

## WICKED MEN USEFUL IN THEIR DESTRUCTION ONLY

Ezekiel 15:2-4

Jonathan Edwards

*Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree? Or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; The fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burnt: Is it meet for any work?*

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**The** visible church of God is here compared to the vine tree, as is evident by God's own explanation of the allegory, in verses 6, 7, and 8. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem," &c. And it may be understood of mankind in general. We find man often in scripture compared to a vine. So in chapter 32 of Deuteronomy, "Their vine is the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are grapes of gall." And Psalm lxxx. 8. "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt;" verse 14. "Look down from heaven, behold, and visit this vine." And Canticles ii. 15. "The foxes that spoil the vines; for our vines have tender grapes." Isaiah v. at the beginning, "My beloved hath a vineyard, and he planted it with the choicest vine." Jeremiah ii. 21. "I had planted thee a noble vine." Hosea x. 1. "Israel is an empty vine." So in chapter 15 of John, visible Christians are compared to the branches of a vine.

Man is very fitly represented by the vine. The weakness and dependence of the vine on other things which support it, well represents to us what a poor, feeble, dependent creature man is, and how, if left to himself, he must fall into mischief, and cannot help himself. The visible people of God are fitly compared to a vine, because of the care and cultivation of the husbandman, or vine dresser. The business of husbandmen in the land of Israel was very much in their vineyards, about vines; and the care they exercised to fence them, to defend them, to prune them, to prop them up, and to cultivate them, well represented that merciful care which God exercises towards his visible people; and this latter is often in scripture expressly compared to the former.

In the words now read is represented,

1. How wholly useless and unprofitable, even beyond other trees, a vine is, in case of unfruitfulness: "What is a vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch

which is among the trees of the forest?" i.e. if it do not bear fruit. Men make much more of a vine than of other trees; they take great care of it, to wall it in, to dig about it, to prune it, and the like. It is much more highly esteemed than any one of the trees of the forest; they are despised in comparison with it. And if it bear fruit, it is indeed much preferable to other trees; for the fruit of it yields a noble liquor; as it is said in Jotham's parable, Judges ix. 13. "And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man?"

But if it bear no fruit, it is more unprofitable than the trees of the forest; for the wood of them is good for timber; but the wood of the vine is fit for no work; as in the text, "Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?"

2. The only thing for which a vine is useful, in case of barrenness, viz. for fuel: "Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel." It is wholly consumed; no part of it is worth a saving, to make any instrument of it, for any work.

### **DOCTRINE.**

If men bring forth no fruit to God, they are wholly useless, unless in their destruction.

For the proof of this doctrine, I shall show,

1. That it is very evident, that there can be but two ways in which man can be useful, viz. either in acting, or in being acted upon, and disposed of.
2. That man can no otherwise be useful actively than by bringing forth fruit to God.
3. That if he bring not forth fruit to God, there is no other way in which he can be passively useful, but in being destroyed.
4. In that way he may be useful without bearing fruit.

I. There are but two ways in which man can be useful, viz. either in acting or being acted upon. If man be an useful sort of creature, he must be so either actively or passively: There is no medium. If he be useful to any purpose, he must be so either in acting himself, or else in being disposed of by some other; either in doing something himself to that purpose, or else in having something done upon him by some other to that purpose. What can be more plain, than that if man do nothing himself, and nothing be done with him or upon him by any other, he cannot be any way at all useful? If man do nothing himself to promote the end of his existence, and no other being do any thing with him to promote this end, then nothing will be done to promote this end; and so man must be wholly useless. So that there are but two ways in which man can be useful to any purpose, viz. either actively or passively, either in doing something himself, or in being the subject of something done to him.

II. Man cannot be useful actively, any otherwise than in bringing forth fruit to God, than in serving God, and living to his glory. This is the only way wherein he can be useful in doing; and that for this reason, that the glory of God is the very thing for which man was made, and to which all other ends are subordinate. Man is not an independent being, but he derives his being from another; and therefore hath his end assigned him by that other: And he that gave him his being, made him for the end now mentioned. This was the very design and aim of the Author of man, this was the work for which he made him, viz. to serve and glorify his Maker.

