



The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.

NUMBER ONE IRON OAKS DRIVE • PARIS, ARKANSAS 72855

SERMONS AND TRACTS OF JOHN GILL
MAN'S FALL AND DEPRAVITY

**The Character and End of the
Wicked, Considered**

2 SAMUEL 23:6-7

by John Gill

(London: Wm. Hardcastle, 1814)

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth*
— Psalm 60:4

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SERMON 14

THE CHARACTER AND END OF THE WICKED, CONSIDERED

2 SAMUEL 23:6, 7

But the Sons of Belial, shall be, all of them, as thorns thrust away: because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them, must be fenced with iron, and the staff of a spear: and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place. <10236>

THIS is the closing part of the last words of David; and it is the reverse of what has been said before, as the adversative particle *but* shews, with which the words are introduced: “*but* the sons of Belial.” These are opposed to the Ruler over men; the Messiah, who is just, ruling in the fear of God. He is said to be as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain; but these are as thorns: or, they are opposed to David, who expresses his faith in the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; in which they have no interest; so far from it, that they are thrust away as thorns. He declares, that this covenant was all his salvation, and all his desire; but as for these sons of Belial, they shall be utterly consumed, burned up with fire in the same place.

*The words are applicable to bad rulers and governors in general; as distinguished from, and opposed unto, him that ruleth in the fear of God. They are represented as such who are not righteous in the administration of government; who have not the fear of God before their eyes, and upon their hearts. The sons of Belial, instead of being helpful, are hurtful to those over whom they rule; not like the just Ruler, said to be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth; a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain. But wicked Rulers are not like him; instead of making those they govern cheerful and comfortable, as he does, they give them pain and sorrow; are like thorns thrust into the hand. This agrees entirely with an observation the wise man makes, that *when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice*; they*

are cheerful as the morning; *but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn* (^{<31B>}Proverbs 29:2); they are grieved, they are distressed, they are made uneasy by the sons of Belial, who are as thorns; and therefore, if possible, they are to be removed, they are to be thrust away. But in as much as they are not tractable, gentle, or easily managed, some violent measures must be used, as here suggested, *the man that shall touch them, must be fenced with iron, and the staff of a spear*. And though it is difficult for men to remove such sort of persons from the rule and government they are in; yet sometimes God does it for them in a remarkable way. Thus Nebuchadnezzar was driven from among men, and sent to the beasts of the field. And sometimes they are thrust away, both root and branch, as Saul and his family were; to which some apply this passage.

The words are applicable also to the wicked Jews in particular, and their rulers, who opposed themselves unto the Messiah; the person that is clearly described, and so much spoken of in the context, whom they received not, when he came to them; but rejected him as a King, threw off his yoke, and would not have this man to reign *over* them. Though many messages and kind invitations were sent, they rejected him; would not attend the gospel of grace, the external ministration of the word and ordinances: and not only so, but abused the messengers that came with these kind invitations; which exasperated the King who sent them; who, according to the parable, sent his army, the Roman army, and burnt up the city of Jerusalem; and they were burnt up in the same place. The greatest part of the Jewish nation were gathered together at Jerusalem, and were destroyed in it, at the last destruction by the Romans.

Again. The words are applicable to Antichrist; that man of sin, that lawless one; who may well be called Belial, the son of perdition, and who has many children signified sometimes by Jezebel. Jezebel is said to have children which God will destroy (^{<4123>}Revelation 2:23). These are the worshippers of the beast, and have his mark on their forehead; who shall be cast into everlasting burnings, and the smoke of their torment shall ascend for ever and ever: even those very kings, who formerly gave their kingdoms to the antichristian whore, will be filled with hatred to her, and burn her flesh with fire. Rome, or Babylon, the metropolis of the antichristian kingdom,

shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God, who judgeth her (^{<418>}Revelation 18:8);

so that all the images in this text are suitable enough to this catastrophe.

