No. 13.

The fear of the Lord, 
Regard to God the foundation of duty.
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Regard He God the foundation of duty.
Psalm cxv, 10. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

It is one of the characteristic excellencies of the religion of the Bible, that the principles and motives which it presents are deep, comprehensive, and general in their nature and influence. They offer no compromise with the captives of prejudice, passion, or opinion, conformable as they always are to the suggestions of enlightened reason, and in perfect harmony with the moral constitution of man, they admit no local restrictions, no partial, wavering applications. It is not so with the instructions of man, unaided by light from heaven. They are stamped more or less deeply with those marks of imperfection which belong to everything human. Look at the attempts which have been made to discover or establish the foundation of morals by those who were destitute of the assistance of revelation or...
by those who have pretended to dispense with that assistance, if you will find that if they fix on any principles, they are but too often variable, accommodating, unsatisfactory. The train of reasoning from which they are deduced is so intricate, or prejudice or the love of theory has had so large a share in their adoption, that they cannot reach the heart with an overruling vigorous power. How strikingly does it manifest the wisdom of God in his instructions to man, that the precepts of the Bible, though given in the most plain practical form without the paraded system of the labour of disquisition, are yet so general and permanent in their application, so in their meaning, so thorough in their efficacy, as to leave us at no time without the best motives of principles to sway our wills and our actions.

Of this character is the precept which constitutes my text; "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The word here rendered "fear" signifies more properly reverence or constant devout regard. It includes within its meaning the habitual sentiment of piety, 


that train of pure and elevated thought of affection, by which our minds are led up to the God of nature and grace, through all the changes of life. Wisdom, as you well know, in the language of Scripture, frequently means, not as in common life, the judicious choice of application of means to a certain end, but right moral conduct, or the ability to discern fitness of position to practice duty. It is in this sense, that the Psalmist, to mention no other instance, uses the word when he says, “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto true wisdom!” The assertion of the royal preacher of Israel must, therefore be considered as intended to express, that a firm belief in the existence of God, a constant devout regard to his providence and government, are the surest guides to a virtuous life, supplying at once the best knowledge of duty, the highest and purest motives to obedience and perseverance.

I propose to consider the application of this principle to the three great branches into which our duty is commonly divided, as relating
to God, to society, and to ourselves.

1. A deep and solemn regard to the character and laws of the Supreme Being is the sure foundation of personal virtue. The duties we owe to ourselves are such as demand the exercise of temperance, sobriety, patience, fortitude. Now that vigorous and bending spirit, which will bear us up through life in the practice of these duties, can be acquired only by a devout and habitual resort to the perfections and government of God, considered in relation to our nature and constitution. On which he is the author. Trials and difficulties occur in our life, which may summon us into action, and it is in these hazardous conflicts that we are convinced how necessary it is to rest and rely on the resources of piety. For if we have not this support, the danger is great, that passions and indolence may persuade us that it is better to yield or retreat, than to wrestle for the victory, and may bring us to believe
that we are exposed to trials with which we are too weak to endure, I sent forth to contest without the defence of well tempered armour. But the mind turns, with the quickness of pleasure of habit, to the pole star of its hope and confidence in heaven, learns a different lesson; for it sees in the Father of all spirits a being who requires of us no more than we can do, lays upon us no more than we bear. Place yourselves for a moment in some not unusual situations of life. Suppose events to be present which so soon or later to every individual, if you will feel the truth of this principle. Perhaps your hopes are disappointed, or your prospects blighted; your best concerted plans, it may be, are made the sport of events beyond your power to control, if the freshness of virtue with which had hitherto surrounded the path of life vanish like the airy delights of a dream. Now in such instances banish all regard to God, listen only to the dictates of pride, of indolence, of the love of
ease, of deprived affection, & what will their suggestions? They will join, with all the agencies of restless spirits, to tell you that your trials are meant to be your torture, that in patience, discontent, & complaint are the unyieldable rights of beings on whom the hand of calamity lays heavy as on you. But, if you would change the scene, call in the aid of that disposition wh in every vicitissitude may lead the mind to "Him who dwellleth between the cherubims." The moment you reflect on the devout attention on the character of governor of God, you are taught that his discipline is a discipline taught with mercy & motion; that he tries you but to strengthen your virtuous principles, to prepare you to the assaults of evil only that you may adhere duty with more affectionate fidelity. When you are thus brought to see the rainbow of God's mercy on every, even the darkest, close your mind is no longer the prey of distress but soon becomes the calm abode of peace & contentment. The same devout habit of thought; it is, oh most effectually es
vishes & strengthens the command over appetite & passion; for by this we are taught, that if God requires us to lay restraint upon desire, & to limit the indulgence of inclination within the range marked out by his laws, it is not because he would bar us from pleasure, or take away the brightness of cheerful feeling: it is not that he would place the cup of enjoyment to our lips & then torture us by dashing it away before we have known its delights. no, it is because excess & intemperance are the parents of pain & misery. because moderation alone can give perpetuity to pleasure, & because God knows that it is not beyond our power to practice self denial. Here then is the high ground from wh reason may repress the struggles of appetite & passion: here is the firm foundation of temperance & self command: here we learn that the restraints of virtue are "a strong defence & her chains a robe of glory!" Thus it is that a devout regard to God furnishes the sure source of support of the duties wh we owe to ourselves.

