

Present Duty Before Approaching Darkness

Ralph Erskine (1685-1752)

“Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness.”—Jeremiah 13:16

This Sermon was preached at Cambusnethen, on Wednesday, August 3rd, 1737, being a Fast day, appointed by the Associate Presbytery, at the earnest desire of the Societies in those bounds.

THESE WORDS ARE PART OF A WEEPING PROPHECY, wherein the prophet is attempting to awaken this secure and stubborn people to repentance, from the consideration of the judgments of God that were coming upon them, of which we read in the preceding part of the chapter: and now he comes to give them good and seasonable counsel, verse 15. “Hear ye, and give ear, be not proud; for the Lord hath spoken.” God has passed his word, and the decree is gone forth: and then he calls them to repent, and give glory to God, before he cause darkness.

From the connection we may observe these few things:

1. That God, in his most severe threatenings, and most awful providences, aims at men’s repentance, and returning to him.

2. These who despise the threatenings of divine wrath should stay still and hear what the Lord says to them; as you may see, Proverbs 1:25-27. “But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.” See also verse 33, “They that hearken unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil”; whereas these that hearken not, he will laugh at their calamity. “Be not proud; for the Lord hath spoken.”

3. What hinders people’s hearing, when God speaks either by word or rod? What but pride? Be not proud; do not think yourself too good to be taught. Be not scornful, be not willful, be not secure when God threatens; be not impatient when God strikes; for pride is at the bottom of both.

4. We ought to consider who speaks to us by the word and rod: “The Lord hath spoken”; he whose authority is irresistible: therefore, bow your stiff necks and stout stomachs, which proceed from hardness of heart, and a custom of sinning. Consider, might he say, it is not with Jeremiah you have to do; it is not with the minister you have to do; it is with the great God, “Be not proud; for the Lord hath spoken.” When you harden yourself against the word and the rod, you harden yourself against God himself.

Another counsel is in the words of my text, “Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness.”

Where observe two things: first, an exhortation; and then a motive. The exhortation is, “Give glory to the Lord your God.” Here is a merciful counsel God gives them, saying, “Give glory to the Lord”; opening up yet a door of hope to them: and here is a merciful compellation he takes to himself, “The Lord your God.” Here we may observe, that God, amidst his threatenings, does not forget that they are his people, and he their God: see Jeremiah 3:12-14. He calls himself the Lord their God, that he may shame them for forsaking him, and that he may invite them to return. “Give glory to the Lord your God; not to your idols, not to other gods.” Give him glory by confession of sin, by repentance and reformation. This is a comprehensive duty, containing all other duties in the bosom of it.

We have here the motive to this duty, “before he cause darkness”; before he bring such judgments upon you, as you shall see no way of escaping. Darkness and distress will be the portion of these that repent not,

to give God glory. When these who, by the fourth vial, were scorched with heat, repented not, to give glory to God, the next vial filled them with darkness, Revelation 16:9,10.

The doctrinal observation we incline to prosecute from these words, is the following:—

DOCTRINE: That it is the duty of a sinful people to give glory to God, before he cause darkness: to repent, before he bring judgments upon them.

We ought to give glory to God actively, in a way of duty, before he glorify himself, passively, upon us in a way of wrath. This is the great call of God in his word — Isaiah 55:6-7, “Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” 1 Chronicles 16:26,30, “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Fear before him all the earth.” Malachi 2:2, “If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings.” Revelation 14:7, “Fear God, and give him glory, for the hour of his judgments is come.” Revelation 16:9-10, “And men were scorched with heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast, and his kingdom was full of darkness, and they gnawed their tongues for pain.” Psalm 46:7-9, “Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him all the earth.”

The method we propose for the further illustration of this subject, through divine assistance, shall be as follows:—

- I. We would speak a little of this glory that is to be given to God, and what it is to glorify him.
- II. Enquire how we are to give him glory, or by what means we are to glorify him.
- III. What is imported in the expression, “Give glory unto the Lord your God.”
- IV. Speak somewhat of the motive here assigned, “Before he cause darkness.”
- V. Deduce some inferences for the application of the whole.

I. We would speak a little of this glory that is to be given to the Lord, and what it is to glorify him. God’s glory is either essential or declarative. His essential glory is the incomprehensible majesty of his deity. This is incapable of addition or diminution; for, our heavenly Father is perfect, and our goodness extendeth not unto him, Psalm 16:2. His declarative glory is, when either he himself, by his word, work, or Spirit, manifests his glory to men or angels; or, when they endeavour to declare how glorious he is, by knowing, loving, fearing, serving, obeying, praising, and commending him; by worshipping him, by believing in him; by trusting in him, and depending upon him, and advancing his glory, by their thoughts, words, and actions.

We cannot glorify God, by adding any glory to him. It is his prerogative thus to glorify us; and thus he did in the first creation, when he crowned man with glory and honour. Psalm 8:5, and thus he does in the second creation and restitution of our lapsed state, when he gives the beginning of glory in regeneration; for grace is glory in the seed, and glory is but grace in the flower; therefore, we are said to be changed into the same image from glory to glory, 2 Corinthians 3:18. And thus he does in the consummation of our holiness and happiness in heaven; as Christ said, John 17:1, “The hour is come; Father, glorify the Son.” So when the believer’s hour is come, the hour of death, God will then glorify him with himself, as verse 5, “Glorify me with thyself, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” So will believers be glorified in that glory which he prepared for them before the foundation of the world. It is, I say, God’s prerogative to glorify us; but in that sense we cannot glorify God, no more than we can create a new Godhead; but our glorifying him is a declaring him glorious. We give him glory when we ascribe glory to him. Brute creatures

glorify him passively, but rational creatures ought to do it actively. Wicked men eclipse his declarative glory by sin, which yet is the greater wrong done to themselves than to him: for, as the sun is still full of light in itself, when you see it under an eclipse, by the moon's interposition between us and it, which, indeed, is not so properly an eclipse of the sun as of the earth; so the glory of God is eclipsed by the sin and wickedness of men; not by depriving God of any perfection, but they deprive themselves whose highest end and perfection is to glorify God, and to be made conformable to him. Thus to glorify God is to show forth his glory, and to ascribe glory unto him.

