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9.

EVERLASTING LIFE,

THE END

OF

THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION:

A SERMON,



BY THE

REV. GEORGE CLAYTON.

**AND WE HAVE SEEN AND DO TESTIFY, THAT THE FATHER
SENT THE SON, TO BE THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD.**

1 JOHN iv. 14.

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1813.



TO
MRS. DAWSON,
RELICT OF
JOHN DAWSON, ESQ.
OF ALDCLIFFE HALL, NEAR
LANCASTER,

THIS UNADORNED DISCOURSE,
COMPOSED AT HER SUGGESTION, AND PRINTED AT HER REQUEST,
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,
WITH AN EARNEST WISH THAT IT MAY,
THROUGH THE DIVINE BLESSING,
ANSWER HER BENEVOLENT INTENTION ;

By Her obliged and

affectionate Nephew,

The AUTHOR.

CAMBERWELL, MARCH, 1813.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

READER.



IT is with a friendly concern to promote your eternal welfare, that this plain discourse is put into your hands. If any subject can deserve serious consideration, it must be the salvation of your soul, which is of unspeakable worth, and is destined to an endless duration. An experimental acquaintance with the Gospel is the only means of insuring permanent felicity, either in this world or in that which is to come. Be entreated then, to separate an hour from the pursuits of business, the delights of pleasure, and the intercourse of social life, to attend to the greatest of all concerns—which indeed you will feel and acknowledge to be the greatest, when laid upon a sick bed, and in a dying hour. Accept these pages, as a testimony of christian affection ; read them with candour, seriousness, and prayer ; and be assured, the only recompense desired, by the writer, and the donor, is, that you may be made wise unto *Salvation*, through the knowledge of Him, whom to know is life eternal.

A
SERMON,

&c.

JOHN iii. 16.

For God so loved the World, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, might not perish, but have everlasting Life.

EVERY man who calmly and soberly reflects on the present state of the world, must be convinced that it is far otherwise than it was, when it proceeded from the hands of the all-wise and perfect Creator. When He surveyed the productions of his power and skill, after the labour of six days, He pronounced them "very good." All was order, harmony, and beauty—and every thing according to the measure of its capacity, conspired to promote his glory. How grateful then, was the universal melody, to the

attentive ear of Heaven! "The morning stars" might well "sing together and the sons of God shout for joy." But alas! Sin has transformed this enchanting scene; and wherever we turn our eyes, sad marks of ruin and desolation are plainly to be discovered. Though there are indeed strong traces remaining of its original perfection, yet the world carries upon its very face unquestionable indications of disgrace and misery. Thorns and thistles are its spontaneous produce; all things are full of labour and toil, disorder and suffering. "The whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together."

Upon such a view of things, whose eye can restrain the starting tear? Whose heart refuse the sympathetic pang? "How is the gold become dim—how is the most fine gold changed!" That shock, however, which has been felt in the natural, is far less to be deplored, than the dire convulsion which has taken place in the moral world—the world of Spirits. The visible objects by which we are surrounded, are destined to the final conflagration, the earth and all the works that

are therein shall be burnt up—but the soul of man is a principle, which no flames can touch, no force destroy. It is of an immortal nature; but, having lost the favour and the image of God, by reason of sin, is now in a state of mournful degradation, and exposed to a train of future miseries which no thought can conceive, no language depict. I pity the man who never seriously laid to heart the sad condition of the human race. What, let me ask, would be your sensations were you walking through the streets of a crowded City, where the plague was raging with uncontrolled violence, and where you beheld, on every side, the sick, the dying, and the dead? Without doubt, you would heave the sigh of regret, and drop the tear of compassion, as you gazed upon the horrid scene. And such *is* the state of the spiritual world. “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint.” Sin, that worst of plagues, has universally infected the race of Adam, and death has reigned and triumphed through all generations. A few, in every age of time have been heard to cry out for help, but alas! by far the greater part are insensible of their danger, and are perishing in a thoughtless and delusive

security. But is this wretched state of man without hope, without remedy? “Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no Physician there?” Does the all-merciful God look down from the place of his habitation, unmoved by the woes of his suffering creatures? “Where, O Lord, is thy zeal, and thy strength, and the sounding of thy bowels, and thy mercies; are they restrained?” No. He hath seen—he hath seen the affliction of a fallen world, and he has determined to effect deliverance. He has pitied us in our low estate, and has sent relief from his throne—a relief, which, all, without exception are invited to share. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