Other creatures are made for inferior purposes. Inferior creatures were made for inferior purposes. But it is to be observed, that man is the creature that is highest, and nearest to God, of any in this lower world; and therefore his business is with God, although other creatures are made for lower ends. There may be observed a kind of gradation, or gradual ascent, in the order of the different kinds of creatures, from the meanest clod of earth to man, who hath a rational and immortal soul. A plant, an herb, or tree, is superior in nature to a stone or clod, because it hath a vegetable life. The brute creatures are a degree higher still; for they have sensitive life. But man, having a rational soul, is the highest of this lower creation, and is next to God; therefore his business is with God.

Things without life, as earth, water, &c. are subservient to things above them, as the grass, herbs and trees. These vegetables are subservient to that order of creatures which is next above them, the brute creation; they are for food to them. Brute creatures, again, are made for the use and service of the order above them; they are made for the service of mankind. But man being the highest of this lower creation, the next step from him is to God. He therefore is made for the service and glory of God. This is the whole work and business of man; it is his highest end, to which all other ends are subordinate.

If it had not been for this end, there never would have been any such sort of creature as man; there would have been no occasion for it. Other inferior ends may be answered as well, without any such creature as man. There would have been no sort of occasion for making so noble a creature, and endowing him with such faculties, only to enjoy earthly good, to eat, and to drink, and to enjoy sensual things. Brute creatures, without reason, are capable of these things, as well as man; Yea, if no higher end be aimed at than to enjoy sensitive good, reason is rather an hinderance than an help. It doth but render man the more capable of afflicting himself with care, and fears of death, and other future evils, and of vexing himself with many anxieties, from which brute creatures are wholly free, and therefore can gratify their senses with less molestation. Besides, reason doth but make men more capable of molesting and impeding one another in the

gratification of their senses. If man have no other end to seek but to gratify his senses, reason is nothing but an impediment.

Therefore if man be not made to serve and glorify his Creator, it is wholly to no purpose that such a creature is made. Doubtless then the all wise God, who doth all things in infinite wisdom, hath made man for this end. And this is agreeable to what he hath taught us in many places in the scriptures. This is the great end for which man was made, and for which he was made such a creature as he is, having a body and soul, bodily senses, and rational powers. For this is he placed in such circumstances as he is, and the earth is given him for a possession. For this he hath dominion given him over the rest of the creatures of this world. For this the sun shines on him, and the moon and stars are for signs and seasons to him, and the rain falls on him, and the earth yields him her increase.

All other ends of man are subordinate to this. There are inferior ends for which man was made. Men were made for one another; made for their friends and neighbors, and for the good of the public. But all these inferior ends are designed to be subordinate to the higher end of glorifying God; and therefore man cannot be actively useful, or actively answer any purpose, otherwise than by actively glorifying God, or bringing forth fruit to God. Because,

1. That is not actively useful which doth not actively answer its end. That which doth not answer its end is in vain; for that is the meaning of the proposition, that any thing is in vain. So that which doth not actively answer its end, is, as to its own activity, in vain.

2. That is as to its own activity altogether useless which actively answers only subordinate ends, without answering the ultimate end; and that because the ultimate end is the end of subordinate ends. The notion of a supreme end is, that it is the end of all inferior ends. Subordinate ends are to no purpose, only as they stand related to the highest end. The very notion of a subordinate end is, that it is in order to a further end. Therefore these inferior ends are good for nothing though they be obtained, unless they also obtain their end. Inferior ends are not aimed at for their own sake, but only for the sake of the ultimate end. Therefore he that fails of his great end of all, doth as much altogether fail of his end, and is as much to no purpose, as if he did not obtain his subordinate end.

I will illustrate this by two or three examples. The subordinate end of the underpinning of an house is to support the house; and the subordinate end of the windows is to let in the light. But the ultimate end of the whole is the benefit of the inhabitants. Therefore, if the house be never inhabited, the whole is in vain. The underpinning is in vain, though it be ever so strong and support the building ever so well. The windows also are wholly in vain, though they be ever

so large and clear, and though they obtain the subordinate end of letting in the light: They are as much in vain, as if they let in no light.