II. The second thing I proposed was, To show how we are to glorify God; or, by what means to give him glory?

In general, we are to glorify God with our whole man, soul and body: 1 Corinthians 6:20, "Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are his"; that is, both with the inward and outward man: with the inward man, by loving him with the greatest love, studying acquaintance with him, longing after him, delighting in him, fearing his name, and following hard after him: with the outward man, and that both with our lips, and with our lives; with our lips we ought to pray and praise God, speaking to him, and of him, and for him; our tongues should be pencils, to delineate and express the glory of God. Many there are whose tongues are but sponges, to wipe out and deface his glory, who seldom speak of God but in an oath, or make mention of his name but when they curse or swear by it. How like are they to hell already, who have no other use of God but to blaspheme him! and blasphemy will be their work forever, if they repent not to give him glory. Alas! how few speak honourably of God in the society they converse with, though he be still intimately present with them, and one of the company? Nay, idle tales and raillery is the business of their tongues, "They speak vanity every one with his neighbour," Psalm 12:2, "I hearkened and heard, but they spoke not aright."

Again, with our lives and actions we are to glorify God: Hence, Matthew 5:16. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." John 15:8, "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit." There may be many talkative professors, who would gladly pass for trees of righteousness; yet bear nothing but leaves, an external show and flourishing outside; these they wear for their own glory, but are wholly deficient in that which is most conducive to the glory of God, the fruits of the Spirit, and "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God," Philippians 1:11. We are to glorify the divine perfections, by seeking conformity to them, so as to be holy as he is holy. And by performing these duties which his attributes obliges us unto; for his incommunicable perfections, such as infinity, eternity, immutability, etc., are inimitable, yet oblige us to duties towards him.

Question: What are the special duties by which we are called, in the text, to give glory to God?

Answer: The context is clear, they are faith and repentance. 1. Faith, verse 15, "Hear and give ear, for the Lord hath spoken." 2. Repentance, and humbling ourselves under his mighty hand; "Be not proud; for the Lord hath spoken." Thus we are called this day to give glory to God.

I shall therefore enquire, 1st, What this faith is, and how it gives glory to God. 2nd, What this repentance is, and how it gives glory to God.

1st, What this faith is, and how it gives glory to God. What this faith is, we may guess from the context, "Hear, and give ear; for the Lord hath spoken." It is a hearing and a giving ear to what God speaks in his word. Unbelief stops our ears, like that of the deaf adder that will not hear the voice of the charmer; but faith is opening the ear to hear God himself speaking. By unbelief we hear only what man speaks to us, but by faith we hear and give ear to God, and believe what he says in his threatenings and promises. We give no glory to God, till we hear him, and give ear to him by faith. When we hear God speaking in the law, then we have the faith of the law, and are awakened: and when we hear God speaking in the gospel, then we have the faith of the gospel, and are quickened. When we truly hear a threatening God, then we believe and fear: and

when we truly hear a promising God, then we believe and hope in the mercy of God through Christ. And this is the faith we are called to this day, that we may give glory to God.

Question: How doth faith give glory to him?

Answer: In general, because it answers God's faithfulness. It is said of Abraham, "He was strong in faith, giving glory to God." More particularly, saving faith gives glory to God.

1. Because it brings nothing to him but poverty, want, and emptiness. Other graces bring something to him, but faith brings nothing; love brings fire to him; repentance brings tears to him; obedience brings works: but poor faith brings nothing but a bare hand, and an empty vessel. Indeed, when we bring any thing to God, we are apt to carry away something of the glory that belongs to him; but faith brings nothing to commend the soul to God; and the poorer any come to God, the more they glorify him.

2. Faith glorifies God; because it seeks all in him, and from him. As it brings nothing to him, so it expects every thing from him, saying, "All my expectation is from thee"; I have no hope but in thee; all my wants be upon thee.

3. Faith glorifies God, by venturing all upon his word. If that word fail me, says faith, I am gone; but, "My hope is in thy word." Faith hangs by the girdle of his loins; his faithfulness pledged in his word; and his word as "Yea and Amen in Christ"; and this brings more glory to God than all things else: "The promises of God are Yea and Amen in Christ, to the glory of God," 2 Corinthians 1:20.

4. Faith glorifies God, because all other acts of glorifying are only so, in so far as there is faith in them, and as they spring from faith; for "Without faith it is impossible to please God," Hebrews 11:6. No work can please God without faith. Take away faith from your prayers, and God gets no glory, nor you any comfort by them. James 1:5-7, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, etc., but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed. For, let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Let faith be separated from your hearing, and God gets no glory by it; yea, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

2ndly, What is this repentance? And how does it give glory to God? What this repentance is, may be taught us in the context, "Be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken." The proud soul is the impenitent soul; the proud man slights and disdains the word of God, and will not hear nor regard what God says; the proud man is the rebellious man, saying with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?" This repentance, then, is the direct opposite of pride: to be truly humble under the mighty hand of God, and thereupon subject to God. So that there are two branches of this repentance: Humiliation and Reformation, and both these we are called unto this day; and by both these we are to give glory to God.

Question: How doth Humiliation give glory to God?

Answer: 1. By a humble confession of sin, we give him the glory of his holiness, owning he is a holy God, and we are unholy sinners, and that he is of purer eyes than that he can behold iniquity, Habakkuk 1:13.

2. By humiliation, we give him the glory of his dominion and sovereignty, while we testify our reverence and subjection to his laws, as holy, just, and good: acknowledging his authority. While we stand out against God, we deny his dominion, but when we stoop to him, we acknowledge his sovereignty over us, and our subjection to him.

3. By humiliation, we give him the glory of his justice and righteousness, acknowledging he is righteous in what he does against us, Daniel 9:14; Nehemiah 9:33; Psalm 22:3.

4. By humiliation, we give him the glory of his power, that he can punish us for our sins, that he has authority and ability so to do, Daniel 4:34,35. We own he has ability to crush us under his feet, and dare not harden ourselves against him.

5. By humiliation, we give him the glory of his truth and veracity in his threatening; thus did old Nineveh, Jonah 3:5. "They believed God, and proclaimed a fast"; they believed, that, unless they humbled themselves, the word of the prophet would come to pass, that threatened their ruin; thus did Josiah, 1 Kings 22:19.

