reason of their private capacities, whereby they are disabled to speak unto magistrates, cities, or the community of the people, think not themselves concerned therein, it is almost wholly laid aside. For what, will some say, doth this speaking unto a *few* in a retirement signify as unto a general reformation

mation of the people of the land? But whereas we have all sinned in one measure, churches, and all sorts of more strict professors of religion, it is every one's duty to be pressing these warnings of God within his own bounds and precincts. And if each of us should prevail but with one, to return effectually to God, it will be accepted with him, who in such a season, *seeks for a man* to stand in the gap, to turn away his wrath; and will save a city for the *sake of ten*, if they may be found therein. Let us not pretend that the repentance and reformation called for, respects the *public enormous sins* of the nation, in atheism, profaneness, sensuality, luxury, pride, oppression, hatred of the truth, contempt of the ministry of the gospel, and the like: they do so indeed, but not only; they respect also the decays in faith, love, zeal, with love of the world, conformity unto it, lukewarmness, that are found amongst the most eminent professors of religion. This is our present wound; here lies our weakness; namely, in the want of a quick, active, zealous ministry, to call and stir up magistrates and people to effectual repentance and turning to God. Unless this be given unto us, I fear we cannot be saved. If it be otherwise, if we have a ministry that really do attend unto their duty in this matter, I beg their pardon for other apprehensions; but then I shall think it the most pregnant sign of approaching destruction; seeing it is apparent unto all, that their endeavours have neither fruit nor success.

So far have we proceeded with our proposition; namely, that sin abounds amongst us; that judgments are approaching; that God hath given us manifold warnings of their so doing.

IV. THAT which, in the next place, we are to speak unto is, the *equity of this Divine constitution, that in the ordinary way of God's rule, and dispensation of his providence, repentance and reformation shall*
turn

turn away impendent judgments, and procure unto a people a blessed deliverance, and nothing else shall do it. Except you repent, you shall perish.

That upon repentance they shall be saved and delivered, is intended in the same rule. This is the unalterable law of Divine providence; this shall do it, and nothing else shall so do. The *wisdom* and *power* of men shall not do it; *fasting* and *prayer*, whilst we continue in our sins shall not do it. *Repentance* alone is made the condition of deliverance in this state of things.

Upon this rule, did God vindicate the equity of his ways against repining Israel, Ezek. xviii. 29, 30, 31. Can any thing be more just and equal? Ruin and utter desolation are ready to fall upon the whole people: this you have deserved by your iniquities, and multiplied provocations. In strict justice they ought immediately to come upon you: But *my ways are equal*; I will not deal with you in a way of strict justice; I will do it in equity, which is a meet temperature of justice and mercy. And this I make evident unto you herein, in that, whilst the execution of judgment is only threatened and suspended, if you make unto yourselves a *new heart and a new spirit*, in sincere repentance, if you *cast away all your transgressions*, by a thorough reformation of your lives, *iniquity shall not be your ruin*. What can be more just, righteous, and equal? Who can complain, if after all this evil doth overtake you, and you shall not escape? the same he pleads again, chap. xxxiii. 10, 11. as in many other places.

That this Divine constitution, namely, That repentance and reformation shall save a church, people, or nation in the state before described, and that nothing else shall do so, however men may please and pride themselves in their own imaginations, is equal, just, and good, that it is meet it should be so, that it hath a condecency unto the Divine excellencies,

cies, and the rule of righteousness in government, is evident. For,

1. The notion of this rule is inbred in mankind by nature, as was mentioned before. There is no man, unless he be atheistically profligate, but when he apprehends that evil and ruin, especially as unto his life, is ready to overtake him, and seize upon him, but he reflects on his sins, and comes to some resolutions of forsaking them for the future, so he may be at present delivered from his deplorable condition. Now all this ariseth from these indelible notions ingrafted on the minds of men; that all evil of punishment is from God, that it is for sin, that there is no way to avoid it, but by repentance and reformation: and those who will not improve this natural light, with respect unto the public, will be found, as it were, whether they will or no, to comply with it, when it comes to be their own case in particular. Herein lies a thousand testimonies unto the equity of this Divine constitution.

2. When this rule is complied withal, when *repentance* and *reformation* do ensue upon Divine warnings, whereby peace with God is in some measure attained; it will give men trust and confidence in him, with expectation of Divine relief in their distress, which is the most effectual means for men to be instrumental unto their own deliverance. And on the other side, when it is neglected, when evil approaches, guilt and terror will haunt the minds of men, and they shall not be able to entertain one thought of Divine help, which will render them heartless, helpless, senseless, and betray them into cowardice and pusillanimity, however they may boast at present. If these two sorts are opposed, ten shall chase an hundred, and an hundred put a thousand to flight. And if any nation do openly refuse a compliance with this constitution, if God should send another to invade them in a way of judgment, they would melt away before them as wax before the fire. When evils compass us about,

and

and are ready to seize upon us, a reduction on the neglect of this rule, will disturb our counsels, distract our thoughts, distress our minds, weaken our confidence in God, and dishearten the stoutest of the sons of men, giving them up a prey to their enemies.

3. This rule or constitution hath an impression of all Divine excellencies upon it; namely, of the goodness, patience, wisdom, righteousness, and holiness of God.

If when judgments are approaching, and deserved, men could divert them by their wisdom, courage or diligence, it would reflect dishonour on God in the government of the world. See Isa. xxii. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. But in this way of the deliverance of any people, there is a salvo for the glory of all the Divine excellencies, as is manifested unto all.

When therefore in this state, impendent judgments are not absolutely determined, yet so deserved, as that upon a supposition of continuance in those sins whereby they are deserved, the glory of Divine justice cannot be vindicated in the absolute impunity; and whereas God hath now prepared all things, and made them ready for their execution, all means and instruments being girt unto the work, his sword is whetted, and his arrows are fixed in the bow, he will first give warning, then give space and time for repentance, and requires no more for the laying aside of all his preparations for destruction, surely his ways are equal, kind, and full of mercy.

If men will look for, if they will expect deliverance, without a compliance with these good, holy, just, gracious, equal terms, they will find themselves in the issue wofully deceived. And if after all this, we in this nation should be found in a neglect hereof, if the nation should continue in its present frame, wherein, of all other means of safety, this seems to be least thought of or regarded, what shall we plead for ourselves? who shall pity us in the day of distress?

trefts? most men now despise these things, but can their hearts endure, or can their hands be strong in the day that the Lord shall deal with them? But,

V. WHEREAS this way, this means of deliverance is so just, so equal, so reasonable, manifesting itself to the consciences and reason of mankind, owned by the very heathens, and fully confirmed by Divine revelation, our next enquiry must be, *Whence is it that there is such an unreadiness, such an unwillingness to comply with this duty as there is? that so many difficulties are esteemed to be in it; so as that there is little hope it will be found among us in a prevalent degree?*

If men, especially such as are great, and esteem themselves to be wise, are told that this is the way to save and deliver the nation, they turn away in a wrath, as *Naaman* did, when the prophet bid him *wash and be clean*, when he would have rather expected an injunction of some heroic exploits: these are thoughts for weak and pusillanimous souls, who understand nothing of state affairs. But it will ere long appear who is wisest, God or men. But an hard thing it is to prevail with any to think well of it, or to go about it, or to judge that it is the only balm for our wounds.

To find out the cause hereof, I shall briefly consider all sorts of persons who are concerned to plant this healing tree, whose root is repentance, and whose fruit is reformation of life. And they are of three sorts.

1. *Magistrates.* 2. *Ministers.* 3. *The people themselves.*

Unless there be a concurrence of the endeavours of them all in their several places and duties, there will be no such public work of repentance and reformation wrought as is suited unto the turning away of public calamities. But yet though it be the express duty of them all, though it be their interest, though it cannot be omitted, but at their ut-

most peril, as unto temporal and eternal events, yet it is a marvellous hard and difficult work to prevail with any of them to engage vigorously in it. Some do not think it necessary; some, after conviction of its necessity, either know not how to go about, or linger in its undertaking, or are quickly wearied; some wish it were done, so as that they may not be at the trouble of it.

Let us consider them distinctly.

1. As unto *Magistrates*. When Jehoshaphat set himself to reform the church, or his kingdom, to escape the judgment that was denounced against them, he appointed for magistrates and judges, men fearing God, and hating covetousness: and his charge unto them was, "Let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it; thus shall you do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a perfect heart, 2 Chron, xix. 6, 9. Without this, there will be no public reformation; and therefore the first difficulty of it ariseth from this sort of persons, and that upon two accounts.