So the subordinate end of the husbandman in ploughing and sowing, and well manuring his field is, that it may bring forth a crop. But his more ultimate end is, that food may be provided for him and his family. Therefore though his inferior end be obtained, and his field bring forth ever so good a crop, yet if after all it be consumed by fire, or otherwise destroyed, he ploughed and sowed his field as much in vain, as if the seed had never sprung up.

So if man obtain his subordinate ends ever so fully; yet if he altogether fail of his ultimate end, he is wholly an useless creature. Thus if men be very useful in temporal things to their families, or greatly promote the temporal interest of the neighborhood, or of the public; yet if no glory be brought to God by it, they are altogether useless. If men actively bring no glory to God, they are, as to their own activity, altogether useless, how much soever they may promote the benefit of one another. How much soever one part of mankind may subserve another; yet if the end of the whole be not answered, every part is useless.

Thus if the parts of a clock subserve ever so well one to another, mutually to assist each other in their motions; one wheel moving another ever so regularly; yet if the motion never reach the hand or the hammer, it is altogether in vain, as much as if it stood still. As in a clock one wheel moves another, and that another, till at last the motion comes to the hand and hammer, which immediately respect the eye and the ear, otherwise all the motions are in vain; so it is in the world, one man was made to be useful to another, and one part of mankind to another; but the use of the whole is to bring glory to God the maker or else all is in vain; and however a man may serve among his fellow creatures, in a private or public capacity, upon the whole he is in vain.

It may perhaps be objected, that a wicked man may, by being serviceable to the public, be useful to many who do bring forth fruit to God, and thus glorify him.

Answer 1. If he be so, he is no further useful than he brings glory to God. It all hath an ultimate respect to that glory that is brought to God, and is useful no further; as the motion of no one wheel of a clock is any further useful, than as it finally respects the right pointing of the hand, and striking of the hammer.

Answer 2. When it is thus, wicked men are useful only accidentally, and not designedly. Although a wicked man may, by being serviceable to good men, do what will be an advantage to them to their bringing forth fruit to God; yet that serviceableness is not what he aims at; this is not his end; he doth not look so far for an ultimate end. And how ever this end be obtained, no thanks are due to him; it is as to him accidental. He is only the occasion, and not the designing cause of it. That fruit which is brought forth to the glory of God, is not brought

forth by him, but by others.

The usefulness of such a man, being not designed, is not to be attributed to him as though it were his fruit. He is not useful as a man, or as a rational creature, because he is not so designedly. He is useful as things without life may be. Things without life may be useful to put the godly under advantages to bring forth fruit, as the timber and stones with which his house is built, the wool and flax with which he is clothed; but the fruit which is brought forth to God's glory, cannot be said for all that to be the fruit of these lifeless things, but of the godly man who makes use of them. So it is when wicked men put the godly under advantages to glorify God, as Cyrus, and Artaxerxes, and others have done.

III. If men bring not forth fruit to God, there is no other way in which they can be useful passively, but in being destroyed. They are fit for nothing else.

1. They are not fit to be suffered to continue always in this world. God suffers them to live for the present, but it is only for a certain season. They are here in a transitory state. It is not fit that this world should be the constant abode of those who bring forth no fruit to God. It is not fit that the barren tree should be allowed always to stand in the vineyard. The husbandman lets it stand for a while, till he digs about it, dungs it, and proves it to be incurable, or till a convenient time to cut it down come; but it is not fit that such a tree should stand here always. It is not fit that they who bring forth no fruit to God, should be suffered to live always in a world which is so full of the goodness of God, or that his goodness should be spent upon them forever.

This world, though it is fallen, and is under a curse, and is a miserable place to what it once was, yet is full of the streams of divine goodness. But it is not fit that those who bring forth no fruit to God, should always be continued in partaking of these streams. There are these three different states ; a state wherein is nothing but good, which is the state of the blessed in heaven; a state wherein is a mixture of good and evil, which is the earthly state ; and a state wherein is nothing but evil, which is the state of eternal destruction and damnation. Now they that bring forth no fruit to God, are not fit for either of the former; it is not fit that they should be continued in the enjoyment of any of the goodness of God.