6. By humiliation, we give him the glory of his patience and forbearance towards us. When a catalogue of our sins is presented to us, and brought forth before our eyes, then we stand astonished at God's forbearance, Lamentations 3:22. Oh! "It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not!" And thus we see this part of repentance gives glory to God, and his perfections.

Question: How doth Reformation give glory to God?

Answer: By reformation I understand, not only that departing from evil, but that doing of good, which flows from that faith and humiliation already spoken of. It is a bringing forth fruits of holiness and righteousness, to the glory of God. And this reformation gives him glory several ways.

1. It is an owning of our principal honour and happiness to be employed in his service, and so a proclaiming that he is a good and bountiful Master. Men are thereby induced to believe, when we are painful and diligent in his service, that there is a great pleasure in it, and a great reward for it.

2. Holiness and reformation glorifies the power of his grace, because it is the effect of his grace. Our hearts being naturally rebellious and disobedient, therefore the power of grace is making them submissive, willing, and obedient: and hence all believers will say, with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am." It is through Christ's strengthening me, I can do all things.

3. By holiness and reformation we glorify and magnify the efficacy of Christ's death and intercession; the virtue of his blood, and the power of his death, who died for us, that we might not live to ourselves, but to him. We thus glorify his fullness: for, if so much grace be imparted to us, as to enable us to bring forth fruit to his glory, what must be in him who is the ocean! The continual supplies of grace tend to raise high thoughts of him.

4. By reformation and holiness we glorify the faithfulness of God, in making good his promise. God hath promised, "I will put my Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in my statutes"; when therefore we walk therein, then the faithfulness of God, in making good his promise, is manifested.

5. By reformation and holiness of walk we glorify God, by expressing his perfections in our conversation: having the very image of God upon us, and stamped in our life. "Ye are a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should shew forth the praises [or the virtues] of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light," 1 Peter 2:9.

6. By reformation and holiness of walk we glorify God, by inducing other people to glorify him, "Let your light so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven," Matthew 5:16. "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation," 1 Peter 2:12. While others, by their evil works, draw people from God, we, by our conversation, should draw them to him.

III. The third thing proposed was, To shew the import of the expression "Give glory to the Lord your God." And here you may observe the import of it. 1. With relation to the act, "giving" God glory. 2. With relation to the object to whom it is to be given, "to the Lord your God."

1st, With relation to the act, "Give glory to God." And,

1. It is a giving, not professing or promising only, but giving glory to God. This giving glory to God, doth not lie in resolution only, for the time to come, or hereafter I will do so and so; but in its present humiliation he calls us to: "Now is the accepted time, before the decree break forth"; before darkness come on, give glory to the Lord.

2. It is giving, not extorting; for, as it should be a present humiliation, so a voluntary one. Pharaoh was at length humbled, Exodus 10:16, saying, “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you”; but it was extorted. Sparks come naturally from a fire, but not from a flint unless it be smitten: then is our humiliation right, when it is natural and voluntary: “Give glory to God.”

3. It is giving, and not commanding others to do so, but ourselves giving glory to God; intimating, that it is not only present and voluntary, but proper and personal humiliation, Zechariah 12:12, “Every family apart, and their wives apart,” every person apart, every man and woman apart. This is the call of God to us, “Give glory to God.”

4. It is giving, and not lending for a time, importing an upright, ingenuous, and honest humiliation: not bowing down the head like a bulrush for a day, Isaiah 58:5; but it is sure work, like that mentioned, Nehemiah 9:38, “Because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.”

5. It is giving, not a selling: importing that it is a free, not a mercenary humiliation, that the Lord calls for. Some people would give some glory to God, providing they might thereby gain some glory to themselves, like that of Saul, 1 Samuel 15:30, “I have sinned; but now honour me before the people.” But we are to give glory to God, and take shame to ourselves, and acknowledge as it is, Daniel 9:8,9, that “To us belongs confusion of face, because we have sinned: but to the Lord our God belongs mercy and forgiveness:” to him belongs all the glory.

6. Hence it is giving and not parting stakes, if we may be allowed the expression, with God; importing, it must be full and entire humiliation. Men will confess their moral and not their intellectual sins; the evils that relate to their morals, their drinking and whoredom, and other gross evils: but as to the evils that relate to their principles, they are shy to make acknowledgment of their errors and ignorance. They will hardly own they are fools; but they that give glory to God, and none but these, will confess their total corruption of heart, as well as way. Thus we see what is imported in these words, as it concerns the act, “Give glory to God.”

2ndly, We may consider the import of the words, as it relates to the object; “Give glory to the LORD your GOD.” It imports,

1. A glorifying him in his sovereignty: give glory to the Lord, as he is the Lord of heaven and earth; the Lord of lords; the Lord of angels; the Lord of men and devils; the Lord of our life; the Lord of our breath; the Lord of our time and talents; the Lord of our health and wealth, and enjoyments; the Lord of all that we have and are; the Lord of our house, and land, and children: the Lord-disposer of all things, to whose government we ought to submit. We do not give him glory, if we do not practically acknowledge his Lordship, and own him as our Lord and Sovereign.

2. It is a glorifying him in his propriety in us, as the Lord our God. This is what we are called and commanded to do in the very first command of the law, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”; which requires us to “know and acknowledge God to be the Lord our God and Redeemer, and to worship and glorify him accordingly.” Never will we be truly humbled, nor give him the glory due to him, unless we come to him as the Lord our God, laying hold on his covenant, that says, “I will be thy God.” The faith of this relation in Christ is presupposed to our coming, “Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings,” Jeremiah 3:22. O the faith of this mercy of God in Christ would make us return to him as our own merciful God, saying, “Behold we come to thee, for thou art the Lord our God.” Thus much for the import of the expression, “Give glory unto the Lord your God.” I come now,

IV. To the fourth thing proposed—viz., To speak a little of the motive, namely, “Before he cause darkness.” I shall speak to this head, 1. By considering the several significations of darkness in Scripture. 2. By offering some remarks concerning the darkness here spoken of.