First, That Magistrates themselves do live in sin, and love it, and hate to be personally reformed; yea take delight in them that openly live in sin also, which is the height of wickedness, Rom. i. 32. When magistrates are profane swearers, or scoffers at the power of religion, or drunkards, or unclean persons, or covetous oppressors, a great obstruction must needs be laid in the way of public repentance and reformation; neither doth this difficulty at present arise merely from their personal sins and miscarriages, but also from the want of conviction, and a sense of their duty in their places, with the account which they must give thereof. For,

Secondly, They seem not to believe that the attempting of this work is any part of their duty, or that they are concerned therein: let it therefore be never so reasonable, so equal, so important, so necessary unto the deliverance and salvation of any people,

people, if those who should further it in the first place, do obstruct and hinder it, it will be attended with difficulties. Ill examples and negligence have ruined this nation.

Wherefore we may lay it down as an assured truth, which the text will confirm,

That unless magistrates, who have the visible conduct of the people, are convinced, that it is their duty to promote the work of repentance and reformation, at this time, by their own example, and in the discharge of their offices, the case of this nation is deplorable, and not to be relieved but by sovereign grace and mercy: for what shall the people do, when they see their guides, unto whose pattern they conform themselves, utterly regardless of any such thing? This is one means of the difficulty which is found among us, of affecting the minds of men with this equal constitution.

2. Those who are principally concerned herein, are *Ministers*, or those who have the administration of the word and ordinances of the gospel committed unto them. Unto these is this work given in charge in an especial manner. They have the principal means of repentance and reformation committed to their management. From them is the beginning and carrying on of this work expected and required. Hereof, as unto their sincerity and diligence, they must give an account at the last day. And if this spring be stopped, whence should the refreshing waters of repentance and reformation arise? But yet herein the principal difficulty of the whole work doth consist: For,

First, Some there are pretending unto this office in whom lies no small part of the evil that is to be reformed. Persons who labour among the most forward to fill up the measure of the iniquities of this nation; such as whose ignorance, negligence, profaneness, and debauchery, are in all their effects transfused and communicated unto all that are about them: shall we expect that such persons

will be instrumental in the reforming of others, who hate to be reformed themselves? Jer. xxiii. 15. It was so of old. But,

Secondly, There are very few of this sort of persons who will be at the *charge of carrying on this work*. They may quickly find what it will cost them; for unless they are exemplary in it themselves, it is in vain once to attempt the pressing of it upon others. They cannot go about it without great retrenchings of that which they have esteemed their liberty in the course of their conversations. All compliance with unreformed persons for secular ends; all conformity unto the course of the world, in jolities, and pride of life; all ostentation of riches, wealth and power; all self-seeking, and self-pleasing; all lightness, and carnal confidences, must utterly be cast away: and not only so, but unless, by incessant prayers and supplications, with earnestness and perseverance, they labour for *fresh anointings* with the Spirit of grace in their own souls, that faith and love and zeal for God, and compassion for the souls of men, and readiness for the cross, may revive and flourish in them, they will not be useful nor instrumental in this work. And is it any wonder, that the most of them think it better to suffer things to go on at the present rate, than to venture at that which will *cost them so dear* in its pursuit? The truth is, I know very few, if any, who are meet and fit to engage in this work in a visible eminent manner: those who have the best, almost the only opportunities for it, seem to be asleep.

Thirdly, Besides the charge they must be at themselves, they perceive the opposition they shall meet withal from others. They find that they shall not only disoblige and provoke all sorts of persons, and lose many of their useful friends, but also expose themselves unto obloquy, scorn, contempt, and reproach of all sorts. He is a lost man in this world, who, without respect of persons, will engage seriously in this work; every day he shall find one
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or other displeas'd, if not provok'd. This neither they nor their families can well bear withal. Indeed, the hardest and most difficult service that ever God call'd any of his ministers unto, excepting only Jesus Christ and his apostles, hath been in the endeavouring the reformation of backsliding or spiritually decayed churches. These are *the two witnesses* which in all ages *have prophesied in sackcloth*. Such was the ministry of Elijah, which brought him unto that conclusion, and an earnest longing to be deliver'd by death from his work and ministry, 2 Kings xix. 4. So was that of Jeremiah, in the like season, whereof he so complains, chap. xv. 10. John the Baptist, in the same work, lost first his liberty, then his life. And in after-ages, Chrysofom, for the same cause, was hated by the clergy, persecuted by the court, and at length driven into banishment, where he died. Most men care not how little a share they have in such a work as this, whose reward will reach them according to the proportion of their engagement in it. All churches, all persons almost, would willingly be let alone in the condition wherein they are: they that would press them unto due reformation, ever were, and ever will be looked on as their troublers.

Hence then it is, that our wound is incurable. Few of this sort are convinc'd of the present necessity of this duty; they hope things are indifferently well with them and their flocks, that they may endure their time well enough: few are willing to undergo the charge and trouble of it, to put all their present circumstances into disorder, few have received an anointing for thee; many are able to dispute against any attempts of it; and not a few have expectations of strange deliverances without it. What is left us in this case shall afterwards be declared.

3. It is difficult also on the account of the *people* that are to be reformed. It is hard to convince them of its necessity; hard to persuade them to en-

deavour it; hard to get them to persevere in attempts for it.

Some of the reasons hereof we may briefly consider: As,

1. That self-justification and approbation of themselves, which all sorts of persons, both by nature and by incurable prejudices, are inclined unto, lie at the bottom of this fatal negligence. When they see all things amiss, they will grant that there is some reformation necessary; but that it is so for others, and not for them. Those that are worse than they (as there are but few who do not think, on one pretence or other, that there are many worse than themselves), they suppose this duty is necessary unto; but not unto them. And if there are none visibly so, yet they will make them and judge them so to be. But whilst men have a *form of godliness*, though they deny the power thereof, they will justify themselves from all need of reformation. Churches will do so, and all sorts of professors of religion will do so; especially if they have any peculiar notion or practice, which they value themselves upon. So was it with the Jews of old, Jer. vii. 6, 7.; and with the Pharisees in the days of our Saviour, John ix. 40. It is so at this day; and it is a rare thing to meet with any who will own themselves to stand in need of real laborious reformation.

Hence it is that no churches would *ever reform themselves*, which have been the cause of all division and separation, whereby some have been saved from a general apostasy. They all approve themselves in their state and condition, which is come to that height in the papal church, that they boast themselves infallible, and not *capable of reformation* in any thing. I pray God secure others from the like presumptions; it will be their ruin by whom they are entertained; yet so it is at this day. Most churches think they need more *revenues*, more *honour* more *freedom from opposition*, more *submission* of
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all men unto them; but they almost abhor the thoughts that they stand in need of any *reformation*.

2. The nature of the work itself renders it difficult; for it requires a general change of the course wherein men may have been engaged; a thing as difficult, as to cause the streams of a mighty river to change their course, and run backward. Vicious habits must be subdued, inclinations, riveted in the mind by long practice and custom, be cast out, ways of conversation promoted and strengthened by all sorts of circumstances changed; which render the work unto some men impossible. So the prophet declares it, Jer. xiii. 23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to evil." Men cannot easily unlearn what they have been so taught or accustomed unto. The mighty power of God on the souls of men, both as unto individual persons, and whole societies; is required unto this change; so it may be wrought, and not otherwise, Isa. xi. 6, 7, 8, 9.

3. The advantage which many make unto themselves, by the present posture of things, and fear of alterations by reformation, is a mountain in the way, a mighty obstacle against entertaining serious thoughts about it.

4. The scripture most frequently casts the cause hereof on mens security in their earthly enjoyments. This keeps them safe from hearing God's calls, or taking notice of his warnings: and therefore it is laid down, as the cause and constant forerunner of all desolating judgments. It is at large insisted upon by our Saviour himself, Matth. xxiv. 37, 38. Luke xvii. 26.

Now this security is like the disease in the body, which is commonly called the *scurvy*; it is not any single distemper or disease, but a complication or concurrence of many prevalent distempers. Security is not the name of any one vicious habit or inclination of the mind, but it is a concurrent complication

plication of many; spiritual stupidity and sloth, called a *spirit of slumber, love of the world, carnal wisdom, groundless hopes of life*, all proceeding from *unbelief*, do concur in its constitution. And if a practice in a course of sin have for some season ensued on these principles, whereby conscience comes to be seared, or is made senseless, the case of those in whom it is, is, for the most part, remediless. And not a few of this sort are amongst us.