These are the words of Jesus Christ, addressed originally to Nicodemus in the conversation he held with the Messiah whom he believed to be a teacher sent from God. Truly He was the ambassador of peace, the messenger of heavenly mercy. The text on which we are discoursing, is in itself a volume, and comprizes all that we need to know, to bless us here

and to conduct us to a happy immortality beyond the grave.

I. Let us contemplate that distinguishing act of divine LOVE, which the text offers to our observation; "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

II. The gracious end and design of this rich bestowment; "that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life."

I. The distinguished act of divine Love, which is offered to our notice in these words.

1. Love—free and unmerited, was the source and spring of this invaluable Gift; God *so loved* the world. Language supplies no terms by which the nature of this divine affection can be suitably expressed. It transcends the conception of angelic minds, and can never be uttered by a mortal tongue. He alone who is the subject of this Love, can fully comprehend its extent, and estimate its value. He contemplated the state of ruined man with a love entirely *disinterested*.

He has no powerful attraction, no external inducement, on account of which to fix his regard upon us. —It is quite the reverse. There is every thing in man as corrupted and vitiated, to repel, disgust, and offend. “Herein was love, not that we loved Him, but that He loved us, and gave his Son to be a propitiation for us.” “Herein God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” There is nothing in man to deserve, nothing to repay so great an act of affection. It is as *unparalleled*, as it is disinterested. History presents us, with no resemblance of it. Search the records of antiquity—explore the rolls of remotest ages—and ask the former times, whether they can produce a specimen of love like this. It is higher than the heavens, deeper than the abyss, more expansive and boundless than the sea. A man may perhaps have been ready to lay down his life for his friends, upon this principle; but who, either before or since, has died *for enemies*? This is a case which stands by itself; without precedent or example. The love of God is *determined*, *active*, and *permanent*, in addition to other qualities which have been

mentioned. "Many waters could not quench it, neither the floods drown it." Not merely did it dwell in the heart, but it has awakened all the energies of Deity, on man's behalf. It is moreover an *ever-enduring* principle. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." "It surpasses knowledge." "Behold what manner of love hath the Father bestowed upon us."

2. Observe, the fruit of this love of God to man; He gave *his only begotten Son*. It was impossible that He could either love or save us, at the expence of his own perfections. Man as a transgressor of the law had exposed himself to the penalty of death, agreeably to the threatening, "In the day thou eatest, thou shalt surely die." Had God remitted the penalty, and forgiven the delinquent in a way of absolute sovereignty, without respect to a satisfaction made to his law and justice, his love to us, would have looked like hostility to himself. In order therefore that He might give a proof of the sincerity of his love to sinners, and at the same time shew forth the purity of his nature,

the equity of his law, and the veracity of his threatening, He spared not his own Son—his equal and only begotten Son, but freely gave him up for us all. He gave him to poverty and shame, to suffering and death, that by his obedience and blood shedding, a sufficient atonement might be made, and so mercy triumph, while justice smiled. How inexpressibly valuable is the gift! Not an angel of the highest order, chosen from the brightest ranks of Cherubim and Seraphim, but his own eternal Son, in whom is all his image, and his sole delight.

3. Mark the freeness of this bestowment.—He *gave* Him—without solicitation, without condition, without the least prospect of remuneration or compensation. He thus gave Him, to the world, in effect, before time began, in the counsels of eternity, in the covenant of peace which was held on man's behalf. “I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. Then was I by Him, as one brought up with Him, and my delights were with the sons of men.” Thus was He

given, to the old testament church, in early promises, in typical institutions, and in the whole fabric and contexture of jewish ceremonies. These were shadows, the substance is Christ. He was given to the world in prophecies at sundry times and in divers manners, which exhibited Him, as the light of the Gentiles, and the glory of the Jewish people,—the consolation of Israel, the desire of all nations, and the salvation of God to the ends of the earth. He was more emphatically given, when “in the fulness of the time, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Ungracious indeed was the reception He met with from those whom He came to save. It might be expected that they would reverence the Son—but they treated Him with scorn, contempt and outrage, and were not satisfied till they had slaked their cruel thirst in his most precious blood. Stand amazed, O my soul, at this marvellous display of divine love! God himself had nothing better to bestow, and He gave us his only begotten Son, as if He had said