But the words may be understood very well of wicked men in common; who may be all of them, especially the most vile and abandoned, called sons of Belial; as they often are in Scripture: those who were so vile as to go about to seduce the inhabitants of any city in Israel to idolatry, are called children of Belial (^{<4613>}Deuteronomy 13:13). The sons of Eli are said to be sons of Belial, being very wicked persons, given up to lewdness, and abandoned to all manner of wickedness. So Nabal, a vile, churlish and ill-natured man, is, by his servants, called a son of Belial. Our master, say they, is such a son of Belial, there is no living with him: nay, Abigail his wife, gave him the same name. Those who stood up as witnesses against Naboth, are called men of Belial, who made no conscience of any thing; having no fear of God before their eyes. So many others of like complexion are thus called in Scripture.

*In this light we may understand the passage before us: “But the sons of Belial,” wicked men, who are enemies to Christ, the King before spoken of, “shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron, and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.” **In the words of the Text we may observe,***

I. The descriptive character of wicked men, by their name, *Sons of Belial*; and by a comparison made of them, *as thorns*.

II. The issue, end, punishment, and utter destruction of these; thrust away, and burned with fire in the same place. This will be the end of the sons of Belial.

I. We shall consider the descriptive character given of wicked men, sons of Belial. Belial is thought to be a name of Satan. This is generally supposed to the sense of that passage, ^{<4765>}2 Corinthians 6:15, *What concord hath Christ with Belial?* that is, with Satan and the etymology of the word, as differently given, well agrees with him; whether it signifies one without a yoke, or one that is unprofitable, or one that is in a low estate and never rises higher; all agree with Satan and his angels.

BELIAL, one without a yoke. Satan and his principalities and powers, cast off the yoke of God; would not be subject unto him, and to his laws; threw off their allegiance to him, and apostatized from him; left their first state and habitation, set up a kingdom for themselves, and set a prince over them, who in Scripture is called, *Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils*

(^{<4124>}Matthew 12:24). These, by their apostasy, became unprofitable to God, and hurtful to men; as in many instances appears: and they, by their sin, were brought into so low a state and condition, as never to rise from thence: they have been cast out of heaven down to hell, there they are, and will never regain their former state, or rise up to that honor and dignity they before possessed as there is no place, we are told, found for them in heaven (^{<6118>}Revelation 12:8).

BELIAL, (as the original word signifies that which is very wicked, abominable, and abandoned) is a name which well suits this grand apostate, who is emphatically in Scripture called, *the wicked one* (^{<6158>}1 John 5:18). Now this Belial has sons or children, seed or offspring. It was threatened immediately upon the fall of our first parents, in which he had the chief hand, that God would put enmity between the seed of the woman, and seed of the serpent; the old serpent the devil, this Belial: and we read of the children of the devil. *In this the children of God are manifest*, says the apostle, *and the children of the devil*, by such and such things there observed (^{<6130>}1 John 3:10). They are evidently distinguished one from the other, and may be known from their different actions and course of living. *Children of the Devil*. Particularly this title is given to the worst and vilest of men, such who are notorious for any crime or crimes; so the apostle Paul gave it unto Elymas, who endeavoured to pervert the Roman pro-consul from the right ways of God;

thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness
(^{<4430>}Acts 13:10).

And as children are of the same nature, and often appear to be of the same disposition and temper as their parents, and alike in their practices; this appears in those who are called the sons of Belial, or children of the devil: they are of their father the devil, and they appear to be so, because the lusts of their father they will do. Is he a liar, and the father of lies? they are children that will lie; *they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies* (^{<4583>}Psalms 58:3). Is he a murderer from the beginning? malicious, revengeful, blood-thirsty? this is their character, *living in malice, hateful, and hating one another* (^{<5683>}Titus 3:3). Cain is said to be that wicked one, a child of Belial, as appears by the slaying of his own brother.