1st, I shall consider the several significations of darkness in Scripture.

1. Sometimes darkness is put for sin in general, and for Satan's kingdom, "He hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son," Colossians 1:13. The gospel is designed to open men's eyes, and to bring them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, Acts 26:18. Now, when we understand it in this sense, to give glory to God before he cause darkness, may have this import—viz., before he give up to the power of sin and Satan, by leaving us altogether under the dominion of sin. It is true, God is not, and cannot be the author of sin, nor can he be properly the cause of it, no more than the sun can be the cause of darkness; but as when the sun withdraws, darkness succeeds; so when God departs, sin and Satan must have the sway.

2. Sometimes darkness is put for ignorance and blindness of mind, incredulity and unbelief, John 1:5, "The light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." Matthew 4:16, "The people that sat in darkness saw great light." Then the meaning is, in this sense, Give glory to God, before he give you up to judicial blindness of mind and to final unbelief, according to that threatening, Isaiah 6:9,10, "Go tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; see ye indeed, but perceive not: make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed." Oh! dreadful judgment!

3. It is put sometimes for error and impiety, in opposition to truth and holiness; 1 John 1:5,6, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"; that is, no untruth or unholiness; and again, "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Now, in this sense, the meaning of it is, Give glory to God, before he give you up to the errors of the times, and to a spirit of delusion, like that threatened, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, to believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness."

4. Sometimes darkness is put for sorrow, grief, and heaviness: Micah 7:8, "Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me"; that is when I am overwhelmed with heaviness and grief, the Lord will be my comfort; as it is said, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness to the upright in heart"; where light and gladness signify the same things, even as darkness and heaviness signify the same; hence the meaning of the word in this verse is, Give glory to God, before he cause grief and sorrow to come upon you, as travail upon a woman.

5. Darkness is sometimes put in Scripture, for the loss of Christ and the gospel, and the blind miserable state that follows thereupon; thus John 12:35, "Yet a little while, says Christ, and the light is with you; walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you," verse 36, "While ye have the light, believe in the light;" then the meaning is, Give glory to God, by believing and walking in the light, before he cause such dreadful darkness, as that of taking away the candlestick, or removing the gospel, the means of grace and salvation. This is one of the greatest plagues and judgments; but spiritual judgments, though heaviest, are generally least felt and understood. Therefore,

6. Darkness is, in Scripture, sometimes put for great afflictions and heavy calamities; Ezekiel 32:8-10, "I will set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord," etc., Joel 2:2. "The day of the Lord cometh, a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong, there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations; a fire devoureth before them." Zephaniah 1:14-17, "The great day of the Lord is near: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung." Lamentations 3:1,2, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light." And it is in this sense especially, that some take the words of the text; and so the meaning is, Give glory to God, before he

send more heavy dispensations, grievous afflictions, and terrible calamities; personal, congregational, and national.

7. Darkness is, in Scripture, sometimes put for death and the grave; Job 10:21, "Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death." Also verse 22, "A land of darkness, as darkness itself, and the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." Then, Give glory to God, before he cause darkness; that is, before his messenger, death, be sent to rend soul and body asunder; for, if you die before you give glory to God, by faith, repentance, humiliation, and renovation of heart and life, ye perish for ever. Therefore,

8. Darkness is sometimes also put for hell; Jude, verse 13, "To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." Matthew 25:30, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 22:13, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Why, then, "Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness," or before the shadow of the everlasting evening be stretched over you, when he will get glory upon you passively through eternity, if you do not give him glory actively now in time. Here, in the text, it seems to be especially meant of the darkness of desolating judgments and calamities, not excluding any of the rest mentioned.

2ndly, The next thing I proposed, on this fourth general head of motive, was, to offer some remarks upon the darkness here spoken of.

Remark 1. That by darkness here we are especially, as I have said, to understand affliction and judgment. God was to judge and afflict Israel, and bring them under a seventy years' captivity. And judgments are several times expressed by darkness, thus in Scripture, Psalm 107:10; Joel 2:2.

Remark 2. Afflictions are, on several accounts, compared to darkness: partly, because of their dreadfulness; they are frightful, as men are afraid in the dark: and partly because of their dangerousness; there is great danger of stumbling in the dark, as in the following part of the verse, where the text lies; "Before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness."

Remark 3. That there are signs of darkness before it come, or when it is a-coming; such as heaviness and drowsiness, which seize people when the dark night approaches. Alas! what a sign of darkness is the present security of our day! Men crying, Peace, peace; it says sudden destruction is at the door. Coldness seizes people in the dark night: and so coldness of affection towards God and Christ, is an evidence of the darkness of our day; the sun down, and the stars appearing. Oh! when the Sun of righteousness is hid, and only the stars appear, only ministers heard, only their gifts seen and discerned, what a darkness is this! When the wild beasts come abroad, it betokens darkness; thus, when the church is infested with foxes or wolves; see to this purpose, Acts 20:29, 30, "I know this, that after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock," etc., Song of Solomon 2:15, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines." See also 2 Peter 2:1, 2, 3.

Remark 4. That darkness of trouble and wrath come not upon a church without a cause. Give him glory before he cause darkness. "Affliction springs not out of the dust": God owns himself the author, "Is there evil in the city, and I have not done it?" There is a concatenation and chain of causes, but God is at the top of the chain; he causes darkness.

Remark 5. That sin provokes God to cause darkness. Give glory to God before he cause it; intimating, That the dishonouring of God by sin is the procuring cause of trouble and darkness, though God be the efficient cause. The darkness of sin is ours, but the darkness of judgment for sin is the Lord's, "Who gave Jacob to the spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Hast not thou, O God, against whom we have sinned?" Isaiah 42:24.

Remark 6. That God is not willing that darkness come unawares upon a church and people, but before he cause darkness he warns them, “Give glory to the Lord, before he cause darkness.” He is not willing to destroy, “As I live, I have not pleasure in the death of sinners: Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?”

Question: But when darkness is determined, why doth God call sinners to turn to him, to repent, to give glory to him? What good service will that do, when to them the darkness and judgment is determined?