“rather than the race of man should perish—take ye Him whom angels worship—Him whom I hold most dear—and let Him suffer in the room and place of the guilty—yea, let Him die,” “the just for the unjust, to bring them unto God.”

II. Let us contemplate the gracious end and design of God, in the bestowment of this his best and richest gift, “that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here let us consider, what it is to believe in Jesus Christ; then remark the danger which is escaped, and the happiness which is possessed, by every one who truly and sincerely believes in Him.

1. What is it to believe in Jesus Christ? This is a question of the highest importance, because it involves in it our everlasting welfare. There are multitudes who fancy they are believers in Christ, while to those who maturely reflect, it is evident, they have neither part nor lot in this matter. It is not enough to believe that such a person as Jesus Christ came into the

world, and lived and died as the evangelical penmen relate—nor is it sufficient that on rational conviction, we give our assent to the scriptural statements which are made concerning Him as the only Saviour of a lost world. This assent is certainly but a reasonable service of the mind, and can scarcely be withheld by any who have calmly and sincerely investigated the evidences on which christianity rests. In this sense the devils believe and tremble: and if our faith be no more, we may believe and tremble, and perish too. The most dangerous consequences are likely to follow from the persuasion, that because we are not infidels, living in an avowed rejection of the Son of God, therefore we must be believers in Him. Faith is not merely a naked assent to the testimony of God concerning Christ, but an acceptance of that testimony. It is such a persuasion of its truth, such a conviction of its importance, such an estimation of its value, as will dispose the mind to embrace and cleave to it, as containing all our salvation and all our desire. True faith not only credits all that is said of Christ and his work, in the inspired volume, but it receives

Christ himself, as offered in the gospel, and depends on Him as the only foundation of hope and confidence. Thus is it expressed in John i. 12. "As many as *received* Him, to them gave He power to become the *sons of God*, even to them that *believe* on his name." This will lead us to make Him the decided object of our choice and preference; discarding every other hope—renouncing every other refuge. Henceforth we shall have no boasting complacency, in our moral virtues, our comparative goodness, our religious performances, but casting away our own righteousness, under a full conviction that it can never serve us as a ground of dependance, we shall feel every wish and desire going out towards the Saviour, supremely anxious that we "may be found in Him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Such a faith as this, gives us an actual interest in the Son of God, uniting us to Him, and making Him our own for the great purposes of justification and salvation. Labour to understand the nature of this grace: and content

yourself with nothing short of a true, a vital, a transforming faith. Let others dispute; do you believe. Encourage every bearing of your soul towards the Saviour, and make it your prayer,—“ Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief!”

2. It is the design of God, that whosoever believes in Christ, with a true and scriptural faith, should not perish. This is the danger which we escape, by believing. Perdition includes the loss of the whole man in body and soul for ever. That we deserve to have incurred this dreadful loss, is evident beyond all contradiction; for truly if we were guilty only of one sin, that single sin being committed against a Being of perfect holiness and inflexible justice, would necessarily expose us to the wrath and curse of God for ever. “ The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” But alas! how many are the sins we have each of us committed! How fearful are the aggravations with which those sins are connected! How long have we persisted in a course of transgression! Look over the catalogue of your offences, consider the equitable de-

mands of God's holy law, and then judge if you do not deserve to perish. As we really deserve to die, so we must inevitably have perished, but for the interposition of divine Love, in the gift of a Saviour, who has died that we might live.