But, as I have hinted, this word *Belial* admits of various significations, according to the different etymology given of it by learned men, and all agree with wicked men as when it is thought to signify one without a yoke,

or one that is unprofitable, or one in a low estate, and rises not from that state; all well agree with wicked men, the sons, or children, of Belial. They are *without a yoke*. In whatever sense we may take this word, or find it used in Scripture, (as sometimes it signifies the chastening hand of God, which he lays upon his own people, and which it becomes them to bear quietly and patiently), *it is good for a man*, Jeremiah says, *that he should hear the yoke in his youth* (~~21:27~~Lamentations 3:27); that is, the correcting, chastening hand of God. He should be inured to it, by which he may learn many things to his profit and advantage. This yoke sometimes presses hard, and is grievous to the flesh; for no affliction is joyous, but grievous; especially to a carnal man, and even to the people of God, when they are first exercised therewith. Thus Ephraim complains, that he was like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; impatient, and unwilling to bear it, desirous of shaking it off, and being delivered from it. Now wicked men, even in this sense, may be said to be sons of Belial, without a yoke; for *the rod of God is not upon them* (~~12:19~~Job 21:9). The chastening, correcting rod of God is not upon them; that rod which is upon the back of the righteous, which a wise man bears, and who hath appointed it, and receives instruction from it, that rod is not upon the wicked; they are without this rod, without this yoke.

They are not in trouble, as other men (~~49:15~~Psalms 73:5);

not chastened as other men are, even good men. These are the wicked that prosper in their wickedness, as Asaph and Jeremiah observe, (~~49:15~~Psalms 73; ~~24:12~~Jeremiah 12:1). God does not deal with these sons of Belial, as with his own children; he lays his rod, his yoke upon them; *he scourges every son whom he receives*. *If ye be without chastisement*, (says the apostle) *whereof all are partakers*, (that is, all the children of God), *then are ye bastards, and not sons* (~~3:13~~Hebrews 12:8); then ye appear to be sons of Belial, and not children of the living God: for the sons of Belial are without this yoke, without the fatherly chastisements, and corrections of God.

Or rather, we may consider the yoke in a figurative sense, as signifying rule and dominion, whether human or divine. Sometimes it signifies the rule and government of masters over servants. *Let as many servants as are under the yoke*, under the rule and government of their masters, *count their own masters worthy of all honor*. Sometimes it signifies rule of a higher kind, even regal power and government; so the people of Israel requested of Rehoboam, when he came to the throne, that he would make their yoke

lighter, or his government easier, than was the yoke or government of his father. Now this yoke, or government, taken *in* a civil sense, is to be submitted to; and all good men will be subject to principalities and powers. They will submit themselves to every ordinance of man, that is not contrary to the law of God and their own consciences: but sons of Belial, children without a yoke, are such as *despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities* (~~6107~~Jude 7); and such as do so, are in Scripture expressly called the children of Belial. When Saul was chosen king, we are informed *the children of Belial said, how can this man save us* (~~6107~~1 Samuel 10:27)? And they despised him, and gave him no presents, which was usual at the accession of a king to the throne, by way of acknowledging him as their king, and of their subjection to him; but the sons of Belial would not do that.

Divine rule or government, may be signified by the yoke; but wicked men, sons of Belial, are without this yoke. The *ceremonial law* is sometimes called a yoke, which neither the Jews nor their forefathers were able to bear, as it consisted of various commands, the breach of which rendered persons liable to death; and hence many were, through fear of death, all their life-time subject to bondage; therefore, it is no wonder it was to men, especially to wicked men, *a weariness*; as it is said to be, *what a weariness is it?* (~~3013~~Malachi 1:13). And not only that, but the *moral law* may be called a yoke; it is bidding upon all mankind. Our first parents had this law written upon their hearts, which was the rule of their obedience to God. They broke it, they cast away this yoke, and apostatized from God; yet, nevertheless, there are some remains of it to be found, even in the Gentiles themselves; who appear to have the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another. This law is of such a nature, that every man is obliged by it; for the sum and substance of this law is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul; and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