It is not fit that an unprofitable, unfruitful creature, who will not glorify his Creator, should always live here to devour the fruits of the earth, and consume the fruits of divine bounty; to have the good things of this life, as God's wool and his flax, his corn, and wine, and oil, spent with him in vain. While a man lives in this world, the other creatures of the world are subjected to him. The brute creatures serve him with their labor and with their lives. The sun, moon, and stars, the clouds, fields and trees, all serve him. But it is not fit that these creatures should always be made to serve him, who brings forth no fruit to the

Creator. Why should God always keep his creatures in subjection to that man, who will not be subject to him? Why should the creation be always kept in such bondage, as to be subject to wicked men? The creatures are made subject to vanity for a little time; God hath subjected them to wicked men, and given them for their use. This however he would not have done, but as it is only for a little while; and the creatures can bear it through the hope of approaching deliverance; and otherwise it would have been intolerable. Romans viii. 20. "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope."

The creature doth, as it were, groan by reason of this subjection to wicked men, although it be but for a while. Romans viii.22. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now." Therefore surely it would be no way fit that wicked men, who do no good, and bring forth no fruit to God, should live here always, to have the various creatures subservient to them, as they are now. The earth can scarcely bear wicked men during that short time for which they stay here, but is ready to spew thee out. It is no way fit, therefore, that it should be forced to bear them always.

Men who bring forth no fruit to God are cumberers of the ground. Luke xiii. 7 "And it is not meet that they should be suffered to cumber the ground always." God cannot be glorified in this way of disposing of unfruitful persons. If such men should be suffered to live always in such a state as this, it would be so far from being to the glory of God, that it would be to the disparagement of the wisdom of God, to continue them in a state so unsuitable for them, forever spending the fruits of his bounty in vain upon them. It would also be a disparagement to his justice; for this is a world where, "all things come alike to all, and there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." If there were no other state but this for wicked men to be in, justice could not possibly take place. It would also reflect upon the holiness of God. Forever to uphold this world for an habitation of such persons, and forever to continue the communications of his bounty and goodness to them, would appear as though he were disposed to countenance and encourage sin and wickedness.

2. If men do not bring forth fruit to God, they are not fit to be disposed of in heaven. Heaven, above all others, is the most improper place for them. Every thing appertaining to that state is unsuitable for them. The company is most unsuitable. The original inhabitants of that world are the angels. But what a disagreeable union would that be, to unite wicked men and angels in the same society? The employments of that world are unsuitable. The employments are serving and glorifying God. How unsuitable then would it be to plant barren trees in that heavenly paradise, trees that would bring forth no fruit to the divine glory? The enjoyments of heaven are unsuitable. The enjoyments are holy and spiritual enjoyments, the happiness of beholding the glory of God, and praising his name, and the like. But these enjoyments are as unsuitable as can be to the

carnal earthly minds of wicked men. They would be no enjoyments to them; but on the contrary would be most disagreeable, and what they cannot relish, but entirely nauseate.

The design of heaven is unsuitable to them. The design of God in making heaven was, that it might be a place of holy habitation, for the reward of the righteous, and not an habitation for wicked men. It would greatly reflect on the wisdom of God to dispose of wicked men there; for it would be the greatest confusion. But God is not the author of confusion, I Corinthians xiv. 33. It would be contrary to the holiness of God, to take wicked men so near to himself into his glorious presence, to dwell forever in that part of the creation which is, as it were, his own palace, and to sit at his table. We read in Psalm v. 4. "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee." Therefore it would doubtless be impossible that the end of the existence of wicked men should be in any wise answered by the placing of them in heaven.

IV. Men who bring forth no fruit to God, yet in suffering destruction may be useful. Although they be not useful actively, or by any thing which they do; yet they may be useful in what they may suffer; just as a barren tree, which is no way useful standing in the vineyard, yet may be good fuel, and be very useful in the fire. God can find use for the most wicked men; he hath his use for vessels of wrath as well as for vessels of mercy; as in an house there is use for vessels unto dishonor, as well as for vessels unto honor. 2 Timothy ii. 20. "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold, and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor." Proverbs xvi. 4. "The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." I shall briefly take notice of what ends God accomplishes by it.

1. Unfruitful persons are of use in their destruction for the glory of God's justice. It was the will of God to glorify his justice, as well as his mercy, on his creatures. The vindictive justice of God is a glorious attribute, as well as his mercy; and the glory of this attribute appears in the everlasting destruction and ruin of the barren and unfruitful.