3. Which leads me to point out the happiness to which we are recovered, as well as the danger from which we are secured, by faith in the Son of God,—“ Everlasting Life.”—This comprehends all that Adam our first father enjoyed in his paradisiacal blessedness, and all that heaven will disclose, when the Kingdom of Glory is revealed. Every true believer, is at present, actually delivered from the curse and condemnation of the law.—“ There is therefore now no condemnation to him who is in Christ Jesus.” He is passed into a new state—even “ from death unto life.” Hence it follows in the 18th verse, “ He that believeth on Him, is not condemned.” The awful sentence of death is revoked in his favor. “ He that hath the Son, hath life.” And this, says the Redeemer, “ is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life, and I will

raise him up at the last day." Words which represent the complete salvation and ineffable happiness of the soul and body for ever. This life also he *has*,—he already possesses it. He has it in the *promise* by which it is insured.—“He that believeth shall be saved.” This is the charter of his inheritance, the deed of conveyance, sealing over to him a right which God is faithful to acknowledge, and none can successfully dispute. He has everlasting life, in the *seed*, the *principle*, and the *germ*. He is alive to God by Jesus Christ: having a new nature, which disposes him to activity and diligence, and qualifies him to enjoy converse and communion with God. He has eternal life, in the *foretaste* and anticipation of it. He enjoys, occasionally, a cluster of the grapes which grow in the land of promise, as an assurance and earnest of the approaching vintage; and nothing shall disappoint him of the final consummation of his hopes and happiness in a state of future and immortal blessedness. The last day, which will be to multitudes a day clouded with gloom and thick darkness, will be to him the commencement of a new series of being. He will lead the same life, it is true, but quite

after another manner. It will be passed in the immediate presence of God and the Lamb, in a state of perfect knowledge, spotless purity, and uninterrupted joy.

Let then the subject before us, be improved by every individual under whose eye it may pass.

1. For the purpose of *conviction*.—Behold the miserable state in which you are naturally found. If the word of God is to be relied on, you are in a condition truly deplorable and alarming. There is but a step between you and death. The sentence is gone forth, the decree is passed;—"The wages of sin is death." I am aware how reluctantly these tidings are received, and how loth men are to entertain such thoughts of their own circumstances, as it is the design of this discourse to awaken. It can surely be no pleasure to the preacher to disturb your quiet, or interrupt your peace. But if that peace is delusive—that quiet pernicious; if you are slumbering in a storm, without provision against its destructive violence; if you are dreaming on your

pillow, while your house is in flames; if you are amusing yourself on the brink and precipice of ruin;—it becomes the first dictate of charity—the surest proof of friendship—the clearest duty of benevolence—to disturb, to awaken, to coerce you—yea, with a merciful violence to snatch you from the verge of destruction. It is difficult to let men into the knowledge of their spiritual situation; they are averse to meddle with it. Like tradesmen whose affairs are ruinous, they like to keep their books closed and clasped, lest unwelcome secrets should betray themselves. It is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit alone, effectually to convince men of sin; yet it becomes them to search and try their ways, and to institute an impartial enquiry into their character and condition. Let me suppose, that some one should assure you, that since you sat down to read this discourse, your countenance had undergone a frightful change—that your features had become distorted, your skin discoloured, and the expression of your visage had assumed an aspect hideous, pale, and deathlike. As long as you were insensible of any malady, you

might be disposed to discredit the report, and to smile at the representation. But should a looking glass be brought to you, which faithfully reflected your likeness, precisely as it had been described—what then could you say? It would be vain to contend against the force of fact, and idle to resist the evidence of demonstration. Look then at yourself as exhibited in the glass of the divine law, and in the pure mirror of the divine perfections, and you will discover that the picture given of your condition, is neither overcharged nor exaggerated. Sin will revive; you will cease to justify yourselves, and will be ready to exclaim with the patriarch Job, “ I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent as in dust and ashes.”

2. Let us be sincerely thankful, that we have been permitted to hear these glad tidings; “ that God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son.” It is a plain text, but there is not a brighter jewel in the whole cabinet of inspiration. How welcome should this message

of life, pardon, and peace, appear to all who are addressed by it. Go tell the trembling malefactor, that he shall not perish—that his Prince has signed his pardon and has bid him live—with what emotions of gladness will he receive the intelligence! How much more cheering is the news which our text reports—how incomparably more important is the gift of divine mercy and eternal life! Wherefore is it that we can hear of these things with such cold indifference—such sluggish insensibility? Almighty Love inspire us with a gratitude suited to so rich a benefit, and help us to live and to die in the spirit of that ascription, “Thanks be to God, for his unspeakable gift!”