A good man, a man that has the grace of God implanted in him, is very desirous to be under this yoke; for though those who believe in Christ are delivered from the law, in which they were held, as it is a covenant of works (for they are not under the law, but under grace, and are delivered also from the curse and bondage of it); yet they are under it as a rule of walk and conversation, in the hands of Christ, delight in the law of God after the inner man, and serve it with all their hearts; though with the flesh

they serve the law of sin, But as for wicked, carnal, and unregenerate men, children of Belial, they are without this yoke; they cast it off, and do not choose to have any thing to do with it. As for the wicked, says the Psalmist, *they are far from thy law*: far from it, indeed they do not care to come nigh, or be under it; they despise it, and cast it away from them. Instead of its being before them, to read it, and meditate on it; instead of having it before them as the rule of their lives and actions, they cast it behind their backs, determined to have nothing to do with it. God has wrote unto them the great things of his law, but they are reckoned by them as strange things. Such is the enmity of the carnal mind against God and his law, that it is not subject unto it, neither indeed can be; there is such a contrariety between the law of God and a wicked man. The law is holy, just, and good; but he is carnal, and sold under sin, in the worst sense of this expression: it is, I say, quite contrary to him, and therefore the natural man disapproves of it, despises it, casts it away from him; and every thing he does, thwarts and contradicts this law. The thoughts and the imagination of the thoughts of his heart, are evil, and that continually, which this law condemns. His words and actions, as they are against the will, so they are against the law of God; every sin whatever, in thought, word, and deed, is a transgression of this law: no carnal man is subject unto it; however he may be externally, yet not internally, from the heart. He cannot be so, unless his heart is changed; unless the stony heart is taken away, and an heart of flesh is given: unless a new and right spirit is renewed within him, and the Spirit of God enable him to walk in the statutes and judgments of the Lord, to do them. A man must have this law written in his heart, by the Spirit of God, or he will never be willing to obey it: he must be made willing in the day of the Lord's power, or he will never be contented to hear the yoke of the law, but will be a son of Belial, one that is without a yoke.

If this be the case of a wicked man, as it certainly is, that he is without the yoke of God's righteous law; then we may be sure he must be without the yoke of Christ, and cannot bear that, though our Lord says,

Take my yoke upon you, and I will give you rest for your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light ([◀HEB](#) Matthew 11:30).

Now let this be understood either of the gospel, or the ordinances of Christ, or indeed of both, a son of Belial is without the yoke; he cannot bear the *doctrines of it*. The gospel, when it comes in power, and not in

word only, into the heart of a poor sinner, brings light and life along with it: such an one receives the truth in the love of it, and receives the love of the truth: rejoices at it, is greatly delighted with it, yields a professed subjection to it: and, from the heart, obeys that form of doctrine delivered to him; for which the apostle expresses so much thankfulness with respect to the Romans (~~4167~~ Romans 6:17). But to a wicked man, a son of Belial, this is a galling yoke; he cannot bear it. Of this, and the other truth, he says, “This is an hard saying, who can bear it?” as the doctrines of distinguishing grace, the doctrine of election, and others; particularly the doctrine of a sinner’s justification before God, without the works of the law, by the imputed righteousness of Christ, is such a yoke he cannot put his neck under; he cannot take it upon him. Self-righteous persons cannot. It is said of the Jews, they went about to establish their own righteousness, and submitted not to the righteousness of the Son of God; they could not bend their necks to this doctrine, this yoke, as it may be called, even a sinner’s justification before God, by Christ’s imputed righteousness. The doctrines of the gospel strike not only at those principles that men value, but at such practices as they are fond of, and therefore they cannot bear this yoke: “For the gospel of the grace of God, which hath appeared to all men, teaches, that denying ungodliness and worldly lust, men should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world:” but these sons of Belial do not approve of it.