And many other reasons there are, rendering this work full of difficulty, though it be so necessary, so just and equal. As for those by whom all these things are despised, and even scoffed at, something shall be spoken afterwards unto them, or concerning them.

But yet this consideration ought not to deter any from endeavouring the discharge of their own duty herein: for as we have seen, it is indispensably necessary, that we and the nation may be saved from desolating judgments; so we shall see afterwards how and by what means this difficulty may be surmounted, and those obstacles removed out of the way. However, happy will they be, be they ever so few, never so poor, never so unknown to the world, whom God shall find so doing, when he ariseth out of his place to shake the earth terribly.

VI. I shall therefore, in the next place, to bring all things nearer home, enquire, What is *the nature of that repentance and reformation which at this time God requires of us all, that we may not perish in his sore displeasure.*

After a *devastation* made of the treasure of the Roman empire, by sundry tyrants successively, Vespasian coming to the government, acquainted the *senate*, that there was need of so many millions of money, that the empire might stand; not that it might flourish and grow vigorous, whereunto much more was required; but that it might be preserved from dissolution and ruin: And I shall propose, not what is requisite to
render

render the church of God in this nation orderly, beautiful, and vigorous, but only what is necessary that it may *stand* and live, by a deliverance from desolating judgments. And,

1. The repentance which, in any case, God requir-eth *absolutely*, is that which is *internal and real, in sincere conversion unto himself*, accompanied with fruits meet for such repentance. So is it declared, Ezek. xviii. 30, 31. "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according unto his ways, saith the Lord God: repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby you have transgressed, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" *A new heart, and a new spirit, or real internal conversion* unto God by the grace of the covenant, is required in this repentance, as the renunciation and relinquishment of all iniquities must be the *fruit* of it. So also is it expressed, Isa. i. 16, 17. Internal purification of the heart, with the practice of universal obedience, and abstinence of all sin, is that which God requires.

This is that repentance which was the subject of the ministry of John the Baptist; on the neglect whereof, he threatened the people with final excision; which accordingly not long after befel them, Mat. iii. 8, 9, 10. God doth not require a *feigned* repentance, or that which is merely outward and temporary. In this case, see Joel ii. 12, 13. But,

2. Where there is repentance and reformation that are *real* in the *root* or cause of them, which is an effectual conviction of sin, and sense of ensuing, approaching judgments, giving testimony of sincerity in its fruits, by an abstinence from open provoking sins, and the performance of known duties, unto its sincerity; in both which, a sense and reverence of God is owned, though it be not in many, in the most, it may be in few, *absolutely sincere and holy*, yet may

it prevail to the turning away of threatened judgments, at least for a season.

These things therefore are required unto this repentance.

1. *A real conviction of sin*, in them that are called unto it, or do make profession of it. If this lie not in the foundation, no expression of repentance, no profession of reformation is of any value in the sight of God: yea, it is a mocking of him, which is the highest provocation. Men, without this conviction, may be driven to somewhat that *looks like repentance and reformation*; as the keeping of *days of fasting or humiliation*, by outward force or compulsion of law; but there is nothing in what they do, of what we enquire after. By such days and ways they shall never save the nation, Jer. iii. 10.

2. *A real sense of God's displeasure, and the approach of desolating judgments*. It is not enough that we have a conviction and sense of our own sins, but we must have them also of the sins of the nation, whereby God is provoked to anger; and apprehensions of his displeasure are to influence our minds in all that we go about herein. Unless these abide and dwell in our minds, unless they accompany us continually in all our ways and occasions, rise and lie down with us, we shall not cordially engage in this duty.

3. Real reformation is an *abstinence from all known sin*, and the avowed fruits of a reformed conversation are required hereunto, Mat. iii. 10.

4. That it be *persisted in*, Hof. vi. 1.

On these suppositions, that this repentance is useful unto the end proposed, is made fully evident in the instances of Nineveh, and of Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 27, 28, 29. Ahab, in his repentance and humiliation, manifested a deep sense of the guilt of sin, and divine displeasure. *Seest thou, saith God, to Elijah, how he humbleth himself?* It might easily be known and taken notice of. There is an humiliation described by the prophet Isaiah, chap. lviii. 1,—5. which

which God abhorreth, and which shall be profitable for nothing. Such have been the humiliations among us for the most part: But although it be the duty of every man to endeavour that his repentance and reformation do consist in a sincere, internal, cordial conversion unto God, which the divine calls do intend; without which, it will not be of advantage unto his own soul, as unto his eternal condition; yet as unto the turning away of *temporal calamities*, at least as to the suspension of them, such a public repentance and reformation, as evidence themselves in their fruits, do proceed from a real sense of sin and judgment, may be useful and prevelent. In brief, the *repentance* which God requireth, with respect to his *covenant*, that the souls of men may be saved, unto the glory of his grace by Jesus Christ, is eternal, spiritual, supernatural, whereby the whole soul is renewed, changed, and turned unto himself. But as God is the supreme governour of the world in temporal things, with respect unto the *dispensation of his providence* in mercies and judgments, there may be a repentance and reformation, wherein his glory is vindicated in a visible compliance with his calls and warnings, and an acknowledgement of him in his righteous judgments, which may be of use unto the end proposed. Besides, wherever there is a *general reformation of life* sincerely attempted, it is to be believed, that in many it is spiritual and saving.

3. The repentance and reformation required must be suited unto the *state and condition of those who are called thereunto*. All are to consider what is amiss in them, as unto their own state and condition, Isa. lv. 7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; every one his own way and thoughts in their present condition.*

Wherefore the persons intended in this call, are of two sorts.

1. Such as *are wicked*, as unto their state and condition,

dition, persons unconverted, unregenerate, not born of God.

2. Such as are *sincere believers*, really converted unto God.

The call of God is unto both sorts; repentance and reformation are required of them both: And they are so in a suitableness unto their different conditions.

In each of these sorts there are *various degrees* of sin and provocation. Some of the first sort are openly flagitious, public habitual sinners, such as whose *sins go before-hand unto judgment*, as the apostle speaks, 1 Tim. v. 24. And some are *more sober* in their outward conversation. The call of God respects them all in their several degrees of sinning. Let the *wicked man* forsake his ways, and the *unrighteous man* his thoughts, those which are his *own*, which are proper to him. None doubts, unless it be themselves, that the *first sort* ought to reform themselves; the generality of men cry out against them, and fear, that for *their sins*, especially if they be persons in high places, the judgments of God will come upon the land.

But if those of the *other sort* also, who are apt to justify themselves, because they run not out unto the same *excess of riot with them*, do not apply themselves unto the repentance and reformation which are proper unto their *state and condition*, the will of God is not answered in his warnings. Yet it is the impenitency of this sort of men, that is the most dangerous *symptom* at this day in the nation. Their unshaken security keeps all that truly fear God in a trembling posture.

6. It is so with *churches*, peculiarly *reformed*, and *true believers* in them, as also all other true believers, who walk more at large. They also are called unto repentance and reformation, and that according to their state, and their respective degrees therein: For some are *more guilty* than others, in decays of faith, love, zeal, holiness, and fruitfulness

in obedience, with conformity to the world. And if there should be a public reformation in the nation, as to outward *provoking sin*; yet, if these of *this sort* do not reform themselves, according as their condition doth require, the desired *deliverance* would scarcely be obtained. And wo be to such persons, if through their neglect of their duty the whole nation should be exposed to ruin. Wherefore,

4. The reformation called for, as the condition of escaping of impendent judgments, must be *universal*, at least *general*; amongst all sorts and degrees, all orders and estates of men. All sorts have sinned, all sorts are threatened; and therefore repentance is required of *all*, if we would not perish. It is so of *magistrates* and *ministers*, of *nobles* and *common people*, in *city* and *country*; and that to be evidenced by its fruits; so as that it may be said of us, *See you not how they bumble themselves?*

But if this be so, some may be apt to say, it seems if *all* do not set their hearts and hands unto this work, if *all sorts* do not engage in it, there is no good effect to be hoped or looked for: But when shall we see any such thing? When shall we see the *generality* of all sorts of men in this nation cordially to go about this work of repentance and reformation? as good therefore let it alone, as go about to attempt it.

I answer, 1. If you can be *content to perish* with the impenitent and unreformed, you may chuse to do as they do: if you would avoid their punishment, you must avoid their sin, especially their refusal to turn on the call of God.

2. Some must *begin this work*, and be exemplary unto others; and blessed are they of the Lord, who shall receive the grace and honour so to do. Let us not then sit looking on others to see what they will do, but immediately engage unto our own duty.