Answer: If we give glory to God, then either,

1. It will prevent the darkness of judgment threatened, as in the case of Nineveh, and make the Lord to turn his hand, though he doth not turn his mind.

2. It may delay the darkness, so as there may be peace and truth in our days; or,

3. It may mitigate the darkness, and make it easy, and not so terrible; or,

4. It may shorten the dark night of judgment, as it is said, “For the elect’s sake these days shall be shortened”; or,

5. It may contribute to strengthen and fortify us for the trial, when it comes, and makes us able to bear it.

6. It will turn the judgment into a mercy, and the darkness to light, for, “All things shall work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose,” and to them that give glory to God. These are the upright ones, of whom it is said, “To the upright there arises light in darkness.”

V. The fifth thing proposed was, To make application, which may be in a use of information, trial, and exhortation.

1st. We may improve this doctrine for information. And if it be so, that we are to give glory to God, particularly by faith, repentance, and humiliation, before he cause darkness, then we may hence see,

1. The excellency of CHRIST, in whom all the glory of God shines, and by whom God hath got all the glory that he requires. Hence the song of the angels before the incarnation, Isaiah 6:3, “The whole earth is full of thy glory.” Heaven, the whole heaven was full of it before, but now the whole earth. And hence the song of the angels after his incarnation, “Glory to God in the highest! on earth peace, and good-will towards men!”

2. Hence see the excellency of the Christian religion, in that it tends to give glory to the great God, and the excellency of the gospel, that shows the way how God may get glory. On this score the Popish religion is to be rejected, that robs God of his pardoning mercy, ascribing it to the Pope, as if he had power to pardon; it robs Christ of the glory of his righteousness, ascribing so much to the merit or works; and of the glory of his intercession, ascribing it to angels and saints. On this head the Arminian doctrine is to be rejected, as robbing Christ of the glory of his free grace, in electing from eternity, and effectually calling in time, ascribing so much to man’s free will. Socinians and Arians rob Christ of the glory of his divine nature, and of the merit and value of his blood, as a sacrifice satisfactory to divine justice.

3. Hence see the infinite evil of sin that robs God of this glory. Every sinner is a robber, and every sin a robbery committed upon God. It is a robbing him of his omniscience and omnipresence, as if he did not see, and was not present, observing; of his justice, as if he did not regard; of his power, as if he could not punish; the language of the sinner is, God is altogether such an one as myself.

4. See whence it is, that the great end of the gospel is to level and bring down self—viz., because this is the great idol that stands opposite to God: “If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself.” Self is the greatest enemy in the world to the glory of God. We may bring the two opposite poles of heaven together, sooner than make a man serve himself, and yet aim at God’s glory, “No man can serve two masters.”

5. Darkness is to be the portion of these who give not glory to God. The darkness of death and destruction will come upon such useless persons, as bring in no revenue of glory to the exchequer of heaven. The unprofitable servant that hid his talent, was to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness.

6. Hence see how reproveable these, and such like persons are,

(1.) Who bring no glory to God at all, being quite useless in the earth. It is not enough for a servant to say, I did no evil: he is an unprofitable servant that does no good. Negative holiness will do you no good; you must not only be able to say, I was no drunkard nor swearer: you must be positively holy, otherwise God gets no glory.

(2.) These are reproveable that rob God of his glory, “Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me,” Malachi 3:8. Thus hypocrites rob him of his omniscience, as if God did not search the heart; unbelief robs him of his faithfulness, as if he were a liar; epicures, gluttons, and drunkards rob him of his glory, for they make their belly their god; covetous people rob him, by making gold their god; hence covetousness is called idolatry. Oh! how he is robbed by the Arians, Socinians, and Deists of our day!

(3.) These that arrogate his glory to themselves, instead of giving glory to God, they take the glory to themselves. Thus some ascribe the honour of their success in the world to themselves, whereas, Deuteronomy 8:18, “It is God that giveth power to get wealth.” Some ascribe to themselves the honour of their duties, when assisted; they do all to be seen of men; seeking to themselves the applause of men, and the praise of men more than the praise of God. The oil of vain-glory feeds the lamp of many professors, “Come see my zeal for the Lord of hosts.” The wind of vain-glory hath blown many to hell. Thus the ambitious Hamans and Herods of the earth seek, that men should give them divine honour, and take God’s glory to themselves, while they would lord it over the consciences of men and would have themselves more obeyed than God. Thus many assume to be lords of God’s heritage, and to have the disposing of their spiritual rights and privileges, such as the election of ministers, which is a privilege belonging to a Christian congregation, and not to any patron whatsoever; God only is Lord of the conscience.

2ndly, The next use we shall make of the doctrine is of examination. Well then, you may try if you give God the glory by these two things. 1. There are some things that will be burdensome to you. 2. There are some things you will desire and long for.

[1.] There are some things that will be burdensome to you; such as these following:—

1. Sin, Because it brings dishonour to God: the sin of your nature, heart, and life; “Against thee, thee only have I sinned,” Psalm 51:6.

2. Self; you will be brought to abhor self, because it competes with God; Oh! to have the single eye! “Oh! wretched man that I am!”

3. That you cannot glorify God as you ought, and that you come so far short of glorifying him; this will be your burden: woe is me, that I honour him so little.

4. The dishonour done to God in the world will be your burden and grief, “I beheld transgressors, and was grieved.” When you see God affronted, his name profaned, this will touch you: “The reproaches of them that reproached thee have fallen upon me.”

[2.] There are some things you will desire and long for, if you be giving glory to God; such as,

1. You will long to have his kingdom established in the world: you will have some concern for Zion and for God’s honour, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right-hand forget her cunning.”

2. You will long to have his kingdom within you, and his throne erected in your heart; every thought brought into captivity to his obedience.

3. You will long to have the work of holiness carried on, without resting in any degree of attainment, “Pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.” “The righteous holds on his way.”

4. You will long to be with him, to behold his glory; “O! when shall the day break, and the shadows flee away!” O for the day when I shall be like him, and see him as he is, and glorify him to purpose!