A wicked man cannot bear the ordinances of Christ, though they are not grievous. None of his commands are so to a good man, one who has received the grace of God; no, he readily yields obedience to them; he makes haste (as the Psalmist says he did), to keep his commandments he readily obeys them from the heart; willingly, cheerfully, from love, and in faith, and without trusting to, or depending on, a submission to these ordinances in the business of his justification before God, and acceptance with him. But wicked men cannot bear this yoke of Christ’s ordinances; their language is, *Let us break their bands asunder, and east away their cords from us.* They reject the counsel of God against themselves, as the scribes and pharisees did, who despised the baptism of John. Thus we see, that this character *Belial*, as it signifies one without a yoke, agrees with wicked men in common; they are without the yoke of the chastening hand of God; without the yoke of the moral law; and without the yoke of the gospel, and the ordinances of Jesus Christ. Neither the one nor the other do they care to submit their necks unto. Again,

This word *Belial*, according to others, signifies one that is *unprofitable*. And this is the account the apostle gives of all men in general, Jews and Gentiles, that *they are together become unprofitable* (^{<B1B2>}Romans 3:12). A wicked man, a son of Belial, is unprofitable to God, unprofitable to men, unprofitable to himself; and indeed every man is unprofitable unto God; for, can *a man be profitable unto God?* says Eliphaz, *as he that is wise may be profitable to himself* (^{<K21D>}Job 22:2); no, he cannot. Even a wise and good man, with all his goodness, cannot be profitable unto God; for his goodness does not extend to him. David says, *My goodness extendeth not to thee* (^{<194D>}Psalms 16:2), can be of no avail unto thee; for if a man's way is righteous, what gain is it to the Lord? what does he receive at his hands? Nothing at all that can be really beneficial to him, so as to lay him under any obligation; for

who hath first given to him, and it shalt be recompensed unto him again? (^{<S115>}Romans 11:35).

When a man has done all he can in a way of righteousness, he has done but what was his duty, and must sit down and call himself *an unprofitable servant* with respect to God. Now if good men cannot be profitable to God, certainly *wicked men* cannot. Good men may be profitable in glorifying God, and causing others to glorify him; or promote the interest of religion by their purses, or the gifts bestowed upon them, but still no man can be profitable unto God, to yield him such benefit as can add to his essential glory and happiness; for if any addition could be made to his happiness, he would not be a perfect being as he is. Now if good men, with all their goodness cannot be profitable unto God, surely wicked men cannot they are sons of Belial, they are abominable in themselves, and to every good work reprobate: nor are they profitable unto men. One good man may be profitable to another, even to wicked men: "the righteousness of a man may profit the son of man," as Elihu owns (^{<K88>}Job 35:8); and that is the reason the apostle gives, why those who believe in Christ should be careful to maintain good works, *because these things are good and profitable to men* (^{<S18>}Titus 3:8). Though they are not profitable to God, they are profitable to men; they set good examples to them: besides there are many things in them that are really beneficial unto men. Saints are the salt, of the earth: and if there were no such persons, the earth would lose its savor, and be in a sad condition. Many temporal advantages wicked men enjoy, by means of good men; and saints, in various ways, are capable of serving one another in love: but a wicked man, a son of Belial, is good for

nothing; he is unprofitable to the generation in which he lives. *Evil communications corrupt good manners*: or men of evil communications, that are bad in their lives and conversations, are hurtful among those with whom they live, and with whom they converse.

They are also unprofitable unto themselves. One that is wise and good, may be profitable to himself, as Eliphaz suggests in that aforementioned text, (^{<K21D>}Job 22:2). A truly wise man, that is so in a spiritual sense, may be profitable to himself; for godliness hath gain annexed to it: it has the promise of this life, and of that which is to come. A wise and good man, building his house upon a rock, it is to his advantage; the house stands against blustering storms and rains. A man that hath an interest in Christ, as is the case with every wise and good man, has gain thereby; gain that is greater than that of gold and silver. The wise virgins, having oil in their lamps, it is profitable to them; for, when the bridegroom comes, they will not be at a loss for a lamp or oil, but be invited to come into the bride-chamber with him. But wicked men, the sons of Belial, are not profitable to themselves; for *what fruit* (says the apostle) *had ye in those things whereof ye are nor ashamed?* (^{<R12D>}Romans 6:21); none at all, but quite the reverse. Though a son of Belial, a wicked man, may be able, by various means, licit or illicit, to obtain a large share of the things of this life, what will it be unto him? what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? he is a son of Belial, unprofitable.