3. The duty herein, of *no one private person*, much less of whole churches, shall be lost, though the nation should not be reformed in general. For,

1. They *shall deliver their own souls*; and if they

be not saved (as I believe they would be in an eminent manner) from somewhat of the outward part of a public calamity, yet they should be from all the wrath and displeasure of God in it.

2. A few, for aught I know, *one man*, may sometimes prevail with God, for the suspending, at least of judgments threatened unto a whole nation. And hereby,

3. They shall give unto others a farther *season of repentance*, which God can bless and make effectual unto them. There are therefore blessed encouragements unto all churches, unto all individual persons, to endeavour a compliance with the present calls of God, though *the body of the people should not be gathered*.

VII. Our next enquiry is, *Whence, or from what causes such a reformation may be expected, as may be useful unto the turning away of impending judgments?* And these causes are either supreme or subordinate.

The supreme cause hereof must be the *sovereign grace of God*, in fresh effusions of his Spirit on the souls of men, to turn them unto himself. Without this, all other ways and means of attaining it will be in vain. This is every where in the scripture attested unto, as the only supreme efficient cause of the conversion of men unto God. And unto that state are things come amongst us, that unless we are made partakers of it in a somewhat more than *ordinary manner*, our breaches cannot be healed; whether we have grounds or no to expect any such thing, shall be afterwards considered. At present there seems to be no other hopes of it, but only because it is a *sovereign* act of Divine grace, which hath been exemplified in the church of old. There seems indeed rather as yet, to be a withdrawing of the communications of the Holy Spirit, in effectually prevalent grace, on the part of God, and a contempt of them, on the part of men: but Sovereignty can conquer all obstacles. This way did God heal and
recover

recover his church of old, when all other means, all mercies, afflictions, and judgments failed, Ezek. xxxvi. 22,—29. And it may at present be for a lamentation, that this work of grace is so disregarded by the most, so despised by many, and so little cried for by the residue. But without it, in vain shall we use any other remedies, we shall not be healed. It is not the best projections of men for reformation, by this or that order or state of things in church or state, that, *without this*, will be of advantage unto us.

The *subordinate causes* hereof, must be the diligent discharge of their duty, by *magistrates* and *ministers*.

I shall but name these things, that I give no place to complaints or indignation, though just and almost necessary. And,

First, As unto the furtherance of it by *magistrates*, it must consist in three things.

1. By evidencing that the *promotion* of it is their *interest*. Unless it be understood so to be, whatever else they do in the countenance of it, will be of no use nor advantage. For this is that which the *generality* will conform unto, or comply withal. And if it be once understood, that *reformation* is what they *desire*, what they *design*, what they place their *chief interest* in, as it was with David, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others, it will have an influence on the people, not inferior unto what the design of Jeroboam, in pursuit of his corrupt interest, had on the people of Israel to sin; all other means are dead, unless they are enlivened by an evidence of reality in the minds of magistrates, and an high concernment in the prosperity of their work. Let them make what laws and orders they please, appoint what outward means they can devise, unless it be made uncontrollably evident that it is their *cordial design*, and what they place their *chief interest* in, they will not be available. Add hereunto,

2. The due execution of laws against *flagitious immoralities*. And,

3. An encouraging example in their own persons; without which, all things will grow worse and worse, whatever else be done. Men seem to be weary, in some measure, of the *dismal effects of sin*; but they seem not to be *weary of sin*. Unto this weariness, they yet want motives, encouragements, and examples. And it is strange unto me, that in all our fears and dangers, in the divisions of our counsels, and confusions amongst all sorts of men, under an high profession of zeal for the *protestant religion* in the nation, and the preservation of it, that this only expedient for our relief and safety lies wholly neglected.

As unto *ministers*, the faithful discharge of his duty in preaching, prayer, and example is required hereunto. Should I stay to shew the necessity hereof at this season; as also what is required thereunto, what *care*, what *diligence*, what *watchfulness*, what *compassion*, what *zeal*, what *exercise of all gospel-grace*, with the *over-neglect* of these things among many, it would take up a volume, rather than become a place in this present enquiry.

But I proceed unto that which is more our immediate concernment. Wherefore,

VIII. *What if all these means do fail? what if all expectations from them be in vain? what is incumbent on them in particular, who are really sensible of these things; namely, of the abounding of provoking sins, and the near approach of deserved judgments?*

That which I design herein, is to give some directions, as unto what *frame of heart* ought to be found in us, and the *practice of what duties* we ought to be found in at such a season as this is. It is no common, no easy thing to wait for the *Lord in the way of his judgments*, Isai. xxvi. 8, 9. There is inward soul-work night and day, as well as outward duties, required unto it. That God may be *glorified* in a due manner; that we may be *found in peace*, whatever be the event of things; that we may be *useful* unto others; and in all serve the will of God in our generation, are all expected from us in a way of duty.

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Unto this end, the ensuing directions may be made use of.

1st, *Take heed of stout-heartedness, and a contempt or neglect thereby of Divine warnings.* There is a generation, who either really, or in pretence, are bold, fearless, stout-hearted, regardless of these things; they seem to provoke and dare God to do his utmost, all that he seems to threaten. So they speak, *Isai. v. 19.* "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the holy one of Israel draw nigh, that we may know it." Here is much talk indeed of the judgments of God, and of their near approach; when shall we see them? why do not they come? when shall he bring forth his work?

This hath been the great controversy between the church and the wicked world from the beginning of it. Those that truly feared God, were always testifying that God would come, and take vengeance on them for their impieties and impenitency. But because these judgments were not speedily executed, the sinful world did always despise their warnings, and scoff at their message. So Enoch, the seventh from Adam, he preached and prophesied of these things; namely, of the "coming of God to take vengeance of ungodly men," *Jude xiv. 15.* And this message was scoffed at, as is evident, because no reformation ensued thereon, until the flood took them all away. So was it with Noah, and his preaching; and so it hath been with all that fear God, in their several generations; and this was one especial thing that the Pagans laughed and mocked at the primitive Christians about; as is plain in *Lucian's Philopater.* So the apostle Peter gives us an account both of what was past, and what would afterwards come to pass, *2 Pet. iii. 3, 4, 5, 6.* unto the end.

And such as these abound amongst us: all the warnings of God have been turned into *ridicule*, previous judgments despised, and sin itself made a scoff of. But of all others, God most abhorreth

this sort of men. They are said to be *far from righteousness*, Isai. xlv. 12. Unto such he speaks in his wrath, *hear ye despisers, wonder, and perish*. Yea, the scripture is full with the severest threatenings against this sort of men; nor shall any in the appointed season, drink deeper of the cup of God's indignation. See Isai. xxviii. 14, 15. Deut. xxix. 19, 20. Such secure despisers, such scoffers at approaching judgments, such deriders of the signs and tokens of them, God will deal withal. And some there are, who it may be, not from the same spirit of open profaness, but out of prejudices, corrupt arguings, pretended observations of things past, disbelief of all they do not feel, and such like effects of long security, do utterly scorn and scoff at all these things. They account it a matter of weakness, pusillanimity, or superstition to concern themselves in these warnings of providence, or the explication of them by the word: but their judgment sleepeth not. And it may be observed, and will be found true, that when judgments do really approach, of all sorts of men, they are the most cowardly, distracted, fearful, and void of counsel: for when God begins to deal with them, their hearts cannot endure, nor their hands be strong, he smites through their loins, and filleth them with a spirit of horror and fear, that they shall tremble like the leaves of the forest. In that day you may say unto them, as Zebul did to boasting Gaul, upon the approach of Abimelech, his enemy, *Where is now thy mouth wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech?* Where is now your mouth and your vauntings, with respect unto these judgments of God? so Micaiah the prophet told Zedekiah the false prophet, in his boasting and confidence of success, 1 Kings xxii. 25. With all thy confidence and boasting, thou shalt be one of the first that shall endeavour to fly and hide thyself. Yea, this sort of persons are commonly the most ridiculous and contemptible, when real danger overtakes them, of any sort of men in the world.

That which God requires of us in such a season,
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is called in scripture, *trembling*; *they that tremble at thy word*. This he regards, this he accepts, this he approveth of, *Isai. lxxvi. 2, 5. Jer. v. 22*. It is not a weakening, an astonishing, heartless consternation of spirit that is intended; not such a dread and terror as should obstruct us in the cheerful performance of duty, and preparation to comply with the will of God, such as that mentioned, *Deut. xviii. 66, 67*. which is the most severe of judgments. But it is an awful reverence of the greatness and holiness of God, in the way of his judgments, casting out all carnal security, self-confidence, and contempt of Divine warnings, so bringing the soul into a submissive compliance with the will of God in all things. But look well in the first place, that this evil on no pretences do make any approach unto you.