The glory of divine justice in the perdition of ungodly men appears wonderful and glorious in the eyes of the saints and angels in heaven. Hence we have an account, that they sing praises to God, and extol his justice at the sight of the awful judgments which he inflicts on wicked men. Revelation xvi. 5, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art and wast, and art to come, because thou hast judged thus; for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy:" And Revelation xix. 1, 2: "And after these things I heard a great voice, saying, Alleluia: Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand."

2. Unfruitful persons in their destruction are of use for God to glorify his majesty upon them. The awful majesty of God remarkably appears in those dreadful and amazing punishments which he inflicts on those who rise up against him, and contemn him. A sense of the majesty of an earthly prince is supported very much by a sense of its being a dreadful thing to affront him. God glorifies his own majesty in the destruction of wicked men; and herein he appears infinitely great, in that it appears to be an infinitely dreadful thing to offend him. How awful doth the majesty of God appear in the dreadfulness of his anger! This we may learn to be one end of the damnation of the wicked, from Romans ix. 22.

"What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?"

It is often spoken of God, that he is a terrible God. It is a part of the majesty and glory of God, that he is a terrible God. God tells Pharaoh, that for this cause he raised him up, that he might show his power in him, and that his name might be declared through all the earth, in his destruction. Exodus ix. 15, 16; and again, chapter xiv. 17: "I will get me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen."

3. The destruction of the unfruitful is of use, to give the saints a greater sense of their happiness, and of God's grace to them. The wicked will be destroyed and tormented in the view of the saints, and other inhabitants of heaven. This we are taught in Revelation xiv. 10. "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture, into the cup of his indignation ; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." And in Isaiah lxvi. 24. "And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me : For their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."

When the saints in heaven shall look upon the damned in hell, it will serve to give them a greater sense of their own happiness, seeing how vastly different their case is from their own. The view of the doleful condition of the damned will make them the more prize their own blessedness. When they shall see how dreadful the anger of God is, it will make them the more prize his love. They will rejoice so much the more that they are not the objects of God's anger, but of his favor; that they are not the subjects of his dreadful wrath, but are treated as his children, are taken near to him, to dwell in the everlasting embraces of his love.

When they shall see the misery of the damned, it will give them a greater sense of the distinguishing grace and love of God to them, that God should from all eternity set his love on them, and make so great a difference between them and others who are of the same species with them, are no worse by nature than they, and have deserved no worse of God than they. When they shall look upon the misery of the damned, and consider how different their own state is from

theirs, and that it is only free and sovereign grace that makes the difference, what a great sense will this give them of the wonderful grace of God to them! And how will it heighten their praises! With how much greater admiration and exultation of soul will they sing of the free and sovereign grace of God to them!

When they shall look upon the damned, and see their misery, how will heaven ring with the praises of God's justice towards the wicked, and his grace towards the saints! And with how much greater enlargement of heart will they praise Jesus Christ their Redeemer, that ever he was pleased to set his love upon them, his dying love! And that he should so distinguish them as to spill his blood, and make his soul an offering, to redeem them from that so great misery, and to bring them to such exceeding happiness!

With what love and ecstasy will they sing that song in Revelation v. 9. 10. "Thou art worthy: For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every tongue, and kindred, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests." One end which the apostle mentions why God appointed vessels of wrath, is the more to make known the wonderfulness of his mercy towards the saints. In Romans ix. 22, 23. there are two ends mentioned: "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" That is one end, then another is mentioned immediately after: "And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?"

### **APPLICATION**

I. Hence we may learn, how just and righteous God is in the destruction of those who bring forth no fruit to God. Seeing there is no other way in which they can be useful, or in which the end of their being can be obtained, certainly it is most just that God should thus dispose of them. Why should God be frustrated of his end through their perverseness? If men will not do the work for which he hath made and fitted them; if they, through a spirit of opposition and rebellion against God, refuse; yet why should God suffer himself to be disappointed of his end in making them? It doth not become the infinite greatness and majesty of God, to suffer himself to be disappointed and frustrated by the wickedness and perverseness of sinful worms of the dust. If God should suffer this, it would seem to argue, either a want of wisdom in God to fix upon a good end, or a want of power to accomplish it.