3. Let us seriously enquire whether we can produce any evidences of a true and saving faith in Jesus Christ. It will avail us nothing to possess all the graces of person, all the embellishments of the mind, all the goods of fortune, all the virtues of morality, if we are destitute of “precious faith.” Whatever else we may have, without this, we must be poor indeed. It is a commodity lamentably scarce, and often

counterfeited. “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith”—“prove your own selves.” Genuine faith purifies the heart, overcomes the world, works by love, and produces the fruits of holy living. Vain are our pretensions to the Faith of Christ, unless it conform us to his image, and lead us to be studious imitators of his example. “Wilt thou know, O vain Man, that faith without works is dead?” “What doth it profit, my Brethren, though a man say he hath faith and not works? can faith save him?”

4. Let every desponding sinner take encouragement, from the extensive grace of the gospel dispensation. For this end was the Son of God given—“that *whosoever* believeth on him, might not perish.” Be he who he may—though his character be ever so vile, his guilt ever so aggravated, his habits ever so inveterate, and his condition ever so desperate—whether he be high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, let him only bewail his misery, repent of his sins, and believe in the Son of God, and he shall be saved. The unrestricted term, “whosoever,” has kept many from sinking into the depths of hopeless

discouragement. And so long as it remains on record there can be no room for desperation. Whosoever will may come and drink of the refreshing streams of mercy, without money and without price. "Him that cometh I will in no wise cast out." Do you enquire how you may be enabled to come? I reply. Faith is the gift of God, and he is entirely willing to bestow it. Implore this grace of Him who is "the author and finisher of faith," and wait in the use of appointed means till you receive it—for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "Ask therefore and it shall be given, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." "Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my door."

Finally, The subject will leave all the impenitent and unbelieving without excuse. I appeal to every one who has attended to these pages, whether (granting the doctrine of the text to be true) his ruin will not be justly chargeable upon himself alone, should he perish from under the sound of this Gospel Message. That

single word "*Whosoever*," will stop the mouth of the sinner who shall have perished in unbelief, in the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be judged according to the Gospel. It will hang as a millstone about the neck of him who, with the tidings of mercy in his ears, shall have gone down to the chambers of death. It is ridiculous for a man to say "I am not elected, and therefore I *cannot* believe." It is enough, surely, that you are placed under a dispensation of forbearance and grace, that you are called and entreated to believe in Jesus Christ, that, believing, you may have life through his name; and that the Spirit is promised and freely given to those who ask Him. "This then is the condemnation, —That light is come into the world, but that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." "Ye would not come unto Me, that ye might have life." And alas! how sad is the alternative! To be doomed to perpetual banishment from God, and to be consigned over to eternal death! Go stand on the margin of the dark abyss—see the smoke which ascends

up for ever and ever from that place of torment.—Read what is written for your warning, Rev. xxi. 8. “ But the fearful and the *unbelieving* shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Lightly as men may think of the criminality of unbelief, it is a stain of the deepest dye, and of a character so peculiar, that strictly speaking, it is, to those who live under the gospel dispensation, the only condemning sin. For every other, pardon is freely promised to the penitent; but he who continues in a guilty rejection of the Son of God, seals upon his own head the curses of a violated law, confirms with his own lips the sentence of an offended God, and with his own hand locks against himself the gate of everlasting life. To refuse our approbation and assent to the testimony of God, is certainly the highest affront that can be offered to Him; the blackest and most injurious reflection which can be cast upon the moral purity of His character. He styles Himself, with emphatical complacency,

The God of TRUTH. “**But,**” says the apostle John, “**He that believeth not God, hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son, and this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life: and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.**”

Sinner, before the awful scenes of a future judgment are realized, I conjure thee to flee from the wrath to come.—Escape for thy life. Haste thee to the cross of Christ for shelter and for rest.—To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; for *now* is the accepted time, behold this is the day of salvation!

THE END.