If one evil seems to be diverted, do not say with *Agag, surely the bitterness of death is past*; which will prove an entrance into this evil frame, and so grow regardless of your duty: God expects other things from you. *The Lion, saith he, hath roared, who will not fear?* *Amos iii. 8*. There is the voice of a lion roaring for his prey, in the present Divine warnings: take heed that you despise not that, which, when it comes to pass, you can neither abide, nor avoid.

2dly, Take heed of a frame of heart that is regardless of these things. We have a sort of men, who although they will not, they dare not openly, as others, despise Divine warnings, yet they see all things in such a light, as suffers them not to take notice of any concernment of their own, in them, *Psal. xxviii. 5. Jer. xxxvi. 24*. The land is filled with sin; it is true, but they are the sins of other men, not theirs; *there are tokens and signs of God's displeasure* in heaven above, and the earth beneath, but men are not agreed whether these things be of any signification or no; some say yea, and some nay; but they are new and strange, and so are meet to be the subject of discourse; *previous judgments have been upon us*; they are but such accidents as fall
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out frequently in the world. But the divisions among ourselves, and contrivances of our adversaries, seem to threaten ruin to the nation; it may be so; but these things belong unto our rulers; and men are divided about this also; some say one thing, and some another: some say there was a plot, and some say there was none. In the mean time, they are filled with their own occasions, and will not be diverted from them, unto any serious regard of God in his present dispensations; like the *wild ass in her occasion, who can turn her away?* Jer. i. 24. Of this frame the prophet complains, as that which God will surely avenge, Isai. xxvi. 11. "Lord when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see and be ashamed, for their envy at the people; yea the fire of thine enemies shall devour them."

Others look on all things in another light, and under another notion; for whereas it is part of our sin and punishment in this nation, an evident fruit of the evil of our ways, that we are divided into designing parties, the one seeking the ruin of the other, they consider all providences as relating unto such differences. This gives them a zealous concernment in them, and continued talk about them; but the will, work, and design of God in them is not laid to heart.

Some are so well pleased with their present advantages, in promotions, dignities and wealth, as their interest, that they cannot endure to think of these things. Whatever warnings are portended of approaching judgments, they look on them as the threatenings of such as have ill will against them, and would have these things to portend their trouble: guilt makes them fearful and sensible; and they think it best to hide those things from themselves, which, if they are so, they cannot remedy.

To free us from this miscarriage also, this unanswerableness unto the mind of God in his present dispensation, we may consider,

1. That a deep consideration of, and enquiry into
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the mind of God in such a season as we have described, is required of us in a way of duty. It is our sin to neglect it, and that attended with many aggravations. It is not a thing that *we may attend unto or omit* as it seems convenient; but it is required as a *duty* of us, without which we cannot glorify God in a due manner.

He that is not daily exercised with prevalent thoughts about the present ways of God in the approach of his judgments, lives in such a *neglect of duty*, as will bring in a negligence and coldness in all other duties whatsoever; for this is certain, that when God calls unto any especial duty in an *extraordinary* way or manner, in any season, those by whom it is neglected, are really cold, formal, and negligent in all other ordinary duties whatever. That grace which will not be excited unto especial duties on extraordinary occasions, is very lifeless in all other things. This is the best note to try, if not the truth, yet the power of grace. When it is in its vigour and due exercise, it makes the soul to be ready, inclinable, and disposed unto all intimations of the Divine will and pleasure; as speaks the Psalmist; "Thou shalt guide me by thine eye, and lead me with thy counsel." He attended to each look and guidance of Divine providence to comply with it, when others must be forced with strong *curbs and bridles, like the horse and mule.*

2. It is such a duty, as whereunto real wisdom and diligence are required. We think it needful to use our wisdom about other things, our own affairs: but in this it is most necessary. "The voice of the Lord crieth unto the city, the man of wisdom shall see thy name;" Micah vi. 9. Ordinary, slight and transient thoughts will not answer this duty. Such, all men that are sober cannot but have; and their discourse is answerable thereunto. But consideration, with diligence and prudence, is required of us: let these testimonies be consulted to this purpose, Psal. lxxv. 9. Deut. xii. 10. Hosea iv. last,

last, Pſal. cvii. 43. Prayer, ſtudy, and meditation are all diligently to be engaged herein.

3. Take heed of *vain confidences*. Men are apt in ſuch ſeaſons, to fix on one thing or other, where-with they relieve and ſupport themſelves. And there is not any thing that is more effectual to keep them off from this duty, and the frame of ſpirit which is required in them. If you ſpeak with any man almoſt, you may, with a little heed, diſcover wherein his *confidence* doth lie, and what it is that he truſts unto. But ſaith the prophet unto ſuch perſons, “The Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou ſhalt not proſper in them,” Jer. ii. 37.

There are ſundry ſorts of *vain confidences* where-with men are apt to relieve their minds in ſuch a ſeaſon, ſo as to countenance themſelves in their ſecurity and a neglect of this eſpecial duty. Two in particular I ſhall only mention, as I do only name the heads of things, which might be much enlarged.

1^{ſt}, The firſt is *ſome certain privileges*, whereon they truſt for an exemption from common calamities: they are the *church*, they are the *people of God*, they are ſeparated from the world, and perſecuted by it; and hence there is a ſecret reſerve in their minds, that indeed they ſhall not be in trouble as other men. So was it with the Jews of old; when they were threatened with the judgments of God for their ſins, and called thereon to repentance, they juſtified themſelves in their ways, and deſpised all divine warnings, on a confidence they had in their church-privileges. They cried againſt the prophet, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are theſe,” and no evil ſhall come nigh us, Jer. vii. 4. And in confidence hereof, namely, that they were the church, and enjoyed the privileges belonging thereunto, and the ſolemn worſhip of God therein, they gave themſelves up unto all abominable immoralities, under an aſſurance of impunity by their privileges; as the prophet upbraids them, verſe 8, 9. “Behold ye truſt in lying words that cannot profit. Will you ſteal, murder,

“murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and say you shall be delivered?” At this day all sorts of men claim a refuge in their privileges. Those who design the ruin of the nation, and of all true religion therein, do it with confidence of success from hence, that they are the church, that the temple of God is with them, that all the privileges belonging unto the church are theirs, and so are the promises made unto it. And such is the infatuating efficacy of their prejudicate persuasion herein, that it hath had two marvellous effects; the one against the light of nature, and the other against the fundamental principles of religion.

For, first, Under the influence of this confidence, they have engaged into as *vile immoralities* as ever were perpetrated under the sun. Murder, persecution, assassinations, dying in falsehoods, with a general design to pursue the same ways unto the utmost, in the destruction of multitudes of innocent persons; as they did formerly in Ireland. But what if they do all those *abominations*? Yet they are the church; the promises and privileges of it are theirs, and all they do is accepted with God; a principle tending directly to the vilest atheism.

Again, Although God in a marvellous, yea a miraculous manner, hath discovered and frustrated their hellish designs, and brought many of them into the pit they digged for others, yet they will accept of *no rebuke from God*, but go on in an obstinate presumption that *they are the church*, and shall prevail at last. And that church which shall prevail by these means, no doubt they are. Some indeed pretend highly *to be the church*, but they lay claim, so far as I can find, to no other advantages thereby, but *dignities* and *promotions*. And others also are apt to relieve themselves with this confidence, that they are the *people of God*, and shall have an especial interest in deliverance on that account. And I say, far be it from me, to weaken any persuasion of God’s especial

cial regard of those that are truly his. God hath a peculiar people in the world, let the world scoff at it whilst they please, unto whom all the promises of the scripture, and all the privileges of the church, do belong. These promises they ought to mix with faith, and plead before God continually, and they shall be all accomplished towards them in the way and time of God's appointment. Nor do any sort of dissenting professions, as they are called, that I know of, appropriate this right and privilege unto themselves, unto the exclusion of others; but extend it to all who are sincere believers. But this is that which I say concerning all sorts of men, That if an apprehension or persuasion, that they are the *church or people of God*, do keep them off from that duty of repentance and reformation, which God calls unto, it is a confidence which God rejecteth, and in which they will not prosper. I desire to ask of any, Hath not the church sinned? Have not professors sinned? Are there not sins amongst us against the Lord our God, proper unto our state, and according to our measure? If it be so, our being *the people of God*, any of us, if we are so, *unless we repent*, doth only as unto these providential dispensations, expose us unto his just severity, for "judgment must begin at the house of God;" *it must begin at us*. Take heed of this failing *reserve*: I have observed much security to arise from hence, and great negligence of known duties. If you are the people of God, you had the more need to tremble at his judgments, and at the tokens of his displeasure. Especially ought it to be so with you at this day, when God seems in a peculiar manner to be displeased with the *rivers*, as the prophet speaks, Hab. iii. 8.; those who should send forth streams of refreshment unto the nation. To me, at present, all things appear in that condition, that there is no reserve left as unto public judgments, but only in *sovereign grace and mercy*, to be waited for in a way of *repentance and reformation*. As unto our privileges, God speaks unto us, as he did to the people of old, concerning their orna-
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ments, Exod. xxxiii. 5. "Put them off, that I may know what to do unto you." We are to lay aside our pleas and pretences, betaking ourselves to sovereign grace and mercy alone.