3rdly, The third use we make of the doctrine, is for exhortation. O Sirs, be exhorted then to “Give glory to God, before he cause darkness.” For motives to persuade you hereto,

1. Consider that the glory of God hath been much darkened by our sins, and the sins of this generation; darkened to such a degree, as may justly provoke him to cause darkness. How hath he been dishonoured by our forefathers and us? How is he dishonoured by the gross infidelity, error, ignorance, and irreligion of the day! by the great contempt and neglect of the precious Christ, and his glorious gospel! the woeful barrenness and unfruitfulness of ordinances! lukewarmness and indifference in the matters of God! lamentable backsliding and defection from his ways and truth! hypocrisy, carnality, and earthly-mindedness! all seeking their own things, and not the things of Christ Jesus! gross immorality, cursing, swearing, whoredom, drunkenness, profanation of God’s name and Sabbath! treacherous dealing with God, and contempt of our solemn covenants, national and personal; and departure from covenanted zeal, principles, and practices! How is he dishonoured by our sinning against so much, and so many mercies, and warnings!

2. Consider how the darkness of sin, in dishonouring God, is attended with the darkness of judgment, portending yet greater darkness. How many shadows of the evening are stretched over us? The shadow of spiritual judgments and plagues; such as blindness of mind, hardness of heart, stupidity, security, and deadness; and the giving up of men to the lusts of their own hearts, in the righteous judgment of God! The shadow of desertion; the Lord visibly withdrawing his gracious presence from his ordinances, and the assemblies of his servants and people! The shadow of dissensions and divisions among ministers and people: God dividing us in his anger! The shadow of heavy grievances upon his church, notwithstanding of endeavours used for her relief, when he goes not forth with our armies! The visible glory of the church, her doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, sadly corrupted with carnal policy, framing the tabernacle of God otherwise than according to the pattern seen in the mount! The invisible glory is much withdrawn, that few tokens appear of God’s powerful presence in the sanctuary, and a great famine of spiritual influence! What a shadow of darkness is the reduction of the remnant! Isaiah 1:9, “When the good men perish,” and few faithful pastors and sound professors are left! “Help, Lord,” says the psalmist, “for the godly man ceaseth”; few to bear witness for God; and when candidates for the ministry are lax and latitudinarian in their principles, affecting nothing but new modes of flourishing and haranguing, without studying the life, power, and mysteries of the gospel!

3. Consider, how much it concerns us to give glory to God: glorifying of God is the great end of our creation and being: “The Lord made all things for himself”: and if all things, then man especially, the master-piece of the visible creation. It is for this end God hath given us rational souls and noble faculties, and the means of grace; and all lest this end be not obtained. The glorifying of God is the chief end of all this works, viz. creation, providence, and redemption. All the other creatures, sun, moon, and stars; yea, and brute beasts, they all glorify God according to their nature and capacities; and, what are we doing? We depend upon him absolutely for life and breath, and being, every moment: “In him we live, move, and have our being”: and is it not highly reasonable that we live to him? The glory of God is most excellent, his glory is above heaven and earth. His glory surpasseth the thoughts of men and angels. It is more worth than heaven; more worth than the salvation of all men. His glory is dear to him. He hath given many excellent gifts to his children, but his glory will he not give to another. And, if his glory be so dear to him, should it not be dear to us? And ought we not to promote it? Our not glorifying of God will come to a sad account: for the sum of the grand account we are to be called to is this, What revenue of glory have you brought in to me? And, if God have not glory by us, he will have glory upon us. If you glorify him not actively, you shall glorify him passively: and, alas! how sad will their case be, who shall serve for no other end, but to set forth the glory of his vindictive justice to all eternity! In a word, it will be to our unspeakable advantage to glorify him, for we shall be glorified by him, “They that honour me, I will honour.” How sweet will it be in a dying hour, if you could say, “Father, I have glorified thee on earth; glorify thou me with thyself,” and with the glory thou hast prepared for me from all eternity.

4. Consider whom it concerns to glorify God; put it not off from you. Doth it not concern magistrates to give glory to him, by enacting good laws, and executing them faithfully? See Jeremiah 13:18. Doth it not

concern ministers and church-officers to give glory to God, by asserting and maintaining the true doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of God's house; to buy truth and not to sell it, though it should cost us our life, as it hath done many worthy ministers and martyrs. Doth it not concern people, in their private stations, to give glory to God, and advance the kingdom of Christ Jesus, and to contribute their mite, though they were never so poor and mean, for the building of the tabernacle? As, when it was reared in the wilderness, some that were able gave gold, silver, precious stones, scarlet, and fine linen; some that were poorer, and unable to give great things, they gave badgers' skins and goats' hair: so according to your ability, you are to give glory to God, and to pray for the coming of his kingdom, when you can do no more.

Question: How shall I give him glory before he cause darkness?

If the question be about the means, I have already spoken of this in the doctrinal part; but if the question be about the power and ability, indeed you cannot give him glory if he do not give you grace: you cannot glorify and sanctify his name, unless he sanctify your heart; you cannot humble yourself for your sin, unless he accomplish his promise to you, see Ezekiel 36:25-31, "I will sprinkle you with clean water, etc. A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, etc. I will put my Spirit within you; and then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations." O Sirs, therefore seek to have the promised blessings and graces of the new covenant, the promised Spirit poured out upon you, that you may humbly confess your sins, and give glory to God; without this, your confession and humiliation will be defective: and there are four respects wherein ordinary confessions are defective. Either we come not far enough in to make personal confession; whereas every family and person should mourn apart: or, we go not far enough down, to our heart sins, that stop in outward and general sins: or, we go not far enough back, as David, confessing the sins of his youth, yea, of his nature: or, we go not far enough on, but confess, and then run away to our sins again, without having any stamp or impress of confession upon our walk or conversation, and without continuing under a sense of sin, as David, "My sin is ever before me"; and without walking softly all our days, as Hezekiah: therefore, that our confession may be of a right stamp, O let us supplicate the Spirit of all grace, that we may be in case to give glory to God.