There is another sense in the term Belial, at which I have hinted, and that is, it may signify one that is *very low and never will rise up* from that state to a higher one. Man, by the fall was brought into a low estate, a very low estate indeed: which may be hinted at in the ^{<D11>}136th Psalm,

Who remembered us in our low estate;
for his mercy endureth for ever.

Man was upon the pinnacle of honor, but is become like the beasts that perish. He is fallen from that pinnacle into the pit wherein is no water, into an horrible pit of mire and clay. Some are raised out of it, to an high estate: the children of God are. The Lord lifteth up them that are cast down; he raiseth up them that fall: *he raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory.* These were raised up in Christ, when he was raised from the dead: are raised up in effectual vocation, when their feet are set upon a rock, and their goings established; and will be raised to

glory and happiness, and sit on the same throne with Christ. But these are the children of God: as for the sons of Belial, they will never rise; they are left in that low estate into which sin has brought them. One is taken, and the other left (^{41B4}Matthew 24:40). These are the ninety-nine left in the wilderness: they are left in this low estate, and here they will live and die; and in hell they will lift up their eyes, and behold Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. Saints in heaven are in a raised condition; but the sons of Belial will never rise thither. No, there is a gulf fixed, the immutable decree of God, which they cannot pass; so that they will never rise from their wretched state, to that high estate of glory the saints are in: they are sons of Belial, without a yoke; law, and will never rise to that high estate of honor and dignity.

These, in our text, are compared to *thorns*. *The sons of Belial shall be as thorns*: to which wicked men are often compared in Scripture. *Though* (says the Lord to Ezekiel) *briars and thorns be with thee, be not afraid of them* (^{41B5}Ezekiel 2:6): though thou be among wicked men, comparable to briars and thorns. So the church of Christ is said to be as a *lily among thorns* (^{21B2}Song of Solomon 2:2). Thorns bear into fruit. Can men gather grapes of thorns? they cannot expect it. Wicked men are called the *unfruitful works of darkness* (^{45B1}Ephesians 5:11): they bear no fruit, have not the fruits of the Spirit of God, neither his grace in them, nor his righteousness upon them. Like thorns they are hurtful, pricking, and grieving to the saints and people of God. They are so, by their lives and conversations: so Lot's righteous soul was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; so the lives of Isaac and Rebecca were made grievous and uneasy by the daughters of Heth, by their manners and behaviors; so David was in very distressing circumstances when he dwelt in Meshech, and sojourned in the tents of Kedar; and so the prophet Isaiah, by being among a people of unclean lips, of which he complains, (^{21B5}Isaiah 6:5).

Wicked men are like thorns to the people of God, by their evil words, their ill speeches to them: this is what is suggested in the passage referred to in Ezekiel; "be not afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee:" though the men thou art with are like thorns, pricking, grieving, and distressing as briars and thorns; yet be not afraid of them, or of their words. The words of wicked men are sometimes very sharp and cutting to the people of God; especially when they reproach them on the account of their religion and their God, as David says,

As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say unto me daily, where is my God? (^{<3920>}Psalm 42:10).

So by their persecutions, in one shape and another, they are like thorns, pricking and piercing the saints: and even there are many sons of Belial, who are professors of religion, that are like thorns too; compared to the thorny ground, among whom the seed of the word is cast, and which becomes unprofitable, through the cares of the world over-topping the seed sown. Such are all those who will be rich, and who are overreaching in their business and occupation of life; of whom it is said,

the best of them is a briar; the most upright of them is sharper than a thorn hedge (^{<3704>}Micah 7:4).