2dly, Another ground of vain confidence may be, an *unjust expectation of such an accomplishment of scripture promises, prophecies and predictions, as are not applicable unto our present condition.*

It is undeniable that there are such promises, prophecies, and predictions concerning the deliverance of the church, the ruin of its adversaries, the glory and beauty of the kingdom of Christ, as those intended. For although the most of that kind in the old Testament, are of a spiritual interpretation, and have their accomplishment in all the elect in every age, whatever be their outward state and condition; yet that there are such also as concern the state of the church in this world, and the ruin of all its anti-christian enemies, with peace and glory ensuing thereon, cannot be denied.

And concerning them, we may observe fundry things, that we may not abuse them into vain and *groundless confidences* in such a season as this is.

(1.) That we ought to have a firm faith of their accomplishment in their proper season. The rule of them all is that of the prophet; *I the Lord will hasten it in his time*, Isai. lx. 22. As it is also, Hab. ii. 2, 3. Though they seem to be prolonged and tarry beyond their proper season, yet they have their fixed and determinate time, beyond which they shall not tarry. And two things I would offer on this occasion.

1. That we are not *only to believe their accomplishment*, but to be in the actual exercise of faith about it. For without this, we shall want a great supportment of patient long-suffering in every time of trial. And by this faith do we take in the power and comfort of things promised, things not actually enjoyed. For faith is *the substance of things hoped for*, Heb. xi. 1. that which gives a previous subsistence in the mind and soul, as unto the benefit and comfort of them,

of *the things hoped for*. And those whose minds are exercised unto these things, do know what benefit they have by such a perception of them. They are carried sometimes by a way of believing into communion with them who lived in the old world, as they had with us in the expectation of what we enjoy; and into the same kind of communion with those who hereafter shall enjoy the accomplishment of those promises which may be yet afar off.

2. This faith ought to be most firm when all things seem to conspire in rendering the accomplishment of such promises not only improbable, but also impossible, as unto present outward causes, as in the state of things at this day in the world. There are no visible or appearing means of the fulfilling of any of them; yea the whole world is joined in a conspiracy to defeat them; but true faith riseth against those oppositions, and is prevalent against them all.

For having God alone, his power, faithfulness, and truth for its object, it values not the opposition that men can make against them. That shall be done in this kind, which God is able to do, let men do what they please. God laughs all their proud attempts to scorn, and so may the *virgin daughter of Zion* also.

(2.) It is our duty to *pray for the accomplishment of all the promises and predictions* that are on record in the book of God concerning the kingdom of Christ and his church in this world. God will do these things; yet for all of them, he will be sought unto *by the house of Israel*. This hath been the practice of believers in all ages, both under the Old Testament and the New. Prayer for the accomplishment of promises, hath been the life-breath of the church in all ages; and faith hereby brings in great refreshment unto the soul. And the greatest evidence of its approach will be a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, be they few or more at any time in the world, stirring them up and enabling them to pray effectually and fervently for

for their accomplishment, as in the example of Daniel, chap. ix. 1, 2, 3. Wherefore,

(3.) There are three things considerable in such promises and predictions.

1. The grace and mercy that is in them.
2. The *suitableness* of that grace and mercy unto the state of believers at any time.
3. The *literal accomplishment* of them in their outward circumstance. The two former belong unto us at all times, and we may plead with God in faith, for the effects of them in all our trials and distresses.

With respect hereunto, it is that the people of God have faith in him against the world, with all their enemies and oppressors, which they have been so reproached withal, as the Lord Christ was with his faith unto the same purpose, Psal. xxii. 8. When things seem to go evil with them, when they are shut up in the hands of their enemies and oppressors, as the Lord Christ was upon the cross, the world is ready to reproach them with their confidence in God, and their owning themselves to be his people; but they faint not herein. However things may go for a season, they are secured of the grace and mercy which is in the promises, which are suited unto all their wants, all that they can desire absolutely; yea, their full deliverance, when it is best for them: But,

(4.) Remember, that as unto the application of the accomplishment of such promises and predictions in their outward effects, unto certain times and seasons, many have been wofully mistaken, which hath been the ground and occasion of very scandalous miscarriages: the world hath scarce seen greater outrages of sin and wickedness that have been countenanced by this pretence, that such or such a time was now come, and that therein such and such things were to be done by those who made such interpretations and applications. For when such a conceit befalls the minds of men, it sets them loose from all rules but their own inclinations. And many have from

such apprehensions fallen under sad and scandalous disappointments. Wherefore,

5. *Such an expectation* or confidence of the events of promises, prophecies, and predictions, as hinders men from applying their minds thoroughly unto the present duties that God calls for, is heedfully to be watched against. I have heard many arguing and pleading for the strengthening of such confidences, but I never saw good effect of them; they please for the present, they profit not.

The story of the prophets Jeremiah and Haniah, is applicable in this case, Jer. xxviii. And it is certain that before the final destruction of Jerusalem, that which principally hardened the people unto their utter ruin, so as they would hearken neither to the voice of God nor man for their safety, was a presumption they had, that at that time their Messiah would come and save them.

(6.) Few know of what sort that *day of the Lord* will be, which they desire, long for, and expect. We know how it proved unto the church of the Jews, Mal. iii. 1, 2. A day may be coming, which, although it may have a glorious issue, yet it may consume all the hopes that men have treasured up in their expectation of it. But I will not touch farther on these things: my design is only to take us all off from such vain confidences as may obstruct us in a diligent attendance unto those duties, which God at this season calls us unto; which shall be declared immediately.

3dly, Some place their confidence in *secret reserves* which they have in themselves, that however it go with others, yet they shall escape well enough. They are rich, and they intend to be wise: they intend not to be engaged in any thing civil or religious, that should prejudice them in their possessions: whilst things pass at the cheap rate of talking, they will be like unto others; but when trials come, they will make a safe retreat. We have their character and their doom, Jer. xxviii. 15, 17, 18.

4thly, A fourth direction for our deportment in such a season

a season is, That "we diligently consider and search our own hearts and ways, to find out and understand how it is between God and our souls." This direction is given us, Lam. iii. 39, 40. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." When trials and punishments draw nigh, or are upon us, it is not our business nor duty to lie complaining under them, but so to *search and try our ways, as to turn unto the Lord.* This is the first word of the voice of God in approaching judgments, *Search yourselves, try your hearts and your ways,* try how it is with you. At such a season, to pass by the consideration of ourselves, of our state, of our walk, of our actions, in an ordinary manner, or with slight or common thoughts, is to despise the voice of God. God speaks aloud, the *voice of God crieth unto the city;* he doth so by the ways before mentioned; he speaks articulately, distinctly, so as that a *man of wisdom may see his name,* and know his mind; he speaks unto us; and says, *search now yourselves.*

And in this search, respect is to be had unto the things ensuing:

1. In general, Search into your *state and condition;* try whether it be built on a good foundation; on the rock by faith; or on the sand by profession only; whether it will hold his trial, who will bring it to the refiner's fire; *he shall slay the hypocrite with the breath of his mouth.* And many dreadful discoveries will be made of the false and rotten states of men when the Lord's day of trial shall come. This is one certain end of a fiery trial; namely, to discover and consume the *profession of hypocrites,* as hath been done in part already.