And, in order to our having the spirit, and having grace to glorify God, O let us, through grace, come to Christ, who hath the Spirit above measure, and who is the store-house of all grace. By faith and believing in Christ, we give more glory to God, than we can do any otherwise. By being strong in the faith, we give glory to God in all his attributes, because, in the way of salvation, through Christ, all the perfections of God shine gloriously: and therefore, when we believe in Jesus, and close with this way of salvation, we give him the glory of them all. Why, thus we glorify the wisdom of God, in laying such a plan of our salvation, as tends to display the manifold wisdom of God, in uniting the most distant extremes, and making a God-man the center in whom God and man meet together. We glorify his power, in executing and finishing what wisdom did so marvelously contrive, and destroying principalities and powers, and saving us, notwithstanding all the mighty oppositions that stand in the way. Thus we glorify the holiness of God, since in Christ, God hath shewed his purity, and hatred of sin, to be so great, that he spared not his own Son, when he only knew sin by imputation. Thus we glorify the justice of God, in that a satisfaction of infinite value hath been yielded by an almighty Redeemer, so as thereupon God becomes just in justifying them that believe in Jesus, and declaring his righteousness in the remission of sin. Thus we glorify the truth of God, whose faithfulness is fully established, and the truth of all the law-threatenings, in that he hath exacted the punishment threatened: and thus Christ also, at the same time, hath sealed all the promises of the covenant of grace, in so much that they are all Yea and Amen in him. Thus we glorify the goodness and mercy of God. Goodness appears in its glory, in providing a Redeemer for such as have destroyed themselves; and the greatest blessings are bestowed freely upon the most unworthy. Mercy appears to the utmost, while provision is made for bringing sinners to partake of the happiness they had forfeited, and grace reigns through righteousness: and thus a way is laid out in which justice and holiness should not be injured, and yet grace and mercy eminently exalted. Here is the most rational scheme in the world, which contributes to advance, and exalts all the perfections of the great God.

O then, as we would give glory to God, let us come to Christ by faith; for, as this way is most for God's glory, so it is best for our behalf. Tell me, O sinner, have you no sins to be saved from? Since you have, O whither should you go but to him, who is the "Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world?" Have you not souls to be saved? Why then, whither should you go, but to the Saviour of souls? Is there not a life to come? O then, whither should you go but to him who hath the words of eternal life? Is there not a wrath to come? O then, where should you go but to him that can only deliver you from the wrath to come? Do you think he is unwilling to receive you? O sinner, how can that be? If he yielded himself into the hands of them that sought his life, will he withhold himself from the hearts of them that seek his mercy? Was he willing to be taken by the hands of violence? And is he not much more willing to be taken by the hand of faith? Are you destitute of faith? O Sirs, look to him as the Author of faith. Though you cannot come to him, make that errand, saying "Lord, I cannot come; but I come to thee for grace to come: O draw me, draw me." Say not, I am unworthy; for if you would have nothing but what you are worthy of, you must have nothing but hell.

If you say you have a proud heart, a hard heart, a dead heart, a wicked heart: O put these among the rest of your sins, and come to him to be saved from them all. None ever came to him for a cure, and went away without it. You would find something in yourself; but it is best you find nothing, but what you have reason to be ashamed of, that you may come to Christ for all so as to glory only in him. Let thy emptiness further thy coming to him for all, instead of hindering thee. Come as thou art; come poor, come needy, come naked, come empty, come wretched; it is his joy and crown to receive thee.

Oh! there is a necessity for thy coming, there is no other Saviour but he, and thou perishest; come, then, and give glory to God before he cause darkness; give glory to God before he cause judgments to fall upon thee. Give glory to God before he take away the candlestick of the gospel. Give glory to him before he take away ministers and sermons. Give glory to him, before he lay you on a sick-bed, or a death-bed. Give glory to him before he pronounce that fearful sentence on you, "My spirit shall no more strive with man. He that is filthy, let him be filthy still: he that is unjust, let him be unjust still. Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone." Give glory to him before he pronounce that final sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" "Give glory to him before he cause darkness."

5. Consider that darkness is threatened. There are signs of darkness and of judgment a-coming.

(1.) Abounding of all manner of sin. See Hosea 4:1-3, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel; for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven: yea, the fishes of the sea, shall also be taken away."

(2.) These aggravated so much, being against light, love, and mercy: so that the patience of God is abused; Romans 2:4-5, "Despisest thou the riches of his forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance; but after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath?"

(3.) When God's patience is not only abused, but affronted, and ridiculed, and laughed at: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" For, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were, from the beginning of the creation. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," etc., 2 Peter 3:3,4,9,10.

(4.) When there are few to stand in the gap: "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none," Ezekiel 22:30.

(5.) When the righteous are removed: “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come,” Isaiah 57:1.

(6.) When the gospel is despised, and Christ is rejected by the generality, it brings darkness; “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and is wonderful in our eyes. Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof,” Matthew 21:42, 43. O then, “Give glory to God before he cause darkness.”

And we would advise you to give him glory particularly in the six following respects:

1. By confession of sin, “Give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to him,” Joshua 7:19. Confess secret sins in secret, and when charged in an ecclesiastical way, do not cover sin.

2. By thanksgiving, Psalm 69:30, “I will praise the name of God with a song; and will magnify him with thanksgiving.” Psalm 50:23, “Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me.” When we pray, we act like men; when we praise, like angels.

3. By calling upon God: “Call on me in the day of trouble; I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me,” Psalm 50:15.

4. By suffering, when he calls you to it: “Glorify ye the Lord in the fires,” Isaiah 24:15. Dishonour not God, then, by complaining: “Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his iniquity?” Remember thou art man, and “Man is born to trouble.” Thou art a living man, and that is a mercy; yet in the land of hope. Thou art a sinful man that deservest hell; and a man but suffering punishment for his sin: and let these be arguments against murmuring.

5. Glorify him by living to his praise, living a fruitful life: “Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” Living a holy life; studying to be holy by avoiding sin, and hating it wherever you see it, especially in yourself. You will hate a toad or serpent wherever you see it; but much more if it be crawling in your own bosom: so here, sin has its residence in the heart: “Out of the heart proceedeth evils”: therefore, abhor that abominable thing which God’s holy soul hates. Glorify him by a zealous life, “Contending for the faith”; and by being conscientious in the discharge of relative duties, that the name of God be not blasphemed, but that the doctrine of God be adorned.