But, perhaps, it will be said, that we might leave it to self interest to effect all this, without the necessity of recurring to a higher principle.
Where is the man, it may be asked, who would be foolish enough not to take the restraint
on the rewards of temperance, chastity, fortitude,
or than revel in pleasure, till the deadly but
tain consequences of indulgence should cool his heart, I leave him nothing but the anguish,
 repentance, the bitterness of remorse? It is true
indeed, that enlightened self-love would un
formly prompt to virtue. Take into the ac
the whole of existence, if there is an insepar
ble connection between duty & happiness. Do
before you rely on a regard to self-interest o
the foundation of personal virtue, consider
often this connection is lost in the distance
remoteness of consequences - how much passion
induced have to do in the calculation. Self
busy the hand of pleasure is in steering flo
ers over the stream to wh she would lead us
Reason is but too often made giddy by the
but fairly promises wh vice holds out, & judgment bin
by the deceptions of desire. Besides, cases som
times occur in wh a regard to God is the
link wh binds virtue to happiness, wh the
world presents, whether near or rem
is in formidable opposition to the dictates
duty. Where had been the martyrs wh in
their blood in defence of truth, & the
rested their hopes in heaven & extended th
views to God? And though we are not called to trials equally severe, yet we own the
pravity of the same infallible principle
to guide us amidst the difficulties of en-
ragement which surround the narrow pathwa
de to life. For the motives & abilities to the
class of duties now under consideration are most
therefore, go to a higher source than self-love.
In its best state, it is too waveriing, uncertain,
short sighted to be our strong hold of relien
in moral exigencies.
2. "The fear of God" furnishes the best aid
guide to social virtue - to the practice of the
duties wh we owe to our fellowmen. These are
justice, charity, fidelity. All that class of
is expressed by the term benevolence. The interest
attention, wh we devote to these duties, will
depend in no inconsiderable degree on our habi-
t of feeling & thinking with regard to those
with wh we are connected. A diseased mind
or a corrupt heart may prompt such views of
men, as will induce indifference, perhaps con-
tempt for the offices of justice or affection.
He who looks on his fellowmen as beings with
whom necessity or interest compel him to hold
alliance, of whom he may use to obtain a favor.
his object or may pass over in silent neglect, be in short who views men only in the light they show them as competitors, helpers, or destroyers, the pursuits of gain, of honour, or of pleasure cannot have, to say the least, a very elevated standard, or a very keen perception of social morality. No, if we are to discharge the duty we owe to our neighbour in that first sense of the meaning of the gospel requisition, we must have an importance in our estimate, must be among us not only a common interest, but an interest consecrated and raised by no I dignified view. Nor it is precisely this interest of this importance, wh is supplied by regard to God as the Creator of Parent of kind. It is this, wh teaches us that we are candidates for the same blessings, of that same bright hope beams on us all. With it impression deeply fixed in your mind, when your eye meets a human being, you find a who belongs to eternity, of who equally we yourself claims the care & bounty of heaven. If you have a sincere regard to God, you'll have the sentiments of kindness & respect of man; as you will be made forcibly to see
that if you violate the law of justice or disregard the promptings of benevolence towards any human family, you will offend that God to whom he has created is unimportant, who is "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow in the heat. Thus a devout regard to the Deity makes an obligation to social duty a sacred principle; it shows us that the tie which binds us to each other in this world is but a part of the chain which reaches to the throne of God. There is another point of view; in which devout reverence for God's laws, appears still more important as a guide to the duties we owe to one another. It furnishes an infallible rule of action. In the moral government by which the Deity has established over man, he can have in view no other object but the good of his creatures; whatever commands or prohibitions he has given. therefore, must be directed to this great end. If God has said, "thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal," it is because these crimes would unhinge society, if strewn desolation in their track. If on the
other hand, he requires of us truth, fidelity, charity, compassion, the forgiveness of injuries, it is because these virtues are the pillars on which rest the peace and felicity of man. Consequently by following with an unhesitating spirit the maxims and prohibitions of God's law, shall with absolute certainty be led to the great object of social virtue - social happiness. As perhaps you will say, where is the necessity of looking to this overwhelming guide? May I not, without this, propose to myself the good of life? True, you may: if it is a noble and serious disposition. But before you trust to your judgment as an infallible rule of action, let me ask you, can you often the long train of consequences to our actions may lead, determine how much good or evil may be the effects near or remote? Are you sure that you shall never be the cause of evil as you intend the contrary, or never neglect to do good where you have opportunity, by not taking the nature and tendency of a certain conduct? No, this is more, much more, to you can promise yourself. Be content, the
fore, to rest in the conviction, that in following the guidance of Him who is all goodness in himself, I love to his offspring, you cannot err.