2. With respect unto those ways and sins which are the *peculiarly provoking sins* of churches and professors; such as the Lord Christ testifieth his displeasure against in them, and which may have as great an influence into the procurement of temporal judgments, as the more flagitious sins of open sin-

ners: such are *decays in love, zeal, and fruits of obedience*, want of delight, warmth and life in the ordinances of gospel-worship: with pride, elation of mind, self-conceit, and barrenness in good works. If we would know what are the sins in churches and professors, that the Lord Christ is so displeas'd with us, as to threaten his departing from them, we cannot better learn it, than in the declaration of his mind which he makes unto the churches of Asia, Rev. ii. 3. And these are the things which he chargeth on them: For persons under the capacities of church-members and professors, to content themselves with *such a search* of their outward actions and duties, of all sorts, religious, moral, and civil, as none may justly cast blame upon them, it no way answers the search that God calls them unto. How is it as unto the inward frame of the heart? what is the vigour and power of faith and love in you? how do they act themselves? what is your real delight in the ways of God? where is your fruitfulness in works of charity and mercy? where is your readiness to forgive your enemies? are there no failings, no decays in these things? are there no indispositions, deadness and coldness in duties, grown upon you? how is it as unto constant meditation on spiritual things, and the fixing your affections on things that are above? With respect unto these things, ought we to *search ourselves diligently* in such a day as this is; and if we find ourselves under decays in them, let us know of a truth that God calls us unto repentance, on pain of his highest displeasure.

For our parts, we cannot search into, we cannot judge the hearts of others, any other way but by the application of the word unto their consciences. But I must needs say, that if men's outward actions be an indication of the inward frame of their minds, there is reason enough for the most of us to be jealous over ourselves herein.

3. With respect unto your *callings, circumstances, and inclinations*, and the sins that are peculiar unto them.

them. There are sins which are very apt to insinuate themselves into the *callings* and *circumstances* of men, both of high and low degree, that do *easily beset them*; as hardness, oppression, severity and unmercifulness, in those that are great, and have large possessions; and deceit, equivocations, over-reaching, in those of more ordinary employments. I speak not of these at present: they are of the number of those *which go before-hand unto judgment*: But these things; namely, mens *callings, circumstances, and inclinations*, are apt to influence their mind with vicious habits, and to render their ways crooked. *Pride of life, self-conceit, negligence in holy duties, distempered passions and lusts, devouring cares, carnal fears*, with other hurtful evils, do spring from these things, if not watched against. In reference unto them therefore are we called to search ourselves in the day wherein God is pleading with us. With respect unto them ought we to be exceeding jealous over ourselves; for verily they have rendered the ways and walkings of the generality of professors a great provocation unto Christ Jesus.

4. In an especial manner with a respect unto *love of the world*, and conformity thereunto. This is that which the Lord Jesus Christ will not always bear withal in his churches; for it lies in opposition unto the whole work of faith, and all the precepts of the gospel; it is not against this or that command only, but it is against the whole design of the gospel, and the grace administered therein.

Now, at present, concerning our outward conformity unto the world, there needs no *great search* to be made: it is open and evident unto all; so that as unto attire, fashions, manner of ordinary converse, mispence of time, feastings of rich ones, and jollities, there is little difference left between professors and the world, which God will not long bear with them in; especially not in those who have increased their wealth in, and grown into conformity with the world, whilst others, under the same profession, have been harrassed, imprisoned, impoverished, and ruined

ed by the world. And as for *inordinate love* unto the world, I have spoken so often to it, treated so much of it, that I shall not here again insist upon it: I shall only say, that when men grow proud, high-minded, and value themselves according to the increase of their earthly enjoyments, and think themselves wronged if others do not also so value them, it is in vain for them to pretend that their hearts do not inordinately cleave unto the world, and the things of it.

This *self-searching* is the first duty we are at this season called unto; and if we are negligent or overly herein, we shall not answer the mind and will of God in any one duty or instance of any other kind. We are therefore herein to call in God and men unto our aid and assistance, as also to stir up ourselves unto it with diligence and perseverance. So the Psalmist, lest he should not be able to make a diligent effectual examination of himself and his ways, cries unto God, to *search and try him*, that he might be known unto himself, especially with respect unto any *evil way of sin* or wickedness, Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24. So we ought to cry for fresh communications of the Holy Spirit of God in his *convincing efficacy*, to acquaint us thoroughly with ourselves, and to deliver us from all self-deceivings in this matter. For when we go about this search, a thousand pretences and arguings will arise, to the concealment or countenance of self and sin, against a discovery and pursuit. Nothing can remove and scatter them but the power of the Holy Spirit, acting in his convincing efficacy. The whole deceit of the heart in such a season will be put forth, to hide, palliate, excuse, and countenance such frames and actions as ought to be seized on and brought to judgment. There is need of the *candle of the Lord to search the inward parts of the belly*, Prov. xx. 27. of spiritual light, to look into the secret recesses of the mind and affections, to discover what is amiss in them. And there is need of spiritual strength, to cast down all the *strong holds* and fortifications of sin, which will be
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all set up at such a time, and will not be demolished or scattered without powerful actings of grace. This therefore, in the first place, we are to apply ourselves unto, if we intend any success in this work of self-examination.

So also are we to pray, that the word, in the *preaching* and *dispensation* of it, may be effectual unto the same end, that we may find it *quick and powerful*, Heb. iv. 12. that it may so judge the *secrets of our hearts*, 1 Cor. xiv. 25. that we may fall down and judge ourselves also. To hide ourselves at such a season, from the power of the word, is an open evidence of a ruining security.

This work, in the use of these means, is to be called over and persisted in, if we design a compliance with the present calls of God, or an endeavour to be found of him in peace when he cometh.

5thly, To be deeply *humbled before the Lord* for our own sins, with a relinquishment of them all thereon, is the principal part of our duty in this season. This the whole scripture testifieth unto, speaking of these things. Without this, all that we do, or can do, signifies nothing, as unto a compliance with the calls of God. This is the end of the search before insisted on. We are to find out, to know every one the *plague*, the stroke, the disease of his own heart, so as to be humbled before the Lord for it.

And unto this humiliation it is required,

1. That it be *internal* and *sincere*. There is an humiliation commonly expressing itself in the observation of *days of fasting and prayer*, which oftentimes is but the *hanging down of the head like a bulrush for a day*. However, it may be so carried sometimes, as to divert or prolong the execution of threatened judgments: But that which God requireth of us, is to be in the *fixed affections of the heart*. When the Lord Christ comes to enjoin repentance and reformation, he gives himself that title, *I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts*, Rev. ii. 23. It is an internal hidden work, which he looks after in our humiliation for sin. So saith David in the same
case,

case, *Thou requirest truth in the inward parts*, Psal. li. Truth, or sincerity in the affections, is that which God regards in our humiliation; which answers the charge in the prophet, *rend your hearts, and not your garments*. Inward power, not outward signs, are accepted with God in this matter. Let us every one take it on our own souls, every one charge his own conscience in private with the performance of this duty: God will bear no longer with pretences; no outward appearances or evanid affections in a temporary humiliation for *a day*, though in the observation of the most solemn duties required on such a day, will answer the mind of God herein. For,

2. It must be *extraordinary*. Humiliation for our own sins, is a duty constantly incumbent on us. To *walk humbly with God* is the principal thing that he requires of us in this world, Micah vi. 9. Hereof self-abasement, in a sense of sin, is the life and soul, the principle of all other acts and duties belonging thereunto. But when the calls of God are extraordinary, as they are at this day, it is necessary that we attend hereunto in an extraordinary manner. Failing in the necessary degrees of a duty, renders it ineffectual and unacceptable. If, as unto times and seasons, ways, means, and manner of this duty, we do not apply ourselves unto it with more than ordinary diligence, and with great intention of mind, we fail in what is expected from us. To deal with God on *extraordinary occasions*, in an *ordinary frame of spirit*, is to despise him, or argues at least no due reverence of him in his judgments, nor a due apprehension of our own concerns in them.

3. It is required that humiliation for sin be accompanied with a *relinquishment of sin*: *he that confesseth his sins, and forsaketh them, shall find mercy*. Confession is grown a cheap and easy labour, whether it be read out of a book, or discharged by virtue of spiritual gifts. Humiliation may be *pretended*, when it is not; and expressed, when it is transitory, no way answering the mind and will of God. But the *real relinquishment* of sinful frames, sinful ways, sinful

sinful neglects, can neither be pretended, nor represented better than it is. He that thinks he hath nothing to forsake, no evil way, no sinful negligence, no frame of heart, will be awakened to a better knowledge of himself when it is too late. This we may therefore evidently try ourselves by; what real change hath there been in us, in compliance with the calls of God? what have we relinquished in our ways, frames, or actings? what vain thoughts are utterly excluded, whereunto we have given entertainment? what passions or affections have been reduced into order, which have exceeded their due bounds and measures? what vain communication, formerly accustomed unto, hath been watched against and prevented? what dissimulation in love hath been cured or cast out? what irregular actings in our persons, families or occasions of life have been forsaken? An enquiry into these things, will give us real, sensible evidence, whether our humiliation for our own sins be compliant with the present calls of God.