6. Give him glory by living by faith upon the Son of God; you cannot glorify God, if you do not glorify Christ; “He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him,” John 5:23. O then, Sirs, give Christ the glory of his name and offices.

[1.] Give Christ the glory of his name, by making his name your strong tower. Give him the glory of his name JESUS, by looking to him for salvation. Give him the glory of his name CHRIST, The Anointed, by looking to him for the Spirit, the anointing. Give him the glory of his name, The Sun of righteousness, by praying him to arise on you with healing in his wings. Give him the glory of his name, The Resurrection and the Life, by looking to him for life to your dead soul.

[2.] Give him the glory of all his offices. A man in his office reckons it his honour to be employed, much employed. O, then, Sirs, give Christ the glory of his Prophetical office, by employing him to teach you, and to dispel the darkness of your mind. Give him glory as a Priest, by employing him to pardon you, and wash you in his blood. Give him glory as a King, by employing him to subdue all your iniquities, mortify all your corruptions, and destroy all your spiritual enemies. Give him glory as a Physician, by employing him to heal all your diseases. Give him glory as a Captain, by employing him to fight all your battles. Give him glory as a Treasurer, by employing him to supply all your wants out of his fullness. Give him glory as an Agent, by employing him to do all your works in you and for you, saying with the Psalmist, “Do thou for me, for thy name’s sake,” and again, Psalm 57:2, “I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me.” If you cannot believe, nor employ him, O will you give him glory as the Author of faith, by pleading,

that he may come and take employment, and work faith in you. Give him the glory of his drawing grace, saying, "Lord draw me, and I will run; turn me, and I will be turned."

Remember you are called to give him glory, before he cause darkness. Darkness will come whether you will or not, the darkness of distress, the darkness of a sick-bed or a death-bed, the darkness of death itself, the darkness of a judgment-day. If you would have darkness to be light before you, O Sirs, give him glory before he cause darkness. Seek acquaintance with Christ and union to him; you cannot glorify God but in Christ: be acquainted with the rule whereby we glorify God and enjoy him. Seek to have the word hid in your heart, and particularly to be well acquainted with the gospel covenant: plead the promises thereof: "For the promises are Yea and Amen, in Christ, to the glory of God," 2 Corinthians 1:20.

Ralph Erskine was born 15 March 1685 at Monilaws in Northumberland, Scotland. He was the sixth son of Rev. Henry Erskine (1624-1696). His father was one of those ministers ejected from the Church of England in 1662 by the Act of Uniformity. After a period of imprisonment on the Bass Rock, he settled at Monilaws in 1684, where Ralph was born. At the Declaration of Toleration in 1687 he accepted a call to the parish of Whitsome, near Berwick; there under his preaching the eleven year old Thomas Boston was converted. When dying he summoned his wife and five of his children to his deathbed, and took from each of them engagements to personal religion. Ralph was at that time eleven years old; and some twenty years later recalled with gratitude "the Lord's drawing out his heart toward Him at his father's death."

Ralph Erskine entered Edinburgh University in November 1699 and graduated Master of Arts in 1704. In childhood he was the subject of strong religious impressions. As a young man he valued the religious conversation of his godly sister-in-law Alison Turpie, who married his brother Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754) in the year Ralph graduated. It was after overhearing a conversation between Ralph and his wife on "the deep things of God" that Ebenezer was converted. After graduating Ralph became a tutor, and in June 1709 he was licensed by the Dunfermline Presbytery and in 1711 ordained to a charge there. So successful was his early ministry that the church was soon crowded and thousands attended his communion seasons.

Together with Thomas Boston and other eminent ministers of the Gospel, both Ralph and his brother Ebenezer Erskine took a strong stand and support of the republication of Edward Fisher's book, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*.

In the late 1730's a correspondence began between Ralph Erskine and George Whitefield that led to the evangelist coming to Scotland; his first sermon in Scotland was delivered from Erskine's Dunfermline pulpit.

The Erskines and James Fisher produced an Exposition of the Shorter Catechism that John Brown of Edinburgh described as containing "in short compass the fullest and clearest exposition of Christian doctrine and law to be found in any language."

Ralph Erskine was twice married. His first marriage was on 15 July 1714 to Margaret Dewar of Lassodie (died 22 November 1730, age 32), by whom he had ten children, of whom three became ministers. His second marriage was to Margaret Simpson of Edinburgh on 24 February 1732; by her he had four sons. He was very fond of music and was a proficient violin player.

In the 1750's Ralph gradually became unfit for pastoral work because of the development of heart disease. His last sermon was in late October 1752 from the text, "All her paths are peace." He died on 6 November 1752. His last words were, "I shall be forever a debtor to free grace. Victory, Victory, Victory!" When Ebenezer heard of his death he said, "And is Ralph gone? He has twice got the start on me; he was first in Christ, and now he is first in glory." Alexander R. MacEwan, a biographer of the Erskines, speaking of Ralph's writings, says, "The highest place that can be given him among Scottish writers of his school is next to Thomas Boston. That, however, is a high place."

Invitation to Sinners

By John Mason (1648-1694)

HAVE you sins, or have you none? If you have, whither should you go, but to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world? Have you souls, or have you none? If you have, where should you go, but to the Saviour of souls? Is there a life to come, or is there not? If there is, where should you go but to Him, who only hath the words of eternal life? Is there a wrath to come, or is there not? If there is, where should you go but to Him, who only can deliver from the wrath to come?

And will the Saviour not receive you? If He yielded Himself into the hands of them that sought His life, will He hide Himself from the hearts of them that seek His mercy? If He was willing to be taken by the hand of violence, is He not more willing to be taken by the hands of faith? He that died for your sins, will He cast you off for your infirmities? O come, come, come! I charge you come. I beseech you come. Come, and He will give you life. Come, and He will give you rest. Come, and He will receive you. Knock, and He will open to you. Look to Him, and He will save you.

Did ever any come to Jesus for a cure, and go away without it? You would find something in yourself, but you find nothing but what you have reason to be ashamed of; but let not that hinder, but further your coming. Come as you are; come poor, come needy, come naked, come empty, come wretched, only come, only believe. His heart is free, His arms are open; 'tis His joy and His crown to receive you. If you are willing, He never was otherwise.