God made all men that they might be useful; and if they will not be useful in their conduct and actions, how just is it that God should make them useful in their sufferings! God made all men for his own glory; and if they, contrary to the

revealed will of God, refuse to glorify him actively and willingly, how just is it that God should glorify himself upon them in what he doth with them!

It hath been shown, that there is no other way wherein this can be done, but by their destruction. Surely, therefore, it must be just and righteous that God should destroy them.

Men are under no natural necessity of being put to this use of glorifying God in their sufferings. God gives them opportunity of glorifying him in doing, in bringing forth fruit, puts them under advantages for it, and uses many means to bring them to it. But if they will not be useful this way, it is very just that God should make them useful in the only remaining way in which they can be useful, viz. in their destruction. God is not forward to put them to this use. He tells us, that he hath "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live;" Ezekiel xxxiii. 11. God represents the destruction of sinners as a work to which he is backward; yet it is meet that they should be destroyed, rather than that they should be suffered to frustrate God of the end of their being. Who can blame the husbandman for cutting down and burning a barren tree, after he hath digged about it, and dunged it, and used all proper means to make it fruitful?

Let those among us consider this, who have lived all their lives hitherto unprofitably, and never have brought forth any fruit to God's glory, notwithstanding all the means that have been used with them. Consider how just it would be if God should utterly destroy you, and glorify himself upon you in that way; and what a wonder of patience it is, that God hath not done it before now.

II. This subject ought to put you upon examining yourselves, whether you be not wholly useless creatures. You have now heard, that those who bring forth no fruit to God, are, as to any good they do, wholly useless. Inquire, therefore, whether you have ever in your lives brought forth any fruit to God. Have you ever done any thing from a gracious respect to God, or out of love to God? By only seeking your worldly interest, you do not bring forth fruit to God. It is toot bringing forth fruit to God, for you to come to public worship on the Sabbath, to pray in your families, and other such like things, merely in compliance with the general custom. It is not to bring forth fruit to God, that you be sober, moral and religious, only to be seen of men, or out of respect to your own credit and honor. How is that for God which is only for the sake of custom, or the esteem of men?

It is not to bring forth fruit to God, for men to pray, and read, and hear, and to be strict and diligent in religious and moral duties, merely from the fear of hell. What thanks are due to you for not loving your own misery, and for being willing to take some pains to escape burning in hell to all eternity? There is ne'er a devil in hell but would gladly do the same. Hosea x. 1. "Israel is an empty vine; he

bringeth forth fruit unto himself."

There is no fruit brought forth to God, where there is nothing done in any wise from love to God, or from any true respect to him. God looketh at the heart. He doth not stand in need of our services, neither is he benefited by any thing that we can do. He doth not receive any thing of us, because it benefits him, but only as a suitable testimony of our love and respect to him. This is the fruit that he seeks. Men themselves will not accept of those shows of friendship, which they think are hypocritical, and come not from the heart. How much less should God, who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men! John iv. 23. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Inquire, therefore, whether you ever in your lives did the least thing out of love to God. Have you not done all for yourselves? Zechariah vii. 5, 6. "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? "

III. Another use of this subject may be of conviction and humiliation to those who never have brought forth any fruit to God. If, upon examination, you find that you have never in all your lives done any thing out of a true respect to God, then it hath been demonstrated, that, as to any thing which you do, you are altogether useless creatures. And consider, what a shameful thing it is for such rational beings as you are, and placed under such advantages for usefulness, yet to be wholly useless, and to live in the world to no purpose!

We esteem it a very mean character in any person, that he is a worthless, insignificant person; and to be called so is taken as a great reproach. But consider seriously, whether you can clear yourselves of this character. Set reason to work; can you rationally suppose, that you do in any measure answer the end for which God gave you your being, and made you of a nature superior to the beasts? But that you may be sensible what cause you have to be ashamed of your unprofitableness, consider the following things.