6thly, Another duty of the season is, that *we mourn for the sins of others*; of those especially in whom we are providentially concerned; as relations, churches, the whole people of the land of our nativity, with whom we are engaged by manifold bonds and means of conjunction. It is well known that this sincere mourning for the sins of the places and times wherein we live, of the people and churches whereunto we do belong, is eminently approved of God, and a token unto themselves, in whom that sense is, of deliverance in a day of calamity, Ezek. ix. 4, 5, 6. To have minds careless and regardless of the sins of other men, is a great evidence of want of sincerity in our profession of the detestation of sin. Many pretences there are of it; as that they will not hear us, we are not concerned in them; that they are wicked enemies of God, and the worse they are, the more will their destruction be hastened: by such pretences do men deceive their souls into a neglect of this duty, yea, unto provoking sin, such as this is.

It is a matter of sorrow unto them that truly fear God, and have any concernment in his glory, or the honour of Christ, that the whole world, so far as we know, is filled with all abominable provoking sins; it lies under a deluge of sin, as it lay of old under a flood of waters; only here and there appeareth an ark, that is carried above it. *Atheism, anti-scripturism, disbelief of gospel-mysteries, contempt of the religion which they themselves profess*, amongst all sorts of Christians, the loss of all public faith and trust, with a litter of unclean lusts, *ambition, pride, covetousness*, in many who have the outward conduct of the church, have spread themselves over the face of the earth. When God thus deals with the world, when he gives it up unto this open profligate excess which now abounds in it, it becomes unto all that truly fear him, a place of darkness, and sorrow, which calls for a mourning frame of heart.

It is so much more as unto the *land of our nativity*. From a conjunction with this people in blood, language, manners, laws, civil interests, relations, arising from the common law of nativity, in a place limited and bounded by providence unto especial ends, we cannot but have a great concernment in their good or evil. It is greater from hence, that the *same true religion* hath been professed in the whole nation, with innumerable privileges accompanying it.

On these and the like considerations, the whole nation is laid under the same law of providence for good or evil.

In the *sin* therefore of this people we are in a peculiar manner concerned; and shall be so in their *sufferings*.

Whether sin abound in the land at present, we have already made enquiry; and nothing, spoken before, shall be repeated. If we have not a sense of these provocations, if we endeavour not to affect our hearts with them, and mourn over them, we are very remote from that frame which God calls unto.

And

And this *mourning for the sins of others* ariseth from a double spring ;

1. *Zeal for the glory of God.*

2. *Compassion for the souls of men* ; yea, for the *woful calamitous state and condition* which is coming upon them, even in this world.

Surely those who are true believers cannot but be concerned in all the concerns of the glory of God. If in *all our afflictions* he is afflicted, in all the sufferings of his glory, we ought to suffer. In the blessed direction given us for our prayers, as unto what we ought to pray for, that which, in the first place, is prescribed, as that which principally and eminently we ought to insist on, is the glory of God in the sanctification of his name, the progressive coming of the kingdom of Christ, and the accomplishment of his will, by the obedience of men in the world. If we are sincere herein, if we are fervent in these supplications, is it nothing unto us, when all these things are quite contrary amongst us ; when the name of God is blasphemed, and all things whereon he hath placed his name are derided ; when the whole internal interest and kingdom of Christ are opposed, and the outward court of the temple given, every where, to be *trodden down of the Gentiles* ; when all manner of sins abound, in opposition unto the will and commands of God ; when the earth is almost as unlike unto heaven as hell itself ; is there nothing to be mourned for herein ? We are for the most part selfish, and so it may go well with ourselves, according to the extent of our relations and circumstances, we are not greatly moved with what befalls others. There is evil enough herein ; but shall we be moreover so minded towards Jesus Christ, that whilst we are in safety, we care not though his concernments are in the utmost hazard ? do we love the name of God, the ways of God, the glory of God in his kingdom and rule, we cannot but be deeply affected with the suffering of them all in these days.

The other *spring of this mourning frame*, is *compassion*.

passion for the souls of sinners, and their persons also in the approach of calamitous desolations.

I am hastening to an end, and cannot insist on these things. This only I shall say, he that can take a prospect of the eternally miserable condition of multitudes among whom we live, and the approaching miseries, which, without repentance and reformation, will not be avoided, and not spend some tears on them, hath a heart like a flint or adamant, that is capable of no impression.

7thly, It is a season wherein we are called to a diligent, heedful attendance unto the *duties of our stations, places, and callings*, duties in our church-relations, duties in our families, duties in our callings and manner of conversation in the world. This is the advice given by the apostle, with respect unto such a season, 2 Pet. iii. 13, 14. "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all manner of conversation and godliness? wherefore be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blemish." Without a sacred diligence in all these duties, we cannot be *found in peace* of the Lord Christ, when he comes to judge the world, and purify his church with a fiery trial.

Negligence, coldness, and sloth in these things are tokens of approaching judgments. And of some of them at this day the generality of professors seem to be almost weary, and to attend unto them in a very indifferent and overly manner. But we may know assuredly, that if we thrive not in our diligence in these things, if the vigour of our spirits in watchfulness be not engaged in them, we are not compliant with the present calls of God.

8thly, It is required of us that we cry earnestly, continually, with perseverance, for such an *effusion of the Holy Spirit from above*, as may dispose and work the inhabitants of the land unto repentance and reformation.

That this is the only way, the only means of relief, of a sanctified deliverance from desolating judgments,

ments, hath been declared. And this is the only way which some of us have to help and assist the nation in its distress. Wherefore, by a constant continuance in supplication for such *effusion of the Holy Spirit*, we shall have a threefold advantage.

1. We shall hereby *discharge the duty we owe unto the land of our nativity*, in such a way as none can deny or hinder.

We owe a duty unto it on all good accounts, moral, political, spiritual. We are, for the most of us, shut up from giving any other assistance unto it, by advice, counsel, or action; this is that which none can hinder; wherein the poorest may be as useful and serviceable as the mighty. And if it be diligently attended unto, it will be far above whatever can be contributed by wisdom, wealth, or strength unto the same end. For by this means we shall be saved or perish.

2. It will preserve our own hearts in the best frame for what we ourselves may be called unto. He that is earnest and sincere in his supplications for the communication of the Spirit unto others, shall not want blessed supplies of him in his own soul: he will not withdraw from them, as unto themselves, who so esteem, prize, and value his work towards others.

3. We shall hereby give *testimony unto God* and his grace, against the cursed profaness of the world; who reject and despise this only means of relief and deliverance: for when all other remedies fail, if God will not utterly forsake a church or people, he doth constantly assign this, as the only means of their safety. See Jer. xxxi. 31, 32, 33. Ezek. xi. 17, 18, 19. chap. xxxvi. 25, 26, 27. This way the world despiseth, regardeth not; wherefore we can in nothing give a greater *testimony unto God*, than by insisting on this way with faith and patience, contemning the reproaches of the world, on the account of it.

9thly, Let us labour ourselves to be *exemplary in reformation*, thereby to promote it among others.

Let

Let us plead and exhort what we will, unless we give an evidence in our own persons, of the necessity which we judge that there is of *present reformation*, we shall be of little use unto the promotion of it.

Many retrenchments of liberty in conversation may be among the best of us; many duties may be attended with more diligence; many causes of offence avoided; many evidences given of a deep sense of deserved judgments, and of our reverence of the name of God therein; much fruitfulness in charity and good works be declared.

I have heard, that in the country, where a man is looked on to be a wise man, and a good husband, among his neighbours, they will note the times of his plowing, sowing, and manuring his ground, and not undertake any thing, until they find him going before them in it. And if men are looked on, in a peculiar manner, as professors of religion at such a time as this, under calls and warnings from God for repentance and reformation, the eyes of other men will be towards them, to see what they do on this occasion. And if they find them, as unto all outward appearance, careless and negligent, they will judge themselves unconcerned, and abide in their security. Wherefore, so far as I know, if such persons be not exemplary, not only in repentance, but also in the evidence and demonstration of it, by its outward fruits, they may be, and are, the great obstructors of the reformation of the cities, towns, and places wherein they do inhabit; nor can any contract the guilt of a greater sin. And if God should bring an overflowing scourge on the inhabitants of this land, because they have not turned unto him at his calls, it is most righteous that they should share in the judgment also, who were an occasion of their continuance in security; a matter we have all just cause to tremble at.