All slothful professors of religion, who are slothful in business, not fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, are like the field of the sluggard, covered with nettles and thorns. So all such, whose lives and conversations are not as becomes the gospel of Christ, these are as prickling thorns, very grieving to the true professors of religion, the children of God; *of whom* (the apostle says)

I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ (^{<3183>}Philippians 3:18).

In a word, all those who, by evil principles and bad notions of religion, apostatize from the truth of the gospel, are by the apostle compared to the earth which bringeth forth thorns and briers, who are nigh unto cursing and their end to be burned (^{<3083>}Hebrews 6:8). *This brings me to consider,*

II. The issue, end, punishment, and utter destruction of these sons of Belial. They are said to be thrust away, and at last to be utterly burnt with fire in the same place. *They shall be all of them as thorns thrust away.* But now thorns, in order to be thrust away, must be rooted up, or cut down, or they cannot be thrust away; they must be rooted up, as wicked men will be. *The wicked, says the wise man, shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it* (^{<3022>}Proverbs 3:22); so David declares, *the Lord shall destroy them, and root them up out of the land of the living*, as thorns may be rooted up. And these must be cut down as cumberers of the ground; for if a barren fig-tree cumberers the ground, then much more briers and thorns, These are cut down, sooner or later, and they are thrust away with contempt and indignation. *Nigh unto cursing*: who

will be, and are, cursed by the righteous law of God; for *cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them*. Thrust away out of time into eternity, suddenly, hastily, in a moment, and in wrath. A tempest shall bear them away; the storm and tempest of divine wrath; for it is God that thrusts them away. He drives the wicked man into darkness, and chases him out of this world. A son of Belial is driven away in his wickedness; while the righteous hath hope in his death. And he will be thrust away in the great day, from the presence of the Lord, as Adam, when he apostatized, was driven out of Eden's garden; and as Cain, when he had been guilty of that shocking sin of murder, was driven from the presence of God; so wicked men will be driven from his presence. They will hear him say, depart from me, ye cursed, I know you not. Then they will be *burned with fire in the same place*: with the fire of God's wrath; *for his fiery indignation shall devour the adversaries*.

Wicked men, whenever their consciences are awakened, are apprehensive there is nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation: now this will break forth at the last day, and consume them. This indignation is sometimes compared to a furnace of fire, and sometimes to a lake of fire; into each of which, thorns and briars are sometimes cast. Thus, as the tares are bound up in bundles and cast into the fire, so the wicked, the sons of Belial, will be gathered by the angels, and cast into a furnace of fire, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (~~408~~ Matthew 8:42). This is also expressed by a lake of fire; a lake which burns with fire and brimstone, into which the sons of Belial will be cast, and where they will be burnt. This is called in Scripture, *everlasting fire*. *Everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*; that will be always burning, and never shall he quenched. And it will be intolerable, so that language imports, *Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fires? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?* This will be the end, this will be the punishment of those who are the sons of Belial.

You see now from hence, of what account wicked men are with God. They are no other than sons of Belial, children without a yoke, unprofitable, low creatures, and will never rise from that state; and like thorns, are only fit to be burnt. You see what will be the end, the issue of these persons; everlasting destruction. They will be burnt with the fire of God's wrath, which will endure for ever; the smoke of their torments will ascend up for ever and ever. There is no escaping this, but in, and through our Lord Jesus Christ, and by applying to him for life and salvation. If any of you are

seeking to flee from the wrath to come, which is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men; and should be asking, Whither shall we flee? Not to rocks or mountains, whether in a literal or figurative sense. Not in a literal sense; they will do no service. Nor in a figurative sense, your own works of righteousness; these will not screen you. There is no other way of escaping the wrath to come, due to the sons of Belial, but by fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you in the everlasting gospel; by fleeing to Christ, turning to him, the strong hold, as prisoners of hope; and, being justified by his blood, you shall be saved from wrath, through him. It is he, and he only, who delivers from wrath to come.