1. How much God hath bestowed upon you, in the endowments of your nature. God hath made you rational, intelligent creatures, hath endowed you with noble powers, those endowments wherein the natural image of God consists. You are vastly exalted in your nature above other kinds of creatures here below. You are capable of a thousand times as much as any of the brute creatures. He hath given you a power of understanding, which is capable of vastly extending itself, of looking back to the beginning of time, and of considering what was before the world was, and of looking forward beyond the end of time. It is capable of extending beyond the utmost limits of the universe; and is a faculty whereby you are akin to angels, and are capable even of knowing God, of contemplating the divine Being, and his glorious perfections, manifested in his works and in his

word. You have souls capable of being the habitation of the Holy Spirit of God, and his divine grace. You are capable of the noble employments of angels.

How lamentable and shameful it is, that such a creature should be altogether useless, and live in vain! How lamentable that such a noble and excellent piece of divine workmanship should fail of its end, and be to no purpose! Was it ever worth while for God to make you such a creature, with such a noble nature, and so much above other kinds of creatures, only to eat, and drink, and gratify your sensual appetites? How lamentable and shameful to you, that such a noble tree should be more useless than any tree of the forest; that man, whom God hath thus set in honor, should make himself more worthless than the beasts that perish!

2. How much God hath done for you in the creation of the world. He made the earth, and seas, and all the fulness of them, for the use of man, and hath given them to him. Psalm cxv. 16. "The earth hath he given to the children of men." He made the vast variety of creatures for man's use and service. Genesis i. 28. "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." For the same purpose he made all the plants, and herbs, and trees of the field. Genesis i. 29. "I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree, yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." He made the sun in the heavens, that glorious luminary, that wonderful globe of light, to give light to man, and to constitute the difference between day and night. He also made the moon, and the vast multitude of stars, for the use of man, to be to him for signs and seasons.

What great provision hath God made for man! What a vast variety of good things for food, and otherwise to be for his convenience, to put him under advantages to be useful! How lamentable is it, that after all these things he should be an useless creature in the world!

3. How much is done for you in the course of God's common providence! Consider how nature is continually laboring for you. The sun is, at it were, in a ferment for mankind, unweariedly running his course from year to year, and from day to day, and spending his rays upon man, to put him under advantage to be useful; every day giving him light that he may have opportunity to behold the glorious wisdom of God, and to see and serve God. The winds and clouds are continually laboring for you, and the waters are going in a constant circulation, ascending in the air from the seas, descending in rain, gathering in streams and rivers, returning to the sea, and again ascending and descending, for you. The earth is continually laboring to bring forth her fruit for your support. The trees of the field are laboring and spending their strength for you. And how many of the poor brute creatures are continually laboring for you, and spending their strength

for you! How much of the earth is spent upon you! How many of God's creatures are devoured by you! How many of the lives of the living creatures of God are destroyed for your sake, for your support and comfort!

Now, how lamentable will it be, if, after all, you be altogether useless, and live to no purpose! What mere cumberers of the ground will you be! Agreeably to Luke xiii. 7. Nature, which thus continually labors for you, will be burdened with you. This seems to be what the apostle means, Romans viii. 20, 21, 22, where he tells us, that the creation is made subject to vanity, and brought into the bondage of corruption; and that the whole creation groans, and travails in pain, under this bondage.

4. How much is done for you in the use of the means of grace. How much hath God done to provide you with suitable means and advantages for usefulness! How many prophets hath God sent into the world, in different ages, inspiring them with his Holy Spirit, and enabling them to work many miracles to confirm their word, whereby you now have the written word of God to instruct you!

How great a thing hath God done for you, to give you opportunity and advantage to be useful, in that he hath sent his own Son into the world! He who is really and truly God, united himself to the human nature, and became a man, to be a prophet an teacher to you and other sinners. Yea, he laid down his life to make atonement for sin, that you might have encouragement to serve God with hopes of acceptance.

How many ordinances have been instituted for you! How much of the labor of the ministers of God hath been spent upon you! Is not that true concerning you which is written in Isaiah v. at the beginning, concerning the vineyard planted in a very fruitful hill, and fenced and cultivated with peculiar care and pains, which yet proved unfruitful? How much hath the dresser of the vineyard digged about the barren tree, and dunged it, and yet it remains barren!