There is another source to which some look with confidence for the direction of conduct on all occasions, independently of a regard to the will of God. This is what is called the moral sense, by which it is supposed we instinctively approve some characters and actions, or condemn others, from their innate excellence or deformity, without any respect to consequences. Here we are told it is a monitor fixed in our breasts by the hand of God himself, to guide our moral tastes in moral exercises. I shall not enquire whether we have such an instinctive sense of right and wrong or not; but, granting its existence, it cannot be relied on as a director to the duties of social life. If man has this moral sense implanted in his nature, we must remember that it grows up amidst a thousand influences, many of which, if not fatal to its existence, may impress on it much of their own evil character. It grows up in the midst of the prejudices, false views, and distorted judgments of the world, and custom, fashion, interest, throw upon it
their several darkening hues, till we can no longer recognize the purity of holiness in which it is supposed to have come from the hands of God. And is it in this condition, think you, a fit guide to virtue? How grossly it is sometimes deceived, is verified by the fact, that it suggests different sentiments to different persons. History will tell you that there is scarcely a wise man has not at some age or another, to countenance his views, the mind of the other. Go then, and learn the rules with God has given for the conduct of men. Then you will rest on from Sennacherib the ground: for if God has imparted to you, the instinctive faculty of judgment, surely he has accorded to certain directions as that faculty with planted the ear, shall be not heard: the formed the eye, shall be not seen: if he that you the moral sense, shall be not guided by his hands to the duties you owe society.

3. The remaining class of duties are those of God. Piety, reverence, submission, gratitude. It is so plain a truth, that it may almost superfluous to state it: that for duties there can be no other foundation than the fear of God. A devout, solemn, impress; respect to the Deity. "Perfecting holiness on fear of God," says St. Paul: I mean in one other a can it be perfected. Indeed the habit of looking to God with the subdued feelings of affection is in itself piety; if it is impossible to suppose the existence of one without implying that of the other. We should think the conduct of that man something worse than ridiculous, who should pretend to a sincere respect of and regard for one to whom he never gave the external pledge of esteem, never tendered the offices of affection. He ought not to tell of his friendship, who, while he professes to respect, was never known to qualify or observe the wishes or directions of his friend. And surely it is no less absurd to pretend habitual reverence for God, yet never be found in the offices of piety, to tell of your regard for the divine laws, while you hesitate not to violate the reasons of their sanctions — or to talk of gratitude, God's goodness with lips that are never capable of desert expressions of gratitude. Thus a mockery too gross to serve even the owner's purpose. If reverence for the Deity be in that the habit of our minds, we cannot longer are reconcile in the duties we owe Him, as He requires in the children. As servants. And where else but in this reverential disposition will you find...
Deity has appeared only in the gloomy light of an angry, vengeful, severe being. So we have supposed that in no way could they so effectually please or appease Him, as by inflicting harm on themselves. Strange that man should think solitude, purification, mortification the best recommendations to the favour of His wrath.