Consider what a shame it is that you should live in vain, when all the other creatures, that are inferior to you, do glorify their Creator, according to their nature. You who are so highly exalted in the world, are more useless than the brute creation; yea, than the meanest worms, or things without life, as earth and stones: For they all do answer their end, in the way in which nature hath fitted them for it; none of them fail of it. They are all useful in their places, all render their proper tribute of praise to their Creator; while you are mere nuisances in the creation, and burdens to the earth; as any tree of the forest is more useful than the vine, if it bear not fruit.

IV. Let me, in a farther application of this doctrine, exhort you by all means to bring forth fruit to God. Let it be your constant endeavor to be in this way actively useful in the world. Here consider three things.

1. What an honor it will be to such poor creatures as you are, to bring forth fruit to the divine glory. What is such a poor worm as man, that he should be enabled to bring forth any fruit to God! It is the greatest honor of the nature of man, that God hath given him a capacity of glorifying the great Creator. It is what no other creature in this lower world can do, in the same manner as man. There is no creature in the visible world that is capable of actively glorifying God, but man.

2. In bringing forth fruit to God, you will be so profitable to none as to yourselves; you cannot thereby be profitable to God. Job xxii. 2. "Can a man be profitable to God?" You may thereby be profitable to your fellow creatures; yet not so much as to yourselves. The fruit which you bring forth to God will be a greater benefit to yourselves than to any one living. You will be more useful to yourselves than to any one else.

Although you are under a natural obligation to bring forth fruit to God, yet God doth not require it of you without a reward. He will richly reward you for it. In requiring you to bring forth fruit to him, he doth but require you to bring forth fruit to your own happiness. You will taste the sweetness of your own fruit. It will be most profitable for you in this world to bring forth fruit to God; it will be exceedingly to your benefit while here. It will be pleasant to you to lead a fruitful and holy life; the pleasure will be beyond the labor. Beside this, God hath promised to such a life everlasting rewards, unspeakable, infinite benefits. So that by it you will infinitely advance your own interest.

3. If you remain thus unprofitable, and be not actively useful, surely God will obtain his end of you, in your destruction. He will say concerning the barren tree, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" Christ, in John xv. 6, tells us, "if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." This is spoken of the barren branches in the vine. How would you yourselves do in such a case with a barren tree in an orchard, or with weeds and tares in your fields? Doubtless, it were in your power, you would utterly destroy them.

God will have his end; he will accomplish it. Though all men and devils unite their endeavors, they cannot frustrate God in any thing; and "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished;" Proverbs xi. 1. God hath sworn by his great name, that he will have his glory of men, whether they will actively glorify him or no. Numbers xiv. 21, 22, 23. "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; surely

they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me, see it."

"The ax lieth at the root of the trees; and every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire;" Matthew iii. 10. The end of those men who bring forth nothing but briars and thorns is to be burned, as in Hebrews vi. 7, 8. "For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briars, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned." So we read of the tares, Matthew xiii. 30. "Let both grow together until the harvest ; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them;" and in verses 40, 41, 42, "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be at the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

So it is said of the chaff, Matthew iii. 12. "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

If you continue not to bring forth any fruit to the divine glory, as you have hitherto done, hell will be the only fit place for you. It is a place prepared on purpose to be a receptacle of such persons. In hell nature ceases to labor any more for sinners: The sun doth not run his course to shine upon them, the earth doth not bring forth her fruit to be consumed upon them there. There they will have no opportunity to consume the fruits of divine goodness on their lusts. In hell they can prejudice or encumber nothing, upon which God sets any value. There the faithful servants and ministers of God will no longer spend their strength in vain upon them. When the barren tree is in the fire, the servants of the husbandman are freed from any further labor or toil in digging about it, and manuring it.

In hell they will no more have opportunity to clog and discourage the flourishing of religion, and to destroy much good, as they often do in this world. In hell they will no more have opportunity to corrupt others by their ill example. In hell they will no more have it in their power to offend the godly; they may hurt and torment one another; but the godly will be out of their reach. In hell there will be no ordinances, no Sabbaths, no sacraments, no sacred things, for them to profane and defile by their careless and hypocritical attendance.

Hell, therefore, if you remain unfruitful and cumberers of the ground, will be the fittest place for you, and there you will surely have your portion assigned you.

There God will get himself honor upon you; there he will magnify himself in your ruin, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and will be praised upon that account by the saints, at the day of judgment; and by all the host of heaven throughout everlasting ages.

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