This may be a very sincere, but certain ly it is a very mistaken "fear of God." For perhaps at the present day are we in danger of indulging such distressing delusions. If we must be in danger of substituting the suggestions of a fantastick imagination in place of those true expressions of reverence I regard as God requires. The pity of the gospel of Jesus may be too simple for us. For we are but too inclined to adopt an artificial method of pleasing God, rather than subdue our feelings down to the sound wholesome religion of the heart. We may think that there is some virtue in acts of self-denial, mortification which answer no other purpose than that of making mistakes in those who pursue them; but far from it, they are more than useless; they are offensive, in the sight of God.

But whatever may be our mistakes
on this subject, let them not be changed on the "year of God" as represented in the
ature. Therefore is founded on noble, excellent,
considering views of the government of char-
ter of the Deity. There it teaches us that we
are to recommend ourselves to the favor of
God only by endeavoring, as far as the weakness
of humanity may admit, to resemble Jesus
in purity, moral excellence, &c. by abstaining
from whatsoever he has proscribed, as in the
death of the soul. It is Jehovah himself who hath said, "I will put my fear in the
hearts, & they shall not depart from me."

Thus we have seen, that the soul of devotion regarded to the Deity is the sure pre-
station of the duties we are to perform to others, & to God. (Heavens, ye not, then
walk in the fear of God, &c.) God has it "my
death from evil!"

Have we a faithful
friend, a never failing guide. Other
forms are weak, insufficient. If wavering, this
may sometimes throw light on our paths, but
how often will they mislead or desert us, &
leave the mind in a sort of moral solitude
the searchings and despair of which are the
peril. He, who trusts to such guides, travels by
moonlight, where every passing cloud leaves
him in darkness & danger! - but the sacred prin-
ciple of reverence for God is like the broad light
of day, ever illuminating our path, & presenting in
time ordained the objects we surround us. &c. &c.
So then to this stable, this conservatory princ-
ple, as the anchor of life, the friend of virtue,
the guide to Heaven: In every day's experience will
convince you how truly the Son of Man spoke
when he said, "to fear the Lord is fulness of
wisdom."
At Dedham, Dec. 6th, 1818, forenoon.
At Watertown, Jan. 10th, 1819, forenoon.
At Rockport, March 12th, 1819, afternoo
At Salem, March 14th, 1819, afternoo
- Mr. Garrett's, May 7th, 1819, afternoo
- Mr. Ray's (Sec.) May 16th, 1819, forenoon.
- Mr. Poole's (Wm.) May 22nd, 1819, forenoon.
- Mr. March (Bst.), June 19th, 1819, forenoon.
- Mr. Richford's, June 26th, 1819, forenoon.
- Mr. Fisher's (Wm.) July 2nd, 1820, afternoo
- Mr. Greenwood (Rob.) Aug. 15th, 1820, forenoon.
At Cambridge (Dr. Palmer) Oct. 12th, 1820, afternoo.
At home, Sept. 16th, 1824, forenoon.

Meet me, J. - We would approach the
sense of thy grace with sentiments of pure
devotion. Teach us to cherish the depre
ance for thy character & will. May the
of thee & a solemn regard to thy laws be
preserving principles of our lives. In every
of our duty may we look to thee for
ce & support. I consider thy will as
rection & which we may never defia
At Dedham, Dec. 6th, 1818. — forenoon.
At Watertown Jan. 10th, 1819. — forenoon.
At Roxbury, March 9th, 1819. — afternoon.
At Salem, March 14th, 1819. — afternoon.
Mr. Gannett’s May 9th, 1819. — afternoon.
Mr. Gray’s (Ree) May 16th, 1819. — forenoon.
Mr. Whipple’s (W. A.) May 20th, 1819.
Mr. Warden (Boston).

Next m. S. — We would approach the theme of thy grace with sentiments of sincere devotion. Teach us to cherish the deep sense of the presence for thy character; for all is felt of thee, a solemn regard to thy laws as the governing principles of our lives. In every branch of our duty may we look to thee for guidance & support; in all instances thy will as the rule of action from which we may never depart. We desire to consecrate ourselves to thee. to resign to thee the hearts rich than our last time for thyself. — We thank thee for the same.

[Signature]